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Mrs Karen Scott
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Dear Mrs Scott

Short inspection of Histon Early Years Centre

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 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 good in October 2015.

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 good as a result of this inspection.**

Only the maintained Nursery school was inspected during this inspection, that is, the educational provision for children between two and five years old. The provision for one-year-olds and the childcare setting are registered separately on Ofsted's early years register and were not part of this inspection.

The provision for two-year-olds was previously also separately registered. This changed after the previous inspection. You have ensured that the Nursery environment is suitable for such young children, with appropriately sized furniture, nappy-changing facilities and spaces for children to be able to sleep. Staff are properly trained and qualified to work with children of this age.

The Nursery is a calm and happy place that children enjoy coming to. Most parents and carers are happy with the school. Of those that responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, most said that they would recommend the school to another parent. Some parents chose to leave additional comments in support of the school, particularly in praise of the staff and to note how happy their children are at the Nursery.

A great deal has been done to improve the outdoor environment since the previous inspection. The main outside area has been transformed and is now a particularly attractive feature. Leaders thought very carefully about the design for the outdoor area and how it should be landscaped. Features such as the artificial 'river' are both appealing to the children and a useful educational resource. For example, during the inspection, we saw children working with an adult to solve a problem by moving the flow of water from one place to another. The children's responses showed that this sort of activity is something that is very familiar to them.

Leaders have taken action to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. These actions have mainly been successful. For instance, children now have far more opportunities to select their own activities and they are given time to follow their interests and develop their skills. Children are also given good opportunities to develop their early mathematical knowledge and understanding. However, some improvements have been slower or more limited. For example, there is little evidence of more challenge being provided for the most able children.

Processes for evaluating the Nursery's strengths and weaknesses are underdeveloped. Leaders and governors do not have a good enough idea of what is best about the school, and what could be better, because there is no systematic approach to analysing the school's performance. As a result, weaknesses in the planning of good-quality teaching and learning have gone unnoticed. Action planning is similarly underdeveloped, leading to slow progress in improving some areas of the school's provision. Governors have too little knowledge and understanding of the school's current position and this limits their ability to hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. However, I found some minor issues with the quality of the school's child protection records. There is also a lack of clarity about the roles of the designated safeguarding lead and the other staff who have been trained to the same level. There is little discernible difference between these roles. For example, concerns are routinely reported to any of the four trained members of staff, regardless of whether the designated safeguarding lead is present in school at the time or not. The designated safeguarding lead's role, as the person with ultimate lead responsibility for child protection, is not clear enough.

Histon Early Years is a very small school, where staff work closely together. I looked closely at the school's child protection records and saw that you, as the school's designated safeguarding lead, are made aware of the concerns that are reported by staff, albeit indirectly at times. Records show that staff are vigilant in reporting concerns and that appropriate action is taken in response to concerns raised. The children are clearly happy and settled, enjoying good relationships with the adults that work with them. All parents that responded to Parent View said that they feel that their children are safe and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- I followed a number of lines of enquiry in order to check whether the school remains good. First, I looked at whether the quality of teaching remains at least good throughout the school. I chose to look at this area because the previous inspection identified aspects of teaching for the school to improve.
- You have ensured that the Nursery is fully staffed, with both qualified teachers and other early years-qualified personnel. Staffing is stable and this has helped to build strong relationships between adults and children. As a result, children feel safe and happy at school, and this enables them to 'have a go' at different things and to start to become successful learners. They sustain their concentration for long periods of time and persevere with activities that interest them. They enjoy sharing stories with staff and are starting to develop a love of books and reading.
- Staff are observant and take note of individual children's needs and interests. They respond to these observations by making activities available that develop and extend children's interests. For example, several children are currently very interested in water and how it can be made to travel along different pathways. Staff have provided a range of resources, such as pipes and guttering, to enable children to experiment and investigate. They support children well by asking appropriate questions and making suggestions, as necessary, but also by standing back and giving children space to explore independently.
- There are some weaknesses in the quality of teaching. I found little evidence that teaching is planned effectively to help children to learn as well as possible. Too much of what staff do is reactive rather than proactive. That is, staff are very skilled at responding, in the moment, to children's particular interests. However, there is little evidence that teaching and learning are planned beyond this. As a result, some activities lack purpose and this limits the progress that some children make.
- The second area that I looked at was how well the school works with parents. The previous inspection asked leaders to develop communication 'with parents who do not understand the school processes and procedures'. You have taken a range of actions to improve communication and Parent View revealed no widely shared concerns about any aspect of the school, including communication.
- Since the previous inspection, you have strengthened the way that the school communicates with parents who are thinking about applying for a Nursery place for their child, and with parents as their children join the school. This has given parents a better understanding of how the school works and what happens when. The vast majority of parents are happy with the school and would recommend it to others.
- Finally, I looked at whether children make good progress during their time in the Nursery, particularly in mathematics and especially the most able children. I chose to follow this line of enquiry because this was one of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection.
- The local authority provides you with useful information about how children who have left the Nursery do at the end of the Reception Year, in the schools they move on to. Although this information is of limited use, as it pertains to children

who have left the school at least a year beforehand, it shows that the proportion of children who reach a good level of development, having been through the Nursery, is consistently above the national average.

- We agreed that the vast majority of children join the school with skills and abilities that are at least typical of their age. You showed me assessment information indicating that most children are making the sort of progress that you expect them to make. Even so, lack of forward planning for teaching and learning means that the progress of the most able children is less clear.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop systems for effective self-evaluation, action planning and forward plans for teaching and learning
- further strengthen safeguarding procedures
- improve governance so that governors hold leaders fully to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders and a representative of the local authority. I spoke with a governor on the telephone and, briefly, with the chair of the governing body. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you, throughout the school. I spoke with children during my visits to classrooms, as they went about their activities. I took account of the 29 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the 28 free-text comments that were received. I also took note of four responses to the staff survey. I looked at a range of school documents including the single central record of pre-appointment checks and child protection records.