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Miss Susan Stewart  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Stewart

### **Short inspection of Brearley Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 5 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 December 2014.

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.**

Since the previous inspection, there have been some significant changes to staffing and the context of the school, which have presented some challenges to you. The school is no longer part of the children's centre. This has resulted in reduced funding and local authority support for vulnerable children and their families. The number of children on roll has also increased from 105 to 180. This includes adding provision for a large number of two-year-olds. You have reduced your contract to part-time and the deputy headteacher manages the school each morning. A new chair of the governing body was appointed in 2017 but governor recruitment has been an issue. There have also been reductions to the number of teaching staff employed due to budget constraints. You have managed these changes well. Nevertheless, there are some areas which need addressing.

The school continues to be very inclusive and community-centred. Children are happy and well cared for. They mix freely with children from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures and adults successfully promote good behaviour and respect. Relationships between staff and children are good. Adults are attentive to children's needs and are highly vigilant to ensure that children are safe. Provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a strength. Parents have positive views of the school and most staff are proud to work at Brearley Nursery.

The area for improvement identified at the last inspection was to improve children's progress in reading to match that in writing. The school's own assessment information shows that the large majority of children make good progress in reading, in line with writing. While this key issue has been partially addressed, further work is needed to improve progress in reading and foster children's love of books.

Other areas identified for improvement include: improving the consistency and quality of teaching in all classes; ensuring that assessments of what children know and can do are accurate; sharpening the school improvement plan to provide a strategic direction for leaders and governors; and improving governors' knowledge of the early years pupil premium funding.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong safeguarding culture within the school. You, your staff and governors recognise the importance of child-protection training so that you have a secure knowledge of how to keep children safe. All staff know who to speak to about any concerns which arise in relation to children's well-being. They understand how to record these concerns and have confidence that these will be taken seriously. Improved systems are in place, through the use of an electronic system, to which all staff have access.

You ensure that routines, such as locking gates and carrying out daily risk assessments, are completed to protect children. Appropriate recruitment checks are carried out on staff to ensure that they are fit to work with children. Parents agree their children are safe and this is evident in the confident and cheerful way children conduct themselves throughout the school day.

### **Inspection findings**

- Together with your leadership team and leaders from other schools, you regularly review the quality of teaching and learning in the school. However, observations during the inspection showed that there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in some classes. Where teaching is effective, staff make the purpose of the lesson clear and ask children a wide range of questions to check their understanding. They also make links with other areas of learning, for example using phonics to reinforce letters and sounds and gauging children's knowledge of a healthy diet when making a Gruffalo crumble. However, this is not the case in other classes. Some adults ask simple questions and do not challenge or extend the most able children.
- Children in both the two-year-old and three-year-old classes grow quickly in their independence, curiosity and confidence. Activities are suitably matched to the different age groups. Adults frequently burst into song and use singing and music to engage children and teach routines. Children respond well and join in accordingly. This helps develop their early language skills. Number work is also promoted well and children make good gains in this area of learning. Adults ensure that the curriculum regularly includes teaching about other cultures and

celebrations, for example Chinese New Year and St David's Day, so that children have an early understanding about life in modern Britain. Good health also features strongly in the curriculum, with children learning to brush their teeth properly as part of Oral Health Week and eating fruit and drinking milk daily.

- The outdoors is used extensively, and for a good proportion of the school day. Adults check that children are suitably clothed for working outdoors. A wide range of activities, including forest school, helps children improve and extend their physical and social development. The curriculum is also enriched well through lots of visits. For example, children enjoyed painting pictures of their trip to the zoo, the park and the National Space Centre. Staff consistently manage children's behaviour well and quickly resolve any minor disputes which arise.
- You have introduced a new programme of phonics and purchased resources to help children practise their letters and sounds and develop their early reading skills. Staff have received training in this aspect and children are taught in ability groups to meet their different needs. You provide workshops for parents that encourage them to support their children at home with reading. However, during the inspection, some parents reported that their children do not take books home to share, including the most able children who can sight read some words. Additionally, few children select or share books independently or with adults during child-initiated learning time indoors or outdoors.
- Leaders and staff regularly assess children's learning in all aspects of the curriculum. You check children's progress carefully and analyse this in terms of different groups, including gender, SEND and pupil premium to detect where gaps exist. Adults observe children in different activities and add photographs, comments and assessments of which age-bands children are working within. These are stored electronically in individual learning journals. However, many of the assessments made are too low. Evidence in the learning journals shows that children are more capable than the adult's assessment suggests. Leaders agree that there is a mismatch between actual evidence and the assessments made. This leads to baseline assessments being insecure and too low for some children.
- Provision for children with SEND is strong. Children receive high-quality support, either individually or in 'the ark'. This provides tailored support, one hour per day, for children with autism spectrum disorder. The SEND leader has a detailed knowledge of children's individual difficulties and accesses specialist support from external agencies. Well-devised support plans ensure that children's needs are successfully met. Leaders track the progress of children and provide additional adult support and resources to ensure that they make good progress.
- You make good use of the early years pupil premium funding to include eligible children fully in school life and provide additional support. This year the school received just over £16,000 to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Children benefit from the large number of school visits provided. This helps their personal, social and emotional development. Work in learning journals shows that most children make good progress across the curriculum. However, school governors are not aware of how the money is spent or its impact on children's achievement. They do not check this aspect carefully enough.
- Until recently, the school has struggled to recruit new governors and only a small

number have been able to hold leaders to account. New members have now been recruited and bring valuable skills to the role. Governors are allocated a curriculum area to oversee. They visit classrooms and meet regularly with staff to discuss provision and gather first-hand information. Governors are aware of the school's key priorities and understand data summaries. However, the school improvement plan contains a wide range of actions and does not prioritise the key issues well enough. Actions to be taken are not precise, time-framed or measurable. This prevents governors from holding leaders fully to account and the strategic direction of the school is unclear.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are increased opportunities for children to select and enjoy books to develop their early enjoyment of reading
- teaching is consistently good across each class, and adults ask probing questions to develop children's thinking skills, especially the most able
- staff's assessments of children's learning and progress are accurate and reflect the evidence gathered in learning journals
- governors have a clear understanding of the use and impact of the early years pupil premium funding
- the school improvement plan focuses on the key priorities identified in the school's self-evaluation and is set out using clear and measurable actions and timescales.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, two school managers and members of your governing body. I discussed the work of the school, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. You and I visited all classes and observed children's learning indoors and outdoors. Together with the deputy headteacher, we looked at a sample of children's learning journals and information about children's attainment and progress.

I looked at a range of documents, including the school's evaluation of its work and the school improvement plan. Reports from peer reviews with other schools were examined. I took account of the two responses to Ofsted's free-text survey and gathered a wider view by talking to parents informally as they collected their children at the end of the school day. The views of eight staff were considered through their responses to the Ofsted staff survey.