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Mrs Deborah Clark
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Clark

Short inspection of Cambridge Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 06 July 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 school was judged to be good in December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Cambridge Nursery School is a welcoming, calm and happy school. You have achieved this by carefully developing and challenging your staff team. Staff, leaders and governors hold a united view of what the school aims to achieve. A key strength of the school continues to be the value given to each child and family. Much encouragement is offered to the local community to enable them to use the school for learning, support and advice. Links between the school, on-site children's centre and the nursery for children aged under three years are strong. Staff expectations of what children and parents can achieve are high.

One of the findings of the previous inspection was that children's behaviour and safety are strengths of the school. This continues to be the case. The safety and protection of everybody at the school is given high priority. Staff work well with children to give them individual attention and help them to respect one another and adults. Consequently, children's behaviour around the school is consistently positive. Children are very interested by visitors such as an inspector. For example, children were not afraid to ask which football team I support. When children arrive at the start of lessons, staff are successful at settling groups quickly and purposefully.

All of the parents who made their views known to me are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They praise the quality of attention that staff give to helping children during their start at nursery school and when they move to primary school. Parents say they are well informed about their children's progress. They praise the broad range of learning experiences their children are given at school and say their children progress well. My inspection findings agree with these views.

At the previous inspection, the inspector asked the school to improve teaching for children about the sounds that letters make (phonics). You have addressed this carefully through staff training and close links with other schools. Most importantly, you have made sure staff fully understand what to teach children from the moment they start at school. Thus, for example, staff give much attention to teaching children to hear, recognise and say everyday sounds, rhymes and songs. The most able children are helped to progress quickly to learn the names and sounds of individual letters. Parents are very pleased with their children's learning about phonics.

The previous inspection identified the need for the school to improve teaching when children explore self-chosen activities. This has been tackled well. All staff are now increasingly successful at teaching within children's chosen activities. For example, teachers and teaching assistants are drawing successfully upon children's needs and interests when deciding how and what to teach. Consequently, children are now able to concentrate and persist much more in their learning.

After being highlighted as an issue by the inspector at the previous inspection, you have improved your plans for developing the school. Key targets are now measurable. You now make good use of information about children's progress when deciding priorities for development and reviewing how well the school is improving.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all arrangements for the care and protection of children, families and staff are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. From the moment visitors sign in at the school reception desk, staff make sure safeguarding arrangements are understood. Leaders have a high level of training for overseeing safeguarding. There is always a trained leader on site from whom safeguarding advice can be sought. Leaders give careful oversight to safeguarding arrangements and practice is reviewed regularly. Leaders keep a close eye on records of incidents relating to children and families. Children's attendance at school is reviewed carefully and their full attendance celebrated prominently. Staff and leaders act promptly when concerns arise. Besides basic safeguarding training each year, staff are given access to a wide range of additional training and information. Staff are up to date with issues such as the 'Prevent' duty and domestic violence. Individual supervision sessions for staff about their work are organised thoughtfully. Clear analysis of staff supervision records is giving leaders a detailed overview of the welfare of staff.

Inspection findings

- You are ensuring the school engages closely with other local schools to help the development of your own staff. You also look across the region and nationally for inspiration and support. You welcome the regular challenge the local authority brings to the school. From its good knowledge of the school, the local authority confirms you are well placed to move the school even further forward. I agree.

- The specific needs of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified quickly by staff and they are supported well. These children make valuable steps forward during their time at the school. Their end-of-nursery record is a positive and well-considered celebration of what they can do, how adults can help, what motivates them, songs/stories they like and what they don't like.
- There is a strong, successful focus upon promoting children's writing skills at the school. Children's writing is celebrated very clearly in wall displays aimed at parents. Children are given many opportunities to develop their physical coordination skills as well as practise writing their name upon arrival at school. Children are confident to 'have a go' at writing individual letters and words. Teaching makes good use of exciting opportunities for children to play at adult roles such as in a café and writing labels for their games.
- Some members of the staff team have undertaken extensive training about improving children's communication and language. The impact of staff learning shows partly in the very carefully selected and presented book areas in classrooms and corridors around the school. The chosen books are giving children important insights into different families, cultures and adult roles.
- Children are given many different opportunities for learning at school. Much use is made of the large outdoor area to develop children's physical skills. Their understanding of the world is promoted well, for example through opportunities to observe ducklings, learn about their own families, hear about different countries and see places on a large world map. Activities also make great use of children's interests, for example their recent fascination with robots led to a range of worthwhile discussions and activities.
- Governors are committed to their roles to support the school. They hold an accurate understanding of the key priorities and strengths of the school as well as the challenges faced. They discuss, debate and review what the headteacher tells them, for example about teaching and children's progress. They make sure safeguarding is kept as a high priority at the school.
- Teaching continues to develop and improve across the staff team. You observe regularly and give staff useful feedback about how to strengthen their work. Targets for teachers are individual to their needs. Team discussions regularly explore how to extend and deepen children's learning. You have booked forthcoming training for staff to learn from a national project how they might improve their support for children's thinking and well-being. Nonetheless, we discussed how you should make sure such learning helps staff and leaders to identify the precise aspects of teaching needed to improve the school further.
- During the inspection, you and I observed strong teaching demonstrated by teachers across a range of activities. A common strength was the careful use of language by staff. For example, we observed a teacher talking with a group of most-able children about a new role-play activity involving pretend ice

creams. She skilfully introduced words such as 'parlour' and 'sorbet' into her conversation with them. Another common strength of teaching in the school is staff giving children time to think. For example, a teacher encouraged children to explore and describe the properties of objects such as plastic wheels, bottle tops and metal wrist bangles. She waited patiently for their responses before quickly adapting her teaching when children needed more challenge. Your evidence over time shows these insights are typical of the quality of teaching in the school. Where teaching is occasionally less successful, you have spotted that activities demand little of children's thinking because they are not matched well to children's abilities. You are taking clear steps to help staff learn much more from one another so any inconsistencies in teaching are minimised.

- We discussed your arrangements for tracking children's progress during the year they spend in the school. This has been the focus of much of your recent work to improve teaching and learning. A wide range of information is being recorded well by staff. Parents value seeing their children's progress celebrated in attractive 'learning journey' records. Wall displays around the school also show and celebrate children's learning.
- School information shows children's abilities on entry to nursery vary between one year and the next. Sometimes children's skills are typical for their age, other times less so. Your analysis of children's starting points in 2015/16 has led you to rightly focus upon supporting children's feelings and behaviour, their health and self-care and their speaking skills. This information is being used carefully to improve teaching. As a result, children are making good progress in these aspects of learning over the year. We also discussed how your systems for reviewing the progress of different groups of children should become more manageable and more exact, particularly in identifying the progress made by the most able children.
- You are planning ahead carefully because the school is entering a period of change with the imminent retirement of your long-serving assistant headteacher. You value the expertise of your teachers and teaching assistants, so they are helping to select the new teacher. Together with staff, you are looking forward to taking the school even further forward.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school reviews of the quality of teaching and learning identify precisely which aspects need improvement
- systems of recording and tracking children's progress are developed further so information is easy to review and use when assessing the impact of teaching on groups of children, including the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the assistant headteacher, the chair of the governing body, one other governor and an adviser from Sefton local authority. I spoke to some parents at the start of the inspection. I reviewed 17 written responses that parents passed to the school for my consideration. I considered responses from two staff to an Ofsted questionnaire. You and I observed teaching and learning in the main classroom, outdoors and in group rooms. We discussed examples of children's progress and looked at displays around the school of children's learning. I reviewed the school's arrangements for safeguarding children and families.