

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Joy Luxford
Headteacher
Grasmere Nursery School
Icknield Way
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU3 2BT

Dear Ms Luxford

Short inspection of Grasmere Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 8 February 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 July 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

Grasmere Nursery School is a vibrant and happy place where children are safe and well looked after. Parents are extremely positive about all that the Nursery provides for their children. Parents say that staff do all that they can to ensure that their children settle quickly, and that parents and carers are well informed about their children's progress daily. One parent commented: 'I am exceptionally happy with the level of two-way communications from the teachers to myself and vice versa.' Another added: 'I am frequently kept up to date with [my child's] development on a regular basis but I can ask her teachers anytime with anything about [my child].' There is much evidence to demonstrate that children's well-being is a priority for school leaders and teachers.

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured the school building to improve the work that you do with leaders of the separate provision for babies and toddlers under two years old. This has strengthened the transition arrangements between these two settings so that children settle well on entry and teaching staff get to know and understand children's specific needs well in advance. Children quickly develop strong and positive relationships with adults in the school and become confident learners.

During the inspection, I was unable to see evidence of leaders' work to address the

areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. In addition, it was unclear how you have identified strengths and weaknesses of the school and what actions are in place to improve standards.

The classrooms are very well resourced with exciting activities to engage children in the many different areas of learning. Children can use equipment with confidence and engage purposefully during independent activities. Adults carry out activities with children in small groups to support their specific needs in learning. For example, activities are carefully planned to support children with autism spectrum disorder and complex medical needs as well as promoting speech and language and personal, social, emotional development. You are quite rightly proud of the success of your chosen method of introducing signing into phonics sessions to help develop children's language and communication. Children confidently sign and identify rhyming words while learning traditional rhymes. They can sign words such as 'disastrous' while responding positively to the adult teaching the session.

Over time, there has been an increase in the number of children who speak English as an additional language entering the school. You have successfully introduced strategies to support these children. For example, the use of a 'cultural wheel' gives children opportunities to share their different lifestyles with other children in the Nursery. This has helped children understand about the different faiths and cultures of children and families in their community and has been successful at helping to develop skills such as listening and attention, turn-taking, communication and language. Work to develop children's well-being is helping them to access their learning. For example, the children enjoy yoga and mindfulness.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders carry out and record all compulsory checks on adults' suitability to work with children. Appropriate risk assessments are in place and employee files hold all the relevant and necessary documentation. Staff understand their responsibilities in terms of safeguarding children and follow the school's processes for recording and reporting any concerns they have about children. Parents commented on the secure systems and the checks they themselves go through before they enter the school and the arrangements in place to ensure that only those who are authorised to, collect children at the end of the school day.

All parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, say that their children are safe and happy at the school. Those I spoke with agreed and those who commented on Ofsted's free-text service were resoundingly positive. For example, one parent commented: 'I have been overwhelmed by the dedication, care and attention shown by all staff at Grasmere. They are wonderful people who truly care about the children and families of the school. They know just what to do to help the children feel safe and secure.' Parents confirmed that staff notify them immediately if children hurt themselves at school or if they have any concerns at all. In addition, adults working with children take appropriate steps in a timely fashion to pass any concerns about a child's welfare on to designated senior leaders for safeguarding.

Parents I spoke with were overwhelmingly supportive of the provision in place for families. You know your families well and do your utmost to provide them with information that can help them to support their children at home.

Inspection findings

- You shared information with me about how you check the progress children are making. This was an area for improvement highlighted at the previous inspection. You identify children's starting points when they enter the Nursery. The school's information shows that a high proportion of children have low starting points on entry in almost all areas of learning. The school's progress information shows that these children make exceptionally good progress from their typically low starting points.
- However, it was unclear how well adults check and log children's progress during the activities they engage in. I saw limited evidence of adults recording information about what children were learning. In addition, the electronic system for recording children's progress did not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate how children's starting points were assessed or how children were making at least good progress. In addition, the next steps recorded for children were not specific enough to move children on quickly in their learning.
- Another area I wanted to look at was how governors challenge and monitor the quality of teaching and learning. The reason for this was because governors were not checking the quality of teaching well enough at the time of the previous inspection. Since then, there has been a change in governance. Governors who I spoke with were very keen and want to do what is best for the children. They meet with leaders, receive information from you, and minutes of their meetings show that they ask questions about children in the school, particularly about those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, although they visit the school to look at the teaching and learning, they do not check well enough on leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Governors are far too readily accepting of what leaders tell them about the progress children make at the school. Governors were unable to explain how leaders check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to explain how children are achieving the impressive progress that they are told about by you and your senior leaders in meetings.
- Finally, we discussed in detail how you and your deputy headteacher work with teaching staff to identify those children who are not making the progress they should. It was difficult to see how teachers use the information in the classroom to move children's learning on rapidly as there was little evidence of leaders' monitoring against children's progress and attainment. Evidence of any monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very sparse and therefore it was difficult to see how precisely leaders check progress of children's outcomes.
- There is limited information available that demonstrates rigorous monitoring of

children's progress or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to inform future plans for improvement. Governors were unable to confirm that they had seen evidence of leaders' monitoring and are therefore not holding leaders to account for their work on school improvement effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders' actions for improvement are fit for purpose and closely linked to the difference they are intended to make to children's learning and development
- leaders rigorously monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school
- planning for children's next steps in learning is focused precisely on what children need to do to make the good and better progress they are capable of.

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

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I visited three classes and looked at evidence of adults' observations of children. I spoke with children during their independent activities and observed their learning. I examined a range of documentation, including safeguarding records, information about children's progress, school development plans and leaders' self-evaluation and minutes of governor meetings. I met with you, your deputy headteacher and four members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I also spoke with a representative from the local authority. I considered 40 responses to Parent View and 23 responses to Ofsted's parent free-text facility.