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Ms Dawn Kelly
Headteacher
Valley Nursery School
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Dear Ms Kelly

Short inspection of Valley Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 1 October 2015 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 the school was judged to be outstanding in March 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You have successfully created a school of high expectations where there is no hint of complacency or excuse. You and the deputy headteacher are relentless in your drive for continued improvement. The outstanding quality of education in the school has been maintained and developed further since the last inspection. You took speedy action to tackle the single area for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You introduced a systematic and developmental approach to teaching early reading skills, in particular phonics, the sounds letters make. Effective staff training enabled the children to quickly learn, practise and develop their new reading skills. All children now benefit from this approach; the range of children's knowledge and their rates of progress are impressive.

In September 2014, you extended the provision at Valley Nursery School to accommodate 72 two-year-old children who previously attended a local children's centre. The size of the school has increased significantly. You remain adamant that the children receive only the highest-quality experience of learning and care, and they continue to be at the heart of the school's work.

You and the deputy headteacher ensure that children experience an exciting but relevant range of activities, experiences and resources. The exceptionally well-organised learning areas guarantee that every available space is used to the best advantage. Classrooms and outdoor areas are inviting and inspire purposeful

investigation, creative play and exploration. The furniture, activities and equipment have been well chosen to ensure their suitability for the different needs of two- to four-year-old children.

Safeguarding is effective.

Children's safety is central to the school's work. The secure premises and checks on visitors' identity effectively limit the extent to which people can enter the school building or play areas. Vigilant checks are made of newly recruited staff and no volunteers are allowed to work unsupervised with children. Concerns are quickly and appropriately reported, investigated and kept under review. Full use is made of the available agencies so that, where necessary, correct actions are followed through.

Leaders have established clear rules regarding the use of mobile phones and cameras. Staff fully understand the restrictions and remain acutely aware of their duties in protecting all children. Adults are increasingly aware of the indications of extremism and radicalisation, and a further programme of training is already planned.

Governors ensure that the school's safeguarding and child protection policies are regularly reviewed and reflect statutory responsibilities and guidance.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have an accurate and uncompromising understanding of the relative strengths and areas for development. Leaders' planned improvements are focused sharply on children's learning. Your strong commitment to children's successful progress is communicated clearly and expected of all staff. Leaders carefully track children's progress and quickly identify when learning falters or accelerates. Leaders check closely and frequently that planned learning moves children on and takes full account of their needs.
- Governors provide ongoing, focused training to ensure adults precisely check, judge and plan for children's progress. Judgements regarding the youngest children are increasingly accurate across all areas of learning. Staff work tirelessly to ensure there is a sharp focus on broadening children's knowledge and ensuring their acquisition and application of essential skills. You have developed detailed systems to track the small steps of children's progress in all areas of learning. These systems help all staff to plan for precise, purposeful learning and assess children's progress against each step. The schemes do not yet fully include all aspects of the youngest children's learning to ensure their maximum progress.
- Governors are proactive and deeply committed to the school's success. They remain objective and suitably ambitious when identifying priorities and necessary developments. Governors have a broad range of relevant expertise and welcome

up-to-date training in order to remain well informed. They know the needs of the children and share the dedication of leaders and staff members to developing each individual child.

- You and the deputy headteacher are providing significant support for another nursery school. You quickly identified the need to maintain the strategic role at Valley Nursery and distribute leadership responsibilities more widely. You prepared staff for their new roles with well-timed, purposeful training and ongoing support. Staff are clear about your expectations and have risen to the demands of their new duties. They are sufficiently confident to be innovative and able to share their practice with other schools.
- The older children settle quickly and happily because they know the daily routines. The adults expertly facilitate children's learning. They model taking turns, speak clearly and name objects, tools or actions. In return, children listen carefully, retain interest, acquire new vocabulary, make sensible choices and contribute their own observations and descriptions. All adults know the children well. They provide comfort when a child is insecure and frequent praise to reinforce good behaviours or effort. Adults plan exceptionally well to ensure all areas are well organised, varied and invite learning. The rich range of activities are conducted calmly and inspire children's curiosity. A genuine sense of care permeates all relationships between adults and children.
- Children are confident to explore activities and select for themselves. They play imaginatively by dressing up and adopting different roles. The wealth of outdoor structures invite children to climb, sit quietly or practise their balancing techniques. They ride tricycles with a keen sense of direction and control. Their self-confidence is evident. All adults interact meaningfully with the children so children learn to play, select, share, measure, count and use different tools appropriately. Children believe they are playing but adults know their learning is assured. The children are very well prepared for the next stage in education.
- The youngest children play in small groups with adults. All furniture, activities and tools are appropriate for their age. The children, although at an early stage of their development, are confident to experiment, talk, look through books and seek comfort, if needed. They show an awareness of safety as they climb and balance on the available equipment and structures. All adults are sensitive to the children's needs and are quick to divert, support or suggest when children's attention drifts. Adults seize every opportunity to teach and facilitate the necessary experiences for children to broaden their knowledge, deepen their understanding and acquire new skills. Very little happens just by chance; success is planned and ensured.
- You have created well-established relationships between home and school. Staff conduct home visits to help them understand the children's particular needs and preferences. Parents are invited to stay with their children to assist the smooth transition into nursery. Staff and parents speak daily as the children are dropped off or collected. In addition, staff meet with parents more formally three times a year to discuss the children's progress in more detail. Parents who came to collect their children from the morning session told me they were highly satisfied

with the nursery. They reported that staff are approachable and supportive across a range of issues, including family bereavement. They said that their children are happy, well cared for and love coming to the nursery. Typical comments included: 'I couldn't be more proud', 'I really enjoyed watching how much the children had come along' and 'I can't praise it highly enough'.

- All staff are overwhelmingly proud to work at Valley Nursery. One member of staff wrote in the inspection questionnaire, 'I am proud to be a member of the team as I feel Valley provides so much for the families and, of course, the children.' Another summed it up simply by saying, 'It's the best job I've ever had!'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- each learning area is mapped out precisely so that adults can plan for the youngest children's maximum progress.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, staff who had taken on additional responsibilities, the Chair of the Governing Body, a governor representative and parents. I observed children as they learned and played in classrooms and outdoors. I reviewed the school's checks for safeguarding children, records of children's progress and the views of 24 staff who completed the inspection questionnaire.