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Mrs Sharon Lewis
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lewis

Short inspection of Highfield Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your clarity of vision, hard work and dedication to the children, parents and carers and your staff have resulted in Highfield Nursery School being a very special place for children to learn. You put the children and their families at the heart of everything that you do and, as a result, they thrive and make good progress in relation to their starting points. You are well supported by other senior leaders and a highly skilled and creative staff team. They are unwavering in implementing your vision to ensure that all children experience the world around them using their senses, while at the same time developing their skills of physical development, speaking and listening, early reading, writing and mathematics.

All children flourish in an exciting, safe, welcoming and inclusive environment. They show good levels of concentration, settle quickly and persevere with learning for significant periods of time. The high-quality outdoor provision and the creative opportunities that are offered through your artist in residence ensure that children explore, investigate and learn about the natural world as well as representing their learning through art and movement. They experience many exciting learning opportunities and leave Highfield Nursery confident and well prepared for their next steps of education.

You and your senior staff have ensured that all staff promote a very high standard of care for every child. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who

have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make swift progress in relation to their starting points.

Since the last inspection, you have offered provision for two-year-olds. Parents are delighted with the provision and the way staff go above and beyond for their children, treating them as if they were their own.

High levels of care help to promote good progress for all groups and high standards of behaviour. Staff sensitively guide children so that they value one another. Interactions with children are always warm and accompanied by a nurturing smile. In focus time in the mornings and afternoons, children greet each other by name and this helps to develop their confidence and self-esteem. As a result, children's social and emotional development is promoted well.

Since the last inspection, you have successfully developed the capacity for senior teachers to take on leadership responsibilities. You have done this by giving them the opportunity to participate in leadership training, so that they can help staff improve their teaching. Senior leaders have taken on some management responsibilities to reduce your heavy workload.

You have implemented the recommendations from the previous inspection report by making links with outstanding settings and this has already helped staff to develop accurate evaluations of children's outcomes.

Another recommendation was to provide more opportunities for reading through play. In our learning walk we saw how learning opportunities are enhanced, through a wide range of books that children use in their indoor and outdoor activities.

In lessons, we observed that teachers take every opportunity to develop children's language. They encouraged boys to concentrate and take advantage of all the exciting activities that are offered. On occasions, a few boys lost concentration when listening to stories. In our learning walk, we also saw some missed opportunities by practitioners to ask children with high prior attainment questions that would deepen their learning even further.

In mathematical activities, while children were able to count, they did not routinely have the opportunity to see numbers or to develop early mark-making skills. This restricted their progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Parents are unanimous in their view that their children feel safe and are well looked after. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and your risk assessments are exemplary. Site security is continually updated.

Keeping children safe has the highest priority for your staff and you have made sure that this is embedded within the culture of the nursery. This has been achieved by

consistently making reference to any hazards in outdoor play and ensuring that children have the appropriate vocabulary to express their feelings.

The school's policies and procedures are comprehensive, up to date and fully understood by staff and parents. High-quality records note concerns and the actions taken by the school, parents and, where applicable, outside agencies. All of the appropriate checks are made on adults who work with children, and you and members of the governing body have attended safer recruitment training. Staff are vigilant in noticing any signs that children may need help. They know the procedures to follow to make sure that children are given timely and appropriate support where necessary.

Parents said that you have won their confidence because you are willing to discuss their problems, and your staff are always there to help. They enjoy seeing you at the school gates every morning, where you are always there to greet them. This gives parents the opportunity to communicate any concerns to you that their children may have on that day.

Governors are very aware of their role in promoting safeguarding and make all the necessary checks on the work of leaders to ensure that children are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- I focused in particular on the following aspects during the inspection: the effectiveness of your work to keep children safe, how well boys and children with high prior attainment are challenged, the effectiveness of your recent provision for two-year-olds, how you have improved opportunities for reading across the school, and how you have helped to develop the leadership skills of your senior staff to enable them to support you in setting the strategic direction for the school.
- Many of the two-year-old and three-year-old children joining the nursery have low starting points. They make good progress in settling into routines and pick up language quickly. Children are well integrated into all learning activities because of the way that practitioners develop play that is based upon children's interest levels, and the good-quality resources that have been purchased to meet their needs.
- Consistently good teaching over time, stimulating activities and high levels of care, mean that all groups of children make good progress in relation to their starting points in all areas of learning.
- Children make particularly rapid progress in their communication and language skills because every opportunity is taken to ensure that children acquire sentence skills at a fast rate. Parents are delighted that their children are such confident learners who are ready for their next stages in education. Parents indicate that they are very well informed of their children's progress and well guided in how they can help their children at home.
- Teaching children the sounds that letters make has had a positive effect on their

speaking and listening skills. Children have a genuine love of books and make reference to them in their play. They are developing secure skills of sequencing a story. They turn pages with great care and they are making good progress in identifying both sounds in the environment and those that letters make.

- Over time, children's progress in mathematics is good, although there are some missed opportunities in activities for them to mark make and to familiarise themselves with numbers when counting objects.
- Teachers have worked hard at improving their questioning skills but, too often, children with high prior attainment are not challenged enough to explain how they arrive at their answers.
- In story session time, there are occasions when some boys get restless and practitioners do not act quickly enough to re-engage them in learning, although, generally, all activities are interesting and imaginatively planned.
- You have ensured that boys' interest levels are catered for in your well-thought-out curriculum. Activities provide the levels of challenge and the breadth of experiences that ensure that all groups of children make rapid progress. Children experience a wide range of visits and trips, especially to the theatre, where they see their favourite stories, such as 'What the Ladybird Heard', come alive on stage.
- You have ensured that your senior staff have attended leadership courses, and this has helped them to develop all aspects of teaching and learning. Your senior leaders now coach practitioners and keep good-quality records of children's responses to learning, which they share with parents. They are fully aware of your strategic vision for the school and they have contributed to school self-evaluation and action planning.
- You have also improved the quality of teaching by rigorous performance management and by ensuring that teachers visit and learn from outstanding nurseries.
- The school action plan lacks clearly defined success criteria in relation to the impact that certain actions will have on children's learning. This makes it difficult for governors to evaluate the success of their spending decisions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children develop their competencies in mathematics by learning how to recognise and develop early mark-making skills in their play
- teachers ensure that boys are engaged at all times when listening to stories, and challenge all children's thinking by asking even more probing questions to develop their skills of explanation
- the school development plan has clearly identified success criteria so that governors can monitor the impact of their spending decisions and progress towards targets.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bogusia Matusiak-Varley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leaders. I had conversations with a wide range of staff. I talked to children while they were playing. I met with governors and the headteacher from an outstanding nursery that you work closely with. I spoke with parents and analysed responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I conducted learning walks during the morning and afternoon session with you. I looked at learning journals and other assessment information. I examined the school's self-evaluation and development plan, documents relating to the early years' pupil premium, support plans for children who have SEN and/or disabilities. I looked at safeguarding systems, the single central record and case studies of vulnerable pupils.