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Mrs Elaine Dupree
Headteacher
Featherstone Nursery School
29 Highcroft Road
Erdington
Birmingham
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Dear Mrs Dupree

Short inspection of Featherstone Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 13 January 2016 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your school was judged to be good in November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, the deputy headteacher, teachers and teaching assistants have high aspirations for the children. Together you make sure that when children leave the Nursery they are well prepared for the next phase of their education and are keen to learn.

The school offers a warm welcome to parents, children and visitors. Displays around the school and projects such as, 'friends around the world' celebrate the diverse nature of the school community. Parents and their children are regularly encouraged to share traditional stories, games and foods from different countries with each other.

The school is on the same site as Featherstone Children's Centre. The school's headteacher and governing body oversee the work of both the school and the centre. Parents and children who attend the school are able to access the activities and services on offer at the children's centre.

Staff work well with parents to ensure that children settle quickly when they join Featherstone Nursery. One parent, commented, 'My child is well looked after and is very comfortable here.' Another added, 'Staff are helping to build my child's confidence.'

You have effectively addressed most of the areas identified for improvement at the previous Ofsted inspection. Staff ensure that the children understand what they need to do to complete their activities successfully. Teachers and teaching assistants are clear about the features of outstanding teaching because this information is included in the school's teaching and learning policy. Senior leaders have refined the way in which they store information across the school and children's centre. In order to ensure confidentiality, incident records, such as those for behaviour in the children's centre and nursery, are kept separately. Governors are able to check the impact of the actions within the school's improvement plan more carefully than in the past because the school's plan contains measurable targets.

School leaders have considerably strengthened the system for collating information about children's achievements. Staff meticulously record what children know, understand and can do and supplement their notes with photographs of children working and examples of children's completed work. Parents are able to access information about their children's progress from their home computers. They can review what staff have written, add their own comments, and upload videos and photographs of their children learning new skills at home. In one instance, a grandmother shared with staff a video of her granddaughter learning to sew her name. The young girl was clearly proud of her sewing.

You fully acknowledge that the activities that staff plan for the most-able children do not always provide them with sufficient challenge. During our visits to classes we noted that staff sometimes missed the opportunity to further extend the learning of the most able. This prevented the most-able children from making accelerated progress. Your plans for helping staff to improve this aspect of their work are appropriate.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff place a strong emphasis on keeping children safe. The parents that I spoke with commended this aspect of the school's work. Children are effectively taught to use equipment in the classrooms and in the outside areas with care. They learn how to cross the road and to keep safe at home.

Regular workshops for parents and information on the school website is informative and stresses the importance of keeping children safe in various settings including at home. The storage of medicines, keeping hot hair straighteners out of the reach of children, and restricting access to inappropriate content on the internet are recent examples of topics highlighted by school staff with parents.

Governors make sure that the school procedures and policies for safeguarding are up to date and reflect the latest statutory guidance. Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that concerns are reported quickly and appropriate action taken. There are clear procedures in place for the use of the internet, cameras and mobile phones on the school premises.

Inspection findings

- You and the deputy headteacher make a strong team. Together, you have successfully created an ethos where staff and governors share your high expectation of children. You are committed to working with parents, members of the community and local schools to help children make good progress.
- Leaders and staff are open to external scrutiny. Staff willingly share effective practice, learn from each other and seek support from other schools. Last academic year you worked with headteachers from four other schools to review the effectiveness of each other's work. The findings of the review have been acted on and they have contributed to improvements in teaching and children's learning.
- Leaders' and governors' evaluations of the school's work are accurate. The school improvement plan correctly identifies the aspects of the school's work that could be improved further. The plan does not make clear who will check the difference that the actions within the plan are making to children's achievement and teaching. Nor does it state how often these checks will take place.
- Staff are effectively held to account for their impact on children's learning. Appropriate training opportunities enable staff to refine the way in which they work. You take appropriate and swift action once weaknesses are identified.
- The deputy headteacher keeps a careful check on the achievement of different groups of children. This information is used well to provide children with the support they need. At the start of last academic year, the school's analysis of this information showed that boys were achieving less well than girls. Staff adjusted their planned activities to ensure they interested both boys and girls. By the end of the year, boys were making similar progress to girls. During this inspection, boys and girls were equally engaged in the available activities. One group was particularly enjoying talking about and creating its own superheroes.
- Children of all ages behave well. They listen carefully to instructions, share equipment and are polite to each other and adults. The children are keen, curious and imaginative learners. They happily take on different personas. In the 'mud kitchen' for instance, children were taking their role of 'chef' seriously. They made sure that the cakes were baked to perfection and that 'customers' were reminded to handle hot food with care.
- Staff make effective use of the school's dedicated 'forest school' area and visits to a local park. The activities that staff plan help children to learn how to solve problems and cooperate with others. During one visit to the park, the children worked successfully in small groups to build the strongest dam across a stream using natural materials.

- While working with groups of children, staff ask a wide range of questions in order to find out what children know and to encourage children to talk about their learning. However, staff do not always give individual children enough time to respond or encourage children to give extended responses. This limits the development of children’s vocabulary and conversational skills.
- All staff who completed the staff questionnaire and who spoke with me stated that they were proud to be a member of this school. The staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire either agreed, or strongly agreed, that the school is well led and managed. Teachers and teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to improvements in the school by leading on projects. Individual staff have, for instance, produced helpful guidance for their colleagues on developing children’s writing skills, making effective use of the ‘forest school’ area and how to use electronic applications to support children with specific learning needs. During my meeting with staff, they raised a few concerns relating to the infrequency of verbal feedback from senior leaders about their work and insufficient time to complete their projects. These concerns were shared with senior leaders. Senior leaders intend to meet with staff in order to discuss and resolve their concerns.
- Governors have the skills required to provide senior leaders with suitable support and challenge. Senior leaders ensure that governors are fully aware of the progress children make. This information enables governors to ask relevant questions about strengths, and the actions being taken in response to any relative weaknesses. Governors are actively involved in agreeing the school’s priorities for improvement. They also discuss with staff the use of the early years pupil premium funding – the additional funding for children known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after. Next term, they intend to produce a formal report on the impact of this funding on children’s learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- staff across the nursery provide the most-able pupils with activities that challenge and extend their learning
- staff make sure that there are sufficient opportunities for children to develop their vocabulary and extend their conversational skills
- the school improvement plan states who will monitor the work of the school, who will check the effectiveness of the actions taken and how often.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the vice-chair of the governing body, one teacher and five teaching assistants. I spoke informally to parents and children. I also met with the headteacher who led the review of the school's work last academic year. The deputy headteacher joined me on brief visits to lessons to observe children as they learned. At the time of this inspection, one teacher was absent due to ill health.

I reviewed a range of documentation including records relating to keeping children safe, children's achievement, the quality of teaching and minutes from governing body meetings. I took account of seven responses to the Ofsted staff inspection questionnaire and 16 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.