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Mrs Susan Lacey
Headteacher
Ashmore Park Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Lacey

Short inspection of Ashmore Park Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 12 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.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your staff are committed to giving children the best start in life. This is done by immersing your staff in researching international best practice. The school hosted an international conference on capturing learning in young children, and this has earned you the respect of the whole school community. You are extremely well supported by governors who share your passion for making the Nursery the hub of learning.

Parents and carers are, rightly, delighted with the progress their children make under the watchful eyes of you and your staff. One parent informed me that you and the staff team are very supportive of parents.

The highly stimulating environment for learning that has been created taps into children's natural curiosity. Children enjoy looking after Stripey, the Madagascan cockroach; Dave, Davey and Sid, the African land snails; and Bell and Bingo, the stick insects. These experiences benefit the children very much, as they learn to take responsibilities and improve their social and emotional development.

Your well-resourced outdoor area is used regularly to develop children's physical skills. As a result, children are well coordinated. Learning outdoors enables children

to make excellent progress in their skills of exploring, investigating and developing story lines. This has a very positive effect on their speaking and listening skills.

The innovative and extensive curriculum promotes all aspects of literacy and numeracy extremely well. I could see very clearly how well children learn. You and I saw children's high levels of engagement and perseverance when choosing and engaging in activities. For example, children could explain through their writing and drawings how thoughts are made in skulls and how blood travels through the body. Their drawings to support their understanding of the skeleton were detailed and imaginative. Children show sustained concentration for significant periods of time, because they are highly interested in learning.

You know your school extremely well and, together with the deputy headteacher, have committed whole heartedly to improving on previous best performance. Children are well prepared for the next stages in their education. The deputy headteacher's one-day-per-week secondment to help with an early years foundations stage setting in a local primary school has enabled you and your staff to see what skills and knowledge are required for learning beyond Nursery.

You have successfully addressed the area for improvement from the last inspection by improving the staff's pronunciation of sounds that letters make. A story-telling toolkit has been effectively implemented, which has ensured that children have an excellent understanding of story structure. As a result, children make outstanding progress and leave Ashmore Park Nursery as confident, inquisitive learners.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The culture of safeguarding permeates all aspects of school life. Governors ensure that the single central record is kept up to date. They assure themselves that risk assessments are undertaken to ensure children's safety. They have undertaken safer recruitment training and ensure that all the necessary checks on staff have been made. Leaders know, through checking, that staff have a good knowledge of government guidelines on keeping children safe. Records of engagement with other agencies are thorough.

Parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, unanimously say that this is a very safe school. They say that you and your staff always act in children's best interest. They are very pleased with all the information that is offered in helping them keep their children safe online.

The school has strong links with other agencies, such as the speech and language service and educational psychologists. You are aware of any issues in the community that might impact on children's safety. Due to the very warm relationships within the school, parents trust you and your staff and readily seek your advice.

Very strong systems for promoting attendance are in place, and parents have been made aware of the importance of children coming to the school regularly. One parent informed me that her children want the school to be open during holiday time because they enjoy learning so much.

Inspection findings

- From low starting points on entry, children make consistently strong progress and many exceed the expectations for their age in all areas of learning, especially in speaking, due to high-quality teaching over time. Teachers and early years educators are keen observers and follow children's interest levels. For example, when children were studying the human body, they became fascinated with skulls. As a result, staff helped children to explore their learning by taking photographs of artificial skulls, and by encouraging them to handle and adorn them with bright-coloured beads to represent the many words that make up thoughts.
- Scrutiny of children's work shows that they make excellent gains in learning about the use of technology. By using a storytelling application on a tablet device and a movie-making program on the computer laptop, children were able to create a story of aliens on the moon who lived in a caravan and ate 'alien chips and burgers with green lettuce on them'. The humour of the story engaged and interested the children.
- You identified a whole-school need to improve children's skills of speaking and listening. Staff undertook training on the best ways of involving young children in telling stories. In our observations, we noted that children made great progress in identifying characters, settings, problems and solutions. This consistent approach used by all adults enables all groups of children to become familiar with story structure. It also helps them develop self-confidence, because they know that their ideas are valued and will be used in storytelling.
- In the lessons we observed together, adults were helping children sound out initial sounds. Children listened attentively and all joined in by repeating the sound. Several squealed with delight when they found the letter in a story. However, not enough guidance was given to those pupils who wanted to write the sound that they had heard. A few of them struggled to hold a pencil correctly. This is an area for further improvement that you and the staff team have already rightly identified in the school action plan.
- The staff keep very detailed notes of children's learning, which they share with parents. However, occasionally there are some missed opportunities to identify the next step so that parents can help their children at home.
- We saw how adults help children develop their self-esteem. The use of praise is consistently applied when children try something new. One child who initially struggled in taking the skin off a satsuma was encouraged by staff, persevered and then beamed with glee after having overcome this initial difficulty.
- The use of pupil premium spending has been effective and has transformed the progress made by disadvantaged children. Their achievements are now equally as strong as those of other children. Your analysis of information from

observations of children's work demonstrates which groups need further help. There is no longer a gender gap, as you have ensured that boys are fully engaged in learning. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are very quickly identified and appropriate help is sought and given. Parents say that you and your staff have significantly enhanced their children's lives by providing the help, care and attention that children who have SEND require.

- In the sessions we observed, the staff managed behaviour very well. They ensured that children were engaged in purposeful play and consistently demonstrated 'good sitting' and 'good listening'. They upgraded children's speaking by helping children answer questions in full sentences, which had a positive impact on developing the children's vocabulary.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- every opportunity is taken to model correct pencil grip and letter formation for those children who are ready to write
- when recording children's learning, staff identify the next steps that parents can use to help their children learn.

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Bogusia Matusiak-Varley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, the chair of governors, a parent governor and the school improvement partner. I looked at the 48 responses to Parent View and the nine responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I visited parts of lessons with you and the deputy headteacher. We examined the work in children's 'learning together' books and I looked at displays around the school. I considered information about children's assessments and their progress in relation to their starting points. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping children safe.