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Mrs Lisa Wilson
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Dear Mrs Wilson

Short inspection of Cleator Moor Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 13 October 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 November 2012. The school was also judged to be outstanding at its three previous inspections.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Over time, your personal leadership, both as senior leader within the school and now as headteacher, has helped to ensure that the highest outcomes and provision have been maintained. As a result of your excellent leadership, the school continues to provide a caring and nurturing environment where children flourish. You strive in your efforts to constantly improve and provide the very best for the children at your school. Successfully integrating two-year-olds into your provision and introducing a revised structure to the teaching of phonics are very good examples of your sheer determination to move the school onwards and upwards.

The high quality of education that your school provides is well recognised. Staff from other settings, such as children's centres and local schools which are setting up nursery classes, come to observe the school's excellent practice.

You know and support your families' needs exceptionally well. Parents talked openly about the 'excellent staff', 'fabulous creative learning' and the 'amazing progress' that their children make. Parents told me that their children wake up each morning and are excited about going to school. Indeed, during the holidays children get quite upset because the school is closed. I believe that this is real testament to the quality of education that you and your staff provide for the children at Cleator Moor Nursery

School. You actively involve parents in their children's learning. By providing workshops to develop their awareness of subjects such as mathematics and phonics you are equipping parents with the skills to support their children's learning at home. After attending a phonics workshop parents commented, 'The workshop has really helped me understand how I can make learning sounds fun at home.'

Staff are equally resounding in their praise of you. They value highly the support that you give them and your leadership qualities. As a team, they told me that they are 'exceptionally close and tight working'. Many told me that it is a 'privilege' to work at Cleator Moor Nursery school. Your staff are very skilled and know how to get the best out of each child.

You have the full backing of the governing body who share your passion and vision. In my discussions with governors, it was clear that they have a very good overview of the school's strengths and what needs to be done to drive standards even higher. Governors are not afraid to make difficult decisions or to challenge you when they think it is necessary. As a governing body they are strong.

Children are very keen to learn. This is due, in part, to the quality of the learning environment which is superb, most notably indoors. Resources are of good quality and capture and sustain children's interests. Standards of behaviour around the nursery are impeccable. Staff are excellent role models for children to observe.

Following the last inspection, you were asked to set simple individual targets which were of meaning to the children and would help them to understand what they had to do to be even better learners. This issue has been effectively addressed. When staff set targets for children these are then broken down into smaller meaningful targets which children understand. These targets are then shared verbally with both children and parents. Children take great delight in telling staff when they think these targets have been met. Such good practice encourages children to take an element of responsibility for their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

High priority is put on keeping children safe. Entrance to the school premises is secure. Within the building, closed circuit television is in place and there are key fob padlocks on all the internal doors. Stringent procedures are in place to protect children from people who do not work in the school. Visitors must complete a written proforma which details the nature of the visit and their discussions with children. This information is then reviewed by you and a decision made on whether the visit can go ahead. Staff are familiar with part one of 'Keeping children safe in education'. They have a good awareness of procedures that must be followed should they have any concerns about a child's welfare. All staff have completed safeguarding training and are aware that anyone can make a safeguarding referral to the relevant authorities. Staff talk with some confidence about the indicators of radicalisation and female genital mutilation. All documentation relating to safeguarding is of the required standard and fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- No stone is left unturned to ensure that all groups of children achieve to their full potential at Cleator Moor Nursery School. You know your school exceptionally well, its many strengths and priorities for development. The school development plan reflects these priorities. However, we are in agreement that key targets set are not measurable. This makes it difficult for senior leaders and governors to monitor with sufficient rigour the progress the school is making towards achieving these targets.
- Children start in the nursery with knowledge and skills which are often significantly below those typical for their age. As a result of high-quality teaching, children make rapid progress from their starting points. Consequently, a significant proportion are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The quality of the provision for two-year-olds is breathtaking. Staff working with this group of children have an in-depth knowledge of how these younger children learn. Progress is rigorously monitored and the activities provided totally capture and sustain children's interest and effectively promote their learning. I spoke to a number of parents as they picked their children up at the end of the morning session. They were in full agreement that their children had made 'excellent' progress since starting at the nursery, most notably in their social and language development.
- As a result of the changes you have made, the teaching of phonics is a real strength of the school. Learning is highly active and fun. I observed children who were totally engrossed in a range of exciting activities which helped develop their awareness of many initial sounds. The pace of the lesson was swift and more complex vocabulary was introduced throughout as the session progressed to extend learning. For example, children eagerly recited the phrase 'super invitation' in a range of different voices such as 'grumpy voices', 'posh voices' and 'pirate voices' to help develop their acquisition of language. Questioning was very effective and assessment seamlessly integrated into the session, giving staff a very detailed knowledge of the progress each child made. Children are taught phonics in ability groups and teachers plan activities that meet the needs of individual children, including the most able.
- You recognise that children at your school come from a predominately White British community. You understand the great importance of helping children recognise that there are many different faiths and cultures both in our country and around the world. Working with a local secondary school you have established links with a school in Tanzania. Teachers and pupils from this school have visited your school. Children are planning to raise money to buy resources, such as pencils and books, to support this overseas school. Chinese families also come into the school to raise children's awareness of their culture. For example, children had the opportunity to taste Chinese food and to develop an understanding of Chinese writing styles.

- Well-targeted support is given to support children who are entitled to the early years pupil premium to break down barriers to learning. From their different starting points this group of children make very good progress, including the most able. Such good practice clearly demonstrates the school's strong commitment to equality of opportunity.
- There are well defined and structured procedures in place to support children with transition both in to the nursery school and onward to primary school. Parents really do appreciate the home visit they have prior to their children starting and the opportunity to contribute to their initial assessment. However, we both agree that the partnership with local schools could be strengthened by working together to track the progress of children who have attended your school. This would allow you to assess and reflect on the initial groundwork that you have put in with these children.
- You are a great advocate of collaborative working with other early years providers in the locality to support and challenge each other. This is done in a number of ways. For example, you share your expertise with local private day nurseries to help develop staff's knowledge and skills. Working with other nursery schools, you are creating a package to support early years staff in moderating children's work. This package is to be shared across the authority. Finally, you and your staff undertook a project to help others understand how imaginative play can be used to raise attainment. This piece of work was published in a local early years publication as an exemplar of good practice.
- Your school website contains valuable information which parents find useful. However, it does not meet the requirement with regard to the information which must be published. The special educational needs report is not dated and does not evaluate the effectiveness of the provision made for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Furthermore, the report does not give details of the arrangements for handling complaints from parents about the special educational needs provision. The actual dates that governors were appointed to their roles and any business or pecuniary interests that the governors may have, are not listed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- targets in the school development plan are measurable to allow governors and school leaders to monitor, with even more rigour, the impact of the school's work
- senior leaders work with local primary schools to monitor and track the progress of children who have attended the nursery school
- the website is compliant and is checked on a regular basis to ensure that it remains so.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you and members of the governing body. I also had informal discussions with a group of parents and staff. I spoke to a representative of the local authority and early years leader from a nearby school on the telephone. I went on a tour of the school to see the learning that was taking place. I observed behaviour at different times of the day. I reviewed a range of documentation including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I also took account of the responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire completed by parents, staff and children.

I considered how well the school had responded to the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. The progress and achievement that all groups of children make was also considered. I looked at what steps had been taken by you to ensure that the quality of teaching remained of the highest standard. I also considered whether safeguarding arrangements were effective and up to date with recent guidance. Furthermore, I reviewed the spending of the early years pupil premium to ensure that it was impacting positively on those children who are entitled to benefit from it. Finally, I considered the work of the governors to assess the level of support and challenge offered to the school.