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13 March 2019

Mrs Sarah Brooking
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brooking

Short inspection of Parklands Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 outstanding in February 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

You remain determined to ensure that the children are at the heart of your decision-making. You lead by example and have high aspirations for the children's safety, happiness and well-being. You and your staff work hard to ensure that the curriculum is rich, meaningful and engaging. Children relish the opportunities to learn through play. The work that leaders and staff undertake to support children's personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language skills is highly effective. As one parent said, 'My child is classed as an individual and given activities that meet my child's needs.'

We agreed that more needs to be done to ensure that a greater number of children leave your school with skills typically expected for their age in reading, writing and number. Leaders do not ensure that children are accurately assessed in these aspects of learning when they start school. Consequently, senior leaders and governors do not have a clear understanding of the progress some children make from their starting points. You also recognise that the needs of the most able children are not always being met in these specific aspects of learning and that these children could make better progress.

Despite these weaknesses, the school still has many strengths. You and your staff continue to successfully address the area for improvement identified at the last inspection. Effective systems for recording children's 'next steps' are in place and used

well to identify individual children's needs. Staff use this information, alongside their deep understanding of each child's interests, to plan activities that are fun, motivating and ensure that most children continue to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding required in most areas of learning. For example, children were seen engaged in mark-making activities with dinosaurs in cornflour. They developed their ability to make different shapes and lines while talking about types of dinosaurs and what they looked like and might eat.

You have established an effective team of staff who share your passion for children learning through play. They provide a wide range of exciting and engaging activities for children. Staff skilfully use questioning to develop children's talk and thinking skills. They cleverly incorporate learning into the children's play. For example, children were seen talking about the capacity of different containers they were filling in the sand area, while others were counting the number of shapes they had printed in the creative area.

Children are imaginative and independent learners. Children access their own resources and make effective choices about how to improve their learning. For example, children were seen building a rocket using a range of large-scale junk materials outside. They discussed what else was needed to launch the rocket to the moon. Children creatively used the water from a nearby puddle to gather 'fuel' to fill up the rocket and prepare it for its journey. Children show high levels of concentration and focus in learning and play. During the same activity, adults asked the children questions to promote their thinking. One child replied politely, 'I'm too busy concentrating, so I can't answer.'

Your ethos of learning indoors and outside 'no matter what the weather' resonates throughout the provision. Children relish learning both indoors and outside. For example, children were observed making binoculars from toilet roll tubes in the junk modelling area indoors. Children used the binoculars outside to look for bugs and minibeasts while riding bikes and trikes around the garden.

Children behave well. Staff have established effective routines. Because of this, children feel safe and are not afraid to try out new experiences. Children are polite, friendly and kind. They show particularly high levels of care towards children who speak English as an additional language. They look after them by modelling English and helping them to say key words while playing games. Children are engaged and inquisitive learners. They like to ask questions and find out more. For example, children were keen to ask, 'Why is the inspector here and where does he live?'

Parents are highly supportive of the school. They appreciate the work of leaders and staff. Most parents say that children are well cared for, are safe and enjoy spending time in the school. As one parent said, 'The staff are amazing. They are a close-knit team who make sure my child is happy.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements, including recruitment and vetting, are fit for purpose. There is a culture of vigilance throughout the school and staff are quick to act upon concerns to ensure the safety of children in

school. They are well trained in safeguarding and paediatric first aid. They have a good understanding of the signs of abuse and harm. You and the family support worker are tenacious in seeking the right external support for children and their families. Together, you act in a timely manner to make referrals for early help and support. The recording of child protection concerns is detailed and precise. Leaders make effective contributions to 'team around the family' meetings and to child protection plans and conferences.

Children feel safe in school and are taught about keeping safe. Children understand the risks involved in everyday play. For example, one child built a ship out of crates and climbed to the highest point to jump down. Before jumping she asked herself, 'Is this a safe place for me to jump from?' Parents overwhelmingly agree the school is a safe place for their children to learn and grow.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection I considered how well the curriculum is planned to ensure that all children are prepared for the next stage of their education and for life in modern Britain. Leaders have high expectations for what children can achieve in personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language. Children make strong progress in these areas and leave school with good interpersonal skills, effective gross and fine motor skills and the ability to speak fluently using a range of appropriate vocabulary. Children develop effective characteristics for learning in preparation for starting in Reception class. However, leaders' and staff's expectations of what children can achieve in reading, writing and number are too low, particularly for the most able. Too many children leave school with skills below that expected for their age in these aspects of learning. As a result, some of these children are not as well prepared for entering Reception classes as they could be.
- Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. There is a strong sense of inclusion and equality throughout the school. Staff carefully adapt the curriculum and provide effective small-group and one-to-one support for children with SEND. 'Family workers' are used effectively to support these children by modelling language, providing short, clear explanations of tasks and asking simple questions to check children's understanding. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable about a range of different types of special educational needs. For example, they use 'now and then' cards and visual timetables to support children with autism spectrum disorder so they can access the curriculum alongside their peers.
- Children are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They are tolerant and respectful. Leaders ensure that children learn about a range of different cultures, faiths and traditions. For example, children learn about Diwali by making Rangoli patterns and Chinese new year by learning Chinese numbers and tasting Chinese foods. Parents from different faiths are invited in to school to share customs and traditions with children, including dressing in traditional Hindu clothing and sharing religious stories. Leaders and staff draw upon the context of the local community effectively. For example, children make regular visits to the local woodland and nearby shops to meet people from the community and experience new things such as den building in the forest. Children experience visits to interesting places such as local farms to see a live

nativity or to larger cities to visit museums.

- During the inspection I considered how effectively governors hold leaders to account for the performance of the school. The governing body has experienced some significant changes in membership since the last inspection. The chair and vice chair of the governing body, along with the safeguarding governor, are all new to role. Governors are reflective and have a clear understanding of the governing body's strengths and weaknesses. They have completed an audit of the governing body's skills and expertise and are keen to access training to improve these areas. While some individual governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school they do not have a detailed understanding of their statutory duties. For example, governors do not know how well children achieve in the school, they do not know how additional funding is spent or its impact, and they do not thoroughly check that leaders have written or updated statutory policies. Consequently, governors do not hold leaders to account effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors receive training to effectively hold leaders to account for the performance of the school and ensure that the governing body fulfils all its statutory duties
- all children are accurately assessed in the specific areas of learning when starting school so that leaders can more effectively track the progress children make from these starting points
- staff raise expectations of what children, including the most able, can achieve in reading, writing and number so more leave school with skills typically expected, or above that, for their age.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Varnam
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other leaders. I held discussions with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and with a representative from the local authority. I observed learning jointly with you in the school provision. I scrutinised children's work jointly with the teaching and learning leader. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation document, the school's plans for improvement, minutes of the governing body meetings and documents relating to safeguarding. I observed behaviour around school. I met with

a group of parents before the start of the school day. There were insufficient responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire), to analyse. There were no responses to the pupil or staff surveys.