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20 July 2018

Mrs Tania Fricker
Head of School
Holmewood Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Fricker

Short inspection of Holmewood Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 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 in 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are a highly effective head of school. You work in close partnership with the executive headteacher and the senior teacher. Together, you ensure that every child makes a strong start to their education. Your passion for early education and your commitment to every child shone through during the inspection. Parents and carers, staff and governors are highly complimentary of both you and the school. One parent, representing the views of many, commented that 'This nursery school is a gem.'

Children waste no time in getting stuck into their learning, and they persevere for long periods of time even when activities are difficult for them. Their behaviour is exemplary. Staff encourage children to reason and to make links between their learning. For example, one child said, 'The heart beats blood, but the heart is slower in older people.'

The provision for two-year-olds is a strength of the school. There is a strong focus on children's early communication, social skills and physical development in a very caring environment which enables them to flourish.

As a result of the highly stimulating educational provision, all children make strong progress. Regular communication with parents, and a wide range of parent workshops about early learning and support, help all children to make strong progress. This is particularly important for those children who need extra support to catch up with their peers. As a result, children are very well prepared to move onto primary school.

At the time of the previous inspection, it was commented on that more school staff should play an active part in helping the children learn outdoors. This has been successfully addressed through staff training. The impact of this increased focus on learning outdoors is that children now make better progress in their physical skills and their social and emotional development. The children learn early scientific ideas and skills as they help to look after the chickens and grow a wide variety of vegetables.

Your governors are knowledgeable and their support of the school is highly effective. They visit regularly to check that high standards are maintained and they ensure that children are safe, happy and making strong progress in their learning.

Governors ensure that leaders and staff work together across the three federation schools to make the best possible use of resources and to share expertise.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders and staff are diligent in checking that the whole site is safe for the children. This does not mean that the children are 'wrapped up in cotton wool'. There are many challenging activities available for them, especially outdoors, so they learn how to manage risks in a safe environment. For example, staff do not lift children on or off the climbing equipment. Instead, children are helped to think for themselves about how high they can safely go. The parents I spoke to all agreed that their children are safe in the nursery school.

Leaders and staff act quickly to give families extra help when they are having minor difficulties with managing the behaviour of their children or developing positive routines at home. Providing help quickly is intended to prevent these difficulties from getting worse. However, leaders' evaluation of some of these initiatives has not been rigorous enough to ensure that they are having the impact intended.

Safeguarding training is delivered to all staff. Staff understand what they must do to keep children safe, and recognise the different signs which may indicate a child could be at risk. Regular updates are given to all staff to ensure that they clearly understand policies and procedures.

Staff know how to report any concerns to the safeguarding team. Records show that this system is well managed: leaders work closely with outside agencies to provide individualised support promptly when children and families need it.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed that we would focus on two main areas to check that the school remains outstanding. The first focus looked at how you and your staff team ensure that provision outdoors contributes to the outstanding quality of education.

- The provision you have developed outdoors is excellent. Nearly all the activities which we saw had been very skilfully prepared to help children extend their physical skills, their communication, and their learning about early scientific ideas.
- In the two-year-old provision, children were looking closely at snails. One child carefully followed an adult's instructions to use a magnifying glass so she could see the pattern on the snail's shell.
- As part of their learning about keeping cool on a hot day, some of the older children were sitting with their feet in large trays of water. They managed their self-care needs very well, independently taking off their shoes and socks, and drying their feet at the end. They talked about how the water felt cool and one child noticed that the sun was 'making the water warmer'. Other children were engaged in making shakers to dance with outdoors. They were challenged to find the right size of lid for their bottle from a large assortment. They also grappled with the tricky task of getting dried pasta through the narrow necks of the bottles. All the children persevered with these difficulties until they had succeeded.
- Adults skilfully helped the children to resolve minor disputes outdoors. This meant that the active and exuberant children behaved immaculately.
- The second area of focus looked at how you ensure that children make excellent progress over time so that they are well prepared for their move to primary school.
- Several parents told me about how the nursery school had helped their children to develop their confidence and their communication skills. In the classes, children settled in quickly and confidently chose what they wanted to do from a wide range of stimulating activities.
- Three children played for an extended period in the home corner. They listened to each other's ideas well and played very imaginatively. One child suggested the role of 'aunty' to her friend before saying, 'This is your special bed, Aunty, so lie down.' In the block play area, children skilfully arranged the wooden blocks and other materials to make a city. When one child said that there was a fire, other children pretended to bring fire engines to the scene. Through these play activities, children engaged in extended conversations, learned about shapes and sizes, and concentrated for long periods of time.
- Children learning English as an additional language particularly benefited from a very skilful retelling of the story of 'Handa's Surprise'. Their eyes were glued to the adult as she retold the story, using attractive props and puppets. Children at the early stages of learning English were helped as the whole group practised saying the names of the different fruits, and counted them into the basket. A more fluent child commented that 'If she didn't put them in the basket, she couldn't have carried them all.'
- All groups of children are making strong progress. Boys start with lower levels of development than girls, but the nursery school is effective in helping them make rapid progress throughout the year. Children eligible for additional funding through the early years pupil premium are also making strong progress.

However, their attendance is lower than other children's, and on average they are missing nearly a day a week of their nursery education. The school takes a range of actions to promote good attendance, including phoning families on the first day of absence. However, these actions have not yet been effective.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and has been skilfully designed. Children take part in a wide range of activities, through which they make strong progress. Parents and carers value the creative ways in which key skills are taught. One grandmother commented that 'My granddaughter has learned to count – which we didn't do so well on at home. It was the Jack and the Beanstalk display with the numbers on the leaves that helped her.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take further steps to improve the attendance of children eligible for the early years pupil premium.

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

Yours sincerely

Julian Grenier
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and the executive headteacher. I met with parents informally as they arrived at school with their children. I met with the chair of the governing body and two school governors. I spoke with the local authority school improvement adviser by telephone. I visited all the classrooms with senior leaders, spoke to children and looked at the activities in the classrooms and outdoors. I considered the 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed a range of documentation related to safeguarding, improvement planning, governance, early years pupil premium and assessments of children's skills and understanding.