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3 March 2014

Mrs Nicola Burton  
Acting Headteacher  
Howard Street Nursery School and Day Care Nursery  
Howard Street  
Rochdale  
Lancashire  
OL12 0PP

Dear Nicola Burton

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Howard Street Nursery School and Day Care Nursery, Rochdale**

Following my visit to the Nursery on 3 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for your help and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the Nursery since the recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the Nursery was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2013. This visit was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

You and the governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The Nursery should take further action to:

- ensure that the improvement plan has clear dates for the completion of action, precise success criteria and a specified timeline for the production of evaluation data and reports to provide the governing body with up-to-date information
- heighten the effectiveness of governance by conducting a review of current practice, including an audit of skills, to identify aspects for improvement
- consider appointing a small group of governors to take prime responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the impact of action taken. .

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I held a joint meeting with you, the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, two other governors, a school improvement officer from the

local authority and the headteacher of a local primary school who has been asked to support and mentor you. We discussed the current situation and action taken to date. The improvement plan and local authority support plan were evaluated.

### **Context**

The team leader of the Day Care Nursery has been absent for some time. You have reorganised the staffing to ensure a better balance of experience in both the Day Care section and main nursery. The local authority is currently carrying out a review of early years provision. You remain in a position of acting headship.

### **Main findings**

Members of the governing body found it hard to accept the finding that the Nursery requires improvement but are supportive and, as one said, 'ready to move forward'. You had already compiled an improvement plan for 2013-14 which focused on many of the aspects for improvement identified in the inspection of December 2013. You have amended the plan but there is scope to tighten it further, especially in specifying dates by which action will be completed and evaluated. Although the success criteria echo the areas for improvement, those related to teaching and learning are too imprecise; it is not clear what will count as 'improvement' or what will count as 'impact on children's learning and development'. It is vital that all staff have a clear understanding of the quality of provision and of their own practice expected by the end of the summer and autumn terms.

Your comments on the current situation, awareness of possible hurdles and what needs to be done in the short and longer term show a realistic and insightful stance. In the short time since your appointment, it is clear that you have coped with and handled effectively complex issues related to staffing, performance management and professional development and have initiated changes in working to make better use of staff's expertise and experience. You are discussing with staff your expectations of their leadership, teaching and support roles. You have also linked the focus of observations of teaching and learning to the content of professional development sessions – a valuable step in heightening expectations of the quality of practice.

A member of the advisory staff from the local authority has led training in the use of effective questioning and in the development of mathematics, the focus for this term. You are conscious of the need not to introduce too many elements too soon and to share existing effective practice within the overall team. Nevertheless, there is a pressing need for governors and all staff to gain an understanding of how early years practice has moved on in recent years, and what outstanding provision now looks like. Your intention to visit other schools and to draw on examples of effective practice, such as those on the Ofsted website, is a useful part of the action planned.

Our joint meeting was particularly useful in highlighting that there are key areas where input from governors and external guidance can be equally productive, such

as the moderation of assessment and review of the use of learning journals to record children's progress. The accuracy of assessment and the development of staff's awareness of how to use information from assessment to plan the next steps in learning for individual children are essential building blocks if the quality of learning is to improve. It was reassuring that this and many of the points raised by me had already been discussed in your recent meeting with the primary headteacher and you had agreed ways forward.

**External support**

The local authority has compiled a bespoke comprehensive support plan to raise the quality of teaching and learning and to improve leadership and management. The plan outlines how the local authority will facilitate mentoring and training. It will also carry out regular monitoring of the impact of action and support, including the impact of the partnership set up between you and an experienced primary headteacher. An early years specialist has already led some training for all staff and given practical suggestions in the use of space and resources. It is unfortunate that the local authority has not been able to bring the school's website into operation.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and to the Director of Children's Services for Rochdale.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**