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15 November 2017

Mrs Jane Wilkie  
Headteacher  
Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School  
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Dear Mrs Jane Wilkie

### **Short inspection of Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 November 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 November 2012.

#### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your motto of 'nurturing curiosity and inspiring imagination' of the children in your care drives your ambition. Every decision that you take is based on making the school even better for all who attend. You constantly drive improvements by reflecting carefully on past decisions and taking suitable action to improve. You are not the only one committed to this quest. Your staff and governors share this unwavering determination. Consequently, the school provides a caring and nurturing place where children can be themselves and bloom.

Parents and carers hold you and the staff in high regard. You know your families well and go the extra mile to support them. The vast majority of responses from the Ofsted survey and the parents I spoke with are very supportive of the school. Several talked about the super progress their children have made since starting at Sandy Lane. They are very confident that you will take care of their children and help them to achieve. Parents respond to your creative ideas to involve them in their children's learning. For example, the 'men behaving daddily' activity attracted 30 dads who learned how to support their children in physical development.

You are held in high esteem by your staff, both as a leader and as a practitioner. You frequently work alongside staff to model strong practice so they can learn from your demonstration. This method has been especially beneficial for new staff. You support staff who want to take further qualifications, but you make sure any

learning is shared and invested in Sandy Lane. This has led to a wonderful team of talented individuals who feel valued and are proud to work at the school. Equally, staff share their expertise with adults across the local authority and beyond.

The entire learning environment is spectacular. It is a treasure trove of opportunities just waiting for children to enjoy. High-quality resources capture children's attention so that they want to learn. Children concentrate well and play happily. Gleeful giggles punctuate the steady buzz of little minds sponging up knowledge and skills. Staff intervene just at the right time. By asking the right question, they challenge a child's thinking so that they can learn even more. By talking about an activity, staff increase children's vocabulary.

Following the previous inspection, you and governors were asked to make sure you had the expertise and resources necessary to teach two-year-olds. Both these issues have been tackled effectively. Consequently, two-year-olds are happily part of the school, settle calmly and are making strong progress.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

'Safeguarding is a continuous conversation' was a staff comment which reflects the high priority given to keeping children safe. Without a doubt, staff believe that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. They are watchful and vigilant. Staff receive annual training on safeguarding, which is followed up by weekly updates. All staff have read the most recent government guidance about keeping children safe. Staff have secure knowledge of what action to take if they are concerned about a child's welfare. They talk confidently about the dangers linked to female genital mutilation, neglect, radicalisation and domestic violence. Staff know children and their families well and can detect any changes which may indicate a concern. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school site is safe, secure and immaculately maintained. Recruitment, selection and induction procedures are stringent so that you only appoint staff you can trust. Visitors' identity is very closely checked. Record-keeping is of a high standard and referrals to other agencies are speedy and fitting.

A well-planned programme of activities, such as visits from the fire and police services, help children to know how to keep themselves safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- All aspects of the school's work are of high quality. Thoughtful self-evaluation enables you, governors and staff to celebrate success and know what you need to do to move forward. New staff have been recruited and developed carefully to make sure they fit into the school. Children's behaviour is excellent.
- From their different starting points, children make rapid gains in their learning. You and I agreed that those children who learn faster could be challenged even more so that they could reach higher standards.
- Arrangements for children joining the nursery and moving onwards to primary school are very effective. Parents receive a range of very useful information to

support their children in starting nursery. Your staff gather valuable information from home visits so that you know and record each child's starting point.

Introductory sessions help parents and children to get to know the routines of the nursery and meet staff. Parents visit the primary schools so they are familiar with staff and routines. Reception Year teachers visit children in the nursery to get to know them. Vital information about a child's achievements is passed on to the primary school staff. Accordingly, the move to primary school is smooth.

- The quality of the provision for two-year-olds is marvellous. After the previous inspection, you and governors implemented an action plan to guide the school to support the admission of two-year-olds. You recruited staff with the knowledge and expertise to teach this age group. You made sure all other staff received training to equip them to meet the needs of this age group. The dedicated room is bright, attractive and calm. These very young children use the resources confidently. They take delight in climbing, driving the car, scooping the sand, pouring water and making bubbles. Staff working with this younger group of children have a deep knowledge of child development. Planned activities enhance children's personal skills and feelings, and their ability to move and communicate. Staff intervene just at the right time so that much learning takes the form of a conversation. This was shown extremely well during a water activity where the teacher showed a child how to swirl the water and pop the bubbles as the child moved the water with a stick. Parents commented on how their children have come on in 'leaps and bounds' in their speaking skills since joining the nursery.
- Forest School is enchanting. Children chatter as they deftly manoeuvre their way through tall trees and bushes. They learn to be safe as they take time to look up at the sky, make fires, build dens, find slugs and even build a house for a worm. Children make decisions, solve problems and learn new words as they explore their surroundings. For example, a group of boys worked as a team to find and carry planks of wood bark to make a pirate ship. Describing the planks as heavy, rough and bouncy, they puzzled over how they would fit the pieces together to make a deck. Smiles of delight showed when they finally stood on the deck and started sailing for buried treasure. Children sat sensibly and listened intently when a chosen child talked about their learning. Such activities enable children to happily make gains in personal, social and physical skills.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make significant steps forward in their learning. Leadership of this aspect of the school is strong. Staff are highly skilled. Sensitive care and attention is given to make sure that children and their families are comfortable in the setting. Staff know these children well and have high expectations of what they can achieve. Personal plans are written in partnership with parents and include advice from other agencies, such as health experts. As a result, activities are set just at the right level for children to feel safe but challenged. A variety of communication approaches are used so that children are supported to communicate and develop independence. For example, two boys used puppets and signing to join in with a story, increasing their repetition of words and concentration until the end. Smiles showed how happy they were with this achievement. Parents are extremely satisfied with the provision. Many commented on the unbelievable progress their children have made since starting at the school.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- activities to support children who learn quickly are enhanced so that they can reach even higher standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew  
**Senior Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your deputy headteacher, your leader for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and your senior leader for outreach work to discuss improvements since the previous inspection. You and I visited all classrooms and the Forest School to observe the variety of activities taking place. I spoke with several groups of parents at the start and end of session times. I also considered your parent survey results and the 38 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey. I spoke with all staff and also to six members of staff individually. I met with the chair of the governing body and discussed the school's work with a representative of the local authority.

I read the school's self-evaluation document, the improvement plan, a sample of governing body meeting minutes and external views of the school. I scrutinised an array of documentation, including documents concerned with safeguarding. I read the information on the school website and checked the records made to confirm the suitability of adults to work with children. I looked at children's learning books and examples of their work on displays around the school.