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Ms Anne-Marie Merifield  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Merifield

### **Short inspection of Lilycroft Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 November 2016 with Her Majesty's Inspector Rachael Flesher, 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 February 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 and the head of school have developed a strong and effective partnership and both of you have managed significant change effectively. This is because you value the staff's expertise and have sought to involve them in your decision-making, so they fully understand your reasons for change. You have not lost sight of the core purpose of your work, which is ensuring high-quality teaching and provision for three- and four-year-olds. You believe there is always room for improvement, and constantly seek to review and refine your work. The local authority frequently draws on your expertise and holds the school up as an example of effective practice in the early years.

You are very clear about what effective practice in the early years looks like and have high expectations of staff and children. You articulate this well in feedback to staff from the robust checks you make on the impact of their teaching and in your development plans. You hold staff to account robustly through finely honed performance management and appraisal systems. You ensure that they have the timely and appropriate training and support they need to develop and improve their teaching. This has enabled you to build on the success of the last inspection and sustain outstanding teaching and provision for the children.

Since the last inspection, you have worked successfully on the area for improvement concerning reading and phonics. As a result of your actions, the proportion of children reaching age-related expectations in reading has risen significantly since 2013, often from low starting points. Learning journals, displays of children's mark-making and writing, and your assessment information show the outstanding progress children make in their use of sounds to read and spell. This is particularly evident for boys and the least- and most-able children. Over time, you have done this in a number of ways. For example:

- You have revitalised language development and sharpened procedures for the early identification of any communication and language issues children may have. Children get the support they need swiftly through daily targeted interventions and consequently make rapid progress.
- Your staff have increased opportunities for children to use the sounds that letters make by weaving reading and writing activities skilfully into the areas of learning and focused teaching time. Staff take great pains to model good pronunciation of words and ensure that children do the same.
- Every child has a weekly targeted phonics session with the class teacher and reading time with an adult.
- You have used the outdoor work to sharpen children's listening skills in the early stages of their learning in phonics.
- You have observed, analysed and evaluated boys' attitudes to reading. From this, you have made changes in the learning environment and resources, such as introducing superhero books and opportunities to read more in the outdoors. As a result, in 2016, boys made outstanding progress in reading, but you have not stopped here. From your evaluations, you have identified further opportunities to develop their reading skills. You are in the process of setting up a creative design studio to encourage boys to engage in reading in this real-life and purposeful context.
- You have worked hard to involve parents in their child's reading and have supported them to do this effectively. Parents have valued this support and note how well their children are progressing, particularly with language development.

You are determined to secure the best provision possible for young children in the community the school serves. You and the governing body have strengthened leadership by forming a soft federation of schools with your outstanding nursery and teaching school, St Edmund's. The governing body is acutely aware of the need to ensure continued excellence while managing tightening budgets. They are working with you to explore future management options with other primary and secondary schools in Bradford.

You say the school's website is a work in progress. Although it is informative and parent-friendly, it does not meet the statutory requirements for what the Department of Education says must be published online. You share your plan for the spending of the early years pupil premium on your website, but you do not share your notable success in diminishing differences in achievement for this group of children. The school complaints procedure and charging and remissions policy are not published online, although they are in place.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You place a high priority on safeguarding. You, the head of school and staff are vigilant. You focus on the small things that concern you and take prompt action to prevent matters from escalating. This means that there are very few referrals to social care. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding matters and their responsibilities. You make sure that they are kept up to date with safeguarding matters through training and regular discussions at staff meetings.

All aspects of the Nursery's work are risk-assessed and records are kept up to date. This ensures that children are safe when undertaking activities both in Nursery and on their frequent visits outside Nursery to places like the local park. Staff fully understand their responsibilities in this matter and they take great care when planning activities both indoors and outdoors.

You also ensure that children understand how and when to take measured risks. You do not shy away from giving them opportunities to do this in their play and learning.

You are very keen that from the outset, young children learn to take responsibility for their decisions and actions.

The governing body checks on the effectiveness of safeguarding and fulfils its statutory duties well.

### **Inspection findings**

- Children get off to an exceptional start. You assess their starting points carefully, taking into account information from parents and the 0–3 provision some of them access. For the first three weeks of each term, you and your staff ensure that all children develop essential key skills. Staff also ensure that children understand routines that enable them to use the areas of learning effectively to learn better and faster. You make clear your expectations of older children and the most able during this time. You give them responsibilities which ensure that they are excellent role models for younger children and those new to the setting.

- You and your staff have created a safe, warm and exciting place for children to be. Parents say how excited their children are about coming to school. You constantly seek to improve provision and practice, and take bold steps to ensure that children are ready for the next stage of their learning. For example, you have been innovative in the development of the outdoor provision where you provide children with different experiences and challenges from those seen indoors. You ensure that several staff stay and work in the outdoor environment all week in order to assess, adapt and follow through next steps in children's learning. This is having a tangible effect on children's confidence to rise to the challenges set and make calculated decisions. It has supported their ability to collaborate and communicate effectively with each other and adults. It has also deepened their understanding of the world and improved how they move and handle large and small objects.
- Teachers plan effectively to offer open-ended activities which allow children to take their learning as far as they are able, and children have the confidence to do this. Adults intervene skilfully and they question to probe and stimulate children's thinking. This is clearly seen in mathematics where children make outstanding progress, particularly the most able. During my observations of children's play, it was a joy to see how advanced some children were in their mathematical understanding and ability to reason.
- Adults are skilful in the way they observe, support and challenge learning. They provide high-quality interactions, model good speech and communication, and give children 'thinking time' to fully assess children's levels of knowledge and understanding. From this, they plan careful next steps for each child, based on robust assessment. This has ensured that children continue to make outstanding progress, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Your plans and procedures for supporting those children who are eligible for the early years pupil premium funding are highly effective. Most children make good and better progress, often from some very low starting points. You ensure that teachers plan very clear, focused and measurable steps for children's learning, and make effective use of the resources and time available to them. You make regular and thorough checks on this group of children's progress. You evaluate precisely how various aspects of teaching and provision have accelerated children's learning and development to inform your planning. The governing body monitors closely and challenges you robustly about the use and impact of this funding.
- You and your team have created well-established relationships between home and the school. There are frequent opportunities for staff and parents to speak to one another. Parents spoken to during the inspection are very appreciative of the time and support that staff give to help them, their families and their children.
- Governors are deeply committed to the school's success. They visit regularly and use their collective skills and expertise well to contribute to the success of the school. They remain objective and share your ambition when identifying priorities and planning for necessary developments.

- Although attendance is not compulsory, you make good attendance a high priority. There are robust procedures in place to monitor attendance, reduce absences and ensure that children are safe.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that the school fully meets the requirements of published information on its website by:

- including an impact statement for the use of the early years pupil premium funding
- uploading the school's policies for charging and remissions and complaints.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Bowyer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Prior to the inspection, I formed some key lines of enquiry which we discussed and agreed at our initial meeting. These were:

- How is the teaching of phonics and opportunities for children to use and apply what they learn supporting improvements in reading and writing?
- How effectively are leaders using the early years pupil premium funding to diminish the gaps in children's learning and development to ensure that these children are ready for the next stage of their learning?
- How effective are teaching, learning and assessment in addressing the needs of the most able children?
- How effectively have leaders managed to sustain outstanding leadership and teaching, learning and assessment since the last inspection and currently, given the recent turbulence in staffing?
- How effective is safeguarding?

During the visit, I met with you, the head of school, members of staff and four governors including the vice-chair of the governing body. There were too few responses from parents on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to take note of this. However, I spoke with some parents during the day and scrutinised your monitoring records, which included parents' views. Staff were unable to submit their views electronically due to a fault with Ofsted's online system. Visits were made to the indoor and outdoor environments to observe children's learning. I reviewed a range of Nursery documentation and records of your checks to safeguard children, and scrutinised records of children's progress and attainment.