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24 January 2014

Janet Brownjohn
Headteacher
Rothesay Nursery School
59 Rothesay Road
Luton, LU1 1RB

Dear Mrs Brownjohn

Special measures monitoring inspection of Rothesay Nursery School

Following my visit with Sandra Teacher, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22–23 January 2014, 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 during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching and children's achievement ensuring that:
 - all staff plan activities that are stimulating, demanding and supported by a suitable range of resources so that all children are fully involved in learning throughout every session
 - adults intervene regularly and effectively during activities to keep the pace of learning high
 - staff take every opportunity to promote language effectively so that all children, and particularly those who speak English as an additional language, develop more confidence and competence in their speaking skills
 - activities are adapted so that they are challenging but achievable for all children particularly those who are two years old.

- Improve children's behaviour by:
 - establishing clear expectations for behaviour both indoors and out sharing them with staff and applying them at all times
 - ensuring that adults do not tolerate any anti-social or unruly behaviour.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - teaching is monitored rigorously and regularly, with a sharp focus on children's learning
 - staff and governors develop a more accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement
 - an external review of governance is undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved
 - children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted more effectively.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 21-22 January 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with senior leaders and other staff, a group of parents and carers, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors spent significant periods of time observing children's learning inside and outdoors. They looked at evidence of children's progress over time. A range of school documentation was examined including reports from monitoring activities, safeguarding information and health and safety checks.

Context

Since the previous visit the headteacher has taken on the role of special needs coordinator (SENCO). There have been no other significant changes to the school's context.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Children are making better progress because their behaviour has improved and teaching is of better quality. Whereas previously children were inclined to flit between activities they are staying with them longer and persevering at them. This is the impact seen from staff providing more varied and interesting activities for them to explore. While they are absorbed in their play, adults are talking to the children extending their understanding, vocabulary and skills. The school's focus on language and communication is reaping rewards. Children are learning to communicate much more effectively. They are encouraged to explain what they are doing: adults introduce them to new words and are beginning to expect children to use them. For example, a child filling up containers in the water tray acquired the new words 'full' and 'empty' as a result of the adult's intervention.

The school's new system for gathering information on children's progress shows that they are making promising progress in some aspects of learning. By December, children exceeded the target set for them at the beginning of term in listening, attention, understanding and speaking. The proportion of children making expected progress in self-confidence, management of feelings and making relationships almost doubled. A group of parents and carers that met with an inspector drew attention to the improvement they could see in their children's confidence and talk. They were delighted that their children had learnt how to share with others. Children's progress in mathematics, understanding of the world, expressive arts and design is more limited. Children are making progress in their physical development; however some of the activities to extend their skills particularly outdoors are not challenging enough to develop their coordination, control and movement rapidly. In

addition, the high-quality soft play room upstairs designed for physical play is underused.

Disabled children make reasonable progress because of the extra help and support they receive. The targets set for their learning are explained in terms of what they will do rather than what they need to learn. A change of emphasis is required to help them to make better progress. The focus on talk is helping children who speak English as an additional language to make adequate progress. Some parents and carers commented that they are very pleased that their children are learning to speak English with increasing confidence.

The quality of teaching

A stronger focus on learning has improved teaching. Adults are interacting frequently with children which accelerates and improves their talk. They are using useful questioning to move children's learning forward and join in their make-believe play presenting new ideas for children to copy. Adults are tuned into literacy providing a range of activities to promote children's early reading and writing skills. This is why children are making better progress. Even so, staff are not using all of the resources available to them advantageously to promote good learning. The beautifully stocked library upstairs is very rarely used for teaching children sounds and letters or reading to them. Around the indoor bases, close to every activity is a written list of new (key) words to encourage children to use varied vocabulary in their talk. While this is good practice, children would learn them quickly if all staff referred to them frequently. It is important to ensure that all words on key word list and captions on the displays are written with high levels of technical accuracy.

High expectations for children to behave well have been pivotal in improving their moral and social development. Staff are beginning to promote their spiritual and cultural development through the improving curriculum.

Planning the daily range of activities ensures that all the required areas of children's learning are catered for. Staff are using records of children's progress to identify which activities should be provided to move their learning on. Nonetheless, planning lacks sufficient detail to provide a helpful guide for staff. The different levels of learning that could be extended through children's engagement with each activity are not always identified. Planning for outdoor play is particularly weak and, consequently, children are not learning as much outdoors as they do inside. In addition, staff in each base plan for their groups separately but the children move between all three bases. Not all staff are aware of what each child needs to learn next so they are not always well placed to move their learning forward. Not enough use is made of the wide range of resources and materials available on the internet to support staff in planning activities that are purposeful and will attract children to explore them and increase their inquisitiveness.

Behaviour and safety

Significant improvement in children's behaviour is very apparent and reflects staff's hard work and commitment to make this happen. The new approach to behaviour with clear rules for children to follow has made a difference. Staff are vigilant and implement the policy consistently. They are quick to intervene appropriately on the rare occasions when children display anti-social behaviour. Children (and their parents and carers) know and understand the rules. Children play together well and safely. They learn share and take turns. New children settle in very quickly because they are following the positive behaviours shown by those who have attended the nursery for longer. The good relationships that exist between staff and children promote positive behaviour and conduct. Children are developing better learning habits and attitudes through some of the activities on offer.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and governors are addressing the key issues from the previous inspection determinedly. Expectations have been raised successfully among most staff that children come to the nursery to learn as well as other children of the same ages nationally. Leaders and managers, including governors, are benefiting from the new approach to gathering information about children's learning and progress. This is very new and to date, only one set of data is available. Even so, staff are already using it to identify where children are falling behind so that they can make informed decisions about the school's priorities.

The school's capacity to make accurate judgements about how well it is progressing towards its goal of removal from special measures has improved. This is because leaders are checking the quality of teaching and learning with increased rigour. Senior leaders are sensibly tapping into the expertise from professionals from outside the school to help them to check that their judgements are accurate. Staff are taking the opportunity to make visits to providers with a proven track record in good and outstanding Early Years' practice. The nursery is learning from others and this contributes to the sea change in its culture with increasing ambition to be as good as the rest. Leaders and managers acknowledge that there is more work to do to achieve this but the journey has begun and the nursery is moving forward. The latest action plan is a vast improvement on the last and is useful as a tool to secure improvement and avoid slippage. To ensure that staff do not lose sight of the end goals it is important to emphasise against each action the difference it will make to children's learning.

Governors have acted upon recommendations following an external review of governance. They have signed up for training and regular visits to look at children's learning in the nursery and have learnt how to interpret data. Meetings are frequent and well attended. A new governor with significant expertise in Early Years education is extending the range of skills that all governors provide. The governing

body is benefiting from her ability to put the statutory responsibilities and duties required of all governing bodies in the context of young children's education.

External support

The local authority is providing a level of support that is appropriate to the nursery's needs. It has addressed weaknesses in its initial statement of action by changing the format and has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that it is fit for purpose. A full review of the school's work towards the end of the summer term will inform the level of support provided in the next school year. The school improvement adviser visits fortnightly to check on the school's progress. Other advisers and/or consultants are supporting staff in improving teaching and learning. The local authority has put the nursery in touch with a range of other good and outstanding providers to share good practice. The Human Resources team are supporting the nursery in resolving some sensitive staffing issues. The health and safety department team has carried out a full health and safety check and is assisting governors in setting up robust systems for tackling the long list of jobs to do, which is diminishing steadily. The local authority provides a range of training for governors.