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Mrs Armela Patel
Headteacher
Alumwell Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Patel

Short inspection of Alumwell Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 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 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your determined and visionary leadership, coupled with your hard work and dedication to the whole of the school community, have resulted in the school being a magical place for children to learn.

You and your staff are consistently focusing on children's interest levels, which become a focal point for developing learning. You are very ably supported by your deputy headteacher. She shares your vision of ensuring that Alumwell Nursery consistently improves upon previous best performance. You and your staff ensure that not a minute of valuable learning time is wasted, and you all strive to make activities both enjoyable and challenging for all groups of children. As a result, children make outstanding progress and leave Alumwell Nursery extremely well prepared for primary school.

Children show tremendous enthusiasm, sustaining concentration for significant periods of time. Your planning of exciting learning activities and the use of the outdoors is exemplary. As a result, children are highly motivated to learn because all practitioners encourage them to try out new skills. For example, in 'Wellies' (provision for two-year-olds), adults added glitter to shaving foam and modelled mark-making. Children were very eager to make marks and enjoyed feeling the texture of the shaving foam.

Your environmental walks and your planned activities in forest school help children distinguish a variety of sounds outdoors. This has a very positive impact on the

development of children's identification of early sounds. When observing learning in adult-led activities, we saw children making excellent progress in learning about rhyming words.

The innovative and expressive curriculum, enhanced by the work with artists and storytellers, promotes all aspects of children acquiring early writing skills and developing a secure understanding of mathematics. When working with the artist in residence, we saw children developing their skills of curiosity by experimenting with masking tape and making the 'longest line in the world', as they eagerly constructed an imaginary track. These experiences contribute significantly to children developing high levels of self-esteem because they lead their own learning and follow their own ideas.

In adult-led activities, we observed teachers taking every opportunity to develop children's language. Children eagerly joined in repetitive phrases when the teacher read the story of 'The Gingerbread Man' and made excellent progress in identifying the structure of the story.

In the mathematics sessions we observed, adults consistently used mathematical vocabulary to ensure that all groups of children were able to understand long, short, heavy, light, greater than, less, and the concept of order in number. Every effort is made to give children practical experiences. One parent I spoke to said: 'My son was so inspired by mathematics that he wanted to measure everything in the house, including the cat!'

You know your school extremely well and your analysis of children's progress is very thorough. Your internal assessment information shows that disadvantaged children make excellent progress and they outperform other children in the Nursery. You use your monies allocated for disadvantaged children very wisely and you know what interventions it is being spent on. However, you have not yet undertaken a sufficiently detailed analysis on which interventions have the most impact on learning so that you can have an even better idea of what works for these children. You have, however, identified that progress is not only due to the excellent emphasis you place on language development, but also the impact that starting Nursery at the age of two has on these children's academic and emotional development.

You are devoted to your whole-school community and you rightly deserve the strong reputation that you hold in the local authority. You are very generous with sharing best practice with other schools and with the local university. Your training for other schools is at the cutting edge of early years practice.

A highly successful feature of your Nursery provision is the continuous professional development that staff themselves undertake to improve their practice and to build on their personal interest levels. As a result of your very thorough monitoring of teaching and learning, practitioners know what they need to do in order to improve and are signposted to training that helps them to develop new ideas.

You have successfully addressed the issue identified in the last inspection and all staff have the opportunity to observe one another teach and improve their practice. A remarkable feature of your Nursery is that every member of staff is an 'expert' on a self-chosen area of learning. As a team, you have a wealth of expertise among you that you continuously develop in light of children's needs.

Parents and carers I spoke to are unanimously supportive of you and your staff. They say that your cheery welcome brightens up their day, and that you have helped them to interact with their children by providing a wide range of classes and pamphlets that you send home. They were particularly impressed with the mathematics booklet, which gave them plenty of opportunities to undertake practical mathematical activities at home.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Parents are unanimous in their view that their children are safe in school and well looked after. You have ensured that safeguarding is an item that is discussed at every staff meeting. Regular checks are made both on staff's understanding of all issues pertaining to safeguarding children and their implementation of systems across the school. Site security is continually updated and children play an active role in keeping themselves safe. For example, the school council has discussed why it is not safe at the moment to use the slide. Furthermore, all children are taught how to identify any hazards around the Nursery.

The culture of safeguarding permeates all aspects of school life. For example, staff ensure that children are able to express their feelings and have the vocabulary to do so. This results in them being able to tell the adults if anything is upsetting them. Where necessary, children use sign language to express themselves. Staff are very vigilant and know when a child is not him or herself. They do all that they can to ensure that children learn in a safe and caring environment.

Relationships are outstanding throughout the school and children trust their teachers. Your parent support advisers know the needs of families very well and offer both timely advice and support. Staff are vigilant in noticing any signs that indicate children or families may need help. They know the procedures to follow to make sure that children are given timely and appropriate support where necessary.

Your school policies and procedures relating to safeguarding are up to date and parents find them very useful. Your website ensures that parents are signposted to the services that they may need.

Your records of concerns are of a high quality and you ensure that no time is wasted in getting help for children and families when they need it. You and the governors have attended safer-recruitment training. As a result, you all make the

appropriate checks on adults who work with children.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we focused on how well you have maintained the outstanding provision since your last inspection, with specific reference to the teaching of early phonics, writing and mathematics. We also looked at how you have used training for staff to maintain high-quality teaching and learning and how well staff use assessment to plan the next steps of learning. We also looked at the way in which you measure the impact the spending on disadvantaged children has on their progress.
- Many of the two-year-old and three-year-old children joining the Nursery have low starting points. Over time they make outstanding progress in all areas of learning because of consistently effective teaching. As a result, they pick up language very quickly. Nevertheless, there were occasions where we saw that there were missed opportunities to challenge those children who are ready to form letters to develop their writing skills further.
- Highly focused teaching of sounds that letters make has had a very positive impact on children's early reading skills. Children develop a secure understanding of the importance of books in their learning. They learn to have a genuine love of books and make reference to them in their play. Older children confidently find initial letters that they are familiar with in books. When observing minibests in forest school, they were able to find them in the illustrations.
- The teaching of mathematical language is extremely well structured. Children have many practical experiences of understanding the concept of number. They measure the climbing frame, pour water into bottles, estimating how many cups will fill a container, and count numbered pebbles in the sand area. As a result, they are developing a very clear understanding of the language of shape, space and measure. Over time, the high quality of teaching of mathematics has contributed to all groups of children making very fast gains in learning.
- Strong teaching over time ensures that children exceed the expected outcomes for their age in all areas of learning. All staff are very highly trained due to targeted opportunities that not only meet their interest levels but also arise out of rigorous observation of teaching and learning. For example, the recent training focusing on the implementation of the tracking system used to measure children's progress has enabled staff to quickly identify any children who might be at risk of falling behind. In planning meetings, this information is used well to plan tasks that help children catch up or build on previous learning.
- Teachers and other adults are expert at giving just the right amount of support to children, without stifling independent learning. They consistently help children to acquire new skills, such as sawing wood in the forest school, and they take every opportunity to develop mathematical language and early mark making. In the 'café' adults discuss with children the value of healthy eating and ensure that they taste all of the fruits that they encountered in the story of

'Handa's surprise'.

- Parents are very pleased with the information that they receive on children's progress. They say that the high-quality learning opportunities help their children become confident, know right from wrong, and value each other's differences.
- Children, including those who are disadvantaged, make excellent progress in their skills of exploring, investigating and learning about the natural world. They also experiment with managed risks, such as balancing on logs in the forest school. You use the money that you receive for disadvantaged children well and you keep a close record of the various ways in which you spend this money. However, the impact that spending has on academic outcomes is not precise enough in giving you the information that you need to identify which elements of support work best.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more opportunities are given to those children who are developmentally ready to participate in more formal writing activities
- greater emphasis is placed upon analysing the impact that pupil premium spending has on the progress of disadvantaged 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 Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dr Bogusia Matusiak-Varley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy, one of your parent support advisers, seven parents, three governors and a representative from the local authority. We toured the school together and visited all areas to see the children and staff at work. I observed children's behaviour in and around the school throughout the day. I evaluated a range of documents, including assessments of children's progress, your monitoring of teaching and learning, staff training logs, and safeguarding records and policies.