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Mrs Sally Leese
Headteacher
Castle Vale Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Leese

Short inspection of Castle Vale Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 outstanding in September 2014.

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 continued to further develop and build upon the high-quality provision. You provide strong leadership and are determined that every child will succeed. You continually raise expectations and look to develop best practice. You have created a strong team of staff who focus on 'all of the children, all of the time'. They share your vision and ambition for the children in their care. Working together, you all strive to ensure that each child has the best possible learning experience. You have further developed the quality of leadership across the school. You spot potential in staff and support individuals to develop their skills. There is a strong commitment to training and learning from research and best practice. This distributed leadership further supports the drive for excellence. There has been no complacency since the last inspection.

The learning environment is extremely well developed, both inside and out. You ensure that it stimulates, interests and engages children from the moment they arrive each morning. Highly organised and extremely well thought out, it fosters independence from the start. Children soon learn the routines and know what is expected. They prepare their own breakfast, pouring out cereal before adding milk. They wash up after eating and put away their bowls and spoons. The environment enables children to learn how to manage risks in a safe and controlled way. They put on sun hats or waterproofs when going outside and understand the rules

around the fire pit. Resources provide suitable challenge for two-, three- and four-year-olds. Children are given time to explore and use their imagination. They build farms, create model vehicles, experiment in the mud kitchen and search for minibeasts. Children are intensely immersed in their learning. As a result, they develop great resilience and make excellent progress from their starting points.

The quality of teaching and learning is exceptional. All adults are skilled in supporting learning. They have an excellent understanding of how young children learn. Adults spot opportunities to take learning forward. Not a single moment of learning time is lost throughout the day. Adults provoke critical thinking through their questions or by adding in an additional resource. Children develop their ideas and make links with other experiences they have had. They are encouraged to reason and explain what they are doing. Interactions with children are of the highest quality. As a result, children flourish and rapidly become independent learners.

Delightful relationships exist between children and between children and staff. Children are happy, confident and play well together. They help each other to put their shoes on or carry water to fill the water trough. They are keen to share what they are learning. For example, a girl making a birthday card proudly showed off the card and her writing to the adults before presenting it to her friend. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They recognise the great progress that their children are making. Comments such as 'love it, love it, love it' and 'can't ask for anything better' were shared during the inspection.

You have successfully addressed the areas identified for further development at the last inspection. Children are given regular opportunities to reflect on what they are learning to do. As a result, children are confident when talking about what they are doing and why. Learning journals provide additional reflections on learning. These have been developed extensively since the last inspection. They now provide parents with a valuable insight into their children's progress and development.

Governance has strengthened considerably since the last inspection, when the majority of governors were new to their role. Governors recognise the journey of development and improvement that they have been on. They are well informed and know the school in great detail. They provide good support and challenge through the questions they ask. Governors monitor key aspects of the school's performance rigorously. For example, they check how well disadvantaged children are doing now that many of these children only have part-time places. They have well-developed links with key leaders in school. This helps deepen their understanding of the strengths and areas for development. Governors make good use of training opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding. They share your passion for excellence.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The learning environment and curriculum complement these arrangements. Staff make the most of every opportunity to teach children how to keep themselves safe in school and when at home. Children learn to use saws and hammers safely in the woodworking shed. They assess the risk before balancing on planks used to build bridges and ramps. Staff teach children what to do if they are lost in a shop. Children know to hold on to an adult's hand or the buggy when crossing a road. The safeguarding culture across the school is strong.

Regular training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge and know how to respond to a concern. They are vigilant and work closely together to ensure that all children are safe. All staff understand their responsibilities and take them seriously. An electronic record-keeping system, developed since the last inspection, is used effectively to build up a picture of concerns over time. You have developed good links with a range of external agencies. Designated safeguarding leads follow up any concern quickly. This ensures that timely support is provided to children and families. You are not afraid to escalate concerns where you feel an appropriate response is not forthcoming. As a result, the children are very well cared for and safe.

Inspection findings

- The introduction of specific learning groups is proving to be a success. Staff teach key skills and aspects of number in these sessions. They introduce children to a range of practical resources, such as counters, number fans, number lines and cards. Staff model what to do and provide a running commentary during each session. Children listen and focus hard. Children count, add and take away. Adults encourage the most able children to estimate before finding out the answer. Adults skilfully match the learning to children's needs and interests. As a result, children concentrate hard and gain confidence to use number in their independent activities.
- Every opportunity is used to promote and develop number skills across the school. Children are excited when their special number changes from three to four on their birthday. They use their knowledge and skills in the role play shoe shop. They measure feet and put prices on shoes. Children select the right coins to pay for them. They use strategies taught in the group session to count accurately. Adults ask children to explain what they are doing. This deepens children's understanding. They develop a secure knowledge of number and an appropriate mathematical vocabulary.
- Early reading skills are developed effectively across the school. The use of symbols, pictures and associated words enables children to read simple labels and notices. They know that print carries meaning. They identify their name attached to their photograph when they start. By the time they leave school, they recognise and read their name without the photo. The story of the week introduces children to a range of high-quality texts. Adults model how to read the book. Repetition over the course of a week helps children develop a sense of

story. They enthusiastically share the books with friends. Children dress up as the characters and act out the story, adding in their own ideas. Expectations of what children can do are extremely high. Children make their own playdough by following a simple recipe card. They follow picture instructions to make models. As a result, children see themselves as readers.

- This year, formal phonics teaching has been introduced to meet the needs of the most able children. This work is providing suitable challenge. Children are beginning to identify initial letter sounds in the environment. They recognise the letters in their names. Some children use them when writing independently. Adults encourage the children to listen carefully and to have a go at writing them. The most able children can segment and blend. The development of these skills helps to prepare children well for their move to primary school.
- Transition arrangements are strong. There are well-developed procedures to help children settle into the nursery. Home visits and stay and play sessions, as well as one-to-one discussions, help build a profile of each child. This ensures that their needs are met from the outset. Parents comment on how well prepared their children were for their start at nursery. Highly effective relationships with key adults help children settle quickly. They use regular observations and joint planning discussions to adjust the provision. As a result, there is excellent challenge for all children. Outstanding teaching, supported by routines and high expectations, ensures that children develop confidence and independence throughout their time at the nursery. This prepares them well for the move to primary school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school continues to be a centre of good practice that shares its expertise with other settings
- remaining gaps in the achievement of different groups of children, including between boys and girls, and between disadvantaged children and other children, are closed.

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

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you about the developments and changes to the school since the last inspection, the school's self-evaluation and plans for the future. We discussed information about children's current progress and attainment. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I considered the 10 responses to the staff questionnaire. I also met with a group of six staff. I carried out learning walks with you. During these, I spoke with children and discussed what they were doing. I met with parents before school started and considered the three responses to Ofsted's Parent View free-text service. I reviewed a range of documents, including: the school self-evaluation and development plan; minutes of governing body meetings; assessment data; safeguarding policies and procedures; and attendance-monitoring data.