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Mrs Katie Tyrrie
Headteacher
St Mary's Community Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Tyrrie

Short inspection of St Mary's Community Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 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 October 2014.

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.**

Under your leadership, the school provides a nurturing and caring environment for children. Each child is recognised as a unique individual, irrespective of their race, gender or culture.

Since your appointment as headteacher, you have made several changes to improve the provision. For example, planning is now more securely linked to children's interests and – to better meet their needs – there is a greater focus on child-initiated play. You have strengthened relationships with parents and carers and developed links with private day nurseries in the local area to support each other with the development of early years education. Staff receive regular training from a speech and language therapist – employed on a part-time basis by the school – to support them in developing children's acquisition of language.

However, over time, outcomes in reading and number have dipped for some groups of children. Middle leaders do not currently take an active part in the leadership and management of the school. In addition, the monitoring of the quality of the teaching is not as rigorous as it could be, and the outdoor area does not fully promote all aspects of children's learning.

Parents hold you and your staff in high regard. Many parents took the time to speak to me as they brought their children to school. They appreciate that you and your staff are always there to greet them with a warm and friendly smile. This gives parents an opportunity to talk to staff about any issues or concerns that their children may have. Parents are delighted with the progress that their children make. They appreciate the fact that transition arrangements into school are tailored to the needs of each child. Parents told me that they are kept well informed about their children's progress and are encouraged to take an active part in their learning. Levels of communication were described by some parents as 'excellent'. The following comment typifies the sentiments of many parents:

'We are extremely fortunate to have such a terrific school on our doorstep. I would not hesitate in recommending it to others.'

You have a stable staff team. Many have worked at the school for a significant number of years. They find you 'open and approachable' and many appreciate the fact that you care about their emotional and mental well-being.

The children are delightful and behave well. Relationships at all levels are respectful. Staff are positive role models. They lead by example and children follow. Children are trusting of staff and feel safe in their care.

At the last inspection, it was recommended that the information relating to children's progress was refined to provide staff and governors with a more detailed picture of how well different groups of children achieve. This recommendation has been resolved.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff take seriously their responsibility to keep children safe. They are fully aware that safeguarding children's welfare is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding training is kept up to date. Staff have a secure understanding of safeguarding issues and procedures to follow should they be concerned about a child's welfare. They also talk with some confidence about the latest national concerns relating to extremism and radicalisation.

Checks made on new staff comply with current regulations. No new employee can start working at the school until all checks have been completed. Families who need additional support receive it in a timely manner. The school site is secure and a record of visitors to the school is maintained.

Inspection findings

- Children come into the school with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age. They make substantial progress and achieve very well in many areas of learning, including their personal, social, emotional, communication and physical development. However, outcomes in number and reading are not as

strong. Staff do not consistently challenge children to do their very best with regard to these aspects of their learning, particularly those children who are the most able.

- Overall, the learning environment indoors is bright, attractive and conducive to learning. Independent play areas are available which cover all areas of learning. However, although improving, the outdoor environment is not of the same high standard. Opportunities for children to develop their skills in reading and number are limited.
- Children enjoy their time at St Mary's. They are secure in the routines that operate within the school and they are learning the importance of sharing and taking turns. In addition to developing their social, physical and language skills, children have opportunities to be creative and to engage in imaginative play. For example, children enjoy creating models using wooden blocks, dancing, making sounds with musical instruments and dressing up.
- You monitor the quality of teaching for all staff working directly with children. This is done in a variety of ways, such as through formal lesson observations, learning walks and reviews of children's work. However, the feedback to staff after the monitoring of their teaching does not focus sharply enough on the learning that has taken place, particularly for different groups of children. Staff access a varied range of training opportunities to keep their teaching skills fresh and up to date.
- You are keen to develop the role of middle leaders to ensure that they take an active part in the leadership and management of the school. For example, plans are afoot to involve them in monitoring the quality of teaching across the school. However, these initiatives are at a very early stage of development and it is not possible to assess their impact at this time.
- No one can doubt governors' commitment to the school. They bring a broad range of expertise to their roles. As a result of improvements made since the last inspection, they are now more aware of the progress that different groups of children are making as they move through the school. A close eye is kept on the budget to ensure that the school remains sustainable. Governors act as a critical friend, offering challenge and support in equal measure.
- Most of the children who attend the school are of White British heritage. You take care to ensure that they are made aware of the diversity of the world in which they live. This is done through the celebration of cultural festivals and use of resources that reflect equality of opportunity. Furthermore, in an age-appropriate and meaningful way, children learn about disability and the different composition of families, such as those with same-sex parents.
- All staff recognise the importance of children attending school on a regular basis. Although at this age it is not statutory, you strive to make parents aware of the potential impact on children's learning if attendance is irregular. Children's attendance is monitored, and any unexplained absences are followed up.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes in reading and number improve, particularly for the most able
- the role of middle leaders is developed so that these staff take an active role in the leadership and management of the school
- the outdoor play area is developed further so that it fully promotes all areas of children's learning, with a particular focus on reading and number
- feedback given to staff after the monitoring of their teaching focuses sharply on the learning that has taken place, particularly for different groups of children.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, staff and the chair of governors. I also held informal discussions with parents as they brought their children to school. Together, you and I toured the school to see the teaching and learning that were taking place. I looked at examples of children's work in their individual files and in displays on the walls. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and the development plans. I took account of six responses from staff and 17 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaires.