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Gillian Owen
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Dear Mrs Owen

Short inspection of Low Hill Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 2017, 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 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in 2013, you have further improved the high quality of teaching and care that children receive. Teaching remains of a very high standard. You and other leaders have ensured that staff set activities which fully capture the children's interests. In lessons, children carefully paint using the colours of autumn and are fascinated by looking at, touching and talking about leaves that they find outside. Children have many valuable opportunities to investigate and explore. This extends their understanding successfully. The children's interest in their learning is seen in their high levels of concentration, the enjoyment in their happy faces and their laughter.

Leaders have helped staff to ask well-chosen questions that encourage children to think and talk about what they are learning. This is deepening children's understanding. Children quickly grow in confidence to talk and share their learning with the staff and increasingly with one another. Leaders have put in place systems to ensure that staff successfully keep a careful check on the progress that each child is making. Staff use this information very well to set further activities that challenge children. Parents spoke of the great progress their children make. One parent spoke of his family's 'amazement' at the things his child can do.

You and other leaders have created a very caring environment. This is an important factor in why the children settle so quickly into the school. Staff know each child well and so provide sensitive support which helps children to feel happy and safe. Under the guidance

of leaders, staff act as excellent role models and form very positive relationships with the children. This is helping to build children's confidence. The school's welcoming environment is greatly valued by parents. One parent said that she feels that 'the school is like a family to me'. This sensitive and caring environment, along with the excellent teaching, means that children continue to make outstanding progress from starting points that are much lower than are typical.

Children achieve particularly well in their personal, social and emotional development, communication and language skills and their physical development. Last year, leaders successfully improved the teaching of mathematical development. As a result, children are now achieving much better in this area, and in line with other areas of learning. Summer-born children also make very fast progress. Leaders have rightly identified that children do not always make as fast progress in literacy as in the other areas of learning. This is a now a priority in your plans to improve. Disadvantaged children achieve very well but are only just starting to catch up with other children in their achievements.

As well as maintaining the high standard of provision in the Nursery class, leaders have successfully extended the range of provision in the school. In September 2016, a resource base for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities opened. These children are achieving particularly well. They play and learn very well alongside their peers and are just as excited by the tasks given. Staff work very closely together to support this high level of integration and care. The school now caters very successfully for two- and three-year old children. You have ensured that staff working with these groups of children provide high-quality teaching and care so that these children achieve very well. The strong focus on developing communication and language skills has been successful.

Important to the school's success has been the partnership that you have formed with the acting headteacher and the deputy headteacher. This was forged during a period of change and, at times, uncertainty in leadership. Together, you have shared a successful vision for the school and have won the full commitment of staff and parents. Staff show a high level of pride in their work. Staff expertise is developed very well through the carefully designed training that you have put in place. As a team of leaders, you have capitalised fully on your range of expertise, put this expertise to work and successfully improved the school. As a governor rightly said, 'I'm really proud of what we've achieved.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders put safeguarding at the heart of everything they do. They know the specific needs of individuals and work tirelessly to support children for whom there are concerns. The designated leaders for safeguarding work very closely with external agencies to ensure that children are kept safe. A close partnership also exists with parents, and leaders ensure that they provide support for families where necessary. All staff are well trained and see safeguarding as their priority. Records show that staff act quickly when concerns arise, and their detailed knowledge and caring relationships with each child play an important role in helping them to do this. Leaders make thorough checks each term to ensure that the school is safe. Safety checks are reviewed regularly by governors.

Inspection findings

- You have found ways to help parents share more information with the staff about their child's achievements outside the school's setting. These are included in each child's learning journeys and other achievement records. Staff also carefully gather information during home visits before each child starts school. Staff use all of this information, alongside their own records and reflections, to carefully plan activities that help children make rapid progress. Parents spoke of how involved they now feel and how much they know about their children's progress. Leaders have also helped staff to provide valuable learning activities, linked to the learning in school, which parents can do at home with their children.
- Leaders have carefully thought about how the curriculum can meet children's needs. A broad range of activities, which link well together to reinforce key skills, is available. The curriculum in place for the two-year olds has been adapted to ensure that more of the specific areas of the curriculum, especially literacy and mathematical development are taught. This is because leaders recognise that children's starting points in these areas are particularly low.
- Governors are highly committed to the school. The chair of governors provides a very high level of service. She brings much wisdom to the role, and this helps the school to thrive. Governors have sensitively supported leaders through a period of uncertainty and made important decisions about staffing that have played an important role in the school's ongoing success. Governors make regular visits to the school to help them understand its performance, and they meet with parents. As a result, they have a very clear grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors keep a check on these by challenging senior leaders. They balance this well with the support they give to leaders whom they value highly. Governors have the best interests of the school at heart. As one said, 'We want the best for our children.'
- The local authority has also provided important support, particularly during periods of change in leadership. It has kept a close watch on the school and provided a range of effective support.
- Disadvantaged children make fast progress. However, they are only starting to catch up with the other children. Leaders have identified a range of well-thought-out ways of helping disadvantaged children to do even better. They have ensured that staff know who the disadvantaged children are and what they should do to help them. However, these plans are not always checked against clear benchmarks. Nor are plans always carefully reviewed to see how successful they are and to make any changes needed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve the teaching of reading and writing to strengthen children's literacy skills by building on the existing strong practice
- They refine and check more closely the plans to speed up the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.

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

Jonathan Moore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the acting headteacher and the deputy headteacher. I also spoke to a wide range of staff at the school. I met with two governors and a representative from the local authority. I talked to the children while they were playing. I conducted learning walks during the morning and afternoon sessions with both you and the deputy headteacher. I looked at learning journals and other assessment records and examples of curriculum projects. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and development plan, the early years pupil premium plan, information about the children's performance, and safeguarding and child protection records. I analysed 12 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and talked to a number of parents.