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Mrs Judith Reay
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Reay

Short inspection of The Sue Hedley Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 1 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 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. You have embedded an ethos of continual improvement both in terms of the physical environment and in further enhancing the skills of the staff. This has resulted in even better outcomes for the children. The highest expectations leaders, managers and staff have for the children and their families mean that children make progress in their learning every day.

Your high aspirations for the children and your constant research into how children learn best have led to many projects, such as that in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) involving teaching training students, staff and parents. The outcomes from this project have been adopted across the nursery and have effectively underpinned the development of mathematical understanding. For example, outdoors in the number shed, children can explore a wide range of stimulating resources in the environment to develop their understanding of number, such as watches of different formats or matching keys and locks. This is successfully enhanced through family learning where parents and children work together, and parents can then support their children's development at home. These high aspirations are reflected indoors too, where photographs of known people at work stimulate discussions about what the children would like to be when they are older.

Children soon pick up on these high expectations in all areas of the nursery life, including behaviour. For instance, children were observed reminding others of how

to behave while listening to a story. Others moved around the nursery between activities without disturbing each other from their work and play.

Alongside these developments and projects, since the last inspection you have successfully developed provision for two-year-olds, introduced flexible hours for three-year-olds, brought in 30-hour provision and established a breakfast club to meet the needs of parents in the community. All of these initiatives were meticulously planned, and your forward thinking identified any potential problems. By working closely with the staff, you alleviated any concerns through simple practical solutions. In the case of the provision for two-year-olds, this has meant that children are readier to learn when they enter the three-year-old provision.

Children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make excellent progress because you make sure that they access the additional services they need. You amend systems so that this happens as swiftly as possible, and ensure that you have the right staff resources to meet these children's needs. This strength has been recognised by the local authority in designating a specialist complementary resource for children with behavioural difficulties in the nursery.

Parents talk positively of how the routines and organisation mean that their children settle in quickly and begin to learn as soon as they enter the nursery. Parents know that the children are happy and learning because they want to come to nursery every day. They talk of how approachable and well qualified the staff are. As one parent said to the inspector, 'The nursery is structured, fun and professional. The children and parents are happy. It's obvious how good it is!'

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff go the extra mile to ensure that children are safe, both in and out of nursery. Parents are confident that they and their children are safe in the nursery. They know that their children's emotional well-being is a high priority. Parents feel that you and your staff are extremely approachable and never judgemental, which puts them at their ease. They know their child's key worker and feel that they can talk to them about any problems they may have.

Your nursery staff are highly vigilant in looking out for those children who are most vulnerable, and they are tenacious in ensuring that children and their families receive the services and support they are entitled to. When children's lives are disrupted, you do everything possible to ensure continuity of learning. You effectively check on staff knowledge and understanding of safeguarding as part of their supervision. Your paperwork shows that you listen to parents and children and act upon their wishes well. Your records outline contacts with families and the actions taken, which are then used effectively to inform other professionals or to track access to services. However, you are aware that monitoring systems would be even more efficient if records of concerns about children and families in school were held in one format to help you to monitor even more effectively.

Inspection findings

- The curriculum and environment have been effectively enhanced to meet the needs of the two-year-old children. Skilled staff were observed working alongside the children, developing their language, communication and social skills. The children were engaged throughout an activity using clay, with staff expertly modelling skills and aptitudes. The structure and routines of the nursery are well known by the children and they know exactly what to do, meaning that they become confident learners. Parents talk of the rapid progress their children make. Those children who have attended the two-year-old provision enter nursery with skills and understanding more in line with what is typical for their age and better prepared for learning in the nursery than children in the past.
- The vast majority of children still enter the nursery with skills below those expected for their age, although this is an improving picture. The overwhelming majority leave in line with or above levels that are typical for their age. This means that they make rapid progress during their time in the nursery. Children who are not making expected progress or better are swiftly identified through robust observation, along with daily reflection by staff and regular progress monitoring meetings. Interventions are then quickly put in place to bring those children back on track. However, you have identified that you need to refine your systems for assessment and tracking to enhance monitoring procedures.
- More children from your nursery go on to reach a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year than the proportion who do so nationally.
- Children entitled to support through the early years pupil premium make rapid progress and any differences between them and their peers have disappeared by the time they leave. You efficiently plan the spending of this funding to meet the individual needs of the children and to fully involve their parents in their development. Forest school, literacy and mathematics projects support children in developing their language and mathematical skills. Your reports to governors and their visits enable them to robustly challenge and question you over the progress of these children.
- Family learning is a strength of your nursery. For example, through termly 'Stay and Play' sessions, parents are helped to understand how their children learn and the best ways they can help them at home. This is having a positive impact on outcomes for children. Through other family learning experiences you provide, there are good examples of parents moving into work, particularly those who have made use of the two-year-old offer.
- Parents' and children's views are highly valued, and you make every effort to know what parents want. During the initial stages of the development of the 30-hours offer, parents were consulted about which patterns of provision best suited their needs. This led to the provision of the breakfast club, with timings to suit parents' work patterns. Parents said that they felt they were consulted 'every step of the way'. Children's views are heard through their own 'plan, do, review' sessions. Staff use these sessions to develop the curriculum by taking note of the children's interests. For example, planting outdoors in 'forest school' is further

developed in nursery by using large containers to plant in, and sticks to measure the distance between each seed and the depth of planting.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems for assessment and tracking are refined to make monitoring procedures even more effective.

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

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Dorrity
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The focus of the inspection was to check whether the highest standards identified at the previous inspection had been maintained, and to find out how well particular groups of children were progressing. I held a variety of meetings with you and the inclusion leader. I observed learning led by adults jointly with you in the nursery classes. We also undertook further observations of the youngest children.

I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information about children's learning and development, the school improvement plan, leaders' self-evaluation and children's work. I also reviewed records of external reviews. I met with four members of the governing body, the local authority representative and an external consultant who supports the school. I considered the 14 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke with eight parents. I also took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.