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Mrs Vanessa Frank  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Frank

### **Short inspection of Gracelands Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 26 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 January 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 are a dynamic leader with high expectations for the children and staff. You put the whole school community at the heart of what you do. You know your school extremely well and have your finger on all the pulses. Your knowledge, enthusiasm and passion ensure that the school continues to improve in all it does. Staff are rightly proud and confident in the work they do, and the children benefit and shine from this. Staff's confidence is very high because you listen to them and build on their best ideas, skills and interests.

Staff are quick to build warm, trusting relationships with the children in their care. As a result, children settle in quickly and learn well. Parents and carers say how much their children love attending the school, forming brilliant relationships with peers and staff. 'My child loves coming to school, if she could stay overnight, she would', 'Staff go above and beyond to settle the children in and get to know the parents' and 'This is an outstanding nursery; both my children have attended and made excellent progress' are just some of the typical comments made by parents.

Leaders' and staff's passion for giving every child a flying start to their education is notable. From the moment children join the school, leaders and staff collaborate closely to assess and meet their needs exceptionally well. As a result, all children make exceptional progress. This includes disadvantaged children and those with special

educational needs and/or disabilities. These children are provided with extra support and experiences that impact well on their learning. You have established clear, effective and understandable systems for assessing children's learning and checking their progress. You are tenacious in monitoring and seeking out solutions where any child's progress is not as strong as expected.

The learning environment is wonderful. High-quality resources are organised so that children learn to be independent. They calmly reach for any equipment they need because they know exactly where it is. Children grow in confidence and self-esteem. Outside is a wonderland of activities that entice children to use their curiosity to learn. Well-planned activities invite children to work together and develop their problem-solving skills so that learning is fun and exciting. For example, children shared equipment to pump water into containers to dip large brushes in to clean a blackboard. They also enjoyed mixing potions in the mud kitchen while talking to each other and working out which containers would fit best in the microwave. Children used large construction equipment to create a building. They wore hard hats and were directed by a girl who had taken on the role of the architect. They are many opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills by using tricycles and the climbing frame. They are so pleased with their achievements. One girl said, 'Did you see me being brave on the climbing frame?' Such activities allow children to take risks, learn from trial and error, and delightedly make gains in their social, personal and physical skills.

Similarly, indoors, children have opportunities to develop a range of skills, for example when creating pictures of boats and flowers using beads, pebbles and rods. A group of children developed their language and communication skills as they bathed dolls and gave each other instructions. One girl pointed out to another, 'She's got soap in her eyes, quick wash it off!' Activities in all areas promote children's reading, writing and mathematical development. One boy used a sand timer to time himself on the computer so that he knew when to allow other children to have a go. Children dress up and use puppets to act out familiar stories. They use their phonics skills to read and write. One girl made a card for her mother and had written a legible message and her name.

You have successfully addressed the area for improvement from the last inspection. Governors add capacity and skills to the school. They are effective in holding leaders to account and pushing for further improvement.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are effective and of high quality. Much attention has been given to making sure that staff have a good understanding of the current child protection concerns facing the community. Consequently, staff work effectively to make sure that children are kept safe from issues such as radicalisation, domestic violence and female genital mutilation. Staff know how to identify possible warning signs and how to report their concerns. Leaders act quickly when issues are brought to their attention. You work closely with external agencies to ensure that families receive the help they need should problems arise. Documents, including individual child protection case files, are kept in chronological order so that important information can be retrieved easily.

Staff are all vetted carefully prior to appointment and all of the statutory checks are made to ensure their suitability to work with children.

The school has a strong ethos centred around children's safety and well-being. Leaders ensure that all areas, including outside, are safe and appropriate for the age and needs of children using them. You carry out regular and rigorous health and safety checks. You and the staff ensure that the activities you provide are assessed for risks so that children are kept safe from harm. This ethos of care ensures that very young children can explore and test their own limits safely, for example within the physically challenging outdoor area. Parents say they feel their children are safe in the building and that children are closely supervised at the start and end of a session. They are confident that their children are taught to keep themselves safe while taking part in appropriately risk-assessed activities.

### **Inspection findings**

- Changes have been made to the constitution of the governing body. You now work with 11 other local nursery schools. This has ensured that governors are well equipped with a range of skills and are very knowledgeable about their role. They are very well informed about all aspects of the school's performance and fully understand the school's strengths and areas for development. They use the assessment information that you give them to check that children are making good progress. When they identify an area that needs further development, they challenge you, but also support you, to ensure that the school's improvement journey continues. This mix of support and challenge is highly effective and helps to take the school from strength to strength.
- I saw clearly that staff support children's language and communication skills very effectively. To help children speak, staff are patient, genuinely listen and use just the right blend of new and familiar language. Staff seize any opportunity they can to carefully extend children's vocabulary. For example, all children, including the two-year-olds, take turns to take the register to the office, where they have to say how many children are present for the session. In one observation, children used chalk to draw on the playground. The teacher talked about what they were drawing. A child then said, 'I've made it rain' and spontaneously sang, 'Rain, rain go away.' Staff encourage and extend children's learning through their use of good questioning. For example, questions such as 'I wonder what would happen if...?' and 'What do you think we need to do next?' are regularly asked. Signs are also used to aid communication and to help children convey their feelings and needs.
- During the inspection, I also looked at how the learning environment is organised to promote children's language. The high-quality provision promotes both the spoken and the written word. Written words are supported by pictures and cues to aid the children's understanding. Adults wear lanyards holding words with visual clues to aid communication with children. Visual prompts for the children to refer to are displayed around the rooms and on activities. The learning environment is closely monitored and changed to meet the children's learning needs.
- Personal, social and emotional development is also an area where the children make exceptional progress. However, you have selected this as a priority to identify where

even further improvements can be made. For example, children are taught they have rights. They learn to listen to each other, to express their thoughts and opinions, and to eat healthily. Children are taught the importance of relaxing and enjoy massage techniques to enable them to do this. Children are encouraged to discuss emotions depicted in pictures and share their own feelings. You provide many opportunities for the children to share their thoughts and opinions. For example, the children decided that music should be played at lunchtime and flowers should be put on the tables. However, some of the most recent initiatives have not yet been measured to see to what extent they are making a difference.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- initiatives in personal, social and emotional development are further established and good practice is embedded across the curriculum.

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

Lynda Townsend  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also met with the headteacher from a local school and two governors. I conducted learning walks during the morning and afternoon session with you. I looked at children's work and records of their progress. By the end of the inspection, there were eight responses on Parent View and eight free-text responses. I took account of these and met with a group of parents at the beginning of the day. I also took note of the six responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I looked at a number of documents, including: the school's evaluation of its performance; the school improvement plan; information about the work of governors; staff training records; information provided for parents; and several policy documents. I also checked the school's website, the central record of checks on staff and the procedures for keeping children safe. I asked members of staff and parents about safeguarding matters.