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Dear Mr Rosewell

Short inspection of Coulston Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 11 January 2017, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Despite significant changes to leadership and governance since the last inspection, you have ensured that the school has continued to improve. The federation with Chipstead Valley Primary School and the joint governing body was dissolved when this partner primary school became an academy in April 2014. A new governing body for this school was established with nearly all the same members as the previous joint governance team. The partnership with the primary remains exceptionally strong and is key to your ongoing success. You have seconded a senior teacher from the Chipstead Valley Primary School to lead the nursery for this academic year. The previous head of school retired in August 2016.

Staff morale is high. Aply supported by your senior nursery teacher, you have unified staff behind the school's development plan. Teachers continuously strive to improve on their already excellent work. They ensure that children benefit from well-planned activities which meet their individual needs and interests.

The school is recognised as a centre of excellence by the local authority. As a result, staff from other schools and private, voluntary or independent nurseries regularly visit to observe practice. Consistently high-quality teaching from all staff ensures excellent progress for children from all groups. In addition, the school's partnership with your local primary school has been used as a model for other nursery schools in the local authority. The local authority believe your innovative work to develop an all-through school from the nursery has helped improve other local maintained nursery schools.

You have continued to develop the school's teaching for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your staff accurately assess children's skills on entry, and identify where there could be barriers to future success in learning. It is this early identification of the learning and social needs of individual children that enables them to make excellent progress. You skilfully plan learning activities which help children work to overcome specific issues, such as speech and language delay. External agencies are used well to support this work. A number of children over the past two years have received an education, health and care plan. Parents value the school's work to implement these plans as it helps to ensure that children with significant needs receive the support they require when they begin primary school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have kept the school up to date with national safeguarding expectations. Governors have this under systematic review and are aware of their statutory responsibility, for example, ensuring that the school's internet filtering blocks inappropriate material.

The senior teacher in charge of safeguarding works closely with your partner primary school and the local authority. This ensures a breadth of safeguarding experience to draw on when considering the school's practice or concerns about a child or family. Furthermore, this ensures that families with siblings across the local schools receive consistent support to keep their children safe. All staff have regular updates so that they understand their responsibilities for protecting children from potential harm.

When issues do arise, staff are quick to act. They implement the policies the school has in place. Designated staff, where necessary, keep detailed records and include the support, advice and engagement of external agencies, such as social care and health. All staff have a strong understanding of the key safeguarding risks in this locality, such as children missing from education. Staff make careful assessments to reduce risks of children experiencing harm. They regularly meet to share information about children and to refresh their understanding of key safeguarding issues, such as keeping safe from strangers.

Inspection findings

- Assessments of children's skills and learning are accurate and based on observations and interactions with individual children. Staff carefully collect evidence of children's skill levels across the early years curriculum, allowing them to build a detailed profile of individual children and their progress at the school.
- You have rightly identified that around one in four children now begin their time at the nursery with skill levels above those typical for their age, while around the same proportion are below. Your team skilfully develops the most able children so that they make excellent progress across the curriculum from their differing individual starting points. Staff ensure that the most able children deepen their personal curiosity and interests, for example by sorting equipment from smallest

to biggest and orally explaining how they are sorted.

- Staff carefully support all children and nurture their talents while deepening their skills across the curriculum. Planned learning activities, additional support and interventions ensure that all children make rapid progress, regardless of their ability, gender or background. A speech and language group is provided for children with specific needs. They benefit daily from help which improves their confidence and ability to speak, listen and use a varied vocabulary.
- Parents are highly complimentary about the school. A good response to Parent View (Ofsted's online survey of parents) showed almost all are positive. One parent summed up the views of many when explaining: 'Coulsdon Nursery School is absolutely brilliant... The staff are supportive and kind, the environment is fun and everywhere you look there is something to learn...children learn to be good little people. I cannot praise it highly enough.'
- Reading has a high profile throughout the school. Staff regularly read to children and help them to develop a love for stories. However, children are also helped to identify individual letters and begin blending (joining letter sounds) to read simple words. Consequently, a large number of children have reading skill levels above those typical for their age by the time they leave nursery. Many are already keen to explore books independently and are quickly developing personal opinions about their simple reading material of choice.
- Governors understand the school very well. They ensure that they challenge the information leaders give them, while checking the impact of the school's work. For example, it is clear that governors have ensured that the early years pupil premium has helped disadvantaged children catch up with their peers in school. Governors have made sure that the school has continued to develop, despite the changes to leadership since the previous inspection. They are resolute in their determination that all children in this community will do as well as they possibly can. Governors ensure that this belief is demonstrated in their robust challenge of leaders' work.
- The previous inspection report identified technology as a key area for further improvement. Children now access simple technology on a daily basis. They have access to a wide range of equipment and show great inquisitiveness, for example when they are exploring friction using cars, playing with toys that make sounds, interacting with computers and whiteboards and retrieving information. Children have access to small programmable robots which they use to create table art. Consequently, children were gaining a strong understanding of how to program and use simple technology. While all can access this work, it particularly deepens the ability of the most able to use simple programming skills.
- Children develop their imagination through all activities across the nursery. For example, in their role play of a railway station in the school grounds. They also benefit from 'sound' walks, where they record sounds and discuss them with adults. However, leaders have rightly identified that children, particularly boys, make slightly less progress in their ability to be imaginative than in other aspects of the early years curriculum.
- Leaders have also identified that children have limited opportunities for representing their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through music.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they provide more opportunities for children, particularly boys, to develop their imaginations across the early years curriculum,
- children have regular opportunities to represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings, for example through music and the exploration of rhythm.

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

Yours sincerely

David Storrie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The HMI agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the accuracy of assessing children's learning from their entry to the nursery
- the progress children make in developing their skills and learning, particularly the most able
- how well staff understand their responsibilities for safeguarding and how well these policies are implemented when required
- how effectively staff develop the ability of children to use technology
- the effectiveness of governors in holding leaders to account since the previous inspection.

The HMI carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection:

- held meetings with you, other senior leaders, including the senior teacher in charge of the nursery, and two representatives of the local authority
- spoke to the chair of governors by phone
- took account of the 57 views expressed in Parent View and the eight completed staff surveys
- made a number of visits to the indoor and outdoor learning activities to observe children's learning
- reviewed a range of nursery documentation and scrutinised evidence of children's work
- scrutinised the nursery's safeguarding information and met with all staff members about their understanding and practice in protecting children from potential harm.