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Ms Rebecca Sherwood
Executive Headteacher
Grove Children & Family Centre
Tower Mill Road
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Dear Ms Sherwood

Short inspection of Grove Children & Family Centre

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2019, 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 December 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 your appointment two years ago, you have developed the federation with Kintore Way Nursery School. This has been effective in moving the school quickly forward. You have used your expertise in early years education, and the inclusion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to deliver highly effective staff training. You have improved the organisation and resourcing of the nursery school. After a period of decline, the number of children on roll is rising.

Your vision for the school is supported by staff, whose skills and confidence are growing. Those who are new in leadership roles have already made an impact. The provision for children with SEND is a significant strength of the school, which includes many children with very complex needs. Staff have been trained to communicate with signs and symbols, alongside spoken language. Specialist group sessions to develop children's attention skills have been thoughtfully implemented. As a result, children with SEND are thriving.

Children benefit from an excellent learning environment. They can choose from a wide range of resources to make their own playdough, mix their own paints and use saws and hammers safely. The staff team work very effectively to help and guide the children as they learn how to play together and manage occasional conflicts. However, children are not receiving the regular teaching they need to maximise their progress in the early stages of reading and writing.

Governors know the school very well. They visit regularly and ask probing questions to senior leaders. However, leaders and governors have not developed a robust approach to tackling children's absence. As a result, attendance is low and has not improved during the last two years. Children who do not attend regularly are not making as much progress as they could.

You have developed strong relationships with parents, who particularly value your support when they are facing difficulties. One stated that, 'The Grove have been so helpful to me and my children during a hard time we have had lately.' Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive. They all agree that their children are happy in the nursery.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that statutory welfare requirements are fully met. You and your staff team work hard to support vulnerable children, including those with SEND. Staff have strong relationships with children and listen to their views in order to keep them safe. Staff know the procedures they need to follow if they have a concern. They are vigilant and ensure that the premises are safe.

Safeguarding posters displayed around the school contain clear information and remind staff and visitors that everyone is responsible for children's safety and wellbeing. Leaders act promptly when there are concerns. They quickly provide 'early help' through local partnerships so that families get timely support.

Parents spoken to, and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, say that children are safe at the school and well looked after. One parent of a child with SEND commented that, 'The way staff have connected with him, I know that he's safe.'

Inspection findings

- When we met at the start of the inspection, we agreed three lines of enquiry. My first line of enquiry was to find out how effective your work is to ensure that children develop their communication skills. You have identified this as a priority for staff professional development.
- Staff seize opportunities to have extended conversations with children, exploring ideas and developing their understanding of size and position. In a long conversation with a child about the importance of wearing a body warmer as well as a coat, an adult used the words 'bigger', 'larger' and 'underneath'. The child, in turn, used these words to describe what she was doing as she prepared to go outside on a very cold January day.
- Children with SEND benefit from a range of small group activities which have been thoughtfully selected. In one of these activities, called 'Bucket Time', children delighted in joining in with the songs. They were bursting in anticipation as they waited for a balloon to whizz around the room and a jack-in-the-box to pop up. A particular strength of this practice is that staff allow children plenty

time to process what they have seen and then communicate their response. These sessions are highly effective in helping children to develop their attention.

- Staff use signs and symbols consistently, alongside spoken language, to support communication. All the children are learning to communicate with each other and play together. This enables children with SEND to take part in activities and feel included.
- Parents appreciate the school's work to develop their children's communication skills. One parent of two children in the nursery commented that, 'Their speech has improved, and they have conversations between each other now.'
- However, support for two-year-olds to develop their ability to communicate is not yet fully effective. The group time at the end of the session did not engage many of the children's attention. Adults do not consistently join in with two-year-olds' play to encourage them to talk.
- The second key line of enquiry was to evaluate the effectiveness of the nursery curriculum in ensuring that children access all seven areas of learning in the early years. We decided on this because your previous inspection found that activities outdoors did not give children the chance to learn a wide range of language, number and science skills.
- Excellent resourcing and organisation give children access to a wide range of stimulating activities, both indoors and outside. In the 'mud kitchen', children explored early scientific ideas as they mixed water and soil together, and put their ears against the water butt to hear the water trickling in. Children were observed making their own playdough and adding water to powder paints to mix their own colours. Through these activities, they are learning about how materials change when they are mixed together.
- A small group of children acted out the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood' in the garden, with adult guidance. The adult was enthusiastic and creatively used the nursery garden to find places to hide in 'grandmother's cottage'. As a result, the children sustained their play and enjoyed retelling the story.
- The nursery's approach to implementing new approaches to learning is sound. For example, leaders introduced parents and staff to small bags of play materials in the summer to help children develop strength and coordination in their fingers. Leaders then supported staff consistently to use these materials with the children. The school's assessment information shows that this new approach is paying off, with improvements in children's dexterity and concentration.
- However, some weaknesses remain. During the morning nursery session, no children were observed in the book corner, and no adults were observed reading books to children. On occasion, some staff do not help children to learn about the relationship between the sounds they hear in words and the letters they can see or write.
- The third key line of enquiry considered how well the nursery provision helps children to develop their physical skills. This was a strength at the last inspection.
- Outdoors, children were highly active. They played chasing games with adults, learning how to run at speed, stop, and change direction. Adults joined in with

children's climbing outdoors, encouraging them to scramble up the nets and develop their strength and stamina.

- Tidying up routines encourage children's physical development as they wash up dishes, wipe down tables, sweep the floor and put things carefully away in the correct places.
- However, children do not have opportunities fully to develop their skills at snack and meal times. Adults spread margarine on crackers, hand out pieces of fruit and pour water for the children. As a result, children are not becoming more independent in their physical skills and self-care at these times.
- The woodwork area is exceptionally well organised and managed, so that children achieve at a very high level. Children are given careful guidance and safety advice as they learn how to use the saws and hammers. As a result, they make rapid progress in their physical skills. During the day, one child learned how to use the vice to hold the wood steady as she sawed. Another child learned how to use the claw hammer. She was delighted when she managed to pull out all of the nails she had just hammered in.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they strengthen arrangements to improve the attendance of children who do not attend regularly
- training and support for staff enables them to give two-year-olds the help they need to make strong progress in their communication skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Julian Grenier
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and your assistant headteacher several times to evaluate the quality of children's education and to discuss the nursery school's work. Together with leaders, I visited the morning and afternoon nursery sessions to observe children as they played and learned. I spoke to children about their learning and looked at records of their achievement over time. I held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and one other governor. I met with a

representative from the local authority. I reviewed a range of documents about safeguarding, improvement planning and assessments of children's skills and understanding. I met with five parents and considered the 32 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, including 3 written comments.