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5 December 2014

Ms Catherine Barnett  
Acting Headteacher  
Millfield Nursery School  
Bell Street  
Sunderland  
Tyne and Wear  
SR4 6JR

Dear Ms Barnett

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

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 December 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 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 Executive Director of People's Services for Sunderland.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- As a matter of urgency, take steps to reduce the number of accidents by ensuring that incidents are recorded accurately and action is taken to avoid reoccurrence.
- Improve the quality of teaching and children's achievement so that they are at least good by:
  - ensuring that children's development is assessed and recorded accurately to identify next steps of learning that build upon children's knowledge and skills
  - planning activities to meet the needs of the different groups of children
  - putting into place procedures for identifying children's special educational needs and establishing the correct programmes of support
  - providing opportunities for staff to observe teaching and learning in an outstanding nursery school and reflect on their own teaching through coaching and mentoring.
- Improve children's attendance by:
  - analysing attendance rates, especially among children who attend afternoon sessions
  - working more closely with parents to establish better attendance routines.
- Improve the effectiveness of the leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that leaders listen to, consult and involve staff more in the development of the school through gathering feedback from staff about the work of the school and making sure staff understand decisions that are made
  - ensuring teaching and learning are monitored more rigorously and that feedback to staff about how to improve their teaching and children's learning is clear
  - ensuring that sufficient time during staff training and leadership meetings is spent discussing how to improve teaching and learning and evaluating the impact of training provided on teaching and learning
  - establishing links with outstanding nursery schools to support leaders in improving the work of Millfield Community Nursery School
  - ensuring that leaders and the governing body understand what progress to expect of three- and four-year-olds and that they evaluate the progress made by different groups of children during their time at the school
  - improving the governing body's knowledge of the nursery's work, its strengths and weaknesses so they can hold leaders to account for their performance
  - undertaking an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3 to 4 December 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents including minutes of governing body meetings, school policies, children's learning journals and adults' planning and met with the seconded headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, the lead support and intervention officer for vulnerable groups and the support and intervention officer for early years from the local authority, the National Leader of Governance who carried out the review of governance and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). A telephone discussion was also held with a community support worker. The inspector also observed several teaching sessions both indoors and outdoors, including one jointly with the seconded headteacher and the early years support and intervention officer, who is also providing leadership and support for the school.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection in July 2014, the part-time supporting headteacher returned to her school in September 2014 and another supporting headteacher led the school on a part-time basis until the end of October 2014. A seconded headteacher took up her post on 4 November 2014 on a full-time basis. The early years lead teacher resigned after a period of absence and a temporary teacher who was covering this role left the school. Another supply teacher is currently covering this post. The SENCo has now been appointed to this role permanently for two days per week. One teaching assistant left at the end of the summer term and another teaching assistant is temporarily covering a post in the daycare setting. A reconstitution of the governing body has taken place and a new parent governor has been appointed.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Children's skills, knowledge and understanding were assessed within the first few weeks of starting the nursery in September 2014, using the descriptors of what is expected of children of their age. This has established that most children enter the nursery at levels below those typical of children of their age. However, new leaders noticed that previous assessments for children who were in the nursery last academic year were not fully accurate and have therefore assessed all of these children again to establish a more accurate baseline from which to measure their recent progress. Subsequent assessments will be made by the end of this term.

It is clear, however, that children's achievement is beginning to improve because the quality of teaching is improving. Children are now much more confident in planning what they are going to do during free choice sessions. They carry out their chosen activities with perseverance and now more able to comment upon what they have

done and learned during 'recall' time. Their skills in speaking and listening are improving as staff create more opportunities for children to discuss their views and interests. Adults are asking children more open questions, although on occasions, these could be more probing to promote children's ability to think more critically and creatively. Assessments have identified that children's early mathematical skills are weaker than other areas of learning. Consequently, staff are taking every opportunity to promote these skills. For example, during snack time, children were able to count how many pieces of fruit and glasses of milk were on the table and then they counted the number of children to make sure there was enough for everyone. In another group, children readily joined in with counting songs and rhymes, such as 'Five Currant Buns', and were able to identify how many would be left each time one was taken away.

Children who are disabled or who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language are fully included in all the nursery has to offer. They receive specific, targeted support from specialist staff which is enabling them to improve their progress. At present, girls are outperforming boys in several areas of learning, so staff are introducing topics, such as 'Superheroes'. This is encouraging more boys to participate, particularly in opportunities for reading and mark making, enabling them to make better progress in these areas than before.

### **The quality of teaching**

Staff are now beginning to use assessment information more carefully to identify and plan for 'next steps' in children's learning. This is helping to move children's learning on in a more systematic way. Adults' planning is not as detailed as it could be in identifying exactly what children are expected to learn as opposed to what they are going to do. However, useful evaluations of what children have achieved are recorded and discussed by staff so that any areas of underachievement can be followed up. There are now more opportunities, indoors and outdoors, to engage children in mark-making activities. Some adults are ensuring that children develop a correct pencil grip but this is not always the case.

There is now more structure in the nursery sessions and children know the daily routines, particularly in respect of planning their chosen activities and reporting back later in the session to the rest of their group. Routines, such as snack time, are used for valuable learning opportunities and 'tidy up' time is now conducted in a much more efficient manner. This is enabling children to take responsibility for carrying out the tasks with greater independence. There is now a calmer, more purposeful atmosphere in the nursery and children are able to concentrate and persevere more readily with tasks, without being distracted. Children are becoming more aware of how to lead healthy lifestyles as this is being reinforced by staff. For example, children indicated that 'vegetables are healthy' and in respect of Baby Jesus, commented that 'vegetables help the baby to grow'. Some adults are able to fire children's imaginations, for example, one child commented that he had 'made a

rocket and fire came out' and that 'it landed on the moon'. However, opportunities for creativity and for children to explore and be imaginative were not as prevalent on this monitoring inspection as at the time of the last one. Although the way in which achievements are recorded in children's learning journals is improving, there is still further work for staff to do to ensure these are of high quality. Nevertheless, these are accessible to children and their parents and some children are keen to share them with adults.

Children are now benefiting more from engaging in first-hand experiences, for example, when learning about 'Barry' the giant snail, they were fascinated by touching his shell and stroking him very gently. They then made their own snails to be companions for Barry. Valuable discussion took place as children commented on what the snail was doing and discussed how he might be feeling. While there are photographs of children engaged in a range of activities displayed in the nursery, the learning environment is not as vibrant and interactive as it could be in order to engage and stimulate children's interest.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Children's behaviour is improving and they are now engaging in activities in a more purposeful manner. This is because adults have higher expectations and are providing more effective role models showing children how to conduct themselves sensibly. For example, when adults speak quietly and calmly, this is reflected in the children's behaviour and the way in which they speak to each other. There is now better cooperation between children. They are more considerate in sharing toys and equipment and learning to take turns. Children are settled and confident and readily approach adults if they have a concern or need help. Attendance is slowly improving because the school business manager is vigilant in following up the reasons for absence. However, in most cases this is due to genuine illnesses.

Staff are much more aware of possible dangers and are more vigilant in ensuring children's health and safety, for example, discussing with them what might happen if they run around indoors. Because staff have ensured there is a calmer atmosphere, the number of incidents and accidents has greatly reduced since the time of the inspection. Any incidents which do occur are analysed carefully by the business manager to ascertain when and where incidents are happening. Any concerns are addressed promptly.

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

There has been significant turbulence in the leadership of the school with three headteachers having been appointed on a temporary basis to cover the absence of the substantive headteacher. However, each has contributed to improvements in the school and they have shared information with one another to help ensure a smoother progression. The local authority's early years support and intervention

officer has provided regular, weekly leadership and support on a part-time basis and staff have benefited from her expertise in enabling them to improve their practice. The current seconded headteacher is keen to involve staff in making decisions on ways to improve the school but acknowledges that there are some aspects which need to be implemented on a 'non-negotiable' basis so the pace of improvement can be accelerated further. A staff meeting is held each day to facilitate staff training on different aspects and to improve practice. There are more opportunities for staff to visit other schools, including those of the previous supporting headteachers, in order to observe good or outstanding practice, and this is also having an impact on improving their own practice.

Performance management arrangements have been reviewed and staff are beginning to be held more accountable for children's achievement. Governors have been involved in a review of governance and are currently awaiting the report from the National Leader of Governance. They have also conducted a skills audit. They are beginning to challenge the school leaders more as shown in the minutes of governing body meetings. They are also beginning to use the expertise of members of the governing body in a more efficient and effective way. They are now more aware of the progress that children are making and have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. Monitoring visits have included checking on incidents and accidents, checking safeguarding arrangements and discussions have been held with the SENCo to ascertain if policies and new procedures are being fully implemented so the children with special educational needs make the best progress they can. The current seconded headteacher, along with a parent governor, is taking important steps to engage parents and carers more in the work of the school, through developing a project with a community support worker. The seconded headteacher is ensuring she is available to parents at the beginning and end of every session so that they can discuss any concerns with her.

## **External support**

The local authority has provided valuable input to the school, particularly the lead support and intervention officer for vulnerable groups who has brokered part-time support from the headteachers of Oxclose Nursery School and Hylton Redhouse Nursery School to lead the school in the absence of the headteacher. She has also provided support and challenge to leaders through the regular headteacher challenge meetings. The early years support and intervention officer has also provided high quality support to the school by training staff to help improve their practice. The current acting headteacher, seconded from Hetton Lyons Primary School, has valued the input from an external safeguarding provider to ensure policies and procedures are fully in place in order to ensure children are kept safe. The local authority support and intervention officer for special educational needs has provided training for the SENCo to help her to implement the new requirements and enable her to carry out her role more effectively to ensure children receive the specific help they need. The local authority support and intervention officer for

English as an additional language has provided training for staff to ensure they meet the needs of children who speak English as an additional language more effectively.