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Mrs Claire Rigden
Headteacher
St Paul's Nursery School
12 St Paul's Square
York
North Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Rigden

Short inspection of St Paul's Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 7 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 outstanding.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

You took up post at the start of this term and prior to your appointment the school had an interim headteacher. You have quickly established yourself and gained the confidence of staff, parents and carers. Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate; you judge the school to be a good school. You have already devised an action plan which rightly identifies priorities to develop the leadership capacity and to secure the school's financial sustainability.

You have already correctly identified that the school's website is 'not fit for purpose' in that not all required information is given. You have started to address this and to reach out to parents through social media. Your astute understanding of the urgent need to promote the school, increase the number on roll and appeal to a changing market is key to securing the school's long-term future.

In the short time you have been at the school, you have successfully focused on ensuring that children are getting a good start in developing their early reading and writing skills. This was clearly evident in some of the group work we observed. The youngest children were confidently identifying initial sounds in words, while the older children were able to write their names independently.

Children come into school enthusiastically and quickly adapt to the routines and

expectations. They sit attentively when listening to a story and take turns playing 'I-spy'. In the dining room, children show good manners when waiting for everyone to finish their meal before anyone leaves the table. Children also show good dexterity when using cutlery. Outside, they show consideration as they carefully control the bikes and trikes and play cooperatively with each other. Their physical skills are effectively developed through a range of activities set out for them. Children eagerly climb over a series of obstacles, showing good physical control, effective balancing techniques and due consideration for their own safety and that of their peers.

Children achieve well across nearly all the areas of learning within the framework for the early years. Their skills in spoken and written language are securely at levels expected for their age by the time they leave the school. They also gain a good understanding of mathematics, including shape and space. This was evident during the inspection, when children were learning about shapes in the environment and could confidently name them and refer to some of their properties.

The school has a very strong team of highly skilled teaching assistants who know the children well. They are given wide scope to plan their own group work from a broad plan provided by the lead teachers. Teaching assistants adapt these plans to meet the needs of the children and use imaginative ways to engage their interest. This results in children being highly motivated and able to sustain activities with a clear sense of purpose. For example, inspired by the story of 'Brave Meredith', two children were keen to create a forest, independently collecting natural materials from the garden area. The technique of 'deconstructed role play' is particularly effective in engaging boys' interest in books and in listening to a story.

The lead teachers have implemented various projects, including 'e-twinning' where schools in different European countries collaborate online. However, they are unable to quantify how this and other work has raised children's achievement in areas such as understanding the world and technology. At the end of the last school year, assessments show children's skills were less well developed in these areas.

Staff keep a range of detailed records charting children's progress across different areas of learning. A lot of time is spent recording what children have done and, in some cases, what age and stage the child is at. However, planning is not clearly linked to children's next steps and subsequent learning activities do not always provide children with enough challenge.

The inside environment is bright and attractive, with displays that reflect all areas of learning for this age group. Role play areas provide stimulating spaces for children to play creatively, and quiet areas, which have a good range of books, provide the opportunity for quiet reflection. Displays evidence children's own work and their attempts at mark-making and exploring different materials. It is evident that children's interests are a key driver for planning activities. For example, play in the sand tray was enhanced with a makeshift pulley because children wanted to experiment with loading and unloading sand. In contrast, the outside area appears 'tired', resources are showing signs of wear and tear and there are missed opportunities to provide activities to enhance the children's early reading, writing

and mathematical skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

Every parent who completed the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, said they were confident that the school keeps their children safe. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are well trained and make appropriate and timely referrals if they identify a concern. In such circumstances, you have been swift to act, engaging external agencies in urgent cases.

Although there is no statutory requirement for children to attend nursery, you are vigilant in following up any absences, particularly for your vulnerable families. You actively ensure that children are in a safe environment if not attending school. Safeguarding is effectively threaded through the curriculum with well-planned activities to help children manage risk. Children were able to tell me what they had to do to 'be careful'.

Inspection findings

- Following the school's last inspection, governors were asked to develop the skills of the team of staff so that they could make a greater contribution to the process of school improvement. The governors I spoke to are aware that further work is still needed to develop leadership skills and to ensure that leaders are held more tightly to account for the effectiveness of their work.
- For example, lead practitioners are unclear about their leadership roles and responsibilities. Although they have initiated projects which have added to the range of activities and to the quality of the curriculum, they are unable to articulate how their actions have improved the practice of support staff or contributed to developing the school.
- The quality of teaching, particularly by the school's teaching assistants, is strong. These support staff are given considerable autonomy to adapt session work to meet the needs of their particular group of children and they do this exceptionally well. As a result, the majority of children make at least good progress.
- Provision for children who attend for 15 hours over the week is strong. They quickly settle into a regular routine and respond well, particularly to the expectations and focused activities that help them develop their early reading skills. Provision for children who attend for 30 hours is also effective. You are rightly reviewing the provision to ensure that these children get an even wider variety of activities and teaching is more closely targeted to their individual needs.
- Parents rightly praise the school's support for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The school's sensory room provides a quiet area for children who need a calm environment. This is particularly beneficial for children with a high level of needs and those who need occasional respite from intensive social interaction. Children who have previously had difficulty settling in to other settings soon adapt to St Paul's. They are quickly

integrated into the nursery, enjoy the same activities as their peers and make strong and sometimes rapid progress.

- The school has up to 12 places of enhanced provision for children who have SEN and/or disabilities, of which five are currently filled. The support for these children, who have significant levels of need, is of a high quality. Provision is extremely well thought through. Sessions are delivered by highly skilled and specialist teaching assistants who have a thorough understanding of children's stages of development, particularly in the acquisition of language. The use of resources is highly effective in helping these children make rapid progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the skills of leaders are further developed and that they are held more closely to account for improving the school
- they develop further the skills of lead practitioners so that they contribute effectively to school improvement and to strengthening the work of support staff
- they use assessment information more effectively to plan the next steps in children's learning, so that children are consistently challenged to extend their thinking and learning
- they develop the outside area so that it provides quality activities across all areas of learning
- the website complies fully with statutory requirements and provides up-to-date information for parents, especially in relation to the school's pupil premium strategy, the behaviour policy and the complaints procedure.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen Heath
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your teacher lead practitioners and team of teaching assistants to discuss aspects of the school's work. You shared your own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school and your improvement plans. We observed teaching sessions as well as activities, both inside and outside, where children had a free choice. We looked at children's records of achievement (learning journeys) and teachers' planning to consider the quality of provision for the groups of children who attend for different sessions.

I reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to the safety and welfare of children. I also shared books with several children who chose to read and talked to children about their enjoyment of school.

I talked with several parents as they arrived with their children in the morning and considered the 27 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, including the written comments.

I met with the chair of the governing body and one other governor, and a representative of the local authority. I considered the views of the eight staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey.