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Mrs Nicola Burton
Acting Executive Headteacher
Atherstone Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Burton

Short inspection of Atherstone 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have very recently taken on the role of acting executive headteacher following the secondment of the executive headteacher to the local authority. You have worked closely with her and the school's leadership team to ensure that there has been a smooth transition for children, their parents and the staff. You, together with leaders and all staff, are determined to ensure that all children have the best possible experience during their time at the school.

Children are happy to come to school because they are excited by their learning and because they have excellent relationships with the adults they work with. The attractive learning environment is vibrant, and it is organised to promote children's independence, with plenty of opportunities for investigation and exploration. Adults provide the stimulus and the resources for children to be as creative as possible through the provision of open-ended activities that allow children to express themselves, for example through role play, story-telling and painting. Visual timetables are used to support children with their learning. Excellent use is made of the outdoor environment to ensure that children develop a secure understanding of the world around them. For example, children take a deep interest in the wildlife in their own woodland area and gain knowledge about the habitats and life cycles of many creatures.

Parents are highly complimentary of the work of the school, commenting on the 'fantastic nursery' and the 'amazing school'. Parents who I spoke to during the inspection, and those who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, are

particularly pleased with the care their children receive. They said that their children are very happy to come to school because they are safe and well looked after. Parents also agree that their children make very strong progress at the school. Several parents told me how well prepared their older children were to start the Reception year after attending the nursery school.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to provide more opportunities for staff to share their expertise with colleagues. Leaders plan purposeful opportunities for all staff to work with practitioners from other schools, including the partner school in the federation, in order to lead specific projects linked to the school development plan. In recent years, this has included implementing changes to how adults develop children's personal, social and emotional skills and, as a result, these aspects of children's needs are extremely well met. In addition, practitioners from the school lead training and provide support for practitioners in nursery schools across the local authority. The local authority has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths. A representative of the local authority told me that they hold the school in high regard, and she praised the 'very strong leadership and high-quality provision'.

Leaders were also asked to ensure that staff were using the newly purchased information and communication technology resources effectively in order to promote learning. Leaders reviewed the use of technology and carried out an audit of training needs as part of their monitoring work. You ensure that children have a wide range of opportunities to use technology to support and enhance their learning. This includes the use of microscopes and digital cameras to support exploration and investigation. In addition, teachers provide opportunities for children to use equipment that helps to develop their fine motor skills.

Governors have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths, and they share the high expectations of leaders to bring about further improvements. They are passionate about providing a wonderful experience for children who attend the nursery. Governors work very hard to ensure that they can secure financial sustainability so that the school can continue to serve the local community in the future.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Keeping children safe is a high priority and a central part of the school's work. All staff are trained to spot the signs of mistreatment, and they know how to report any concerns they have about a child. Leaders act on any concerns swiftly, and the school works effectively with a range of agencies to provide additional support where needed. In addition, when it is appropriate, the school's own family support worker provides immediate support for families who are experiencing difficulties that could have a negative impact on a child's welfare. Leaders know the needs of individual children very well. Child protection records are well organised and stored securely. All staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey agree strongly that children are safe at the school.

Children learn how to stay safe in a variety of ways. This includes how they use a range of tools and how they move around both indoors and outside. 'Super Ted' explains the clear and simple rules that are used consistently throughout the nursery by all staff. This ensures that routines and expectations are well understood. As a result, children behave exceptionally well. Children have many opportunities, with appropriate adult supervision, to explore the outdoor forest area, where they enjoy climbing, digging, building dens and cooking on open fires. Adults ensure that children can lead their own investigations safely and, as a result, children grow in confidence and resilience and are very willing to try new activities.

Inspection findings

- Leadership at all levels is exceptionally strong at Atherstone Nursery School. Following the last inspection, there was a restructure of the leadership team. This clarified responsibilities and ensured that everyone had the time they needed to carry out their role effectively. Leaders benefit from the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers in local schools and to complete training matched to their role. As a result, the highly skilled leadership team provide excellent professional development for adults working in the setting and have maintained and further built on the outstanding quality of teaching and learning.
- Leaders carry out regular and purposeful checks on every aspect of provision and, as a result, they have a meticulous understanding of the school's strengths and where further improvements could be made. You and other leaders have very high expectations of each other and of all staff. For example, although assessment information shows that children make very strong progress in all aspects of their learning, you are determined to ensure that even more children will leave the Nursery with skills and abilities that are typical for their age, particularly in literacy and mathematics.
- Leaders provide regular opportunities for staff to moderate their assessments of children's knowledge and skills, with colleagues in the federation and in the local alliance of nursery schools. As a result, leaders are confident that all their judgments are accurate. This contributes to the very successful transition arrangements with local schools when children move into the Reception Year.
- The quality of teaching and learning throughout the nursery school is excellent. Staff appreciate and act on the feedback they receive about how to improve their practice. Adults strive to create learning opportunities that are very well matched to children's interests and abilities. Adults use the wealth of assessment information they collect to plan activities that build on what children already know and can do. As a result, children make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. Adults ensure that the most able children complete tasks that provide stretch and challenge through the 'star challenges' that are available for all planned activities and at each work station. However, adults have high expectations of all children and any child can try a 'star challenge' if they want to. The school's assessment information shows that over time there has been a steady increase in the proportion of children who leave the nursery with skills and abilities that exceed those typical for their age in all areas of learning.

- Leaders ensure that there is a constant focus on developing children's language and communication skills. Adults expertly model subject-specific and technical vocabulary. For example, during the inspection, an adult was leading a discussion on worms and their habitat. She encouraged the children to use magnifying glasses to look closely at the skin of the worms and to use adjectives to describe what they could see. Consequently, children join in with conversations using some of their new-found knowledge, for example one child confidently shared their knowledge of what happens to the ground when it is very cold and said that they would see more worms during the spring.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum is organised so that it promotes independence, investigation, exploration and creativity. Children acquire skills and knowledge through learning opportunities that are imaginative and fun. Adults also ensure that important reading, writing and mathematical knowledge and skills are woven into all aspects of learning. No opportunities are missed to practise counting or to recognise familiar letters and the sounds they make. This is because a significant proportion of children enter the nursery with skills below those typical for their age in these areas. You and your team are determined that all children will be as well prepared as they can be for the next stage in their education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue with their work to increase the proportion of children who leave the nursery with knowledge and skills typical for their age across all aspects of learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the executive headteacher, who has recently taken a secondment with the local authority, the head of school and the school's safeguarding officer. I met with two members of the governing body and I spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I met with several parents at the start of the day. I also met with a trainee teacher.

You accompanied me during a visit to lessons and, together, we observed children's behaviour at lunchtime. We also looked at samples of children's learning journey books together.

I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the development plan, assessment information and reviews produced by an external consultant. I also reviewed documents relating to keeping children safe, including the school's central register of recruitment checks on staff.

I also took account of the 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 text messages. I also considered the 18 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupils' questionnaire.