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Ms Elinor Warner
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Ms Warner

Short inspection of Highters Heath Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 2018, 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 good in September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has retired and you took over as acting headteacher in September 2017, having previously been the assistant headteacher. You have been appointed as substantive headteacher with effect from September 2018. There has been significant staffing turnover since the previous inspection, but you have stabilised this during the last year. This has resulted in establishing a consistent approach to teaching and greater continuity in the provision for children's learning and care. In a relatively short space of time you have successfully created a united team, and staff morale is high. Staff questionnaires show that 100% of staff are proud to work at Highters Heath Nursery and they unanimously agree that the school is well led and managed.

You have an ambitious vision and strong determination to improve children's lives. You have increased the opportunities for staff development and training and have introduced new systems to track children's progress and to keep them safe. As a result, children achieve well and feel secure. You have also worked hard to improve the engagement of parents and involve them in their children's education. Parents and carers have positive views of the school and value the work of staff. Typical comments include, 'My child loves nursery. The staff are absolutely fantastic', and 'My child has come on in leaps and bounds.'

Children are happy, safe and well cared for. Good relationships exist between children and their key workers. Children understand and follow routines and

instructions closely and settle quickly to tasks. They behave well, take turns and readily share equipment with other children. The good ratio of adults to children ensures that all children are known to adults and receive high levels of care and support. This enables them to thrive and get off to a good start in their education.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. Adults use their knowledge of individual children to plan suitable activities for different abilities. Children behave well, listen carefully and demonstrate good levels of concentration during group teaching. However, adults need to encourage greater engagement of passive children, challenge the most able to extend their learning and ensure that staff observations match assessment age bands more closely.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established an effective culture of safeguarding in the nursery and embedded the philosophy for staff of 'never do nothing'. Protecting children is given the very highest priority and deemed to be a shared responsibility of all adults. All staff and governors undertake annual training; you and your designated safeguarding leaders attend all training updates. Reminders about raising concerns are published around school, for example in staff cloakrooms. These ensure that adults know what steps to take if they are worried about a child. Concerns raised by staff are recorded fully on the recently introduced electronic safeguarding system. You and your leadership team check these records meticulously and access further advice and support from the local authority if needed. However, occasionally the outcomes of these referrals are not recorded or followed up rigorously enough, for example where external agencies are slow to respond and whether there are ongoing or no further concerns.

Safer recruitment checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of employed adults to work with children. You have introduced visitor badges. Your team carries out regular risk assessments for potential hazards around the nursery. Strict rules are applied in relation to the use of tablets and mobile phones. Regular fire drills are carried out so that staff and children know how to evacuate the building quickly in the case of an emergency. During Forest School activities, children are taught to use everyday tools safely, for example potato peelers, table knives and hammers. They are closely supervised and show high levels of concentration and perseverance in tricky exercises, such as cutting up raw carrots and whittling a plant stem with a potato peeler. Parents are confident that their children are kept safe at nursery.

Inspection findings

- You are ambitious in your pursuit of high-quality provision and, as such, have set high expectations for children, staff and parents. Your evaluations of the school's effectiveness are accurate and honest. Together with governors, you have developed a robust action plan which appropriately targets the key priorities. These are clearly set out, and actions towards meeting your targets are evaluated regularly. You have rightly placed a strong emphasis on improving the

quality of teaching. To this end you: encouraged staff to visit and observe practice at other local nurseries; invested in a language programme for staff to aid children's communication development; initiated project work in relation to children's emotional wellbeing; and improved the learning environment. You also see yourself as an ongoing learner and, as such, arranged a peer review with a colleague to get an objective view of your leadership and the school.

- You are well supported by a small but effective leadership team. Good communication between you ensures that important information is shared regularly and areas for improvement are identified. Middle leaders make a positive contribution to outcomes. For example, robust systems are in place to track the attendance of children, and any absences are followed up swiftly. As a result, attendance has risen this year. Members of the leadership team also lead staff training to help to improve the quality of teaching and accelerate children's progress. An appropriate focus on improving children's literacy skills and developing outdoor education has led to a rise in the proportion of children working at age-appropriate levels in reading, writing and physical development.
- Governors visit the school to observe teaching and receive regular reports from you and your leadership team to keep them fully informed of day-to-day routines. Governors monitor children's achievement carefully. They have a good knowledge of how the early years pupil premium is spent and the impact that this has on eligible children. They receive regular assessment updates and, as a result, know how well different groups of children are doing. Governors participate in safeguarding training and monitor the budget carefully in order to fulfil their statutory duties. Governors carried out a robust recruitment process when appointing you as headteacher. They use their extensive knowledge and understanding of the nursery to support you and your staff, and present good levels of challenge.
- Children make good progress from their different starting points. This is due to good teaching, effective adult support, effective use of regular assessment and improved links with parents. Attainment on entry is generally mixed; the majority have skills, knowledge and understanding below those typical for their age, especially in communication and language. All staff have been trained to assess children's speaking and listening skills accurately, and regular checks are carried out to determine children's progress during the year. Funding received to support disadvantaged children is used very effectively. As a result, these children make good gains in all areas of the curriculum, and differences in attainment between these children and their peers diminish by the time they leave the nursery. Adults carry out regular observations of children's learning in different aspects of learning and record these well in children's individual files. However, on occasion, the assessment age bands used do not correspond to adults' comments or photographic evidence. They are often too low. This misrepresents children's true progress and attainment.
- On occasion, adults do not challenge or extend the learning of some of the most able children well enough. For example, some two-year-olds could reliably name the prime colours and some mathematical shapes, such as a square and triangle. Little extension was provided, either through introducing new subject vocabulary or probing children's problem-solving and reasoning skills to further deepen their

knowledge. Additionally, some adults allow children who are reluctant to actively engage in learning to remain on the periphery of activities, rather than encouraging engagement and ensuring that all children participate fully. This slows the progress of some children and does not promote their self-confidence.

- Overall, teaching is carefully planned to meet the needs of different age groups and abilities. For example, two-year-old children have a higher adult to child ratio and benefit from more child-initiated activities focused on the prime areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development; communication and language; and physical development. Three- and four-year-old children have more formal teaching, including daily phonics sessions, and the most able children are introduced to guided reading activities. Staff ensure that the curriculum for four-year-old children leads to 'school readiness' and that transition activities prepare them for a successful and smooth transfer to primary school.
- Adults form strong and caring relationships with all children. Good support is provided for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Inclusion is a strength of the school, and all children are fully included in activities planned. For example, disabled children who use walking frames eagerly participate in the daily mile circuit around the school at the start of each day. Children in both classes develop good levels of independence; for example, some two-year-olds successfully spooned powder paint into small cups and added water to mix their chosen colour for artwork. Not only did this help to improve their coordination and fine motor skills, but also added to their scientific knowledge of mixing powder with liquid.
- You have worked hard to engage and involve parents more in their children's learning. You have increased communication opportunities as you meet and greet parents daily at the gate at the start and end of the school day. Parents are invited to stay and participate in mark-making sessions twice each week to help their children to develop early writing skills. Staff also lead training workshops for parents, including Forest Schools and literacy. These have been successful and are valued by parents. The growing partnership between home and school has also led to parents running fundraising activities, such as the Christmas Fair, to celebrate the school's 70th year and raise money for Forest School waterproofs for the children. You and your staff provide regular feedback on children's achievement through the 'celebrating me' project. Discussions with parents about their child's progress are held termly, and a display board is created with photographs of individual children to celebrate their achievements. You have also been very successful in encouraging and supporting parents to apply for early years pupil premium funding and funding for full-time nursery provision. This additional support has strengthened home-school partnerships.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- safeguarding concerns raised on the school's electronic system provide a clear chronology of referrals made and the outcomes of actions taken

- teaching challenges the most able children and moves them on in their learning when they show that they are ready
- adults act swiftly to include all children who are on the periphery of activities and not fully engaged
- training is provided for staff to match age-band assessments more closely to their written comments and observations.

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, members of your leadership team and two governors. I discussed the work of the school with you, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. I visited the teaching areas to observe teaching and learning and spoke with children. I also scrutinised copies of children's individual 'learner observations' files.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's information about children's achievement. I also reviewed the school's own evaluation of its work, together with the school development plan. There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, due to a technical issue. However, I took into account the views expressed by parents and grandparents as they collected their children and grandchildren from nursery at the end of the day. There were 10 responses to the staff survey and seven responses to the children's survey. These views were fully considered.