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Mr John Croft
Headteacher
Sir James Knott Memorial Nursery School
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Dear Mr Croft

Short inspection of Sir James Knott Memorial Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 good in December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You were appointed in January 2016 and despite being faced with several staffing issues that needed to be resolved, you ensured that the good quality of teaching and learning was sustained. You immediately addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection and established a rigorous system for checking the quality of teaching. You secured accurate assessment of children's learning and use this to pinpoint children's needs, which you expect to be acted on by teachers. This means that staff are held accountable for the outcomes of children in their care. As a result, children are making no less than typical progress with a great majority making rapid progress from their starting points.

At the same time, you offer staff high levels of support and have invested in extensive training for them. This is evident in the raft of courses and qualifications staff have gained since your appointment. You expect all staff to share their learning more widely, so that children and colleagues can benefit, thus creating a culture of continuous learning for all. Staff have risen to the challenges you have set them, feel valued and listened to, and are proud to be members of the school team.

In addition to tackling previous issues, you have strengthened the leadership capacity of the school by creating a middle tier of leadership. Staff feel empowered by this and have embraced the additional responsibilities. It has given them a better awareness of the strategic priorities of the school and a wider understanding of the changes you have introduced.

Among your many successes are the changes you have made to curriculum provision. Your fundamental principle is that all planning will be drawn from children's interests. All staff must get to know the children well and must demonstrate how they use children's interests to teach key knowledge, skills and understanding. This leads to very strong and trusting relationships and highly engaged children. It is welcomed by parents who commented on how much they value the time taken by staff to get to know their children.

You are forward thinking and along with governors are developing a strategy to secure future financial stability. This includes offering wrap-around care from 8am until 6pm and holiday care, which means you are well placed to accommodate changes to Nursery entitlement from September 2017. This year you introduced provision for children who are two years old. You acknowledge that this facility is not fully utilised as attendance is not yet in keeping with your expectations.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are always at the forefront of their thinking. A display in the school entrance contains the most relevant and recent policy and procedures for all staff. This, alongside routine training, ensures that all staff are aware of their responsibilities in keeping children safe. Records are detailed and external agencies are used for advice and support when appropriate.

Designated governors are responsible for safeguarding and health and safety. They make regular checks to verify security and to identify any potential hazards. There is evidence of detailed discussion in governors' minutes, and evidence that actions have been taken to minimise risk and ensure children's safety.

Leaders encourage good attendance and recognise that this is an important part of school readiness. A raft of procedures are undertaken to secure improved rates of attendance by all children. Despite these efforts, you are aware that attendance is not as good as you want it to be.

Inspection findings

- You have a clear understanding of the school and its performance. Your accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is communicated effectively to others. As a result, there is a shared vision for continuous improvement and a precise development plan, which provides an effective tool for moving forward.

- Leaders monitor the performance of staff thoroughly, ensuring that all staff are held to account for improving children's outcomes, contributing to the school's improvement priorities and meeting the national standards for teachers. This is supporting the good outcomes for children.
- Middle leaders embrace their roles. They are highly reflective practitioners and evaluate the impact of their initiatives on improvements to outcomes for children and on strengthening the quality of teaching, which are both good.
- A key focus for the inspection was to review the school's assessment procedures. You have ensured that children's starting points are accurately identified and teachers use this information well to pinpoint the next steps in children's learning. Consequently, children leave Nursery having made no less than typical progress, with a large majority, having made rapid progress and demonstrating the skills expected for their age, ready for school.
- In September, just under a fifth of all children entered school with skills that were typically expected for their age. By the end of the autumn term, just over half of the children had made rapid progress and were demonstrating age-expected skills. This is the result of effective use of assessment information and the good-quality teaching and learning they receive.
- You check closely on the progress of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and ensure that they are well supported. Highly effective relationships with parents are helping to secure appropriate advice and support from external agencies. This means that children are accessing additional funding in a timely manner, which is supporting their good progress rates from their varying starting points.
- You pay careful attention to the individual needs of disadvantaged children including the most able disadvantaged. While you check their progress rigorously, there are too few disadvantaged children for you to draw conclusions. It is also difficult to identify shared barriers to learning that you can usefully apportion your limited funding towards. Nevertheless, you are mindful of the best possible use of this funding and use it to access resources that support individual learning needs.
- Outdoor provision is well resourced and children demonstrate confidence to explore and play. However, there are occasional missed opportunities to deepen children's learning and extend their thinking, particularly in the specific areas of learning relating to understanding the world and expressive art and design. You acknowledge that this is an aspect of your work that remains needing attention.
- Provision for two-year-olds was introduced in September 2016. The emotional well-being of children accessing the unit is paramount and all staff demonstrate patience and good attention to the individual needs of the children. However, good attendance has yet to be secured, which impinges on the high expectations for progress you want.
- Rates of attendance generally are below the targets you have set. You have established procedures to support you in this work and are beginning to see signs of improvement, but you recognise there is still more to do.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- adults maximise opportunities, particularly in the outdoors, to deepen children's understanding in the specific areas of learning relating to understanding the world and expressive art and design
- improved attendance, particularly in the two-year-old offer, is encouraged to ensure children's readiness for school and that your high expectations for good attendance are met.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you and several members of the governing body. With you, I observed children in the indoor and outdoor provision. I talked to children about their learning and conducted scrutiny of their learning journals. I examined your safeguarding documents and your information about assessment and attendance. I took account of 28 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including written responses and 11 responses to the staff questionnaire.