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Dear Ms Gillett

Short inspection of Kenilworth Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 14 September 2016, 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 predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in February 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a deep understanding of the ways that young children learn and develop, and have exceptionally high expectations of the standard of education that all children should receive in Nursery. You have been relentless in continuing to develop and improve teaching and learning through innovative approaches and involvement in cutting-edge research projects that have further enhanced the already very high-quality Nursery provision.

Since the last inspection, you have taken on the role of executive headteacher of both Kenilworth Nursery School and another nursery within the local authority. This has allowed you to share the considerable expertise that exists across both schools. You have appointed a senior teacher to the leadership team within the school and she has contributed to the quality of leadership and takes shared responsibility for the management of the school on a day-to-day basis. Together, you closely monitor the quality of teaching delivered by the team of dedicated and experienced early years staff.

You have successfully addressed the one area for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have fully implemented a revised system of measuring and recording children's outcomes. You use this information effectively to understand how individual children and groups of children are progressing and attaining across all the areas of learning. Leaders' analysis of children's outcomes is now sharply focused on identifying where planning and teaching can be further improved to ensure that all children make rapid progress both academically and socially.

In 2013, responsibility for the children's centre that was based on the school site and run by school leaders transferred to a private provider. In 2015, you were able to successfully fill the gap that this left by ensuring that the 'nurture nursery' class that was already operating within the nursery was able to offer further appropriate, relevant and exciting learning opportunities for the two-year-old children. You have also put in place a more flexible approach to the sessions that children are able to attend across the nursery. This allows parents greater choice over when their children attend and supports parents' different working patterns and needs. The introduction of breakfast and teatime clubs, which was fully implemented in 2013, also offers parents extended sessions in the nursery for their children.

You, together with senior leaders and all staff, ensure that children experience exciting and challenging learning opportunities in a highly supportive and caring environment. At the time of the inspection, children were only just starting at school. Despite this, due to the skill of the teachers and other staff, all the children settled quickly and confidently. They left their parents without upset and became engrossed in the range of activities that were available to them. For example, a group of children in the Nursery class worked with an adult to investigate the shape and texture of the objects in the 'stone pool'. The nursery worker's well-chosen questions and calm manner helped to engage the children's curiosity and encouraged them to express their thoughts and ideas with increasing confidence.

Parents are highly appreciative of the work that you and your staff do with their children. All the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents and were universally positive about all areas of the school's work. These views were echoed in the responses to the end-of-year questionnaire that you asked parents to complete in July 2016.

Both the indoor and outdoor classrooms for the 'nurture and nursery' classes are wonderfully bright, vibrant and attractive places that offer exceptional opportunities for children to learn through well-planned activities and experiences. The children who were seen in the nursery during the inspection were captivated by the lights, mirrors and sounds in the sensory room and responded enthusiastically with an impromptu dance.

You and other leaders, including governors, are accurate in your evaluation of the strengths of the school and also how it can continue to develop and improve. You use the information about children's outcomes well to identify priorities for improvement. For example, last year you identified that there were further improvements that could be made to the teaching of early reading and consequently put in place a series of actions that enhanced children's involvement in and enjoyment of learning to read. However, school improvement plans do not have sharply defined success criteria and this limits leaders' effectiveness in judging the full impact of the actions you have taken.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety, security and well-being of children are of the highest priority within the school and a culture of collective responsibility for safeguarding permeates all the work that you and your staff do. You have ensured that staff are fully trained in all aspects of safeguarding, including recent changes in requirements, such as those relating to child sexual exploitation. You provide regular updates on how staff can recognise and support any children who might be at risk.

Weekly 'children's meetings' provide staff with the opportunity for each key worker to discuss with their colleagues the children that they support. This helps to ensure that if there are any concerns about a child's health, well-being or safety, these can be addressed quickly and effectively. Records relating to safeguarding are detailed and securely stored. Procedures for reporting concerns are robust and understood by all members of staff. Governors place an equally high priority on promoting safeguarding and have carried out a recent audit of the procedures and policies in school. They use their expertise to challenge you and other leaders to make sure that the high standards that are evident are maintained and developed further.

Inspection findings

- Your inspirational leadership and expertise in the education of early years' children continues to drive the school forward. This has been recognised through the leadership work that you provide to other nursery schools within the local authority and through the school becoming a national early years teaching centre. You have also successfully led the school's work for the Department for Education on establishing local networks of nurseries to improve teaching and learning across other schools and pre-school providers. You also obtained funding for, set up and led a school project involving the use of a trained psychotherapist in the school who has provided training and support for staff and has worked with children and their families. This has had a significant impact on improving behaviour for a very small minority of children who did not always behave in appropriate ways, and in addressing the specific needs of some children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have taken the decision to continue funding this support on a part-time basis due to the highly positive outcomes that it has achieved.
- Children start at the nursery with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age. As a result of outstanding teaching in the provision for two-year-old children, they make rapid progress. This is sustained and developed through the main nursery and consequently the large majority of children leave to move into their primary schools with standards of attainment that are at or above those expected for their age.

- Teachers and other staff ensure that the expectations they set for children are high and are made clear to the children. For example, in the provision for two-year-olds, a child who had started school on the day of the inspection needed to wash her hands when she had finished painting. A member of the nursery staff demonstrated the process and then quietly talked the child through the stages of what she needed to do. This enabled the child to undertake the activity independently and helped her to make rapid progress in this important aspect of health and self-care. In the main nursery, a teacher observed children involved in constructing a model road and used questioning very effectively to help the children to expand their vocabulary and extend their speaking skills to use words such as 'junction' and 'direction'.
- Leaders and other staff make extremely good use of the assessment information that they gather on children. Assessment is an ongoing and collaborative process and is very well led by the senior teacher and the headteacher. Evidence seen during the inspection showed that over the course of the year, staff closely observe children's progress and development, accurately and regularly record the information, and then analyse the information to monitor the outcomes of all children to identify any areas of learning where progress is not as rapid. For example, assessment information for last year indicated that, at the beginning of the year, some children were not making the same rapid rates of progress in personal, social and emotional development. Leaders consequently made sure that staff adapted their planning so as to provide more opportunities for children to develop their awareness of their own feelings and the impact of their actions on other people.
- Governors are a highly challenging and well-informed force within the school. Through their regular visits to the school, they are able to monitor how staff work with and support the children. They have a very good understanding of the assessment information that the school collects and use this information to ask searching questions of school leaders. They recognise that the school cannot be complacent about its outstanding provision and consequently support school leaders and staff in their drive for ongoing improvement.
- All staff ensure that the potentially difficult process of starting at school is handled exceptionally well. Members of staff, including the headteacher and the administrative staff, were observed on the day of the inspection, which for all children was either their first or second day at school, greeting parents and their children. Parents were encouraged to help their children make their way to designated areas that were identified with different coloured carpeting, where they were welcomed by their key workers. All children settled without upset and were quickly engaged in a range of activities that appealed to their individual interests. Staff were diligent in allowing children to make choices about what they wanted to do and in then supporting and encouraging them through quiet, clear instructions.

- The high priority that the school places on children's safety and well-being is evident in the work that the teachers and other adults undertake. Children are encouraged to be aware of the need to take responsibility for their own safety and that of others. An example of this is the 'stop' signs that are placed on the large climbing equipment in the outdoor classrooms when it is not safe to use it, due to it being slippery and wet. Children are made aware of the reasons for not using the equipment and all responded appropriately to the signs once their purpose and meaning had been explained. This helps with early reading development as well as physical well-being.
- Relationships between adults and children are consistently strong and positive. This is because all the staff in the nursery recognise that children need to feel secure and valued. Staff go the extra mile to enable this to happen. They also have a deep understanding of the different needs between the two- and three-year-old children. Teachers and other adults take time to get to know the children before they start in the nursery through home visits, and build up a clear and accurate view of what each child can achieve and what each one's individual needs are. This was seen through the 'learning journeys' from last year, where there was compelling evidence of the rapid progress that children make across all areas of learning.
- Parents are highly valued as partners in their children's education. As part of the actions that were carried out last year to improve reading, an improved home-school library was provided. Parents spoken to during the inspection commented positively about how this supported them in reading to and with their children and how it helped to instil a love of reading in their children from an early age. Parents were also appreciative of the methods that the school uses to ensure a positive start at school, with one commenting, 'My son has received excellent settling-in care; for example two teachers coming to the house to meet us and play with him. They have also listened to our personal needs and are adapting their care accordingly.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school improvement planning is further refined to ensure that there are sharply defined success criteria to measure and evaluate the impact of actions taken to deliver identified priorities.

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

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- At the time of the inspection, the school year had just commenced and as a result not all children had started at the nursery. The children who were in the classes had only been in school for a maximum of two days. During the inspection, I met with you, a member of your senior leadership team and with two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to a group of parents at the beginning of the school day. I also considered the 10 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and looked at the results of the parental survey that leaders had carried out in July. I visited, together with you, both the classes that were in school for the morning session to observe teaching and learning. I scrutinised information about children's progress during the last academic year and children's records of achievement known as 'learning journeys'. I considered other documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, including policies and checks on staff employed in the school. I also considered the five responses to the online staff survey.