

28 February 2019

Mrs Rebecca Merritt
Headteacher
Wallace Road Nursery School
Wallace Road
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN2 7EE

Dear Mrs Merritt

Short inspection of Wallace Road Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 2019, 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 March 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

Upon your arrival at the school in September 2015, you noted that staff did not have enough regular opportunities to discuss the quality of teaching and learning in the school. You also judged that staff did not have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills over time. As a result, you began weekly staff meetings at which staff could reflect on what they did most effectively and how they could improve other aspects. At the same time, you introduced training for staff in, for example, the teaching of mathematics. Staff have welcomed these changes. All of those who responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire appreciate the opportunities for professional development. They also strongly agree that you treat them with respect and support them well and that they enjoy working as a team.

You have attended effectively to the area for improvement from the previous inspection. Staff now consider how they can group children for specific activities, such as cooking, or learning in the wooded area. An additional member of staff provides focused support, for example when working with children who are at the early stages of learning English.

You have worked effectively to increase the communication between the school and parents. In addition to your newsletters, which give parents valuable information about recent school occasions and forthcoming events, the school's regular Twitter

feed allows them to see photographs and films. For example, they can see how children are learning about Chinese New Year by wearing costumes, eating Chinese snacks, dancing, and using chopsticks to move noodles on a plate. You and your staff also sustain a positive partnership with parents, visiting families in their homes before children enter the provision for both two- and for three- and four-year-old children. Staff use the information to help them assess what children can do. They provide parents with ongoing information about what their children are learning in relation to other typical children of a similar age. Parents are very supportive of the school. All of those I met during my visit and who gave comments through Ofsted's free-text service expressed consistently positive views. As one explained: 'My child loves coming here and is really well supported by the fantastic staff. She's made good progress and enjoys all the activities, especially the art ones.'

Staff create a safe and welcoming environment for children, including two-year-olds. Children's first experience of school is positive so that children feel secure and want to come to school each day. Resources, including for the youngest children, are accessible for them to use independently. As a result, they do not need staff's support, for example, to get water from the tap to fill different containers. Children know that staff are helpful and will assist them where needed. I saw how staff explained how to twist the base of a glue stick to make the glue appear so that children could make a collage. Staff also promote children's independence, for example by showing them how to put on their own coat and gloves. Staff repeat words such as 'gloves' so that children will say it for themselves. They introduce new words such as 'connect' to build children's vocabulary. They plan snack time so that children can get their own food and drink, and learn to use plates and cups appropriately.

Staff teach children how to take turns, in order to teach them how their behaviour can affect others. I saw children sharing toy animals in the home corner, and others making 'soup' in the mud kitchen. Children are well behaved and cooperate as they paint or add water to sand to see what will happen. Staff encourage children to be polite and to say 'please' and 'thank you' at appropriate times. Children are keen to show what they can do or have experienced. They were very excited to bring you and me a worm they had found in the soil outdoors and, later, how they had learned to use a yo-yo.

There are a range of activities to interest children, and their overall attention span is good. They respond to challenges that they are given, for example to make a tall tower with play bricks or to find buried 'treasure' by digging at the soil with spoons. Staff also spend time reading an attractive range of books with children. However, in doing so, they often miss opportunities to develop children's early understanding of sounds and the letters they are represented by. As a result, although children develop an early interest in reading, they do not make exceptionally strong progress in their phonic skills.

Although the learning environment is attractive, staff do not plan to ensure that children are given frequent opportunities to learn about number. The outdoor area, and the activities taking place there, do not help them enough to understand, for

example, counting, or how to identify when two groups of objects have the same number. Staff do not make sufficient reference to number or ask children regular number-based questions in order to ensure that children make strong progress from their starting points in this area of learning. This means that they are not as well prepared to begin the Reception Year as they could be.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are attuned to spot the many, often subtle, warning signs that signal that a child may be being exploited or abused. They communicate together continually and share any concerns between them so that everyone sees the 'wider picture', for instance, concerns others may have noticed in a child's sibling. They are well trained and understand their responsibilities in safeguarding. They do not hesitate to pass their concerns on to senior leaders.

School records show that you keep a good, detailed level of information regarding children who are, or may be, vulnerable. You do not delay in taking robust action, including referral to external agencies. These records show a good level of working with these agencies, including social care and the local authority safeguarding board. You and members of the governing body have undertaken safer recruitment training in respect of new staff.

Inspection findings

- The governing body benefits from the knowledge of both its chair and vice chair, both of whom have extensive experience of the early years. They are able to support other governors in holding you to account effectively. Your reports to them show that you provide them with good levels of information about many different aspects of the school's provision, including data on children's achievements. Minutes from the meetings of the governing body show that they use this to challenge you appropriately.
- Approximately two thirds of children enter the school with lower levels of skills than are typically found in children of the same age. Around half of children have skills that are particularly low.
- Staff model language for children well. Staff speak clearly and provide a narrative for them so that children hear and understand how to explain what they and others are doing. Staff also ask children effective questions and offer them good choices. As a result of staff's good teaching of language, children make strong progress in their speaking skills. They begin to catch up and become more confident in communicating with each other and with adults.
- Staff ensure that those children who attend for 30 hours are given alternate tasks and activities to complete in the afternoon so that they do not become bored repeating things they have done in the morning.
- Although a majority of children, up to 85%, make secure progress in many areas of learning, this is not the case in all areas. In reading, writing and number, the

progress of some children is not sufficiently substantial and sustained to ensure that they are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

- While the teaching of number is improving, due to staff receiving good training, the learning environment does not promote children's understanding of number exceptionally well. There are not sufficient resources and equipment for staff to encourage children to use and become familiar with number.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Children make consistently strong progress in English and mathematics by staff using the learning environment, and the activities they plan, to give children frequent opportunities to become familiar with, and use, sounds, letters and numbers.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with the chair and vice chair of the governing body. There were insufficient responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, but I nevertheless read all free-text comments, considered the views of those who had responded to the school's own recent questionnaire, and met with parents when they came to collect their children at the end of the morning session. I considered the responses from staff to Ofsted's questionnaire. We visited together all learning areas in the school. I looked at samples of work from children on walls and in learning records. I observed children's behaviour in lessons. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and plans for its further improvement. I scrutinised with you school data regarding children's progress and attainment. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the school's website to check that it meets the requirements on the publication of specified information.