

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 566937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com



13 March 2015

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

Dear Miss Barnett

Special measures monitoring inspection of Millfield Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 March 2015, 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 fourth 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 Director of Children'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 fourth monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 March 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with and observed the quality of teaching and learning in the Nursery jointly with the acting headteacher and the Early Years Foundation Stage Support and Intervention Officer from the local authority. The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the special educational needs coordinator, the temporary teacher, the acting Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. The inspector held a telephone conversation with a senior representative of the local authority, had brief discussions with individual staff and met with a small group of parents.

Context

The substantive headteacher resigned in January 2015 and the acting headteacher, who was temporarily in post at the last visit, has had her contract renewed until the end of the summer term. The supply teacher in the nursery has also been appointed on a temporary basis until the end of the summer term. The Chair of the Governing Body stood down from this role, but remains on the governing body, and the vice-chair is currently covering this role until a new Chair of the Governing Body is appointed. A new governor, with a background in education, has been appointed and there remain two vacancies.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since her appointment, the acting headteacher has taken successful steps to review the systems for tracking and collecting data on children's achievements and to check that this information is more accurate. However, these systems are not yet fully embedded. Assessments of children's achievement are now being completed on a half-termly basis. The most recent analysis of data showed that while children have made some better progress, girls outperformed boys. Consequently, two staff received training on how to improve boys' achievement in the early years. They are keen to share the strategies they learned with other staff and plan to do so at the next staff meeting. Through regular meetings, leaders have improved the accountability of staff for children's progress in their key worker groups. Any children who are underachieving are quickly identified and targeted work is provided to help them improve. For example, staff are now taking every opportunity to promote children's speaking skills throughout the day and develop appropriate mathematical language, such as discussing whether items are 'bigger than' or 'smaller than' other objects. Staff are also making the most of opportunities to improve children's learning about their local community. Local councillors are including the children and their parents in making decisions about improvements to the local park and a police officer regularly visits the school in order to build up relationships with the children.

Leaders have also identified that there are gaps between the achievement of children who speak English as an additional language and their classmates. By taking steps such as ensuring that there are lots of visual clues to help children understand, these gaps are beginning to close. Similarly, weaknesses in some children's fine motor skills are being addressed through a specific activity to help children develop a 'pincer grip' so that they learn how to hold a pencil correctly. There remains work to be done in this area to help children improve further. Most children who have special educational needs are now meeting or exceeding the targets set for them. Their needs are identified very early and therefore children quickly receive the help and support they need. Consequently, these children are making better progress.

The quality of teaching

While there have been improvements in the quality of teaching, not all staff are responding to guidance from leaders rapidly enough. Leaders are providing training on aspects of teaching and holding frequent staff meetings to discuss how teaching can improve. There are now specific times identified in each session for the development of children's early literacy and numeracy skills and to promote their physical development, based on leaders' analysis of data. However, not all staff are carrying out sufficient observations to ensure that they have evidence to support their assessments of children's achievements. Although they refer to prior learning when talking to children, not all adults are confident enough in identifying the precise 'next steps' to move children further on in their learning. Adults do not consistently gather and share information on children's achievements, often working in isolation, particularly during child-initiated sessions. Consequently, children, particularly boys, are not making as much progress as they could.

Adult's interaction with children is improving and they are now teaching children appropriate skills and using specific vocabulary, such as discussing 'more than' or 'less than' and ensuring that children understand positional language such as 'in front', 'behind', 'up' and 'down'. Where children have specific difficulties, for example with speech and language or comprehension skills, there are now targeted activities to help them improve through a language intervention programme of work. This work is being implemented successfully by adults and is helping these children improve their communication skills. Children now enjoy sharing books with adults and listen with interest when adults read with expression in their voices and when they can join in. For example in one small group, children were quick to identify rhyming words such as 'duck', 'truck' and 'muck' and could anticipate other rhyming words when the story was read to them. In another activity, children were planting small plants in pots and knew that they needed light and water to grow. One child commented that the roots looked like 'Spiderman's web'. The adult then took the children to the raised flower beds to look at and discuss those plants and then into the wildlife garden where children were keen to identify the different types of plants and flowers. The interaction with children on these occasions was of high quality, but this better-practice is not always readily shared among other adults.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Children's behaviour is improving as specific work is being carried out to encourage them to be kind to one another, take turns and share equipment. Children were observed helping one another to put on and fasten their coats and one child was seen to be helping another to fill a bucket of water so their toy crocodile could have a swim. There are better opportunities for children to talk about their feelings with their key workers and for example, through discussions at story time when they are able to talk about how the characters in the books may be feeling. However, when teaching does not interest or engage them, children become restless and do not concentrate on the activity being shared. Children are more aware of how to keep themselves safe, for example, telling other children not to climb on a chair in case they fall off. In one snack time session, children were discussing the use of mobile telephones and computer technology and the key worker took the opportunity to discuss 'e-safety' with the children. Children's understanding of routines has improved; they now tell staff it is 'tidy up' time or 'snack' time. The school business manager continues to analyse and keep records of any accidents or incidents. Records show these have greatly reduced and any incidents which have occurred have been of a very minor nature. The school's own survey of parental views indicates that all parents who responded said their child was happy and that they were kept safe. Attendance is improving but is still not as good as it could be. Staff are using a range of strategies to encourage children to come to school regularly, including 'Spike' (the mascot). Detailed letters have now been sent to parents which use a 'traffic lights' system, to explain the impact on their child's education, if they do not bring their children to school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There has been significant turbulence in leadership and management since the last inspection and, as a result, there have been changes in policies and procedures. The current acting headteacher is taking appropriate steps to improve the quality of teaching and to ensure that outcomes for children improve. However, not all staff are responding as well as they could and not all are aware that progress needs to be very rapid. The acting headteacher has ensured that she consults and involves staff in decision-making and she explains carefully to them why the changes are being made to enable the outcomes to be better for children. Each adult, when spoken to by the inspector, acknowledged that the acting headteacher is approachable and is explaining developments well. They acknowledge there are better opportunities for training, particularly when working with staff from other nursery schools, and they now have opportunities to share what they have learnt with others. The acting headteacher regularly monitors the quality of teaching and provides effective feedback to staff on how they can improve. This is evident from the improvements in planning over time, although there is still further work to be done in this area. The temporary teacher shares the headteacher's vision and is working more effectively to

support staff to improve. The special educational needs coordinator has a good understanding of the needs of the children with special educational needs and outcomes are improving for these children because she is able to help staff to implement suitable strategies to support them. Leaders have taken very successful steps to improve communications with parents. The survey of parents' views and the parents spoken to were very positive about improvements in the school. They commented that the acting headteacher was accessible at the beginning and end of each session and was approachable so that they could share any concerns. They particularly enjoyed participating in a 'Bedtime Stories' session which staff, parents and children joined in.

Governors have responded positively to the recommendations in the external review of governance. The Chair of the Governing Body has stood down because of her own work commitments, but remains on the governing body. Governors have now begun to produce their own action plan and have established small working parties of governors who are beginning to look at aspects of the school's work in more detail. There are link governors for specific aspects, such as safeguarding or special educational needs. These governors meet with staff and leaders to discuss developments and the former Chair of the Governing Body uses her expertise to check on children's progress with leaders and attend the progress meetings with staff. The school improvement plan has been revised and identifies the right priorities, although criteria by which success can be measured are not always quite precise enough. The school website has improved significantly, but some policies currently there are out of date and as yet, there is insufficient information about the school's curriculum. Evidence in the minutes of governing body meetings shows that governors are asking more challenging questions of leaders and staff and are holding them to account more effectively. They are fully aware that all staff need to understand that the improvement in the school needs to be more rapid.

External support

The support and guidance from the local authority continues to be effective. Support and intervention officers for the early years, special educational needs and for English as an additional language have provided useful training for staff and this is beginning to help staff to improve their skills in these areas. The links with Pennywell Nursery School, Oxclose Nursery School and Hylton Red House Nursery School are still in place and these provide opportunities for staff to check that assessments on children's learning are more accurate. A new link has been developed with Houghton Community Nursery and the headteacher of this school has been appointed to the governing body.