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Donna Harwood-Duffy
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Dear Donna Harwood-Duffy

Short inspection of Dorking Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 14 September 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 outstanding in October 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You and the governing body provide very passionate and effective leadership that ensures everyone is 'working together to achieve the best for the children', in keeping with your school motto. As one governor explained, the school does not 'rest on its laurels'. Staff share your dedication and together you make incisive, ongoing improvements to further strengthen provision for all. Consequently, the leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The school is tremendously welcoming to all. Parents greatly value being part of the school community. They recognise and appreciate the time and care that your staff afford to building links with families and getting to know each child. One parent said, 'they care about the whole family'. As a result, trusting relationships, that benefit everyone, prevail. Even on their very first day, children were happy, comfortable and highly motivated by the wide variety of activities on offer. Children danced to 'summery sounds', delighted in dinosaurs, composed music, built ramps to find the fastest cars and made 'meals' in the 'mud kitchen' with great enthusiasm.

You have extremely high expectations of what children can achieve. You have wisely drawn on support from the local authority to scrutinise the impact of the school's work on children's achievements. From this information, you identify further developments. For example, you have provided all staff with training to support children's speaking skills because you know that this is increasingly an area of

difficulty for many. Your minimum expectations are steadfast and consistent for all so that those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged children achieve extremely well from their starting points. The very large majority of children make rapid and sustained progress. A majority of children join the school with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. Nevertheless, most move into their Reception classes, in other schools, having reached the expectations for their age across the areas of learning. Half of the children exceeded these expected levels last year because aspirations are high.

Leaders and governors have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspections. Work to support parents with children's learning, behaviour and attendance has had a very positive impact. In the outdoor area for two-year-old children, there are more prompts to reinforce important early reading and mathematics learning. Staff make sure that these prompts change often to stimulate children's interests and promote thinking and reading skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have put in place systems so that safeguarding is an ongoing priority for everyone. Staff receive regular training updates so that everyone knows what to do if they are worried about a child. Governors' regular visits always include a safeguarding check. The governing body recently commissioned an audit of safeguarding and you have wasted no time in implementing some minor enhancements as a result. Consequently, leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

The school provides very effective early help to families. Through the strong, trusting relationships, parents receive carefully targeted support where and when they most need it. A wide range of help is available from the linked children's centre. The school also works with other agencies and schools, often taking a leading role, to take action to keep children safe.

You know that children achieve more when they attend school well. Therefore, you work closely with families to provide often bespoke support to make sure that children come to school every day. As a result, children's attendance has improved greatly since the last inspection.

Inspection findings

- Disadvantaged children made even better progress than their classmates last year. You know that disadvantaged children who join aged two, attend daily and then increase to a full 25 hours at age three, achieve more than those who attend less often. Therefore, you make sure that disadvantaged children have priority access to these opportunities to succeed. Indeed, you have changed arrangements at the start of the year, welcoming disadvantaged children in first so that staff can take time to get to know them, what they like and what they can do. This also helps staff to initiate very effective working relationships with families who spend time at school settling in their child.

- You have made effective use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. There has been an emphasis on ensuring that disadvantaged children at least reach the expectations for their age across the areas of learning. You have used funding to promote children's development, especially in speaking and personal and social skills. Extra support from adults in these areas has been successful. Although two thirds joined the school with skills and abilities that were below those typical for their age, most disadvantaged children reached the expected levels before leaving the school and a small minority exceeded these expectations. Nevertheless, you rightly recognise that additional support has been limited in its focus because it has been targeted at those who need to catch up. This means that the most able disadvantaged children do not always benefit from extra funding and may not achieve as well as they could.
- A detailed knowledge of each child underpins the high quality teaching. One member of staff said, 'we never take our eyes off them'. Staff check children's learning with great care and use this knowledge to set appropriate, yet challenging, next steps. Staff use this precise assessment of each child alongside knowledge of their interests to plan appealing activities to secure children's development across the areas of learning. Adults encourage children, particularly the most able, to think for themselves. For example, one child asked how to use a star shaped cutter for play dough. Instantly, the adult responded, 'What do you think? Let's see what happens.' Shortly after, the same child was asked if her 'cakes' were tasty as she put them in the 'oven'. She quickly responded, 'I don't know, they aren't cooked yet!' Consequently, children, including the most able, achieve very well across the curriculum and there is no difference in the attainment of boys and girls.
- The specialist provision for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very effective. It provides children with personalised support that is appropriate to their level of need. Wherever possible, learning takes place with the mainstream classes to better facilitate personal and social development. Staff support these children to use a range of communication systems, including symbols, pictures and signs to help them reach their high expectations. Those with speech and language difficulties receive regular, effective and sustained therapy. As a result, children with speech and language difficulties make rapid progress so that they reach a typical level of development. Others with more complex needs achieve very well from their varied and often low starting points.
- You are determined to provide well-rounded support to children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, you recently seized the opportunity to take a small group of children swimming at a local primary school. Last year, the children made gains in confidence and self-awareness and were all able to swim independently with or without aids by the end of the summer term.
- You have worked well with the interim special needs coordinator to refine the approach to planning support for all children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This has ensured that leaders now check that support is effective enough, making changes as necessary. Those with the highest level of expertise now lead the extra activities to support children's development in the areas that they find most difficult. However, all staff share information about what each child needs next very well and therefore staff use this in their

interactions with each child. It is evident that this is particularly effective in improving children's outcomes across the areas of learning.

- Leaders and governors have rightly prioritised working with parents. Home visits before children start at the school build vital links between parents and key workers. Parents value the extra little touches such as the letters that the key workers send to each new child in the post. These help to initiate the dialogue between home and school. Consequently, staff get to know children very well and share their knowledge of children with parents, including strategies to support parents with behaviour at home.
- Parents are well established as essential partners in education. Each day the class noticeboard shows what children are learning and how parents can help them at home. Topics continue over the weekends, so that children can come back in and share what they have learned with their families. Parents feel comfortable attending the informal meetings to agree the next steps in their child's learning. There are helpful information evenings such as 'getting ready for school' and workshops to show parents how to develop their child's speech. All parents feel that they receive valuable information from the school and would recommend the school to another parent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a sharper focus on providing extra support for the most able disadvantaged children so that they achieve as well as they can.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Dulon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the interim special needs coordinator, three governors and a representative of the local authority. I visited all classes jointly with you, to see the children learning and to speak to staff. I took into account responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents during the school day. I also considered responses to the staff questionnaire. I evaluated a range of documents, including children's progress information.