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Ms M Hart
Headteacher
Margaret McMillan Nursery School
Hornsey Rise
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Dear Ms Hart

Short inspection of Margaret McMillan Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 28 September 2016, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the nursery since the last inspection. You and your governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and potential challenges that face the nursery and are quick to take action to bring about improvements when they are needed.

Since the last inspection, you have overseen many changes while maintaining the good provision. These have included major building works to facilitate the reopening of a children's centre on site and subsequent emergency site works. You and your governors have managed change well. You have responded effectively to significant changes in numbers on roll and increasing cohort mobility. At the time of the last inspection, the nursery catered for 116 children aged between three and five years. This has now reduced to 54 children. In September 2014, you and your governors took the opportunity to admit younger children to broaden the provision and address the declining roll. This provision is increasing, and there are now 36 two-year-olds on site.

You and your leadership team have addressed the first area for improvement identified at the last inspection with success. You and your deputy have worked hard to ensure that adults use questions skilfully so that children are able to explain what they are learning. Staff now ask questions effectively to support children's learning. You have provided comprehensive training for staff, including peer coaching and review, along with access to specialist coaching support from a qualified speech and language therapist. This ensures the swift identification of any

communication difficulties early on in a child's life. As a result, children continue to make good progress in their communication and language development.

You accept that other priorities have had an impact on your success in ensuring that middle leaders check and coach staff to improve their practice. You know that further work is needed to target support for middle leaders. This is to ensure that they are fully engaged in monitoring, developing and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within their teams and phases.

The previous inspection highlighted children's excellent behaviour and their strong understanding of how to keep safe. These continue to be areas of strength within the nursery. Parents speak very positively about how safe and how happy their children are and particularly how much they enjoy learning every day.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Updates throughout the year keep staff focused on identifying concerns quickly and passing these on to the designated safeguarding officer. The designated safeguarding officer shares this information appropriately and in a timely manner. Additionally, termly multi-agency meetings are a regular feature of current practice so that help is put in place swiftly to support children and families. Systems are well established and effective.

The most recent guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education', September 2016, has been incorporated into the school's policy and shared with staff. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- You, your deputy and governors work closely together to evaluate the school's performance. You analyse the progress of children and groups in great depth across the early years curriculum. Where issues are identified, you respond quickly. Consequently, the proportion of children demonstrating the knowledge, skills and understanding expected for their age is more evenly spread across all areas. This year, children are leaving with good skills across both the prime and specific areas of the early years curriculum.
- You hold all staff fully to account, checking the daily provision on offer, and children's engagement and progress regularly. As a result, your assessment and evaluation of standards are accurate and detailed, and the children continue to make good progress from their starting points. Attainment remains good so that children are well prepared for their next move into school.
- Children entitled to the early years pupil premium funding make rapid progress as a result of carefully targeted support for both children and their families. Their learning has been enriched with a series of ceramic projects supporting shape, space and an awareness of number, and the provision of focused language groups.
- Family learning projects and book-making workshops are used effectively to support parents and demonstrate how they can continue to help their child on

their learning journey. Children develop a love of books. They look at them intently and enjoy retelling stories they have heard read to them. The most able are learning phonics skills and using these to start to make sense of texts.

- Professional development and performance management systems support staff well. You and your deputy have worked hard to ensure that high-quality training and peer coaching and review support adults in using questions skilfully. This good questioning is enabling children to explain and talk about their learning and what they are doing.
- Following the admission of two-year-olds, you and your staff have focused on producing detailed 'continuous provision' plans tailored to the different age ranges of the children. These plans clearly identify the adult's role, assessment opportunities and model questions. This is resulting in a shared understanding among all staff of what constitutes good provision. Staff now understand clearly the differing needs of the very youngest two-year-olds and the older three- to five-year-olds.
- You and your deputy head ensure that exceptionally well-organised learning areas are set up by adults to provide inviting learning opportunities for children.
- Separate learning zones cater for the different age ranges. This separate provision helps staff to track children's academic and personal achievement accurately and identify what learning opportunities are needed to facilitate further progress.
- Well-considered planning for a 'continuous provision' enables all children to explore freely, indoors and out, and decide for themselves what play they would like to engage in next. The wealth of outdoor structures invites children to choose whether to climb, sit quietly and observe, or practise their balancing techniques. They ride tricycles with a keen sense of direction and control. All furniture, activities and tools are carefully considered by staff and are appropriate for the different age groups.
- The youngest children play in small groups with adults. Adults take opportunities to teach and facilitate the necessary experiences for children to deepen their understanding of the world around them. Children were seen happily choosing to walk barefoot on straw and mix paint with their hands, enjoying the sensory experiences of rough and smooth surfaces.
- The nursery is rightly proud of the way it successfully integrates all children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are six specially resourced places for children who have complex special educational needs. The nursery uses its established expertise effectively to help other children who have been identified as needing additional support.
- Nursery staff work as a close team with other professionals so that all children's needs are met. The views of parents and children are considered well. For children who have complex special educational needs, particularly detailed records are kept of how well they respond to the learning environment. Staff constantly review and adapt their teaching. They ensure that learning activities make sense for this group of children. As a result, children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities enjoy their learning and develop positive relationships with staff, making the same good progress from their starting points as their peers.

- Adults model caring and sensitive relationships with children, who in turn reflect the same care for each other. Children learn together well, regardless of ability or need.
- You and your deputy have been instrumental in driving whole-school improvement since the last inspection, developing and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the nursery. However, you are fully aware that work is needed to further develop leadership capacity throughout the school. You and your governors have rightly ensured that school improvement planning for the current year identifies the need to provide a targeted programme of support for your middle leaders, many of whom are new to their roles.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they build on the support and challenge provided for middle leaders so that they are fully engaged in monitoring, developing and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within their teams and phases.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Thwaites
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The following key lines of enquiry were agreed with senior leaders at the start of the inspection:

- how skilfully all adults use questions so that children are able to explain what they are learning
- how leaders have ensured that middle leaders check and coach staff so that training improves their practice
- the quality of leaders' assessment and evaluation of children's attainment and progress, especially for two-year-olds
- the effectiveness of safeguarding.

I carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection. During the visit, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, a member of the administration team, a representative of the local authority and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke informally to staff during the day and to parents at the beginning of their children's session at the nursery. The views of 96 parents from the school's own questionnaires, the nine

responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and the four questionnaires completed by members of staff were considered. Visits were made to the indoor and outdoor environments to observe children's learning, and to the morning day care provision to see children who attend the early breakfast sessions. I also reviewed a range of documentation and records of your checks to safeguard children. I scrutinised records of children's progress and attainment.