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29 March 2017

Miss Angela Graham
Headteacher
Usworth Colliery Nursery School
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Dear Miss Graham

Short inspection of Usworth Colliery Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 January 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 know your school well and have a strong understanding of the needs of very young children and a passion for developing a 'natural' curriculum. You are well on your way to achieving this aim by maximising access to learning outdoors and developing forest-school provision.

When I came to the school, I wanted to check whether the quality of teaching and learning was still good. I found your staff to be highly skilled at working together and using their collective strengths to ensure that the needs of children are met. You have expertly managed senior staff absences, because you are uncompromising in your expectations to provide the very best educational experience for all children. Staff share your high expectations and embrace the extensive, high-quality support, training and guidance you provide for them. As a result, the transition of new staff into school has been seamless and the good quality of teaching and learning has been sustained.

I also wanted to check on the progress of children currently in the school and the effectiveness of the school curriculum in enabling this. You track children's achievements carefully to ensure that they are making good progress. A detailed analysis is completed following each round of assessment. Teachers use this information to plan activities that will build on children's skills and move them on from their prior level of understanding or provide interventions in order to address any slowing of progress. This means that children are continuing to make good progress from their starting points.

You recognised that attendance in the Nursery class was low and have put new procedures in place to encourage good attendance. Current attendance figures suggest that your actions are having a positive impact when compared with this time last year.

Since the school was last inspected, you have introduced a 20-place provision for two-year-olds and extended your offer to include babies from six months. You have managed this transition well and all available places have been taken. This demonstrates the popularity of your school and the high regard held of you within the community.

Governors are equally determined to provide the very best learning experiences for all children. They acknowledge the important role they play in holding leaders to account. To ensure their effectiveness, they commissioned a review of governance. Although this was only completed in January this year, actions for improvement have been quickly addressed. Governors' increased level of challenge to you and other leaders is already evident within governing body meeting minutes and their role in monitoring the impact of the school's work is strengthening successfully.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of safeguarding is well established. Staff and governors acknowledge the important role they play in keeping children safe. A comprehensive programme of training is in place to ensure that all procedures are relevant. This includes the welfare arrangements for very young children. You take steps to ensure that there are appropriate vetting procedures in place for adults who work in the school. Induction procedures reflect the high priority given to keeping children safe.

You ensure that the curriculum is effectively supporting young children's growing awareness of how to keep themselves safe. You have involved parents in this and organised a 'keeping safe week', where you worked alongside parents and children to talk about how to keep safe in school and when playing outside. The development of forest-school provision is supporting this further.

A designated governor is responsible for health and safety and they, along with you, report rigorously to governors any issues or potential risks that require attention.

Inspection findings

- Self-evaluation is accurate and priorities for improvement are well chosen. The plans you produce are thoughtful and detail the actions needed to be successful. While they ensure that the school continues to provide good overall effectiveness, plans do not pinpoint precisely the targets you wish to achieve for key groups of children.
- Teachers' planning is effective and is drawn from children's interests and motivations. With this in mind, activities are organised to scaffold the learning needs of children and to meet their different abilities. This means that children are engaged in their learning and are making good progress.
- Resources are well planned for and offer a stimulus to entice children into learning. Adults are skilled at developing children's interests and leading them into specific areas of learning. For example, staff in the 'block play' noticed that boys were enthralled with superheroes and used this interest as a lever to encourage them into mark making and drawing successfully.
- You have engendered a strong ethos of care and support within the school, so that all children have the very best opportunities to thrive in a safe and secure environment. This is evident in how readily even the youngest children are keen to talk about their learning, and are happy to share and to take turns.
- There is an equally strong partnership with parents, who welcome the support and advice you give them. You provide parents with an opportunity to be part of their child's learning journey and together your contributions create a treasured memory of the start of school life. Although only a few parents responded to the inspection questionnaire, those that did so were all delighted with the warmth with which they are welcomed to the school.
- Children demonstrate a growing curiosity about the world around them, especially when activities are open ended and challenging. This was particularly the case for the two-year-old children in the forest school, who needed to navigate tree roots and branches and complete bark-rubbing tasks. This is not consistent across all classes and occasionally tasks offer limited challenge to children's thinking and reasoning.
- Overall attainment on entry remains below that typically found in children of this age. It is generally lower for boys than girls and particularly in the strand of learning associated with communication and language, specifically speech. You have prioritised your work with the speech and language service and provided extensive training to ensure that all staff are good role models in developing children's early language skills. The impact of this work is evidenced by the rapid progress that most children make in this area.
- Staff recognise the slightly lower starting point for boys than for girls, and plan activities that meets boys' needs and interests. Strong links with parents support this further. Consequently, boys make good gains in their learning, and any differences in attainment noted between boys and girls upon entry to school are diminished by the time they leave.

- Attainment over time has remained good, with most children reaching age-related expectations in all areas of learning. For those children who are below age-related expectations, they have made no less than expected progress from their starting points. This is because the system you introduced to track children's progress is used well to respond to their individual needs.
- Most-able children embrace the wide range of activities on offer. You track their individual progress to ensure that they make the same good gains in their learning as that of their peers. However, your target-setting is not sufficiently precise enough to identify the specific gains you expect to see for this key group of children.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and resources are closely matched to their needs. Outcomes for this key group of children are lower than those of their peers in the area of learning that relates to communication and language. That said, additional adults provide purposeful support to enable this key group of children to be fully engaged in their learning. This means that overall, children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their starting points.
- Disadvantaged children, including the most able disadvantaged children, make good progress in all areas of learning. You know the barriers to learning that this group of children sometimes face and work tirelessly to reduce any differences in skills and understanding that exist when children first start school. With this in mind, you deliver several interventions to ensure that any differences are diminished swiftly. However, you are not yet measuring the precise impact of these interventions to determine which is having the greatest impact.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans for improvement include more measurable targets against which the governors can check the impact of the school's work more precisely
- planned activities are consistent in the challenge they present to all key groups of children, particularly in the areas of learning for understanding the world and expressive art and design, so that more children can make faster progress and exceed expectation.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I held discussions with you and governors about your plans for improvement and your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I undertook tours of the school with you, observing children in lessons, and talking to children about their work. I conducted a scrutiny of children's 'learning journals' and examined your own evaluation of them. I examined your safeguarding documents, including the record of security checks carried out on each member of staff, assessment information, and behaviour and attendance information. I took account of nine responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, in addition to your own parent consultation outcomes.