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Ms Emma Williams
Headteacher
Balham Nursery School & Children's Centre
72 Endlesham Road
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Dear Ms Williams

Short inspection of Balham Nursery School & Children's Centre

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 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 May 2013.

The school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You, your leadership team and governors have addressed the key priorities for improvement identified by the previous inspection. For example, you have successfully ensured that all questioning is of the highest quality and that no opportunities to extend children's learning are missed.

There is a pursuit of excellence at Balham Nursery that begins with you and extends right through the school community, through practitioners, and through parents, to place the children, rightly, at the very heart of all activities. This is a dynamic place, a warm, supportive and caring school, where children are nurtured, and encouraged to explore and have fun. All children enjoy their time at school and make outstanding progress. Their parents agree unanimously.

Of the many strong features, the children enjoy a stimulating curriculum which is seen in every classroom across the school and outdoors. Fun and exploration are at the core of practice. Relationships are strong and supportive. Practitioners provide an exceptional range of stimulating resources and activities which reflect and value the diversity of the children's experiences. Assessment is accurate and well used to build in challenge. Because the curriculum and teaching are strong, the children are happy, settled and engaged; learning is rapid.

The behaviour of the children is perfect in every respect. Older children listen intently and are highly responsive, kind and caring towards each other. All children

are highly motivated, showing curiosity, concentration and imagination. For example, during the inspection the children prepared a tasty 'mud stew' and cheese and tomato pizza in the outdoor café for the visiting inspector.

Children consistently show the characteristics of effective learning and move on to the next stage of their education, having been exceptionally well prepared.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff manage children's well-being meticulously. Leaders work with outside agencies and liaise with them quickly in order to keep children safe and to meet any need that arises. Leaders manage concerns sensitively and effectively. All staff have a secure knowledge and understanding of current safeguarding guidance and procedures. Pre-employment checks on adults working at the school meet statutory requirements. Staff training is up to date and their safeguarding practice is effective. Governors carry out appropriate checks on safeguarding during the school year.

There is a culture of vigilance where children's welfare is actively promoted. Children are listened to and feel safe.

Inspection findings

- The first focus for this inspection was to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to improve the teaching of literacy and mark-making. This is because internal records of progress showed that, although strong, you believed there was some scope for improvement in this area of the work of the school.
- Approximately half of the children begin school with skills that are below or well below those typical for their age. In some cases, children are at an early stage of learning to speak English, or speak no English at all. Last year, a large number of children began school with widely varying levels of literacy skills. From some low starting points, strong teaching of literacy, including listening, speaking, early reading and mark-making, has enabled the great majority of children to catch up to where they should be. Notably, in many instances, children perform beyond where they should be by the end of their time in the Nursery. All children, regardless of starting points, are making substantial and sustained progress.
- Although the focus on raising literacy has been highly effective, you told me that you wanted to sustain the successful drive in this area.
- The second inspection focus evaluated the accuracy of the school's assessments of children's skills and knowledge. This is because school records showed striking instances of children making consistently high rates of progress in relation to their starting points. This needed to be verified.
- Observations of learning in classrooms, watching children's activities and interactions, and looking at high-quality recorded observations shows that the

assessments are accurate. Parents told me that they are also closely involved in this process.

- The recently improved tracking system uses the assessment information to enable the school to build up a comprehensive picture of each child so that highly engaging and challenging activities can be set up.
- Finally, the inspection focused on the accuracy of leadership's judgement of the performance of the school. This is because the evidence presented showed that although the children are making strong gains based on high-quality teaching and resource provision, this is not reflected in the school's own view of itself.
- The inspector undertook a scrutiny of records of learning, discussion with parents, and observations of the practitioners in the school who have very high expectations. These, combined with watching the children using their curiosity and skills and fully enjoying and using every moment of their time, revealed a setting which is clearly outstanding in every respect. Continuous emphasis on improvement through training, often modelled by the headteacher herself, is one of the cornerstones of the school.
- Leadership has been over-cautious in its evaluation of the school's performance. This is a reflection of a relentless pursuit of excellence, and it is a strength that you feel there is always more to be done, more areas to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the highly effective drive to improve literacy and mark-making is sustained.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Roberts
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector carried out the following activities during the inspection: held meetings with the headteacher and deputy headteacher; held meetings with safeguarding leaders; met a member of staff who recently qualified as a teacher at the school; observed practitioners in all the rooms and outdoors; evaluated progress over time by looking at records of learning; had a discussion with three governors; met a local authority representative; observed children in literacy and reading sessions; evaluated recent information about children's progress; and considered the views of parents through face-to-face discussions and responses to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View.