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20 March 2019

Mrs Judith Reay
Acting Headteacher
Boldon Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Reay

Short inspection of Boldon Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 2019, 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 nursery was judged to be outstanding in March 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

In your role as acting headteacher you have continued to develop the school. The detailed development plan and accurate self-assessment of the school's effectiveness have helped to guide you in this. The inclusive approach of the permanent headteacher in developing priorities means that all staff feel ownership of the improvements in the nursery and are effectively held to account for progress in these areas by the governing body. Governors have an excellent understanding of the high-quality work of the nursery through their short visits to rooms and outdoor activities and regular challenge. They attend joint workshops, analyse data and review parent and carer comments and keep abreast of research nationally and internationally so that they have a well-rounded view and knowledge base to challenge practice.

The headteacher and staff fully recognised the recommendation for further improvement at the last inspection to ensure that teaching maximises the opportunities that exist to document children's progress and achievement, particularly in their early writing, number and work with shape and measure. They looked at best practice in many different settings, and effectively implemented and adapted this to the way the nursery works.

The school's philosophy of teaching and learning in the outdoor environment shines through in all areas of the curriculum. Staff are skilled at providing challenge to the

children, supporting them to develop their thinking. Staff then reflect on how successful they have been and identify what to do next with the individual child to further their understanding. For example, asking questions such as, 'What happened and why?' then praising responses such as, 'That's good thinking', to develop children's self-esteem and readiness to learn. A wealth of resources are provided to enable children to challenge themselves and their thinking. Together, we watched a child engage for a long period building a shelter from boxes and branches. The child had a clear plan, and overcame any obstacles, testing and re-testing the best way to carry a heavy log. The child then assessed their own work and recognised that they needed to create an entrance. All this work epitomised the philosophy of the nursery, using the outdoor environment and developing the children's independence and resilience. Mathematics, literacy and phonics teaching are skilfully interwoven into activities by knowledgeable staff. For instance, when children are cutting willow strands to make a wicker fence, staff expertly use the mathematics of comparative length to increase children's understanding of measure. When working in the mud kitchen, staff develop children's knowledge of capacity, asking them to estimate how many scoops will fill the container, and then testing out their assumptions, or using counting and measuring skills when planting onion sets in the allotment.

Staff are expert at creating appropriate levels of challenge for children through their play and ensuring that they develop their skills and understanding across all areas of learning. For example, science is brought in during water play as staff seize the opportunity to explore scientific method, asking the children to predict which object will sink and which will float and then getting them to test this out. Phonics is taught in context and used by children in their spelling using phonically correct spelling. We saw children labelling their work, and making their own tally chart to find out who would like jam and who would like syrup on their pancakes being made on the firepit.

The children's behaviour is excellent. The focus on developing independence and taking responsibility shines through in many activities. This focus, and the stimulating learning environment, mean that children are engaged in learning at all times. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe. They know when they need to wash their hands to keep clean before preparing or eating food and do so without being directed. They understand the safety rules when working in the firepit and can describe these to others, such as 'staying behind the circle' or using 'the back path' to move around safely away from the fire itself. They know to test how the strength of a branch before beginning to climb a tree, or test how slippery it is.

Parents who spoke with me talked of how their children's understanding of safety has made them as parents much more confident in the home environment. The children show real care and understanding of each other. For example, when a child tripped over, we saw another immediately go to them to check they were alright and not hurt.

All the parents who made their views known agreed that children make great strides in their learning while at the nursery. Parents talk of how their children are taught

'skills for life here' and that 'they are set up for learning'. Another said, 'We feel it provides our child with the very best in terms of education, health and well-being. We feel confident that this school is preparing our child with the best building blocks for his future.' This is confirmed in all the evidence seen during the inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and governors have regular update training and are knowledgeable about their roles in relation to keeping children safe. The high-quality recording and record-keeping mean that any concerns staff may have about any child are effectively monitored and, where necessary, swiftly acted upon. Staff who work most closely with the most vulnerable children now attend any meetings with other professionals involved with the family to represent the nursery.

Inspection findings

- I looked at how well the leaders and managers of the nursery were managing the absence of the headteacher. Very effective appointments have been made by the governing body. The acting headteacher knows the school and the community well, being from a local outstanding nursery. This has ensured that continuity for staff, parents and children. Staff have felt involved and well supported throughout the process. They feel developments have continued as planned. They feel well cared for and are confident that if there were any difficulties in this period they would be dealt with straight away. The chair of the governing body has been very visible in the school to ensure good communication and constant consultation. Staff said to me that, 'It feels like everyone has been working together', and so there has been no negative effect on children or parents.
- The acting headteacher has made herself available to parents and so what could have been a difficult transition period has been extremely well managed by all concerned. In response to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, one parent commented, 'Despite the recent absence of the head, the nursery has continued to be a place of excellence in terms of its academic expectations and the social and emotional care provided. In my opinion, a sign of good management is that the nursery has maintained such high standards even in the absence of an important figure.'
- I reviewed how effectively the nursery had responded to the recommendation at the last inspection. Since the last inspection, an effective evidence base and detailed recording, observations and planning are now in place which takes into account who it is for – professional, parent or child. For example, the richly detailed floorbooks, which are a way of recording children's work, give part of the evidence base for professional judgements alongside observations and data analysis. The learning journals demonstrate the daily learning experiences for each child and identify the next steps in their learning for parents and children. The reflection boards capture children's voice, interests and progress and are effectively used during reflection at the end of each day to inform planning.
- I investigated how well staff were supported when they work with the most

vulnerable children. Staff regularly receive very effective professional support from the acting headteacher when working with the most vulnerable children. They told me that their work-life balance is always considered, and they feel they can offload to the acting headteacher any concerns or worries they may have about individual children. This is reflected by all staff in their responses to the Ofsted online survey. The paperwork maintained by the nursery about these children consistently reflects the views of the parents and the voice of the child in relation to any actions that are being taken.

- I looked at how effective the nursery was at ensuring that children made progress and were ready for school. The majority of children enter the nursery with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age but the vast majority, including the most disadvantaged, leave at least in line with their peers nationally, if not above. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make rapid progress from their starting points and consistently meet their own individual targets. Children are well prepared for the next stage in their education, being inquisitive, independent learners. This is demonstrated by the fact that the local authority analysis shows that the children who attend this nursery do better at the end of their Reception class than children nationally. However, you and the governing body know there is more work still to be done on improving the rate of attendance for many children.
- Finally, I discussed with parents how the staff worked with them to ensure that they were included in their children's education. A wide range of opportunities enables parents to be effectively involved in their child's learning. Parents I talked to spoke enthusiastically about the termly workshops, stay and play activities, social occasions such as Bonfire Night, and helping out on trips. Everyone could identify the positive effects of these activities, from stronger bonding and spending more time with their children to developing their confidence as 'teachers'. Parents spoke of how they now use shopping trips as learning experiences instead of it being a 'chore'. They say because of their engagement with the nursery they now look at things from a child's perspective.
- Parents of children with SEND felt strongly that staff at the nursery were very knowledgeable about their child's individual needs and quickly identified how to effectively address these. For example, working with a parent, staff had identified an issue and referred a child for speech and language therapy. As there was a delay in getting an appointment, the member of staff gave the parent ideas and resources to use at home while waiting and put together interim plans. By the time the appointment came around, the issue had been resolved.
- As parents who made their views known said, 'It's unique here. Children are free to learn, and they understand everyone is different.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the children's attendance.

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 affirm the standards identified at the previous inspection and to find out how well children and the nursery were progressing. I held a variety of meetings with you and your staff. I observed a number of sessions jointly with yourself in the nursery. I considered a range of evidence, including the school improvement plan and leaders' self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I also reviewed other documentation.

I met with three members of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority. I considered the 32 responses to Parent View and I spoke with 11 parents. I also took account of the nine responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and spoke with three staff.