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6 March 2014

Ms Jennie Kennedy  
Headteacher  
Ditton Nursery School  
Dundalk Road  
Widnes  
Cheshire  
WA8 8DF

Dear Ms Kennedy

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Ditton Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 4 and 5 March 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 and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

This was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 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 school may 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 Strategic Director of Children and Enterprise for Halton.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2013**

- Improve the quality of teaching and children's achievement by working with all staff to make sure they:
  - ask questions that can be answered in different ways and ensure that these encourage children to participate in an activity
  - encourage children to think by talking to them about what they understand, know, are finding out or trying to do
  - physically get down to children's eye level in order to better involve them in play and investigation
  - review how the daily routine can best promote good learning,
  - including opportunities for staff to meet daily with their allocated children for a short group time
  - understand the characteristics of effective learning as described in the Early Years Foundation Stage framework
  - observe teaching and learning in an outstanding nursery school.
  
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
  - ensuring that leaders listen to, consult and involve staff more in the development of the school
  - gathering feedback from staff about the work of the school and making sure staff understand decisions that are made
  - improving formal observations of the work of teachers and nursery nurses by giving them clear, precise and challenging feedback about how to improve their teaching and children's learning and then checking that improvements are made
  - setting goals for teachers and nursery nurses that are clearly linked to learning and teaching and are specific, measurable and achievable
  - ensuring that sufficient time during staff training and leadership meetings is spent discussing how to improve teaching and learning and deepening understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework
  - establishing links with outstanding nursery schools to support leaders in improving the work of Ditton Nursery School
  - ensuring that children in both classrooms benefit from being taught for equal amounts of time by a qualified teacher
  - ensuring that leaders and the governing body understand what progress to expect of three- and four-year-olds
  - evaluate the progress made by different groups of children during their time at the school.
  
- Improve the governing body's knowledge of the nursery's work, its strengths and weaknesses so that they hold leaders closely to account for their performance
  
- Improve children's behaviour by ensuring that all staff:
  - supervise children well when they move around the school and ensure that

- children do not run around indoors
- are given clear guidance about how to support children to behave well.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 March 2014.**

### **Evidence**

I observed teaching in the morning and afternoon sessions with the headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I met with three representatives of the governing body and the School Improvement Partner. I had a discussion with four parents and looked at the 38 responses to the school's questionnaire. I met with two representatives of Halton local authority.

### **Context**

One of the two teachers has been absent for a few weeks so her groups are being covered by a supply teacher. At the time of my last inspection a teaching assistant was absent with long-term illness and she was also absent for this inspection.

### **Achievement of children at the school**

Children's achievement is improving quickly because of better teaching. Around a third of children have made good progress in their listening and speaking skills since September. This is because teachers ask them to use vocabulary and sentences to explain what they are doing in the different areas of the Nursery and set up activities that requires children to use key vocabulary with each other. An example of this was in a mathematics-based activity in which children used cubes, bricks and other non-standard equipment to measure against the size of the giant in 'Jack and the Beanstalk.' Children used language such as shorter, longer, more, less, nearly and taller to describe their measures compared to the giant. There is still a need, as I described in my last report, for all adults to maximise every opportunity to extend children's vocabulary, pronunciation and diction.

Close to a half of children have made good progress in their physical development particularly in their health and self-care. This is because all adults work hard to make children independent in, for example: taking tissues to blow their noses and prevent the spread of germs; taking paper towels to dry their hands after going to the toilet; and washing hands before and after taking snacks during the day. Teachers have taken action to make sure children are not aimlessly riding on bicycles and wheeled toys for the whole session. They now have well-designed activities that develop coordination, balance and handling skills, such as using a spade to dig and a mini rake to gather leaves and grass together in the garden area.

Children's self-confidence and ability to form relationships and manage their own feelings and behaviour are improving. Adults, for example, demonstrate how children should take turns in activities or in contributing in groups. As a result, children are better at listening and appreciating each child's contribution, they adjust their behaviour to listen to others and work well in small groups.

Children's knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) is improving. They are getting better at recognising the first sound in words and recognising some basic rhymes. In a phonics session, for example, children successfully recognised whether different words began with a 'b', 'c' or an 'f' sound and were able to sort the words by their initial sound. Children's writing is improving quickly. This is as a result of some focused training on mark making and early writing skills provided by the local authority. Children are making progress in writing letters of their names and having a go at writing simple signs, phrases and sentences. One boy, for example, successfully used water and a paintbrush to write some of the letters in his name while outside.

Children's knowledge of counting, numbers and of shapes and measures is also improving. They sing songs and rhymes which demonstrate what happens when one is added to a group or taken away, for example, five sticky currant buns and five sausages sizzling in a pan, then four, three, two, one and zero. They also are quickly picking up numbers and counting to 10. The teacher, for example, in one session successfully showed children how to count a number of beans from the story 'Jack and the Beanstalk' and then checked this by using a number line to count from zero. Both activities enabled children to link the number with the number of objects and the teacher's questioning made children think what would be the next number and how many more they would need to make 10.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching is improving. Part of this improvement is the restructured timetable which means each group of children is taught by a teacher for phonics and for mathematics during the week. This targeted teaching is proving effective in speeding up the progress that children make and staff are tracking children to make sure all have some quality teaching. After each teacher's input there are linked activities for children to complete. For example, a teacher taught a group about the story 'Jack and the Beanstalk' and then children chose activities that enabled them to apply what they had just learned. Some children chose to order pictures from the story to help them retell what happened; some chose to draw and label what could be on top of the beanstalk; some children chose to build a giant's castle out of construction blocks.

Across the Nursery, adults' interactions and conversations with children are better; they make sure they speak to children eye to eye and there is less focus on supervision and more focus on asking questions and teaching. There are still some improvements that need to be made so that adults maximise every chance they have to extend children's vocabulary, their speaking skills and their thinking. In one effective example the teacher asked a child what she was drawing on the top of the giant's beanstalk and instead of being happy with the child's response of 'eggs with spots' the teacher extended the child's vocabulary by introducing the word

'speckled'. However, in other situations adults failed to take the opportunity to ask children to explain their thinking, to use words, sounds or numbers they had just learned, or to extend their vocabulary and knowledge further.

All adults have a much better understanding of effective learning as laid out in the Early Years documentation. They redirect children better and think of different ways of involving children in the activities on offer. Teachers report on children's developing skills and knowledge and these are recorded in individual learning journals. The journals have improved since my last visit but there is still some way to go to become good. There are too many spelling errors and examples of incorrect punctuation and grammar. Although adults now identify the next steps for each child's progress and development these are not commented on in subsequent observations in the learning journals so it is difficult to track how much progress the child has made.

### **Behaviour and safety of children**

Children's behaviour continues to improve. As a result of the new timetable and structure for each session there is less opportunity for children to run around boisterously or aimlessly as identified a year ago when the school was inspected. In addition, teachers and adults talk through and demonstrate their expectations of behaviour to each other and to adults and supervise children's behaviour more. This did not stop, however, a couple of boys in one session sounding their excitement and opinion when blowing raspberries at me as I walked into the unit.

Quite a few children arrive late for the morning session which means they miss important key worker time or the start of the focused teaching session. Because of changes to the school day and pick-up arrangements, a greater proportion of children stay for the full session rather than leaving early. As a result, they learn more and make better progress.

Parents are rightly pleased with the changes to security to ensure children feel safe and secure. The bamboo screen, for example, shields children from public areas outside the school as well as protecting children from the wind and the sun.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Leadership is improving rapidly. The assistant headteacher, for example, has liaised with the local authority to introduce a new system of tracking how much progress children make across the year. The data are used effectively. Senior leaders noted that in one key worker's group, for example, children made less progress and knew less about the world. In another key worker group session time the children studied growth and examined an onion to locate roots and its outer skin. This practical session was enjoyed by the children and they made faster progress in the areas in which they needed to improve.

Teachers and adults have a greater say in the running of the Nursery and meet daily to discuss the progress and attainment of individual children as well as provision. As a result, changes are made more quickly and adults have a better knowledge and understanding of what each child needs to learn next.

The school is much more outward looking. Senior leaders seek out and use or visit other schools and expert practitioners. As a result, they are quickly picking up ideas about best practice and improving their own teaching or provision in the Nursery. On a visit to an outstanding school in Manchester, for example, the staff saw in action how technology could be used effectively to record children's work and their successes and how this could then generate electronically the next steps each child should take to make progress. This visit reflects the quality of training and the improvements to teaching that the school is now encouraging.

Governance has improved significantly. There has been an external review and governors have used this to change committee structures, to introduce a clearly written list of expectations for each governor and to review roles, responsibilities and each governor's skills. As a result, the governing body is better placed to challenge and support the school as it has the necessary skills and knowledge to help the school to improve. Having data which track pupils' progress has also improved governors' oversight of children's progress and the impact initiatives have had on improving children's learning. Governors are actively involved in the life of the school. The Chair of the Governing Body, for example, has constructed a sound board outside which children use to beat and sound out rhythms on pots and pans. As a result, children's understanding of media, sounds and rhythms have improved.

### **External support**

The local authority support has been highly effective. There are two main reasons for the rapid improvement of the school. The first is the work of the local authority which has given an impressive level of support helping the school to improve quickly. The local authority employed the School Improvement Partner who has given frequent help, support and practical advice. As a result, the learning environment indoors and outdoors continues to improve; the structure of the day allows teachers to track children and the progress they make; and the quality of teaching is getting better. Local authority officers on the governing body provide challenge, support, model good practice and commission other local authority services to intervene. The personnel department is helping the school with issues around long-term absence of staff and contracts. The officers commissioned support from the ICT (information and communication technology) team to re-cable the Nursery and install wi-fi. As a result, the school's website is in place and functioning and the Nursery has invested in hand-held tablet computers to develop children's technology skills. The second main reason for the improvement is the highly effective leadership of the headteacher, supported by local authority advice and guidance.