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6 March 2018

Ms Caron Rudge
Executive Headteacher
St Margaret's Nursery School
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Dear Ms Rudge

Short inspection of St Margaret's Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 October 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 demonstrate ambitious leadership and all staff share your vision. You have developed a skilled and effective leadership team who deliver an exceptional provision for all children. As a result, children make excellent progress in all areas of their learning and development.

You place strong emphasis on the school being a place of possibilities, with play at the heart of the children's learning experience. Your team is highly successful in developing children's use of language through well-chosen resources and activities which foster their imagination and creativity.

Classrooms are bright and attractive learning spaces where children feel confident and secure in their learning. You and your team's use of outdoor areas to support children's learning is impressive. Staff ensure that children benefit from stimulating and exciting activities which help them to practise and extend their physical, social and communication skills.

The provision for two-year-old children is outstanding. You and your team give children excellent opportunities to take turns, to share and to be inquisitive about the world around them. You develop fine and gross motor skills through creative

and physical activities; opportunities for speaking and listening are at the centre of children's learning.

Governors are reflective and ask the right questions to maintain standards. They are skilful and seek ways to develop the learning further through the support and challenge they offer to senior leaders. Together with governors, you have established a strong federation of three nursery schools working together as the Barnet Early Years Alliance. You are now considering how best to disseminate the excellent practice within the school through your designation as an early years hub.

You and your team know each child exceptionally well. From the moment that children join the school, staff keep a careful eye on their progress and development. As a result, staff know precisely what they need to do to ensure that children make substantial gains in all aspects of their learning

At the time of the previous inspection, it was recommended that parents and carers should be given opportunities to contribute to how staff assess their children's achievement. The school has addressed this through the introduction of an online system. Parents can now provide staff with information on their children's development and interests at home.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff demonstrate a strong culture of safeguarding. The leader with responsibility for safeguarding is well known to all staff and procedures for reporting concerns about a child's welfare are clearly understood and followed. Staff recognise signs of potential risks and safeguarding updates are a regular agenda item in staff meetings.

This is a small school where each child is acknowledged and nurtured as an individual. You develop close links with families and parents report that their children are well cared for. The school has the support and affection of the parental community. A parent, summarising the views of many, commented, 'This is a safe, attractive and much-loved place to be.'

You and your team meet regularly to discuss the welfare of all children, with a particular focus on children who may be vulnerable or not achieving as well as they could. Leaders check continuously that the extra help that these children receive makes a positive difference to both their well-being and their academic outcomes.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains outstanding, my first line of enquiry was to find out how effective independent learning is in supporting children's development.
- During classroom visits, I saw that all activities are planned to offer a level of challenge matched to children's learning needs. The development of language is central to all play activities and adults model and reinforce key vocabulary throughout the setting.

- Outstanding phonics teaching plays a pivotal role in the substantial gains that children make in their communication skills. Staff are skilled in supporting children to use their phonics knowledge to experiment with mark-making and early writing. Alongside this, staff share books and stories with children regularly. They spend time discussing the meaning of words and phrases to deepen children's vocabulary and make sure that their understanding is secure. As a result, children recall their favourite stories confidently, including the main events and characters.
- You and your team's unwavering focus on children's language development extends to mathematics teaching. As children play, staff are adept at modelling language to extend children's understanding of mathematical concepts. For example, in the 'mud kitchen', staff supported children to use phrases such as 'how long', 'how many' and 'how heavy' to describe and explain what they were doing. At the same time, staff select mathematical equipment carefully to reinforce children's recognition of number and shape.
- You explained that you and your team continually review the curriculum to ensure that the outstanding quality of education is maintained. Therefore, for my second line of enquiry, I asked you to highlight aspects of the school's work that demonstrated excellent practice.
- Children are encouraged to approach tasks that may be challenging and to persevere when at first they may not succeed. This encourages children to think through issues and deepens their learning experience.
- The use of dolls as a teaching aid is highly effective in school. Children engage fully in the storytelling of events experienced by the doll. They listen intently, ask relevant questions and share their own experiences. Children also demonstrate strong empathy, sensitivity and understanding of the needs of others.
- My final line of enquiry examined how well the school supports and tracks the progress of children.
- Leaders and staff use their detailed knowledge of every child to plan learning that is tailored to their needs and maximises their progress. You and your team check that all groups of children achieve equally well. The most able children benefit from challenging tasks which enable them to build successfully on what they already know or can do well. For example, small-group sessions encourage them to deepen their understanding of the books they read.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from focused language development support. The teaching of this group is outstanding and the impact on outcomes is shared at child awareness meetings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more children, beyond the federation, benefit from the exceptional practice, expertise and research seen in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Tom Canning
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this inspection, I held meetings with the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation of its own performance. I looked through a range of school documentation. This included the school's safeguarding procedures and the school's development planning. I scrutinised staff training records on keeping children safe and I viewed the school's single central record of vetting checks on staff. I met with a number of parents at the start of the school day as they arrived at school with their children. I viewed 29 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and I took into consideration eight staff questionnaires and 13 responses from children. I visited all classrooms with senior leaders, spoke to children and observed indoor and outdoor activities. A meeting was held with the chair of governors and two other governors and I also met with the school improvement adviser from the local authority.