

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelmersdale

WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566 937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com

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Miss Anne Gunning
Headteacher
Millfield Community Nursery School
Bell Street
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR4 6JR

Dear Miss Gunning

Special measures monitoring inspection of Millfield Community Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 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 December 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders, members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. I observed the quality of teaching during one session and observed a staff meeting at the end of the school day. I checked the school's documentation including information in relation to accidents and incidents, risk assessments, attendance data, minutes of governing body meetings and leaders' records on evaluating the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the inspection in December 2013, one member of staff has retired and a new appointment has been made. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has just returned from long term absence and a member of support staff is currently absent. These posts have been covered by supply staff. Two extra local authority governors have been appointed to the governing body and there are currently vacancies for one parent governor and one community governor.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, and the governing body, have begun to address the points for improvement identified in the last inspection. You have produced a useful evaluation of progress towards addressing the key issues based on your own monitoring. This shows you have taken prompt action to reduce the number of incidents and accidents which occur by analysing the information you record and taking steps to address any concerns raised. You are closely monitoring children's attendance and working hard to engage parents to ensure their children attend school regularly. As a result, rates of attendance are slowly beginning to improve.

While there is a school improvement plan which incorporates some of the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection, it has not been amended to include all the areas the school should focus on. Consequently, the plan is not effective as a tool to drive improvement forward rapidly. The plan does not identify what precisely needs to be done to address all the priorities or how progress towards them will be measured.

You have introduced a new tracking system to gather assessment information about children's achievement. This is beginning to be used more effectively by staff to identify 'next steps' in children's learning and to assess the progress of different groups of children more effectively. Learning journals are beginning to be improved to record children's achievements more precisely. While staff meetings held at the end of the day provide a useful opportunity for adults to share information on children's achievements, they are not used effectively to plan the 'next steps' in children's learning. You, and the governors, have high expectations of the role of key workers and the contribution they should be making to improving children's learning. However, there is still a way to go in ensuring all adults carry out their roles and responsibilities in a consistent and effective manner. In the teaching observed during the visit, adults did not always ask probing questions to move children on in their learning and opportunities to develop children's skills and knowledge were missed. Local authority advisers are helping you to check that leaders' judgements about

learning and teaching are accurate. This is essential to ensure judgements are not overgenerous.

The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator has set up more effective systems to identify, and check on the progress of, disabled children and those with special educational needs. This is helping all staff to increase their awareness of how best to support these children and better meet their needs.

With the support of the local authority, two new governors with educational backgrounds have been appointed to help strengthen the governing body. Governors are beginning to have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and are determined that any weaknesses will be addressed. They are aware they need to challenge the school more robustly in order to ensure that it improves. An external review of governance is planned.

The local authority's statement of action identifies clear milestones and targets by which progress can be measured and the persons responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress. It has been specifically designed to ensure there is intensive support for leaders and staff early in the improvement process and it is being regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be effective. The local authority is holding half-termly challenge meetings to hold leaders to account and ensure progress is being made on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

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

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

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 Executive Director of People's Services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector