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16 July 2013

Mrs Linda Bowles
Headteacher
Ditton Nursery School
Dundalk Road
Widnes
Cheshire
WA8 8DF

Dear Mrs Bowles

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ditton Nursery School

Following my visit to Ditton Nursery on 15 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with two representatives of the local authority and one member of the governing body. I also met with you and the incoming headteacher and with the assistant headteacher. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

Context

Prior to the inspection, you decided to retire this summer. A new headteacher has been appointed and will start in September. The local authority appointed two senior and experienced advisors to the governing body and a third governor has been appointed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school has made expected progress so far and is on track with its planned improvements to make the progress it needs to get out of special measures in 2014. The number of teachers is due to increase in September to make sure each class is taught by a qualified teacher.

The headteacher, with one of the governors, has started making short visits to lessons to identify the impact adults have on children's learning. As a result governors are getting a better understanding of children's achievement and senior leaders are making better connections between teaching and learning. Leaders, following a visit to a nursery school judged to be outstanding at its last inspection, have reviewed their deployment of adults. They have formulated a plan to use adults as key workers responsible for monitoring pupils' achievement and attendance. As a result leaders are starting to make better use of adults in making sure groups of children achieve.

The local authority introduced training to give adults a better understanding of teaching and learning for young children. As a result adults now talk with pupils at eye level and are starting to take account of children's different learning needs.

Senior leaders have also taken action to change the structure of the different sessions, such as a rolling programme for snack time and entering and leaving the Nursery via the front door. Consequently, there is more time for learning.

Although there have been changes to how adults plan lessons, more work is needed to make sure planning links directly to the needs of different groups of children.

The school's action plan covers all of the points for improvement identified at the inspection. It clearly identifies the actions to be taken to make sure the school improves and the people responsible for implementing each of the actions. To improve it further, senior leaders should add in to the plan all of the weaknesses identified in the inspection report such as:

- improving the teaching of children who are of higher ability and those who have special educational needs
- improving the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) and mathematics
- improving the school's website and how it works with parents and carers
- developing a way of assessing children when they first start in the Nursery and a way of tracking groups of children's progress.

The improvement plan identifies the ways in which senior leaders will monitor how successful the actions have been, but the people monitoring the actions should be different from the people evaluating the success of the actions. It would also be useful if there were milestones so that leaders can measure how successful the actions have been throughout the year.

The number of governing body meetings per year has increased. There is a newly formed committee responsible for checking on children's progress each half term and on the progress of the improvement plan. Governors have bought into the local authority's training package for governors and have plans to work with a national leader in governance.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan requires improvement.

The school may not appoint newly-qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Halton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

Her Majesty's Inspector