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Mrs Sarah Helm
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Helm

Short inspection of Old Church Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 3 December 2015, 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the school has continued to develop. You have expanded the part-time provision for two-year-old children. Disadvantaged children and those with language delay are admitted early to nursery through the pre-school places. This typifies the culture of the school; leaders are right to be proud of the inclusive ethos of the school. Leaders work with health visitors to ensure that parents are signposted to this provision.

You have shared this excellent practice with other leaders locally and nationally. Your model of outstanding practice is helping other schools know how to find the children who most need Nursery provision from two years old. You work well with a range of initial teacher education partners to help train the next generation of teachers. Student nurses learn about children and their developmental stages during visits to the school. As a result, the nursery plays a role locally and regionally in the training of a range of professionals crucial to the health, well-being and learning of children.

Many children start the pre-school and Nursery with little or no English. A significant proportion of other children have language delay in their speaking and listening. Your staff are highly skilled at identifying the individual needs of children and working with their families to develop English. A wide range of classes for parents

are provided; topics include using letters and sounds at home (phonics), helping children who require speech therapy and sharing books with your children. One parent commented, 'It is great knowing how to bring a book to life for my child.' Another said, 'Old Church cannot do enough to help me, help my child.'

Class teams discuss learning activities and the learning of individual children. As a result, the interests of children are identified and their learning is built upon the next day. For example, a boy with an interest in dinosaurs was given a range of books to further develop his interest. This initial interest was quickly shared by other boys in his class. Staff provided a range of dinosaur activities and one boy developed his own dinosaur through collage – he called it 'a respectausaurus'. This showed his deep thinking about dinosaurs and the impact of the school's work to develop children's understanding about rights and responsibilities.

Children quickly settle into the routines and expectations of the Nursery. Children play and learn well alongside each other. Staff are highly engaged with children. They demonstrate skill in standing back, observing and stretching children through thoughtful questioning.

The conduct of children is impeccable, including at lunchtime where Nursery children sit talking quietly and share a pleasant lunchtime. They are encouraged to try new foods and to use cutlery appropriately. Lunchtime is a calm and civilised event where children take responsibility for tidying up after themselves.

Your commitment to the development of staff and their continuing professional development is evident. You nurture and develop talent in the school. Morale is exceptionally high and staff have a common and shared vision of where and how the nursery is developing. Staff are uniformly committed to each child starting the next stage of their education above the national expectation for their age. Most children have already achieved the expectation for the end of the Reception Year by the time they leave Nursery. This represents exceptional progress from their starting points. Staff systematically gather evidence each day.

You, other leaders and governors have looked to learn from the very best practice locally, nationally and internationally. For example, you have resolutely tackled the area identified for improvement at the last inspection; the outdoor area is now alive with learning opportunities. The 'edible garden' allows pupils to learn about planting seeds, nurturing them and harvesting food. Staff use the outdoors exceptionally well to develop the vocabulary of the children through their play. For example, the inspector observed children talking about their 'work' building walls with bricks and mortar made from straw and mud.

After research in England and Denmark, you and your leaders have created what you call your own 'forest school'. Children spend time in the grounds of the school exploring the environment. They identify birds and insects and examine wildlife using scientific equipment. They learn to develop an understanding of personal safety through pond exploration, using tools and visits to the school's beehive. This learning and social time in the outdoors helps children learn to interact with nature and the natural environment. Regular visits to the local city farm help children

develop an interest in animals and an understanding of where food comes from, such as eggs. Children increasingly show extended periods of concentration, engagement and resilience as they are taught in the school's outdoor area.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Staff are fully trained and knowledgeable about the new legal duties relating to female genital mutilation (FGM) and 'Prevent' (preventing radicalisation and extremism).

Leaders work consistently with all staff to ensure the needs of children are considered. They work well with other agencies from social care, health and the local authority.

Children are helped to develop an understanding of safety. This is evident in their work and play outdoors, their trips and in their general learning. For example, learning how to climb equipment safely, play with construction materials like real bricks or the need to be cautious near a bonfire.

Inspection findings

- You have exceptionally high ambitions for disadvantaged children, including those in the pre-school. You have highly skilled staff who tailor activities to the interests of children so that children across the Nursery make truly exceptional progress. Children who attend from two years old have caught up with their peers nationally when they start nursery. They continue to flourish and develop once they begin full-time nursery. All groups of children make similarly excellent progress, particularly boys, who start Nursery behind girls. Boys catch up with girls in their learning across the curriculum and in many cases exceed the high attainment shown by girls.
- Children joining the school are assessed accurately to identify the starting points in their learning and interests. A detailed record of each child's learning journey is kept with detailed and accurate evidence.
- Leaders have developed their own assessment system to check and ensure all children make exceptional progress. Staff are astute in 'plugging' gaps to ensure all children can achieve their full potential. For example, small groups may be taken off-site when it meets their learning needs, e.g. on a visit to the local library or the shops.
- The vast majority of parents testify to the difference the school makes. 'The staff are enthusiastic, warm and hardworking ... my son cries when school is closed. My daughter has excelled at her new school in part due to the confidence instilled at Old Church.' Another parent told the inspector, 'They cannot do enough to help your child or you. They have changed my life. They helped me go back into education by funding before-school childcare.'
- The governing body are knowledgeable and fully committed to ensuring all children get the very best start to their education. Governors ensure that the school has a clear plan of how to remain outstanding and continue to improve. They challenge leaders to show the impact the school has when investing money

in new equipment or learning activities.

- Planning for the future of the school and working with parents are both strengths of the school. However, governors and senior leaders acknowledge that the school could do more to get formal feedback from parents through the academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they plan to receive formal feedback from parents throughout the year, particularly focusing on areas within the school development plan.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Storrie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector met with you, other senior, middle leaders and teachers. He met with two representatives from the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector looked over a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, information on the progress of children, the single central record, an email to the inspector from a parent and records of the children's learning. The inspector observed learning in all classrooms and in the school grounds. He spoke to children informally to gather their views. The inspector spoke to a range of parents. He considered the views of 15 parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey 'Parent View'. Fifteen responses to the staff survey were also considered.