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Mr Michael Forber
Headteacher
Somerville Nursery School
Brentwood Street
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Dear Mr Forber

Short inspection of Somerville Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since the previous inspection, the school has federated with Somerville Primary School and there have been significant changes to the senior leadership team. You became headteacher in 2016, at the point of federation, and both schools share the same governing body.

Under your leadership, the school has gone from strength to strength. For example, the number of children attending the school has more than doubled since your appointment. You and your assistant headteacher have successfully integrated two-year-old provision into the school. This has had a positive impact on the good progress that children make. Training for staff is now more securely linked to the school's priorities for development. Children's progress is more closely monitored. As a result, any underperformance, such as the slight dip in 2017 in outcomes for speaking, reading and writing, is quickly identified and addressed. These improvements in speaking, reading and writing are still being embedded.

You, your school and staff receive, unsurprisingly, high levels of praise from parents and carers in all respects. Many were keen to talk to me as they brought their children to school. They explained to me how their children thoroughly enjoy coming to school to learn. The emotional support offered by you and your staff to families in challenging circumstances is valued by parents. Parents also greatly appreciate the wide and varied workshops that you and your staff provide to help them develop their children's learning at home. Parents typically commented: 'My child has come on in leaps and bounds since starting at the nursery.'

Children are an absolute credit to the school and their families. At the start of the school day, children skip into school with beaming smiles, eager to see the exciting range of activities on offer. Parents do not have to stay long because children settle quickly. Children's behaviour throughout the day is impeccable. Staff, through their words and actions, demonstrate positive behaviour. They lead by example and children follow.

You and your assistant headteacher have the full support of staff. They are proud to work alongside you both and morale is high. Staff share your aims and ambitions for the school. As a leader, you encourage your staff to develop their roles in education.

The school's website is bright, informative and easy to navigate. It provides parents with a wide range of useful information. This enables parents to have a clear understanding of how children spend their time and what they are learning while at the school.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to provide more opportunities for children to develop their problem-solving skills and to ensure that staff have the chance to observe best practice at other schools. Both issues have been resolved. Staff are now more skilled at standing back and giving children time to work things out for themselves before intervening to offer support. The quality of teaching has improved since staff have had the opportunity to observe colleagues' practice at other schools.

At the last inspection, leaders were also asked to ensure that governors provided a greater level of challenge to leaders. There is no doubt that governance has been strengthened by the federation and governors now hold leaders more fully to account. However, this aspect of governance is still not fully effective.

As part of this inspection, I have discovered that the school development plan, at times, lacks precision and it is not easy to measure success. In addition, the role of middle leaders could be strengthened regarding their contribution to monitoring the quality of teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff have a strong commitment to the safeguarding of children. You have ensured that they have received good and regular training, including in the areas of recent national concern, such as radicalisation. They are vigilant for any signs that a child may be being neglected or abused and use the school's systems to report any concerns that they may have. Designated safeguarding leads, in turn, make timely referrals to relevant agencies to ensure that vulnerable children are protected. Leaders have put in place comprehensive procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff. Children's safety is further assured by ensuring that new employees are not allowed to start working at the school until all relevant checks have been completed. At the time of the inspection, the single central record was

compliant, and there were no breaches to the statutory welfare requirements for the early years. All documentation relating to safeguarding examined during the inspection was in good order and fit for purpose.

Children are safe and supervised carefully by staff. Staff are always present to offer parents and children a warm welcome at the start of the school day. This gives parents an opportunity to talk to staff about any issues or concerns that their children may have. Staff teach children about personal safety as part of the daily routine.

Inspection findings

- Children start at the nursery with varying levels of knowledge and skills. From their different starting points, most children, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, make strong gains in their learning. However, in 2017, although still good, outcomes in speaking, reading and writing were slightly lower in comparison to other aspects of children's learning. You and your staff did not stand still, and swift action was taken to address this issue. Staff received additional training to refresh their teaching of reading. In conjunction with Liverpool University, the school took part in a project which involved trained volunteers coming into school to work with targeted children to improve their reading skills. You engaged the services of a speech and language therapist to work with children across the nursery to enhance their communication skills. To improve writing, a wide range of interesting mark-making opportunities were incorporated into independent play areas. These initiatives have improved outcomes in speaking, reading and writing. You recognise the importance of building on this success and ensuring that it is sustained over time.
- Staff have crafted an environment across the nursery, both indoors and outside, which is exciting and conducive to learning. This makes a significant contribution to the good progress that children make. Most resources are made from natural materials, providing children with real-life experiences. Resources are stored within child-height, allowing children to make independent choices about their play.
- The effective introduction of the two-year-old provision has helped to provide a good start for children. Leaders and staff place a strong focus on developing children's social, communication and physical skills in the two-year-old's classroom. Conversation flows freely as children play. Staff encourage children to identify colours, make marks in shaving foam with trucks and develop their fine motor skills by using scissors to cut straws into small pieces.
- Children move into the three-year-old's classroom as happy and confident youngsters. They are secure with the routines that operate with the nursery and confidently share and take turn with their friends. They access a wide range of exciting activities which develop all aspects of their learning. As a result of good teaching, children are keen to learn and are developing resilience.
- Children relish the time they spend outdoors. They play out in all weathers, suitably clothed to protect them from the elements. For example, in the school's

nature garden children excitedly search for bugs, climb trees, swing on ropes and erect tents. These delightful experiences allow children to explore, take risks, think and work out different ways of doing things.

- You and your assistant headteacher keep an eagle-eye on the quality of teaching. This is done in a variety of ways, such as formal lesson observations, learning walks, planning reviews and book scrutiny. You provide helpful feedback to enable staff to improve further their practice. Together with your assistant headteacher, you place strong emphasis on training to ensure that all staff have the knowledge and skills to provide children with the best start to their education. However, the monitoring of the quality of teaching is not delegated sufficiently among middle leaders in the nursery.
- The school development plan sets out the school's priorities which focus on improving further the outcomes for children. There are clear lines of accountability in place and timescales for the completion of these targets are realistic. However, at times, targets are not precise enough or measurable. Consequently, leaders and governors are not able to monitor, with accuracy, the progress the school is making towards achieving its goals.
- Transition arrangements into the nursery and onwards to primary school are effective and tailored to meet the needs of individual children. Children are admitted to the nursery gradually at the start of the term. This ensures that they are happy and settled in their new environment. Parents take an active part in their children's initial assessments. Almost all children move on to Somerville Primary School. Teachers from this school visit the nursery regularly to get to know the children, their likes, dislikes and capabilities. Such good practice smooths the pathway into the Reception class.
- Governors share your dedication and high expectations. They are ambitious for the school and are keen to ensure that children achieve their best during their time at the nursery. Governors are aware of what the school does well and what further improvements are needed. The federation has enabled governors across both schools to learn from each other and to develop further their skills of governance. Governors are not afraid to ask leaders pertinent and searching questions. However, the level of challenge offered to senior leaders, at times, still lacks sufficient rigour.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements to outcomes in reading, writing and speaking are sustained over time
- middle leaders take a more active role in the monitoring of the quality of teaching
- targets in the school development plan are sharper and measurable
- governors challenge senior leaders with even greater rigour.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you and your assistant headteacher. I also held informal discussions with staff, and with parents as they brought their children to school. I spoke by telephone with the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority. Together with your assistant headteacher, I toured the school to see the teaching and learning that was taking place. I looked at examples of children's work in their individual files and in displays on the walls. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and the development plans. I took account of the eight responses from staff to Ofsted's online questionnaire, as well as the school's own questionnaires to parents.