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13 June 2011

Mrs J King
Headteacher
Ashgate Nursery School
18 Stepping Lane
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Dear Mrs King

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Ashgate Nursery School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 June 2011, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the representatives of the governing body and your School Improvement Partner for meeting with me, and to the staff and children for making me welcome.

The appointment of a permanent headteacher from 1 June 2010 followed the retirement of the previous headteacher and periods when the school was led by acting headteachers. A number of long-term temporary staff appointments have continued, pending the delayed restructuring of staffing following the establishment of a children's centre in the area. The number of children on the school roll, having dipped, is now rising rapidly and is near capacity.

As a result of the inspection on 16 March 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

When they start in the Nursery, most children demonstrate skills and experiences that are within the 22–36 month range. Recent assessments indicate that most children are now working within the 40–60 month age range but that there are variations between areas of learning. Although many children have made rapid progress in their personal, social and emotional development, progress is satisfactory overall because in other areas of learning, such as calculating, progress has been slower.



Since taking up her appointment, the headteacher has built on improvements already in hand at the time of the previous inspection. New storage arrangements have been introduced in order that both children and adults can access learning resources more easily. Defined learning areas have been created indoors to encourage children to make and sustain their choices, particularly in early reading and writing. Linking sounds and letters is now planned and delivered in each session in small groups, appropriate to children's needs. The headteacher is supporting and regularly monitoring the progress of children in these sessions and the inspection confirms that children are making at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Inspection evidence confirms that both boys and girls are now using their knowledge in sharing stories and mark making, and that the gap between boys and girls is closing. Recent monitoring of children's progress has shown that children's counting has not been sufficiently developed into calculation skills and this is now being addressed.

The development of the outside learning environment has been supported by in-service training and development for staff. Accrued capital funding has been used to bring the toilet accommodation up to requirements and create a new second access to the outside area. The garden area has been refreshed through improving the drainage and creating a number of natural areas for digging, sitting and water play. Additional time has been made available for children to play outside, coupled with more outdoor resources that children can select for themselves. There is fixed climbing and balancing equipment, together with a stock of wheeled vehicles. These are included in children's choices on a regular basis. Staff are giving greater emphasis to the development of children's physical skills. This is the result of an audit of children's skills and experiences which demonstrated that boys, in particular, but also girls, were not making fast enough progress in developing finer physical control. This has led to a greater awareness within the staff team of the importance of ensuring progression in children's outdoor learning and the need to raise their expectations of what children can do, together with the support they need to achieve this.

Improving children's achievement through more effective assessment and its use in planning their next steps in learning has rightly been identified as a key focus for development in the school's development plan. Staffing turbulence has contributed to inaccurate assessments and inconsistencies in the rate of progress children have made over time. While the accuracy of observations and assessments is improving, this remains at an early stage of development and consistency has yet to be secured, especially in planning children's next steps in learning. Learning journey records have been improved by increasing the quality and frequency of adults' observations of learning. In the best practice, these records are evaluative but there remain too many entries that are over-descriptive but do not point clearly enough to children's next steps in learning.

The identification of continuous opportunities for promoting children's experiences across the areas of learning has also been the focus of joint staff planning. This

includes ensuring a better balance between adult-led and child-initiated learning, and ensuring that adult interventions build and extend individual children's learning.

The governing body has provided stability and steadfastness during a difficult period and given the new headteacher good support and counsel. Individual governors' professional experiences, particularly in finance and Early Years education, have been pivotal in strategic planning and calling the school to account. The local authority School Improvement Partner has provided valued support and advice in helping to secure improvements. The headteacher, governing body and local authority are in full agreement that the delayed staff restructuring should now go ahead in order to secure the school's greater capacity for further improvement.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Best
Additional inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Increase the number of children, especially boys, working at age-related expectations by the end of Nursery in linking sounds to letters, reading, writing and calculation by:
 - checking learning regularly through observations that are carefully and efficiently recorded, and using this information to adapt the children's learning experiences
 - providing exciting, purposeful writing and reading experiences that ensures the engagement of all children, especially boys
 - providing daily provision for children to learn and practise their skills in linking sounds to letters
 - maximising opportunities for children to develop their calculation skills
 - carefully monitoring each child's progress and adapting the curriculum to meet each child's needs.

- Ensuring the outdoor environment is used effectively to promote children's development in all six areas of learning by:
 - increasing the amount of time that children are able to choose to learn in the outdoor environment
 - ensuring the activities planned and the resources used are suitable for this learning environment
 - ensuring an appropriate balance between teacher-led and child-initiated learning experiences.