

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Veronica Hilliard
Executive Headteacher
Maxilla Nursery School
2a Bevington Road
London
W10 5TN

Dear Ms Hilliard

Short inspection of Maxilla Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 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. You and your staff ensure that Maxilla is a beacon of excellence in early years education. The school bustles with children's eagerness to learn and discover. As one child put it: 'I always want to come here. I have fun, friends and adventures.' Parents and carers too are fulsome in their praise for the school, describing it as 'brilliant', 'simply amazing' and 'a very special place'.

The basis of the school's continued success lies in your inspirational leadership. You radiate a passion for providing children with an exceptional start to their education, irrespective of their needs or starting points. This passion is matched with a tenacious approach to identifying and addressing aspects of the school that could be even better. For example, you have recently refined the way staff check children's progress. This is ensuring that all children, including those eligible for the early years pupil premium, continue to benefit from the teaching they need to flourish. Staff share your high expectations. They reflect continuously on what they need to do to bring out the best in each child. As a result, children make substantial gains in their skills and understanding across all areas of learning. From starting points that are generally below those that are typical for their age, the vast majority of children exceed age-related expectations by the time they leave the school. This means that they are in a strong position to succeed when they move to primary school.

Since becoming headteacher of Maxilla Nursery in 2015, you have steered the school successfully through a period of considerable change. For example, the school has moved to a site shared with Golborne Nursery School, of which you are

also the headteacher. The school also now offers its own before- and after-school provision. Leaders and staff have embraced these changes as a way of strengthening teaching further. This has been central to maintaining children's excellent outcomes.

The school has been a pillar of strength in the community in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire, providing exceptional levels of care for children and their families. At the same time, you and your team have worked with both resilience and sensitivity to ensure that Maxilla remains a place of rich and purposeful learning, where children are nurtured and challenged in equal measure. You particularly value the support provided by the local authority at this difficult time.

Both the governing body and local authority recognise that you are a valuable asset to the school community. Following recent changes in senior staff, governors have put suitable plans in place to restructure the leadership team. Nevertheless, during this interim period, the governing body is not doing as much as it could to support leaders' efforts to maintain the school's effectiveness.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders and staff are attuned to children's well-being. If children feel overwhelmed or frustrated, staff provide comfort or reassurance to ensure that children do not lose confidence in their own abilities. Staff combine exciting activities with clear boundaries and routines that mean children feel secure and explore the environment safely. For example, through adults' well-targeted guidance, children learned to use a knife carefully to prepare their own fruit at snack time. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed unanimously that their children are safe and happy at the school.

You and your staff are resolute in your work to keep children safe. Together, you are vigilant to signs that a child's welfare may be at risk, including those related to neglect or radicalisation. Staff report any concerns straightaway, so that children receive effective help and protection should they need it. Without compromising your duty to protect children from harm, you work sensitively with families to identify what support they might need to meet their children's physical and emotional needs. When appropriate, you ensure that parents and carers and children access extra support available from external agencies, including therapy and counselling. This assists families with overcoming any difficulties before they escalate and have a negative impact on their children's welfare.

Inspection findings

- You explained that the school has a dedicated team of staff, who combine expertise in early years education with a passion for meeting children's needs. Therefore, for my first line of enquiry, I considered how this contributed to leaders' work to maintain excellent teaching and outcomes for children.

- You and your team's in-depth and accurate knowledge of each child underpins all teaching. Staff continually discuss how well children are learning. This means that they are quick to recognise when children need extra support or practice to develop age-expected skills and understanding. They act immediately to adjust their teaching so that it is tailored to children's needs. At the same time, staff know when to step in and challenge children further. For example, a group of children decided they wanted to build a car out of large bricks. An adult deepened children's thinking skilfully by asking them to explain where their car would take them. The children agreed to 'go on a safari' and then constructed a new vehicle, discussing how they needed 'to be safe when they see lions and giraffes'.
- Alongside high-quality teaching, staff foster children's self-esteem and enthusiasm for learning. Staff praise children's efforts and guide them to find their own solutions when they find something hard. As a result, children are inquisitive about the world around them and are ready to persevere when they encounter a problem or something they do not understand. This plays a key role in children's excellent progress over time.
- You explained that the school was particularly successful in ensuring that disadvantaged children and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities achieve to the best of their abilities. I therefore made this the focus of my second line of enquiry.
- Leaders' use of the early years pupil premium funding is highly effective and ensures that eligible children receive an excellent start to their education. Through a bespoke programme of support, including small-group teaching and access to therapeutic services, children quickly overcome any barriers to learning and achieve as well as their peers.
- A higher than typical proportion of children who attend the school have SEN and/or disabilities. The teaching for these children is characterised by high aspirations and ensures that they make substantial progress from their individual starting points. While staff give careful consideration to children's needs and preferences, they are equally adept at enabling them to try something new and challenge themselves. For example, in the soft-play area, staff gently encouraged children to explore the activities on offer. Through adults' well-focused support, children talked about what they wanted to do and were considerate of others as they took turns using the equipment.
- The previous inspection identified the need for every adult to give children as much practice as possible in speaking fluently. For this reason, my second line of enquiry considered the impact of leaders' work to promote children's language development.
- Children make outstanding gains in their communication skills during their time at the school. Through effective phonics teaching, staff instil children with a fascination with language and words. Staff support children to explore links between letters and sounds, drawing effectively on familiar experiences to deepen children's understanding. For example, during a small-group phonics activity, children enthusiastically described other words they knew starting with

the letter 'p' after identifying that 'p' was the first sound they could hear in the word 'pig'.

- Both indoors and outdoors, staff plan exciting ways to develop children's awareness that letters and words convey meaning. For example, as part of their learning linked to the Chinese New Year, children were thrilled to open 'fortune cookies' and talk about the messages they contained. Alongside this, staff ensure that children develop a love of books and stories at an early age. For example, through the 'book loan' scheme, parents and children enjoy sharing books together, both at home and at the start of the school day.
- Classrooms are awash with high-quality resources and activities that pique children's curiosity. As a result, children are eager to explore and talk about what they find with each other and adults. For example, in the 'Chinese restaurant' role play area, children were immersed in asking each other what they would like to eat as they pretended to prepare food. Adults model and reinforce key words and phrases routinely as they play alongside children. This extends children's use of vocabulary and increases their confidence in talking in front of others. For example, as a group of children made playdough, an adult described how to do it, emphasising words such as 'before', 'after' and 'next'. She then questioned children skilfully, encouraging them to use these words to tell each other how they had made the playdough.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the governing body provides leaders with sufficiently well-focused support as the school transitions to a new leadership structure.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy-Dutton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you and members of the governing body to discuss the school's self-evaluation as well as the actions leaders have taken to maintain the outstanding quality of education. I visited all classrooms and the outside spaces to observe and talk to children as they were learning. This included the school's breakfast club and provision for two-year-old children. I also looked at examples of children's work and assessment information to evaluate children's outcomes over

time. A range of safeguarding documentation was reviewed, including records of child protection concerns and the single central record of vetting checks on staff. I considered the views of parents through informal discussions and the 16 responses to Parent View. I held a meeting with staff and spoke to them informally to gather their views on the school. No responses were received from children or staff to Ofsted's surveys.