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Mrs Laura Brodie
Headteacher
Allens Croft Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Brodie

Short inspection of Allens Croft Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 24 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Allens Croft is an exceptionally high standard of outstanding provision. You have very high expectations of children and staff. You have consistently researched how children flourish and become accomplished learners. You have sought expertise so that proven, successful approaches are introduced, implemented and further developed. You and your deputy headteacher are united in establishing the clear direction and purpose of the work at Allens Croft. Together, you have tenaciously built on the staff's growing confidence to embed successful practice and continue to develop. In addition, you provide significant support for a broad network of nurseries, schools and settings.

Children thrive in this exciting, vibrant and purposeful nursery. All staff work ceaselessly to plan children's learning in line with your shared belief that, 'Life is not measured by the number of breaths you take, but by the moments that take your breath away.' Children are happy and engaged in their learning. They are confident to try new experiences and visibly proud of their achievements. Children make outstanding progress and almost all children leave the nursery having met or exceeded the expectations for their age.

Staff at all levels keep children's welfare and learning at the centre of their decision-making, planning and daily activities. All staff maintain close and frequent contact with parents. They offer sessions where parents and childminders can stay and play alongside their children, and provide workshops so that adults can learn how best to support their children at home. Almost every parent takes up these opportunities. The nursery has a wealth of accessible expertise within the children's centre. Parents, children and families receive a range of highly valued support.

Following the last inspection in January 2013, you lost no time in supporting staff to enhance their skills and expertise. You and the deputy headteacher provided regular training events to share good examples of speaking, reading, writing and counting with children. You have rightly emphasised the importance of creating firm foundations on which to build children's knowledge and skills in all areas of learning over time. You have skilfully identified and tracked each early step of learning, leading to the acquisition of age-related outcomes. These steps are used to track children's progress, identify the next stage and inform day-to-day planning. Staff vigilantly look out for children who find tasks difficult or do not understand and always intervene to provide the necessary support. All staff are adept at observing children's behaviours, comments, abilities and achievements to amend their input and plan future learning. Your analysis of children's progress and outcomes is rigorous and based on detailed information.

Governors receive information in advance of their meetings so that they can prepare questions and seek evidence for themselves. They are a visible presence in the nursery. They take frequent opportunities to observe aspects of the nursery's work and provide feedback. Governors know where additional expertise is needed on the governing body and they are in the process of appointing suitably qualified and skilled members. Governors lack confidence in promoting their own role in bringing about improvements.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders, governors and staff strongly believe that children come first. Children's safety and welfare are core priorities at Allens Croft. Parents are very well informed about policies, procedures and available support. The names, photographs and contact details of designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) in the nursery are visible in the reception area and throughout the premises. All DSLs carry communication devices, which enable them to be contacted immediately if a concern or incident arises. Staff receive weekly updates in staff meetings so that their training is reinforced. The DSLs provide detailed feedback about how well procedures were followed, lessons learned from any incident and areas to further develop.

All governors and leaders who serve on staff appointment panels have undergone safer recruitment training. Suitable checks are made on staff's suitability to work with children prior to taking up their roles. Governors and leaders assess the levels of risk within a range of possible concerns, including the premises, children's learning content and the individual needs of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They ensure that the appropriate actions or amendments take place to reduce or remove any identified risk.

When concerns about children arise, the relevant procedures are followed speedily and in detail. Leaders seek relevant expertise where appropriate to ensure that the children's needs are fully met. Such cases are kept under constant review so that actions and support are up to date, relevant and fully informed. A range of agencies with relevant expertise is based at the children's centre and staff have immediate access to the help that children need.

Inspection findings

- Staff know the learning purpose underpinning every planned activity. They understand how any planned task incrementally builds children's essential skills, reinforces their understanding or broadens their knowledge. Adults believe that learning is not a straight line of development but more a spiral of increased demands on knowledge and skills. Children are obviously used to these challenges and eagerly engage in each new experience with enjoyment, confidence and ambition to succeed.
- The communication between adults and children is consistently clear, supportive and perceptive. Adults are highly skilled in facilitating, encouraging, enabling and comforting so that children are confident to explore, investigate, observe, practise and try out new experiences. Staff are adept at playing with the children, dressing up as characters to extend children's imagination or seizing opportunities to count, build, create or to solve problems.
- Children develop their climbing, sliding and balancing skills in a variety of indoor and outdoor facilities. They are undaunted by cold weather and eagerly put on their coats, hats and appropriate footwear to explore outside. They confidently handle a variety of tools and utensils, shape clay, explore materials and learn how to compare, measure, count and label.
- The two-year-old children have access to high-quality resources, activities and care. They play, create and explore at length without losing concentration or interest. Adults skilfully extend children's experience of learning and their ability to investigate safely. Adults capably and sensitively guide children to learn purposefully through play. The children show high levels of mutual respect, trust and care.
- Adults model speaking extremely well. Children respond by naming objects and counting or forming simple sentences to make their needs known or to share their thoughts and ideas.

- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported exceptionally well so that they fully integrate with other children and make significant progress. Learning areas are well organised and accessible. In addition, there are quiet, comfortable areas where inclusion workers can support the children in response to their emotional or specific needs. There is a high level of trust between adults and children. Inclusion leaders establish close relationships with parents to fully understand the children's needs, interests and routines. Valuable expertise, such as that of speech and language therapists and the communication and autism team, is readily available within the children's centre.
- All staff at Allens Croft are valued and are part of a skilfully nurtured team. This approach results in a committed staff that all want the best for the children. Leaders encourage staff to reflect on what works well and what could be improved. Staff openly share their successes and concerns so they learn from each other and develop as practitioners. Regular training events in staff meetings ensure that shared priorities and solutions are reinforced and embedded.
- Many of the staff have been at Allens Croft since their initial training. Due to leaders' consistent coaching, staff have developed into highly skilled leaders and managers. Many staff are able to take on additional responsibilities, share expertise and help develop skills in others. As a consequence, leaders have created a strong team that can ensure ongoing excellent practice within Allens Croft while supporting other nurseries and networks.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors' skills and knowledge are further developed to more confidently contribute to the nursery's strategic direction.

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

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the nursery manager, two inclusion team leaders, the chair of the governing body and a parent governor. I observed children learning in a variety of sessions with you. I looked at a range of documents including your self-evaluation and plans for development, the analysis of children's progress in all areas of learning, minutes of governing body meetings and a range of policies, including those for safeguarding, child protection and special educational needs. The inspection focused particularly on: how leaders have addressed and further developed the areas for improvement from the last inspection; the capacity of leaders and managers to sustain outstanding provision while supporting a significant range of other providers; the provision for two-year-old children; the support for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; and safeguarding.