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Ms Nancy Farrow  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Farrow

### **Short inspection of Grace Owen Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 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 October 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Grace Owen is a small school with a large heart. Your caring and nurturing approach permeates throughout everything you do. You and your rooms lead educator (deputy) lead by example. You make sure that all adults provide exceptionally high levels of care across the school. As a result, staff, children, and parents and carers are safe and happy. Relationships are harmonious. Families appreciate how approachable all members of your team are and recognise that you will 'go the extra mile' for them. One parent commented, 'I am so happy... staff are kind and caring. It always feels relaxed, positive and fun.' You provide a range of services for your local community through, for example, the use of a community foodbank, free breakfasts and strong pastoral support for both families and children. This is because you know your community well. You do everything you can to ensure that you meet the needs of children and their families. Parents particularly value the Saturday special you run each half term. Here, parents can work together on projects and meet other families.

The school is a very special place, where each child is valued as an individual and supported to reach their full potential. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are particularly well supported. Early years educators plan activities based on children's individual learning plans, and because they know the children well they scaffold their learning effectively. For example, one child was picking up different coloured pompoms that had been frozen into ice cubes. The activity captured the child's fascination, enabling him to sustain concentration for a long period of time. Another group of children, with specific learning needs, were well supported in their learning. This was because the adult skilfully used both sign language and verbal communication to engage all the children and hold their concentration. As a result of these well-planned activities, children are highly motivated and engaged in their learning. Provision for children with SEND is particularly strong.

The quality of teaching is consistently high across the three classrooms. The teaching of speaking and listening skills is a strength of the school. Children are confident learners. They talk to each other and to adults throughout their play. Adults skilfully watch and listen before they respond to what they see. When they intervene, they ask open questions which help to extend thinking. Adults model correct sentence structure throughout activities. Consequently, children speak confidently, listen to each other and are developing a wider vocabulary. Attainment at the end of nursery is particularly high in communication and language.

You take an active role in the partnership of schools across your locality and lead the early years networks. You are involved in moderation and professional development across all 17 schools. Your successful music bid has resulted in a much higher profile for music across the area. As a result, children now have the opportunity to work with musicians and perform to an audience. The community song book has captured the imagination of your families. It has provided a wealth of songs to share in a variety of community languages. You provide extensive training for other early years teachers and student teachers and share your good practice with others. You have strong links with the local university and keep abreast of current research.

Grace Owen is a rich, vibrant and diverse learning community. You celebrate the differences and similarities of your local families. Displays about families celebrate the wide mix of cultures, backgrounds and family types within your school. Children learn acceptance of others who are different from them from a young age. Behaviour is exceptional because children enjoy positive relationships with adults. Adults use praise well to celebrate children's achievements.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders carry out comprehensive checks to ensure that all adults are suitable to work with children. All staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff carry out a safeguarding quiz to ensure that they are up to date with their knowledge. You focus on different aspects of safeguarding, in detail, so that staff understand what

is expected of them. For example, staff completed training on the use of social media prior to launching your school Facebook site.

You are particularly vigilant in your record-keeping. You attend all meetings with other professionals and chase up anything you have concerns about. Extra support is quickly put in place for any children who are going through particularly stressful situations.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the previous inspection, you were asked to accelerate children's progress further, by providing more opportunities to link the spoken and written word. You have achieved this by providing a variety of opportunities to support children's early reading and writing skills. Older children make up stories, which adults write down. Adults use the written stories to develop work on characterisation and early comprehension skills. Some children choose to 'write' their own stories and many draw pictures to illustrate them. Children act out their stories with the support of adults. Consequently, children see themselves as writers and recognise that the spoken word can be recorded. Extended work on each story helps children to extend their language and spoken vocabulary.
- Each morning, children find their own name label without the help of pictures. They have access to name cards throughout the day in order to learn how to write their own names. Children enjoy sharing their home-made personal photograph books. Younger children share photographs of themselves and talk about what they are doing. Older children have written captions alongside the photographs and enjoy 'reading' about their adventures. Everyone is immensely proud of these treasured possessions and willing to share them with others. Children increasingly see themselves as writers because you have high expectations about what children can achieve. As a result, a high proportion of children make strong progress across the literacy areas of learning.
- You were also asked to improve outcomes by clearly identifying what children need to learn next from written observations. Beautifully crafted learning journals provide written summaries of how children learn and capture what children say. You highlight all children's speech and, over time, this gives a clear picture of how well children's spoken language is developing. Journals clearly record what children need to learn next. Adults use this to inform their planning. As a result, children are highly engaged in activities that are well matched to their needs, and outcomes are continuing to improve.
- The previous inspection report asked you to improve procedures for measuring the achievement of different groups of children. Termly analysis of assessment information provides governors with a clear overview of how different groups of children are progressing. Some of the group information is difficult to compare, due to there being small numbers in each cohort and significant variance in patterns of attendance. However, because your individual tracking is thorough, you identify which children need extra support in order to meet their needs. All groups of children make at least good progress across all areas of learning. Children with SEND make particularly strong progress from their starting points.

- I wanted to know how you engage with your parents because there was limited information on the website about school events. You have an active Facebook group that keeps parents up to date with everything that is happening in school. Both staff and parents contribute regularly. Parents find this a useful way of communicating with each other and yourselves. You provide regular home-learning newsletters which inform parents about the songs and stories you are learning and planned events. You know parents well and speak to them as they pick up and drop off their children. One parent stated, 'We have regular feedback sessions with our child's key worker. They, and the other nursery staff, are always open and approachable.' Parents are encouraged to get involved in their children's learning through workshops, homework and the Saturday special. Parental engagement is a positive feature of the school.
- Finally, I wanted to know whether you had continued to build on the strengths identified at the previous inspection. Your curriculum is child-centred and planned around the interests of the children in your care. You also plan around calendar-based festivals and events. You adopt the same curriculum approach across all three rooms. The built-in progression provides the older children with additional challenge. Each week, children learn different songs and poems to add to the repertoire of songs they know. Learning leaders provide exciting and fun sessions to engage children in singing known songs and retelling stories. All children join in with singing because the sessions are fun, lively and repeated daily. They know the routine and this helps them feel safe and secure. Work around rhymes and stories is helping children to develop early literacy and communication skills. Although you inform parents about the curriculum through newsletters, more detailed information would help them to further support their children at home. The curriculum information provided on the school's website does not provide parents with enough information about what children are learning.
- Leadership is strong. The newly appointed chair of governors is an early years specialist and offers both challenge and support. Governors have audited their skills and have actively sought new governors with particular strengths. Governors provide challenge and demonstrate a good understanding of the strengths of the school. They have increased the leadership capacity through appointing a new teacher to release you from your three-day-a-week teaching commitment. Strengths, identified at the previous inspection, have significantly improved.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they review the new school website to ensure that it provides more information for parents about the curriculum children are following.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Lunn  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I visited all three classes, with yourself, to observe children's learning. I scrutinised a range of learning journals and viewed the work displayed around the rooms. I met with you, your rooms lead educator (deputy), two governors, including the chair, two representatives from the local education authority and six parents. I looked at the school's information on safeguarding and checked procedures for safer recruitment. I checked a range of documentation, including risk assessments, leaders' self-evaluation, governor minutes, data analysis and external reviews. I watched children reading with known adults. I considered all 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 15 written responses from parents.