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Mrs Sue Mansfield
Headteacher
Batford Nursery School
Holcroft Road
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Dear Mrs Mansfield

Short inspection of Batford Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Despite the school being judged outstanding prior to your arrival as headteacher, you have always been steadfast in the view 'we can do more.' You and your team have not stood still, nor been complacent. Consequently, your contagious passion for early years education has made sure that the outstanding provision and excellent outcomes, recognised at the previous inspection, have been sustained.

Children at Batford are happy and inquisitive. Through their excellent experience at your nursery, children develop a thirst for learning. The quality of the learning environment is exceptional, and this successfully captures and holds children's interest. Additionally, children are given many opportunities to develop their personal, social and emotional skills through creative means, for example the regular yoga sessions, focused nurture groups and 'forest school' activities.

Standards of behaviour from the young children around the nursery are impeccable. This is because staff are excellent role models for children to learn from and imitate. Children are encouraged to be independent and take responsibility for the activities they choose. For example, during this inspection, children were observed cosying up on a sofa to share a book, role playing in the hairdressers, writing their own books and sweeping the autumn leaves, among other engaging tasks. During this time,

children were participating fully and working exceptionally well together, being kind, considerate and caring towards one another.

Teaching and learning at Batford Nursery School are firmly underpinned by nurturing, caring relationships between staff and children. Even more impressive are the relationships children have with each other. Even within these early days of settling into the nursery, children are respectful of each other and they learn to take turns and be polite. As one parent said, 'The school is a wonderful environment for little people to learn about life.' As a result, parents are very happy with the quality of the nursery's provision.

You have the full support of the governing body, which shares your passion and vision for Batford Nursery School. Governors have a clear, succinct overview of the school's strengths and what needs to be done to improve standards even further. Governors are not afraid to make difficult decisions or to challenge you when they think it is necessary. As a governing body, they continue to be effective in their work.

Staff receive many high-quality opportunities to develop personally. New initiatives are encouraged and both you and your deputy headteacher make sure that any work undertaken is for the benefit of the children. However, there are a significant number of staff who feel that, while the support they receive is effective, communication could be improved. There is more room for staff to be able to contribute explicitly to school improvement in the future.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, along with all staff, ensure that there is a deeply embedded safeguarding culture evident throughout the school. Training and clear systems are in place that enable all staff to know what to do if they have concerns about a child. You also complete thorough checks and assessments of staff's suitability to work with children.

The allocated safeguarding governor has strong expertise and understanding of how to keep children safe. This is disseminated to all governors so that they successfully fulfil their statutory duty to ensure that safeguarding arrangements at Batford are secure. As a result, all children are well cared for and safe.

Staff are highly vigilant and care deeply about the young children they work with. During learning activities, they make sure that safety is always a priority. For example, during the children's induction to the 'forest school' work, children listened carefully to instructions and behaved appropriately around the fire pit. Children could explain clearly why they must not step into the fire pit area, also pointing out, 'It is not dangerous yet because the fire is not there, but we are learning to be safe because that's where they will light the fire.'

Parents say that their children are well looked after. They report that their children 'are happy, safe and well cared for', adding also, 'The emphasis is upon the

children's happiness, safety and development and this is undoubtedly the priority at Batford.'

Inspection findings

- My first focus during this inspection was to evaluate the capacity of the current leadership team to sustain the outstanding standard of education seen during the previous inspection. This was because at the previous inspection leaders and governors were tasked with ensuring a smooth transition in leadership, following your appointment as the new headteacher, to make sure that Batford's outstanding provision was maintained. This has been achieved successfully.
- Leadership has been strengthened since the previous inspection. The deputy headteacher role has been introduced and this has brought further expertise to the school. Your deputy headteacher has an accurate view of the current quality of teaching across the school and is working well with you to further refine actions to ensure even stronger achievement for children across the nursery. The chair of the governing body is new in post since the previous inspection. She has been joined by new governors with a strong range of skills and expertise. Leaders' and governors' self-evaluation and action planning are sharp and rigorous. You have identified the right priorities to improve provision even further.
- You and the deputy headteacher are rightly identified in the locality as specialists in early years provision. As a result, you both provide outreach support to other providers and also deliver high-quality mentoring and coaching to your own staff. Professional development, support and training are at the core of your work, for colleagues in school and within the locality.
- Another line of enquiry for this inspection was to evaluate the progress that children make from their various starting points when they join the nursery. I chose to look at this to ensure that the high-quality teaching and learning evident at the previous inspection have continued.
- From their various starting points, children in 2016/17 made very strong and sustained progress and attained very well in all areas of learning. A real strength in the nursery provision is the quality of leaders' tracking of the progress children make. Leaders' early and precise assessments of children's needs mean that they support individual children quickly when they join the school. For example, you identified that a higher number of children were joining the school this year who speak English as an additional language. Therefore, you secured extra language and communication support to develop children's speaking and listening skills.
- As well as rigorous staff performance measures being in place, there is a full, intensive programme of staff training for all staff to access. Staff appreciate what they learn and routinely reflect and plan how they will apply it to their day-to-day practice. This results in all staff working effectively together to provide outstanding provision for children.
- Despite this outstanding provision, you have identified that there are odd occasions where adult intervention does not challenge a few of the most able children to extend their thinking fully, including through their actions during a task, so that they can attain even better.

- My final line of enquiry was to check how effective the transition arrangements are for children and how well prepared they are for their start to statutory schooling. The deputy headteacher undertakes a lot of effective work with the infant and primary schools children leave Batford to attend. Shared experience and expertise ensure that there are agreed expectations across settings as leaders check assessment information consistently. This is ensuring that children's progress and attainment are monitored precisely and are accurate at each stage of transition.
- You and your team focus on the 'whole' development of each child, that is, both their academic and their personal, social and emotional development. This means that by the time they leave Batford, they are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education. You continue to work with the children's new school after they have left you. A high proportion of your children go on to achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year, in part because of the outstanding start that they had in your nursery.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff are able to contribute meaningfully to school improvement
- all adults are as self-assured as the most confident to provide opportunities for the most able children to attain the very highest standards.

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

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection you and I visited all classes together. Some of these observations were also with the deputy headteacher. I reviewed children's learning journals from the previous academic year. I talked to children about what they were doing. I also observed work in a nurture group and some parts of two children's induction sessions to 'forest school' provision.

I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the two special educational needs co-ordinators. I held a meeting with three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and had a telephone conversation with the school's allocated representative from the local authority.

I reviewed the school's website and a range of school documentation, including policies, current assessment information, your school development plan and school self-evaluation, as well as safeguarding procedures and systems. I met with a parent, took into account 21 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 19 free-text messages, as well as the school's own parent surveys. I also took account of the 13 responses to the staff questionnaire.