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Ms Diana Heath
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Heath

Short inspection of Norcot Early Years Centre

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders at Norcot Early Years Centre have continued to provide an exciting and stimulating curriculum, alongside the exceptional care that was identified in the previous inspection report. As a result, children love learning and make outstanding progress from their starting points. Your strong leadership has ensured that all staff receive tailored training, so that they are able to provide expert support to children. Parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were overwhelmingly positive about the school's 'amazing team', the 'colourful, inspiring, educational and fun' facilities and the 'amazing experiences' that children gain. One parent's comment was echoed by many others when they said, 'Staff are genuinely concerned about each child and give them 100% of their attention and time.'

Leaders, including the governing body, have continued to improve the quality of education and care. You have refined the school's monitoring and support systems to ensure that children's skills, knowledge and understanding develop well in every area of the curriculum. Consequently, children, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make rapid progress from starting points that are below those typical at this age.

Governance is impressive at Norcot. Governors have a breadth of educational and social-care expertise which informs their questioning and challenge of leaders. Through regular visits and meetings with leaders and staff, they gather a range of information to challenge and support the school in equal measure. Their work informs the school's

improvement priorities and is meticulously documented.

Children behave extremely well at Norcot. They are attentive, kind and empathetic. Children play very well together and share their toys and books happily. Children also respond very well to instructions and attentively follow the school rules. Throughout the curriculum, children develop their understanding of different cultures and faiths, through celebrations such as Christmas and Diwali.

You correctly judge children's language and communication skills to be a strength of the school. You have skilfully embedded evidence-based research about children's language development in the curriculum. Children make rapid improvements in their ability to articulate their feelings and viewpoints.

You and your leadership team take swift and appropriate action where you consider that improvement is required. All the issues identified at the previous inspection have been met well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, are highly vigilant and alert to the importance of ensuring strong safeguarding arrangements. Records, including the checks made on adults who work at the school, are carefully and securely maintained. All parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children were safe at the school. One parent's view was voiced by many others throughout the inspection when they said, 'Norcot provides us with the best, safest and most inspiring environment for our children.'

Through the curriculum, children learn about how to keep safe in many ways such as the importance of washing their hands before eating and demonstrating kindness to each other. The 'learning through nature' approach enables children to learn about the dangers of fire and the importance of exercise and fresh air. As a result, children are well prepared for the Reception class.

Leaders and staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures and respond swiftly and appropriately to safeguard children both physically and emotionally. Leaders and other staff provide exceptional care for families that goes beyond their statutory duty. The family worker, in collaboration with leaders, provides support to families regarding housing, finance and medical issues. This helps to ensure that children are well cared for both at school and at home. Many parents told me how the school had transformed their lives and the lives of their children through this additional care and support.

Inspection findings

- This inspection's first line of enquiry focused on how well leaders ensure that children have quiet areas at lunchtime which are supported by staff as well as at other times of the day. This was an area for improvement from the last inspection. Leaders have worked hard to redesign the provision for children at lunchtime. Staff at lunchtime have received high-quality training that enables them to support children's development in quiet areas of the school. Children drive the design of the curriculum by making their own decisions about where they want to go, what they want to learn and how they are going to learn. Consequently, some children spend time observing

the activities and behaviour of other children before joining in. Staff support children's understanding of the world around them very well through targeted questioning and a breadth of storybooks. In these quiet areas, children listen attentively to stories and engage fully in make-believe worlds.

- Leaders and other staff have structured very effective activities at lunchtime to develop children's skills, knowledge and understanding in a range of areas. For example, I observed children relishing the opportunity to make music and perform with a range of instruments on a small stage. I also observed children playing on tricycles and scooters in the outdoor area with infectious enthusiasm. Staff ensure that children continue to develop their critical skills, knowledge and understanding at lunchtime. This helps children to make rapid progress throughout the curriculum.
- My second key line of enquiry was about the ways in which teaching and learning meet the needs of all children, including children with SEND and children who speak English as an additional language. The quality of teaching and learning is very strong. Leaders and staff have ensured that children acquire and develop strong language skills throughout the curriculum. For example, I observed staff throughout the day adapting their use of language to extend children's vocabulary. Through structured repetition, particularly through songs, children imitated and innovatively applied the vocabulary used by staff. Consequently, children make rapid progress in the development of their language and communications skills.
- Drawing on evidence-based research, including visits to early years settings in Norway, leaders have established a highly effective 'learning through nature approach'. Children regularly visit the local parks and woods to be immersed in the sensory, imaginative world of nature. Children develop independent learning skills, resilience, problem-solving and critical language skills. I observed a group of two-year-old children absorbed in cooking marshmallows over an open fire in the woods. Children engage in very well-structured activities whereby they design the focus for learning and extend their vocabulary and their understanding of the complex challenges of the natural world. Staff skilfully interact with children in the woods so that they articulate what they are experiencing both physically and emotionally.
- Leaders and other staff have ensured that children with SEND have equal access to the curriculum through additional adult support. Well-structured activities enable children with SEND to develop a range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Children decide what they would like to learn and how they would like to learn, with expert support from staff. I observed children digging holes in the sand with focus and enthusiasm, well supported by staff. To support children's language and communication skills, staff skilfully use sign language, enabling children to participate fully in all activities. Many parents told me about the 'fantastic', 'amazing' team who work with children with SEND.
- Leaders and other staff have constructed activities that extend children's physical and emotional engagement with learning through painting and music. Children are immersed in the sensory, creative construction of their interpretation of the world they inhabit. Children also develop and extend their understanding of how to articulate their views of the world through the stories narrated partly by adults, and partly by the children. For example, I observed children offering their interpretations of a story about a family of owls through pertinent and creative use of vocabulary.

- Leaders use information about children very well. They identify children's strengths and weaknesses with precision. Consequently, additional support is provided to children who may be falling behind to enable them to make strong progress. The school introduced a new online system to communicate children's achievements to parents and carers quite recently. The system enables parents and carers to provide additional information about children's achievements at home. This enables staff to adapt activities and resources if necessary, and to enrich children's development. However, staff have not yet been able to help some parents and carers to use the system effectively. Consequently, staff do not have the information to enrich and complement all children's learning experiences at home with activities and conversations at the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- parents and carers are helped to respond regularly to the new online learning journal, so that children's experiences at home and at school can complement each other, and strengthen their development.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

For this inspection, I had meetings with you, other senior leaders, and middle leaders. I also met with three governors. I spoke with children informally in the indoor and outdoor areas. I visited a range of activities to look at children's learning across the curriculum and carried out a separate scrutiny of children's learning journals.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the record of recruitment checks carried out on all adults working at the school. A range of documentation was looked at, including: the school's self-evaluation; improvement plans; information relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; the minutes of governors' meetings; and curriculum plans. I considered the views of 18 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 19 free-text comments. I also considered the views of 17 members of staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey.