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Karen Wiggan  
Headteacher  
Hillside Nursery School  
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Dear Mrs Wiggan

### **Short inspection of Hillside Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 June 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 the school was judged to be good in February 2013.

Since the last inspection, the headteacher and one classroom teacher have left the school. Two new teachers are in post and you took up your position in September 2015.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The quality of teaching is good and children achieve well. You have made a strong start in your new post by getting to know the work of staff and governors in detail. You have built positive relationships with families and developed a good knowledge of the needs of individual children. You are ambitious and hold high expectations of what staff and children can achieve. You and the governors know where the school is succeeding and where further attention is required. Staff, parents and governors have great confidence in your skills and knowledge to take the school forward.

Displays of children's learning on the walls and in large activity books in classrooms and corridors show how much staff and leaders value children's comments, questions and explorations. The high quality of children's work and the great care and respect shown by staff in celebrating children's achievements reflect the strong values of the school.

Learning outdoors is now at the heart of the school curriculum. Teaching successfully uses the school 'forest' each day to give children fascinating and meaningful experiences. This improvement has been achieved through regular training and team discussions as well as careful checks on the quality of teaching and reviews of children's achievements. All parents who spoke to me during the inspection or completed an Ofsted questionnaire

expressed much praise for the school. The 'forest' teaching was consistently identified by parents as making a huge difference to their child's progress.

The previous inspection identified that the school should improve how well information about children's progress is used to review the quality of teaching. Since your appointment you have acted quickly to ensure that information is used carefully by staff and leaders to improve the work of the school. You have gone further and are successfully strengthening staff skills in assessing and recording children's learning and progress.

A further recommendation at the previous inspection was that the school should develop the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and problem-solving. Leaders and staff have tackled this carefully and successfully. Staff have a good understanding of how children's early reading skills can be developed. As a result, children are making good progress in their phonics skills. In particular, the most able children are being given regular and worthwhile opportunities to stretch their understanding of phonics. Children now show good problem-solving skills in their learning because staff are using questions skilfully to challenge children's thinking.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have a clear understanding of how to safeguard the welfare of young children. Since taking up your post you have reviewed the quality of safeguarding carefully. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Through training and monitoring you have made sure that staff have up-to-date knowledge about the care and protection of children. Staff know to refer and follow up any concerns they may have about children, families or colleagues. You work well with other agencies to protect children. Staff and leaders have created an environment in which children are at ease with one another and adults. Parents are confident that children are safe in the school.

### **Inspection findings**

- Through your strong leadership and support to staff, the school continues to flourish. Your reviews of teaching are well informed by your deep knowledge of how young children learn. You draw successfully upon your detailed understanding of the expectations set out in the early years foundation stage framework and recent research in early years education.
- You are ambitious about how the school can raise standards further. You are realistic and clear about the school's priorities. For example, your support to staff has ensured that teaching of the most able children in the school is increasingly successful. You rightly wish to see this happening more frequently. You have set out clear plans to improve how well staff stretch the abilities of all most-able children.
- You have concentrated staff attention upon establishing clearly what the school believes high-quality learning for children looks like. This means staff are increasingly clear and confident about what they want young children to achieve. Expectations of children are high and the planned curriculum is well considered and interesting. The high quality of resources, room organisation and the

outdoor areas demonstrate that staff give careful attention to making every effort to use the school environment fully within their teaching.

- Relationships between staff are good. All members of the team are confident in what you are striving to achieve. They believe in your efforts to support them and raise the quality of the school even further. You have established effective arrangements for staff to learn from one another and to be better linked to other local schools. Already other teachers are visiting to learn from the successful improvements at Hillside Nursery School.
- Members of the governing body are thrilled with the impact they see you having upon the school. They are fully behind your efforts to achieve the highest standards. They welcome the way in which you are supporting them to debate and challenge information about teaching and children's progress. They recognise that improving this aspect of governance is a key priority for the school.
- During the inspection, you and I observed successful teaching in the 'forest' area. Children were being taught skilfully by a teacher and teaching assistants to think and to question what they were finding and observing. Children were highly engaged in their learning. As a result of such teaching, children in the school are developing good language, inquisitiveness and much understanding about the world around them. Some staff need further help to learn from the best teaching in the school and you have clear plans in place to address this issue.
- The limited additional funding to support disadvantaged children is being spent carefully. Consequently, these children are progressing increasingly well across their learning. For example, many children have much-improved understanding of phonics. Parents commented to me how much they value the school's emphasis upon teaching their children early reading skills.
- You appreciate the support from the local authority link adviser, who has been a frequent source of advice and assistance during your first year in the school. Her work is giving you much-valued insight into the success of improvements in the school.
- Parents say they feel consulted, involved and informed about their children's time at nursery. They praise the success of the school's carefully considered arrangements for settling children into new routines, expectations and procedures. The impact of this work shows in the consistently good behaviour of children in the school. Children have strong relationships with staff, particularly their key person. They love attending Hillside Nursery School.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all activities provide high levels of challenge for the most able children
- staff consistently help children to think and to question
- governors give even greater challenge to the headteacher about improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you to discuss your views of the school and your priorities for improvement. You and I observed teaching, learning and behaviour in the classroom, group room and outdoors. We discussed examples of children's records and assessments of their progress. I spoke with children during their play. I spoke to both teachers. I checked school records of checks of the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers. I met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I met with a school adviser from Lancashire local authority. I reviewed the views of 14 parents that were shared through Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I spoke with some parents at the start of the inspection.