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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Karen James
Headteacher
Ludwick Nursery School
Holwell Road
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL7 3RP

Dear Mrs James

Short inspection of Ludwick Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 28 June 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your passion for providing outstanding education for the children of Ludwick Nursery is infectious; you enthuse governors and staff. After three successive outstanding inspection judgements, the drive and ambition to improve shared by you, staff and governors remains as strong as ever. Every member of staff responding to their online survey agreed that they have a clear understanding of the goals the school aims to achieve. One summed up the comments of many, stating, 'It is a privilege to work at Ludwick.'

Teamwork among staff is at the heart of Ludwick's success. Staff share ideas and expertise, to the benefit of all. The quality of teaching is highly effective because of consistently high expectations among staff. Staff are very adept at 'tuning into' children's thinking, to further develop their understanding. Staff morale is very high. All staff responding to their online survey agreed that they are proud to be members of staff, and feel the school has improved since it was last inspected.

Everyone views training as vital. You have created a culture of self-improvement: staff genuinely believe they are 'lifelong learners'. Staff constantly strive to improve, and embrace each and every training opportunity. In their online survey, all staff agreed that professional development encourages, challenges and supports their improvement. One stated, 'The school has given me so many opportunities to

develop my skills and knowledge and to share with a wider audience.' Parents embrace the culture, too. You have enthused many to find out more about how children develop. Many of these parents have then joined your training programme, gained qualifications and now work in early years settings. Their children benefit from their parent's greater knowledge and understanding; their families benefit from a working parent.

Learning is purposeful because every activity is carefully planned to build on children's interests and what they know already. Indoors and out, an excellent range of resources are easily accessible to children so they can choose for themselves how to go about a task. Children enjoy learning and are proud of their accomplishments. Whether practising phonics or adding and subtracting numbers, they are engrossed and keen to learn more.

Ludwick is a very harmonious community. Staff model British values such as fairness and respect in the everyday life of the school. Children respond positively. They know staff will listen to their views. Children are taught that rules are there to protect everyone, and that there are consequences when rules are broken. In the curriculum, children enjoy opportunities to make choices within clear boundaries.

Children make excellent progress in part because of the stimulating curriculum. Governors say, 'We always ask ourselves, both governors and staff, what will inspire children to love learning? For example, we have improved the garden with real activities such as when the children toasted marshmallows on the firepit.'

Partnership with parents is very strong and the school achieves its aim to 'see children's learning as a journey that we [parents and staff] make together'. Parents said 'you go the extra mile' to include them. Parents said you always ask their views at an early stage in any changes you want to make, explaining your reasons in language they understand. Several gave the school's values as a good example. They and their children helped choose those values. You gave the parents examples of what the values might look like at home and stickers to record examples of their children exhibiting them to proudly display at school alongside those completed by staff. Children have a real sense of the partnership between all the adults that look after them. They hear an identical message at home and at school, and receive identical rewards. Many parents said their children's behaviour at home has improved because they – the parents – understand it better following the advice you and staff provided.

The nursery continues to flourish because you are so effective in analysing where improvements can be made, and always mindful of ensuring that children thrive. You recognised that the personal, social and emotional development of boys and some vulnerable children was weaker than that of other children. With children, staff and parents you identified 'values' to rectify this. Children responded very positively. They sometimes remark when their actions, or those of a friend, show a value. Staff congratulate children showing values such as resilience, and encourage others to do likewise. Staff's visual reinforcement of positive behaviour, through signing and the use of value cards, is a strength in all teaching. Although it is making a very positive difference to the identified children and their families, the

values system is not yet embedded throughout the Nursery, so its impact on other children who would benefit is restricted. In your teaching-school role you have since identified other settings and schools with a similar need.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding is very strong. Staff and governors receive regular and up-to-date training in all aspects of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Staff fully understand the clear and effective safeguarding procedures. All staff are vigilant in spotting concerns and reporting them immediately. Your team of designated safeguarding leads uses a 'real-time' electronic system to ensure that information is shared immediately. Checks on the suitability of staff, governors, regular volunteers and contractors are rigorous.

The Nursery works very closely with the children's centre and external agencies to ensure that vulnerable children and their families have the support they need.

Every parent responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, agreed that their children feel happy and safe at school, and that they are well looked after.

Children's awareness of safety is excellent. One parent told the inspector, 'I held my son's hand to cross the road and he said, "That's not right mummy you need to hold my hand tighter".'

Inspection findings

- To check that the school continues to provide an outstanding quality of education, I identified several areas to explore with you.
- The first line of enquiry was to ascertain if children, including disadvantaged children, continue to make outstanding progress. Very detailed learning journals clearly demonstrate children's outstanding progress. Your accurate assessments confirm that over 97% of children make at least the progress expected of them in their time at school, and a very high proportion – generally about 85% – do even better than this. Your tracking last year highlighted some differences between groups; girls' attainment was higher than boys', and disadvantaged children did not achieve as well as other children in the school. You immediately analysed the reasons and made suitable changes. Largely as a result of those actions, disadvantaged children and boys now make accelerated progress and their attainment is similar to that of other children.
- Second, I looked at how effectively the area for improvement from the previous inspection had been implemented. The school was asked to share its outstanding practice further at local and national levels. Your response was exceptional. Whether training new teachers or coaching existing ones, researching perceived challenges or offering tailor-made support to individual settings and schools, your participation in the Acorns Teaching School Alliance is beneficial to many schools and staff. Not least among these are the school's staff and parents. The teaching school's name is appropriate, as 'mighty oaks from little acorns grow' is your

mantra: finding the little acorns of potential in everyone and helping them to fulfil their aspirations.

- My third line of enquiry was around the provision for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The Nursery rightly has an excellent reputation for meeting the needs of these children. School data and learning journals show that these children make similarly rapid progress to the other children, but often from lower starting points. Staff use an outstanding range of activities to enthuse these children and build their basic skills and positive attitudes to learning. Cooking, for example, provides staff with many opportunities to use their excellent questioning skills to promote children's thinking and reasoning skills.
- The enrichment group, which supports local children with severe speech, language and communication needs, is similarly effective. In the school grounds, for example, staff set up numerous activities and resources to stimulate children's senses and encourage them to talk. Parents are very positive and appreciative. One parent stated, 'This nursery truly transformed my child.'
- Lastly, I looked at the provision for two-year-old children. Rigorous checks ensure that all children make rapid progress from their starting points, including disadvantaged children and the most able. Learning journals support this view. Children behave very well because they enjoy positive relationships with staff, who they want to please. Children learn to make choices, for example in choosing what they want to eat at snack times. They learn to follow rules, passing a handheld computer to the next child when the timer indicates time is up. Children enjoy a similarly broad range of experiences to older children, and respond equally positively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the values system is embedded across the school to ensure that all children benefit fully
- the good practice in teaching values is disseminated to other settings and schools through the teaching alliance.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Greatrex
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, staff and members of the governing body. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority. We visited all teaching areas together to observe teaching and learning, and looked at children's learning journals. I scrutinised all aspects of safeguarding practice, and considered a wide range of other documentation. This included the school's own self-evaluation, plans for improvement and external monitoring reports. I took account of 84 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and spoke with some parents. I also took account of 31 staff responses to their online survey.