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Mrs Denise Kilner
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kilner

Short inspection of Bensham Grove Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 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 took up post in September 2017 and already have a deep knowledge of the many strengths of this highly effective nursery school. Your plans for development reflect your ambition for the school and accurately capture the very few aspects of the school's work that would benefit from refinement. You have unwavering support from the staff, who appreciate your willingness to listen to their opinions and develop their expertise. Staff feel valued and empowered by your leadership. This has helped you to build on the already strong teaching, so that children make substantial progress across almost all areas of learning.

The needs of children are at the heart of every decision that is made in the school. The determination that you articulate to secure exceptional achievement for children is mirrored in every conversation with staff and governors. There is no complacency in this school. Staff are reflective practitioners who take time every day to review the impact of their work on children and to plan the next steps needed to meet children's needs. There is a strong ethos of team working, and staff are eager to receive and act on feedback from you and from their peers.

The curriculum provides rich learning experiences for children, enhanced regularly by visits to local institutions such as The Baltic and Seven Stories. Leaders' work to improve outdoor learning since the previous inspection has resulted in a captivating environment where children are occupied in purposeful play. Whether developing a project in the

invention shed or cooking up a storm in the mud kitchen, children are fascinated by their learning. Staff work relentlessly to tweak and refine the curriculum to take account of children's interests. This pays off in the extremely high levels of engagement which I observed from children during this inspection. Moreover, this curriculum approach contributes to the exceptionally strong development of children's effective learning habits over time. Children attend well and approach their learning with enormous enthusiasm.

Leaders' work to engage with families is a strength of the school. You recognise the value in creating a mutually supportive partnership between home and school. Parents are tremendously positive about the school, and 100% of those who responded to the online inspection questionnaire would recommend the school. The comment of one parent typifies that of others: 'The staff go out of their way to make each and every child feel special and each and every parent feel valued. My little boy skips through the door. He loves his teachers and has made so much progress since he started last year. I couldn't ask any more from them at all. They go above and beyond my expectations every day.'

Since the previous inspection, leaders have refined the school's assessment information so that they have a clearer picture of the achievement of individual children and groups of children. Governors receive this detailed information regularly, ensuring that they know the school's performance well. This information is used to identify priorities for improvement. You have recognised, for example, that the progress of those children who have typical starting points for their age is not quite as strong in writing as it is in other areas of learning. You have already started to address this. You and governors acknowledge that the targets set in your school development plan in relation to this priority could be more measurable, so that governors can check on the impact of your work more precisely.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding children is the top priority of all staff at Bensham Grove. Training and regular safeguarding updates have ensured that staff have a deep understanding of the signs and symptoms that might raise concerns about children's safety. Since your arrival, you have enhanced practice further by making sure that, alongside you, staff now attend multi-agency meetings which relate to the children they look after. Staff appreciate this change, which acknowledges the important role they play in keeping children safe.

Governors fulfil their statutory duties to check on your work in relation to safeguarding. The nominated governor for this area meets with you to review practice, and her recommendations have contributed to the meticulous safeguarding files which record the school's work.

Children feel safe and are safe in this school. Staff exploit every opportunity to support children to develop their sense of personal safety, while not discouraging them from taking measured risks. Children make use of tools and equipment in the outdoor learning area, such as real hacksaws and a vice grip. They know that the blade of the saw is sharp, that they must use the tool with great care and that safety goggles are a must.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I was interested to review the effectiveness of the school's curriculum. Leaders have adapted the curriculum to suit the changing needs of the different children who have joined the school in recent years. Aware that some children have weaker speech and language skills, staff model excellent spoken English. Staff articulate the learning that is taking place and are quick to extend and challenge children's vocabulary development. For example, when cutting up their snack, one child commented, 'It's snapped.' The member of staff responded with, 'Did the cucumber snap, or did you cut it?' Following this intervention, the child corrected their choice of language. In the outdoor learning area, a child mimicked the teacher's actions as he introduced the word 'thudding' to describe the movement and noise of a dinosaur. These subtle interactions contribute to the excellent progress children make in their communication and language skills over time.
- A notable strength of the school's provision is the development of effective learning skills which transfer to all aspects of children's lives. During the inspection, I was highly impressed at the perseverance and concentration demonstrated by such young children. In the invention shed, one boy kept going to saw through a piece of wood, even though it was exhausting work. Staff plan carefully, not just for the acquisition of knowledge, but so that children are eager to explore and are happy to work independently or to cooperate as part of a team. Children are curious and confident to engage in appropriate conversation with adults. Two children were keen to talk to me about the remembrance poppy I was wearing and showed a good understanding of the significance of this symbol. In the mud kitchen, children took turns to stir the 'custard' while one carefully measured out a portion for me, promising to keep it warm until I was ready to eat!
- Strong teaching is securing substantial progress from children in almost all areas of the curriculum. Excellent relationships between children and adults are rooted in the fact that staff know each child exceptionally well. This allows staff to take advantage of children's personal interests to engage them in purposeful learning activities. Staff use questioning very well to extend children's thinking and to encourage children to develop their own ideas.
- Over time, the progress made by children in writing has been strong. However, you recognise that, last academic year, progress in writing dipped slightly. Fewer children with typical starting points made more rapid progress to exceed the standards that are expected for their age. You have already begun to address this. Staff are full of enthusiasm about the opportunities they have had to access training and to visit other nursery settings to observe best practice. This has resulted in more provision for children to write for different purposes. For example, children visited the post office to send their own letters home. Children also wrote responses to the headteacher following her letter to them, sent from the Houses of Parliament. However, you know that there is still more to do to ensure that staff plan systematically to develop writing skills so that all children make substantial progress.
- Every member of staff recognises the importance of the relationship between home and school. Parents value the regular, informal, daily communication that they receive from staff. Parents benefit from termly consultation sessions when they can meet with staff and review their children's work to check on the progress they make. The home-school

books, 'Me, My World and I', are testament to this impressive ongoing relationship, with parents recording many of their child's home experiences in photographs and notes and staff acknowledging and responding to these. This communication helps staff to build on what children already know and can do and contributes to the school's well-planned curriculum.

- Governors have recognised that, in this small school, it is necessary to develop the leadership skills of all staff. You have responded to this challenge and have established a team of staff who take a lead role, alongside you, in developing provision for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Staff are grateful for the opportunity to pursue this area of expertise and interest. The impact of their work is already evident in the more effective support for children who need some extra help with their learning. This is enabling children to make more rapid progress. Importantly, staff reported that they feel more confident to take a lead and to identify aspects of the school's work which they feel can be fine-tuned to secure further improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children, particularly those with typical or better starting points for their age, make substantial progress in writing and that governors keep a check on this through more precise targets in the school development plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and members of the staff team. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I discussed the school's journey of improvement with a representative of the local authority. I visited learning spaces and observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I spoke to children about their learning. I reviewed progress across a range of areas of learning by examining records of children's learning journeys with staff. You presented information detailing children's progress and attainment, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. Documents relating to your work to safeguard children were checked. I reviewed the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the six responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.