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Ms Caron Rudge
Executive Headteacher
Brookhill Nursery School
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Dear Ms Rudge

Short inspection of Brookhill 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Since your appointment seven years ago, you have put in place and developed a federation of schools dedicated to the delivery and promotion of excellent early years practice. This united team shares your ambition for high-quality education. Many staff are home-grown, building on and contributing to both the school's and the federation's capacity year on year. As a result, the school continues to move forward rapidly under your leadership.

You have a clear vision for the school and are supported by excellent practitioners at every level. You and your team reflect continually on what is best for the children in your care. Together, you research effective education practice, tailoring it to support the development needs of every child. As a result, all children make substantial gains in their learning. They are very well prepared for primary school.

Your governors' ambition for the school is evident. They are highly skilled individuals who challenge, support and hold school leaders to account. The previous inspection identified the need for you to support high-quality early years practice locally and nationally. You and your governors have relished this challenge. Since the previous inspection, together you have formed a highly effective federation of three well-regarded nursery schools. You have established a national teaching school to train early years practitioners, providing school-to-school support and continuing

professional development. The strong practice in place has been recognised. The federation's recent bid to become a centre of early years excellence within the Greater London Authority has been successful. You are now leading on developing and supporting other schools in their aim to provide the very best practice in the early years sector.

Your commitment to supporting ongoing professional development and in-school research for all staff is paying off. You and your senior leadership team have created a culture of trust and support that allows all to flourish. Many staff are former parents, apprentices or members of the local community. Adults, regardless of age or background, are encouraged to undertake further learning. Parents and carers participate and engage fully in the range of parent workshops you provide. Many of your teaching staff undertake further study and are consequently able to make a strong contribution to school improvement. Staff retention rates are particularly high. Staff were unanimous in their agreement that leaders ensure a motivated, respected and effective teaching team.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are well kept. You and your team work hard to support vulnerable children and their families. Staff liaise closely with the children's centre, external agencies and parents during home visits so that suitable support is in place. All necessary information is gathered in advance for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities or who may be at risk. This allows staff to support vulnerable children right from the start. Families see and value this. Consequently, these children, like their peers, settle extremely well into their new learning environments.

A culture pervades where everyone is responsible for protecting the well-being and safety of children. Parents check and close the gates carefully on entry and exit to and from the site. The secure premises and checks on visitors' identity effectively limit the extent to which people can enter the school building or play areas. Leaders have established clear rules regarding the use of mobile telephones and cameras. Staff understand the need for these policies. Parents spoken to, and who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, say that children are safe at the school and well looked after. They value the time taken by staff to get to know each child as an individual. Staff have a deep understanding of how important it is to be aware of children's changing emotions. They understand the range of welfare concerns that may affect children at school. Staff are vigilant and work closely with families to minimise the effect of any changes in families' circumstances, such as bereavement or illness, which may impact on the children in their care.

Inspection findings

- A lively and purposeful atmosphere permeates the school. You and your team work very effectively with new children and parents. Those parents with whom I spoke value the excellent transition arrangements, including the time given to get

to know their children during home visits and stay-and-play sessions. Parents commented that, even the small things, like the issuing of fridge magnets with a picture of their children's key worker, really helped their children to get ready for their time at the school and to settle in swiftly. Right from day one, there is a friendly face to meet and greet them.

- The indoor and outdoor environments are learning places of endless possibilities. Adults skilfully provide opportunities for children to talk about what they experience, and challenge them to think of ways to take their learning further, for example tracing round their bodies and then exploring what's inside their bodies. Children could share what they already knew – that there are arteries and 'they move your blood' and a brain and 'it helps you think'. They are encouraged to take their learning further by looking at encyclopedias.
- Learning in woods and natural areas is providing learning opportunities within and beyond the school's boundaries. It is an integral part of the rich curriculum on offer. Adults take every opportunity to engage in learning conversations with children, eliciting what they know and challenging their learning further. Children are keen to apply their knowledge of sounds. For example, when making popcorn around the open firepit, they talked about the 'popping' of the corn, relishing the sound of the 'p'. The children eagerly described the tastes, smells, sounds and sights as they watched and then ate their popcorn.
- You and your team are ensuring that the school is a joyful place because of the wonderful, rich learning environment on offer, where children are developing their love of learning. Staff provide ways for children to experiment and take risks because they support them in working out for themselves how to make safe and sensible choices. Staff consider and provide opportunities for challenging learning. For example, two-year-old children learn to use knives safely, carefully cutting their own fruit at snack time. Older three- and four-year-olds learn what they need to do to stay safe around the firepit.
- Adults know the children very well and have exceptional skills in adjusting their approaches to meet the needs of all children, including those who are most able or who have SEN and/or disabilities. They know when to stand back and when to intervene as children balance on beams or chose to climb even higher, balancing on the box crates. There is a constant element of decision-making as children at play choose what equipment or resources to use, deciding what they would like to explore further.
- Children behave exceptionally well because they are so absorbed in what they are doing. They play remarkably well together and activities build on children's previous experiences. The teaching of early literacy and phonics is exceptional. It is woven seamlessly into story time, as well as when children are being taught in smaller 'challenge' groups. All children understand that mark-making conveys meaning. They confidently experiment with making marks and sounds. Some explore forming letters or groups of letters to convey meaning further or to write their name. Parents value the extra opportunities for children to excel in phonics or numeracy through the specially tailored group sessions on offer. These sessions are enabling the most able to make rapid progress.
- Checks by staff on children's progress are extremely thorough. Adults take every

opportunity to observe children at play, to understand what each child needs next and whether to adjust activities or the learning environment on offer. Very structured daily evaluations among staff underpin future planning. You and your team make excellent use of the assessment information available about children and groups of children. For example, early last year, you picked up that boys' communication needed to be a focus. Planned opportunities to interest boys further in talking about their learning were successful. A much-higher proportion of boys are now leaving the school at or exceeding age-related expectations for communication.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- even more children benefit from the school's excellent practice by sharing expertise and research more widely within the early years sector, particularly beyond the federation.

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

Jean Thwaites
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, the SEN and/or disabilities leader, the school business manager, three governors and a representative from the local authority. I spoke informally to parents at the beginning of the day. I considered the 150 views of parents from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 22 written comments. I also considered the 24 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. Visits were made with senior leaders to all classes and both outdoor learning areas to observe children's learning. I reviewed a range of school documentation, including the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning and children's assessment and progress information. Samples of work in children's special books and captured in their online learning journals were also viewed.