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Ms Neena Lall  
Headteacher  
St Stephen's Nursery School  
Whitfield Road  
London  
E6 1AS

Dear Ms Lall

### **Short inspection of St Stephen's Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 October 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 May 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 have built exceptionally strong partnerships with parents. This is central to the school's success and was a recurrent theme during this inspection.

Leaders are committed to offering high-quality early years education to all children. Staff have an exceptional understanding of children's early development and provide excellent opportunities across all areas of learning. As a result, children make outstanding progress from their low starting points. They leave the nursery school very well prepared for primary education.

Your evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and correctly recognises all the strengths of the school. You have exceptionally high expectations for and of the children. Governors are very supportive of you, leaders and staff and have a thorough understanding of the school and the community you serve.

You and staff have ensured that the children have access to highly stimulating resources. The indoor and outdoor provision helps children to make excellent progress in their development. High-quality learning opportunities encourage children to explore, investigate and learn about the world around them, as well as manage risk.

Through raising attendance significantly since the last inspection, you, leaders and governors have successfully addressed the key priority for improvement identified in the previous inspection report.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and statutory welfare requirements are fully met.

A culture of vigilance exists throughout the school. Staff are quick to recognise possible safeguarding risks and understand how to raise a concern. As a result, concerns are reported in a timely manner. Leaders from across the federation hold regular safeguarding meetings. They monitor procedures meticulously and ensure that records are detailed and of high quality.

Leaders liaise closely with outside agencies and make swift referrals when necessary. By providing specialist support such as a school counsellor and family support worker, you give effective support to the most vulnerable children and their families.

You, staff and governors work closely to ensure that children are safe. Governors receive regular updates on safeguarding and ensure the suitability of staff to work with children.

Staff have well-established routines for safely releasing children at end of nursery sessions. Children are taught to manage risks effectively. For example, children climbing in the outdoor area are helped by adults to find the safest way down.

Parents spoken to, and who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are well looked after and safe.

## **Inspection findings**

- The first key line of enquiry for this inspection was to look at how effectively leaders work in partnership with parents. You identified this as a particular strength of the school.
- The school has an excellent knowledge of its families and community. You understand that partnerships are key to successful early years experiences for children and provide a range of excellent opportunities to engage with parents. These include a wide range of workshop, including communication and language, toilet training and healthy eating support. Parents are provided with regular updates on children's progress. They told me that this was invaluable in helping them support their children's learning at home.
- Leaders and staff meet and greet parents at the beginning and end of sessions. This enables staff and parents to develop and reinforce positive relationships. Question and answer sessions with you provide opportunities to share your high expectations. These strengthen parent and community links very effectively.
- As a result of all this work, parents feel empowered and part of their children's learning. This is having an extremely positive impact on the school's community. Parents I spoke to said that communication is strong and that relationships

between parents, leaders and staff are a particular strength. One parent stated, 'I feel blessed that my child attends this school.' Nevertheless, we agreed that even more could be done to include those parents who, for various reasons, have difficulty in accessing education.

- The second key line of enquiry was how well the school is continuing to prepare children for the next stage of their education. It was identified as a strength at the last inspection and is an important part of early education.
- Talking with leaders and parents, I learned that home visits are used very effectively to share key information about children. This includes using parents' extensive knowledge of their children. Weekly 'stay and play' sessions in the summer term ensure consistency from home to school. This allows children to become familiar with the school's routines. Adults are skilful in building strong relationships with children at this early stage. This enables children to settle quickly into their learning. As a result, no time or opportunities are wasted.
- In the summer term, a robust transition process from Nursery to Reception ensures that all children's needs are met, including children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. All staff are well informed to ensure that these children are integrated smoothly into their new classes. This helps to reduce anxiety and uncertainty for all children.
- The third key line of enquiry looked at how effectively staff develop children's communication and language skills. This is because this is a prime area of learning in early years education and leaders said that it is 'at the heart of everything we do'. However, data suggests that children's attainment in their communication and language development is not as strong as other areas of learning. Most children join the school with underdeveloped language skills.
- Together with leaders, I observed small-group work, learning in classes and outdoors. Staff are skilful in using language enrichment activities. These provide children with opportunities to learn and extend language developmentally. Repetition of words and phrases through songs, nursery rhymes and familiar stories enables children to build up their vocabulary and explore language through play. Adults understand well when to intervene in children's play to support language acquisition. This ensures that children's language is developed and enhanced.
- Using high-quality books as an integral part of your curriculum, you have created a language-rich environment. Adults constantly model and reinforce language, encouraging children to talk and explain what they are doing. Staff are highly skilled in questioning children and modelling dialogue alongside children's play. They use any opportunity available to introduce new vocabulary and develop children's listening skills. For example, in a whole-class carpet session, children were encouraged to identify the sounds of musical instruments, such as glockenspiels and tambourines.
- I found that staff promote children's language and communication skills very effectively. Children make strong progress from very low starting points and speak confidently in readiness for their move to Reception Year.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- strengthen further the strong and purposeful partnerships with parents, particularly those who have most difficulty accessing education.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hook  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I carried out the following activities during the inspection. I held meetings with you, the deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. I held meetings with safeguarding leaders and special educational needs coordinators. I met with two teachers who had been recently appointed to the school. I observed practitioners in all classes and outdoors. I had a discussion with two governors and a representative of the local authority. I observed language enrichment activities and evaluated a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, development plans, and governors' minutes. I met with nine parents and took account of nine parent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. There were no responses to the staff and pupil surveys.