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Mrs Janet Mitchell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Mitchell

Short inspection of Whitecross Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Whitecross Nursery has a long-standing reputation for excellence in the local community as a school where very caring and skilled staff inspire children to learn. This is rooted in your deeply held ambition for staff to fulfil the potential of every child and to ensure that they leave with all the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes they need to succeed at their next school. Parents who gave their views through Parent View were unreservedly positive about all aspects. Many commented on the commitment of staff, the positive culture of the school, its focus on learning and on how much children progress during their short time there. One parent summed up the view of others by explaining, 'It is an amazing place. It is very well led, and all the staff are very approachable. My children are building so many happy memories there. I wish they could go for longer than a year!'

Despite the rapid progress and high attainment levels of the children, you and your staff are determined not to 'rest on your laurels'. You have attended well to the area for improvement from the previous inspection, writing a very effective school improvement plan. This has actions that are sharply focused on improving further any aspects you feel would benefit from additional work.

The outdoor area is filled with many activities for children to get involved in. These range from opportunities to study ants and insects with magnifying glasses, to a variety of outdoor climbing equipment and places to explore and hide together. Children are also given whiteboards and practise their mark making with pens. The

indoor classroom is spacious and provides opportunities to, for example, make models, share books, and enjoy water-based activities. Staff model their expectations very positively so that children quickly learn how to behave and interact with each other and with new adults. Children know that, regardless of which adult they are with, the staff member will be positive, kind, interested in them, and will help them to learn. This consistency makes children feel very safe and helps them to settle in extremely quickly. Children are keen to communicate with each other and adults, and to find out new things. Staff plan exceptionally well together, using children's interests to spark enthusiasm in the activities they provide, and to promote excitement for learning. Staff know children very well and plan a curriculum that meets the needs of each child. There are many activities each day where children can use their imagination and creativity. During my visit, I saw children making a bus from wooden boxes and from wheels. One became the driver while the others sat behind as passengers on a camping trip, ensuring that everyone had tickets to ride.

Because of excellent teaching, children are keen to explore. Staff show them, for example, how to look for minibeasts in soil by using real spades. Children were keen to explain to me how they had spotted a worm and a frog in the ground, but 'hadn't seen any slugs or spiders yet'. Children are also keen to try new experiences, such as learning how to swing on a rope by holding on tightly and sitting on the knotted part. Despite their young age, their attention levels are high. They do not waste time, flit about or appear bored. Instead, they are eager to engage in their learning and sustain their interest and application to activities with an excellent sense of purpose, whether they are painting a picture or acting out the story of the 'Three Billy Goats Gruff', for example.

Staff are skilled in teaching children the love of reading books, and promoting the excitement of learning early phonics skills. I saw for myself how adults were introducing correct terminology such as 'author' and 'illustrator'. Staff ask children good questions when they are learning new words and use these to check what children know. This prompts children to respond by saying excitedly things such as, 'because that word begins with a "p" sound'. Staff also use books to help make children understand links between things. For instance, a child was sharing a book with a member of staff about dinosaurs. The adult asked the child if they could think of animals today who, like some prehistoric creatures, also laid eggs. The child then talked about chicks hatching and how this was similar.

Many of the staff have worked at the school for several years, but nevertheless are very receptive to any new ideas and ever better ways of working. For example, they are embracing a new system of recording their assessments of children, and of improving further the information given to parents and carers. You have previously offered parents a paper format to use to let you know what their child is learning at home. However, you have noted that parents seldom took this up. You have therefore chosen a new electronic system of communication to be implemented from this term. You intend this to be used to show parents, on a continual basis, the things that their child is learning at school. It will also give them, in turn, better opportunities to upload news of what their son or daughter has learned or done at

home. You intend to use this information from parents to help staff assess each child's progress even more effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

Nothing is more important to you and your staff than the protection and welfare of the children. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and receive regular updates. They are attuned to notice even subtle warning signs for any potential harm to a child. They understand their utmost responsibility to pass on any concerns, and do not hesitate to do so. You, in turn, ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You make brisk referrals to agencies whenever these are needed. Leaders and the governing body ensure that they are trained to recruit new staff safely.

You and your staff keep children very safe in school. Children know that you will help to keep them safe from harm while there and, as a result, they play and learn happily. Staff teach them about how their actions can affect others, and always to be kind. Children understand that, for instance, they must ride their tricycles only anti-clockwise around the track, and to watch out for other children, because it keeps everyone safe. They mop up any water they spill so that no one slips. Staff also remind them about other risks, such as from strangers. They remind them of other common dangers, for example, the risk of getting sand in their eyes from resting their head in the sandpit.

Inspection findings

- You have addressed effectively the area for improvement from the last inspection. The measurable targets for success within the school development plan are allowing the governing body to compare outcomes for different cohorts and groups of children. In turn, this has helped you plan quickly and even more precisely to address any weakness in your provision, however small.
- Staff work together as a committed and consistently high-performing team. They understand the school's system for planning and they communicate continually so that they are clear about everyone's role and approach. You give them further training and support, so they can continually update and refine their skills.
- The governing body holds leaders to account exceptionally well. They have a secure understanding of data on how well children are learning and ask questions that challenge you, so they can check that no child falls behind. Like you and staff, they lack any complacency and therefore undertake regular audits of their own effectiveness. They seek out training to ensure that their collective skills remain high, recruiting new members wisely so they can continue to fulfil their strategic role very well.
- Staff ensure that children settle in without delay and understand the school's systems and routines. Children follow these happily. Sessions run smoothly, and their level of cooperation is exemplary. Children do not squabble over equipment but, for example, use egg timers so everyone gets a fair turn on the tyre swing. Staff use every opportunity to develop children's independence by, for example,

teaching them to pour their own drinks from the beaker and by, for instance, putting their own coat on.

- Children consistently make substantial progress from their starting points. Almost all children make at least the progress expected of them and between six to eight in 10 children make rapid gains. Almost all children leave the school with at least the skills typically found in children of the same age, and a majority exceed these. They are very well prepared for Reception Year. This readiness for the next stage is greatly assisted by their enthusiastic attitudes to learning, well-developed communication skills and their confidence.
- Boys arrive at the school with skills overall that are lower than those of girls. However, they make progress that is at least as fast, and often is more rapid than girls. The most able children are well taught so that they leave school with skills exceeding those usually found in children of the same age.
- The school's new electronic system for recording assessment and communication with parents is in its infancy. Staff are new to using it, and you are currently showing parents how it will work. For this reason, you cannot be sure that it will be effective. The school development plan has already identified the need to monitor its introduction and impact.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's new system of electronic assessment and communication is introduced successfully, and its impact is checked and reviewed for effectiveness.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Derby. 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 representatives of the governing body, and with the senior teacher. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, read all free-text comments and considered the views of those who had responded to the school's own recent questionnaire. I met with a parent myself and observed staff meeting another parent to tell them about their child's progress since starting at the school. I considered the responses from staff to Ofsted's questionnaire. We visited all parts of the school, both

indoors and out, to see learning taking place. I observed children's behaviour in lessons and as they moved about the different areas. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and their plans for its further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.