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Mrs Helen Ackerman
Headteacher
Rye Park Nursery School
Walton Road
Hoddesdon
Hertfordshire
EN11 0LN

Dear Mrs Ackerman,

Short inspection of Rye Park Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 2017, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The school has had significant leadership changes since the previous inspection, including your own appointment as headteacher. You have created a new leadership team to assist you in the drive to secure exceptional early years provision across the school.

You have brought a calm, composed and highly strategic approach to school leadership. Parents, staff and governors are delighted with the thoughtful, nurturing care which you provide for children and their families. Parents whom I spoke to informally at the start of the day were fulsome in their praise for the school. Typical of the comments made were 'This is a fantastic school', 'The staff are so approachable' and 'It is the best thing we have ever done, bringing our child here.'

Children receive a warm welcome into classes at the start of each session, and staff give freely of their time to talk to parents and childminders and to answer questions about the day's activities. One teacher listened carefully when, for example, one child was feeling a little anxious and she was able to give the family reassurance and support.

You have worked closely with your leadership team and with governors to ensure that staff provide an outstanding level of care for all the children. Teachers and other key workers pay great attention to detail when planning learning opportunities and, as a result, activities capture the imagination of children.

You continue to be ambitious for the school and have worked hard to develop the skills and talents of staff. Consequently, adults make a strong contribution to children's development. Teachers and other adults demonstrate considerable expertise in promoting children's communication skills. They teach very creatively, carefully weaving individual learning programmes seamlessly into each child's own choice of play. This allows the children to practise making their own choices, develop independent skills and become socially confident.

Since the previous inspection, the school has taken over responsibility for the pre-school class, Ryesings, and you have invested wisely in new furniture and equipment. This has improved the learning environment in this class and improved continuity for children moving from Ryesings into the Nursery classes.

The school could do more to develop links with local primary schools in order to further improve transition and to share good practice.

You have a comprehensive and detailed plan for continuing to improve the school which you review regularly. Additionally, I have asked you to align this plan more comprehensively with specific, focused visits by governors. This will enable governors to monitor the work of the school even more sharply.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality.

You and the governing body ensure that staff are kept up to date with safeguarding requirements. Staff know their duties and understand their role in keeping children safe. They are well equipped to spot any signs that children may be at risk of harm. All required checks take place to make sure the adults that children meet in school do not pose any threat. The parents I spoke to told me very clearly that their children feel exceptionally safe and well cared for at school. They consider bullying and bad behaviour to be exceedingly rare events, and they are confident that adults who work at the school will be quick to respond if they have any concerns.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained outstanding, one of my key lines of enquiry was about how staff use assessment information to plan children's learning. In 2012, the previous inspection report had asked the school to make sure that children's targets were more detailed. Since then, children's individual portfolios have improved considerably and teachers are meticulous in recording their observations about the achievements of each child. As a result, I was able to see thorough and comprehensive planning and monitoring of progress in every class.

- Staff know the children exceptionally well and they use this knowledge to plan small tasks which sensitively lead each child to his or her next step in their learning. On visiting classrooms and the lovely outdoor garden, it was clear that staff are expert in planning learning activities which link closely with the children's own development needs. For example, one adult had identified that a child was nervous about using the outdoor play equipment and she was gently encouraging him to feel more confident by asking, 'Can you do a little jump and balance on the beam if I hold your hand?'
- My second line of enquiry was about the progress children make in the school and about opportunities to develop early writing. The comprehensive information which teachers regularly update about each child shows that children in the pre-school class and in the Nursery make outstanding progress in all areas of the curriculum.
- In the pre-school class, 100% of the disadvantaged children are currently making or exceeding the expected amount of progress in their communication skills. In personal and social development, 96% of all children are on track with their progress and 71% are exceeding expectations.
- There are extensive opportunities for children to practise mark making and they love writing. During my visit to classes, I saw numerous examples of children's writing including making lists, writing party invitations, copying their name, writing to friends and writing a recipe for a giant pizza for everyone to share. One child confidently explained that his story was about a ladder which he was using to repair a broken window, and another child was writing instructions to tell a friend how to look after the class tortoises.
- Leaders and other adults have created a rich, vibrant and stimulating learning environment, making wonderful use of all the indoor and outside spaces. As a result, the children are free to choose, explore and challenge themselves across a wide range of structured and purposeful learning activities.
- Well-trained staff use their knowledge to guide, support and extend each child's personal development. The strong focus on adults' use of questioning enriches children's speaking and listening skills. This is significant because these skilfully performed interactions between staff and children enable children to make exceptional progress across all areas of the curriculum.
- My final line of enquiry was about how well governors and senior leaders have managed changes to leadership since the previous inspection. The governing body has provided stability and consistency to the school in times of change. Governors have appointed an exceptionally able headteacher who has managed to bring new strategies, improvements and innovations to an already outstanding school.
- Parents and staff are unswervingly supportive of you and they recognise your determination to do everything possible to nurture the learning and personal development of every child in the school. Indeed, one parent told me that, 'The

headteacher knows all the children personally and she looks after us all.'

- I reviewed the school's action plans, records of meetings and written evaluations, and I also spoke to leaders, governors and a representative from the local authority. It was clear to me that senior leaders have a forensic understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development, and you have clear plans to make continual improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they use specific, focused visits by governors to monitor the impact of their plans for improvement even more sharply
- teachers are supported to develop links with local primary schools so they can better prepare children for the next stage of their education and share their own excellent practice more widely.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Rudman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I held meetings with your senior leaders who have responsibility for managing the pre-school class and the Nursery. I also met with the leader responsible for phonics and with the speech and language therapist. I met with a group of governors including the chair of the governing body and I spoke on the phone to a representative from the local authority. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information including your records of monitoring and evaluation, governing body minutes of meetings and the school's assessment information. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to attendance. We both undertook observations of learning across the school and viewed children's learning portfolios.