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1 November 2016

Mrs Stephanie Astle  
Headteacher  
South Normanton Nursery School  
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Dear Mrs Astle

### **Short inspection of South Normanton Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 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 February 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has addressed the issues from the previous inspection. You are an inspirational early years leader. Since your appointment, you have demonstrated a vision for excellence in the early years not only in your school but also in the wider community. You take responsibility for leading others to develop high-quality early years provision. You are responsible for setting up support groups for private nurseries, childminders and local schools. Other providers seek your support to develop their own early years practice.

Your desire for excellence in the quality of provision and care that you and your team deliver at South Normanton Nursery is clear to see. You have gained the trust and admiration of your parental community. Every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire would recommend the school to others. As one parent put it, 'This school gives my child varied activities to help him develop not only educationally but as a person. Since the new headteacher came, the school has come on in leaps and bounds. So, so impressed with the quality of teaching here. Everyone does a great job.'

You and the assistant headteacher have a precise understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. Your plans for improvement are based securely on the wealth of assessment information you collect.

You track the progress of each individual child so that learning is planned exactly to meet each child's needs. Your staff work closely together, share planning and assessments and take collective responsibility for every child. Outcomes for all groups of children are high across all 17 early learning goals.

Your systems to support children's transition into school are excellent. Your home visits and children's pre-school visits ensure that children feel secure with their key adults and ready to learn from their first day in school. Children come into Nursery excited to begin each new day. This is because the staff team prepare learning activities that challenge, interest and engage the children. Children learn and play together harmoniously. For example, during the inspection I witnessed a child of three hand a toy that she was playing with to another child because she asked for it. Although it is early on in the school year, your ethos of caring and sharing is already having a profound impact on the children's social skills.

You have created a stimulating, accessible, secure learning environment. Each area of the well-resourced Nursery provides children with opportunities to explore, investigate and make links with previous learning. You have considered the needs of your most able children carefully. You have planned for their needs through extending and modifying both the continuous learning activities and through the differentiated and in-depth questions your staff use. School assessment information shows that the most able children make good and often outstanding progress and achieve very well across the curriculum, including in the development of reading skills. The most able disadvantaged children make similar progress to their most able peers and this ensures that attainment differences between these two groups have diminished. Their outcomes ensure that they leave the Nursery well prepared for the challenges of the next stage of their education.

Your well-trained and knowledgeable staff plan activities that closely reflect the characteristics of effective early years learning. Children have the freedom to make choices and the freedom to follow their ideas. Adults support children to explore and investigate problems. For example, during the inspection a group of children were investigating the rolling properties of different objects. Children worked together as a group, took turns in rolling objects down a small hill and drew conclusions about why an object might roll the farthest. The activity was filled with fun and learning as apples, stones, logs and other objects went down the slope. The adult working with them made suggestions and asked questions that supported the children's independent critical thinking skills. The children drew their own conclusions that objects with 'round edges' rolled further.

Your evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning demonstrate that high-quality interactions, such as those already mentioned, are instrumental in gaining the excellent outcomes for your children. However, you have identified that on occasion, some adults respond too quickly before children have the opportunity to think for themselves and formulate their own plans. On these occasions, children do not always achieve as much as they should. It is clear from your development plan that you are addressing this through training and support.

Since the previous inspection, you have successfully supported your children to understand how well they are learning through the spoken comments of your staff. Your monitoring of this shows children themselves beginning to copy the adults and self-assess their own learning with comments such as, 'I am concentrating' and 'I am thinking carefully'. You have developed this further by offering parents the opportunity to add their own views through an electronic communication system. This is appreciated and well used by parents and adds valuable information to your own assessments of children's learning.

The governing body has strong routines for checking the quality of your work. These monitoring activities are robust, effective and challenging. Governors use the comprehensive data about children's learning to set priorities for school development. Governors match the skills they use in their everyday lives to ensure that all aspects of school life are checked systematically. Systems for self-review are well established within the governing body. However, systems for external challenge of governing body effectiveness are less so. Governors are aware of this. The chair is taking steps to build relationships with other governing bodies to ensure that they have critical friends to support them to assess and develop the effectiveness of their work.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The safeguarding of children is the highest priority within your Nursery. Your systems to protect your children are appropriate for the ages and understanding of very young children. You expect your staff to consider the safety of children first. Systems for managing the care of children's wider needs, such as administering medication or toileting care, are carefully considered so that children's safety and well-being are paramount. You and your staff ensure you assess the risks of the activities you provide so that children are safe from harm. This ethos of care ensures that very young children can explore and test their own limits within the physically challenging outdoor area, for example. You ensure your staff receive a wide range of training to help them understand and recognise when a child may be at risk from harm. You are aware that young children may not have the language to tell you they need help. Your staff are vigilant in recognising changes in children's normal demeanour that may suggest there is a concern that needs to be addressed. Systems for tracking the absence of children are robust. You work closely with a variety of external agencies to ensure that families receive the help they need should problems arise. Records of concern are detailed and kept securely.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have a precise understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. Leaders' plans for improvement are accurate and focus on the correct actions to improve outcomes further.
- Leaders ensure that adults are well trained and knowledgeable. Adults use the training to best effect and this ensures that all children make good and often outstanding progress in learning.

- In 2016, nearly three quarters of the children gained skills and understanding above those typical for their age. There were no striking differences in the standards reached by boys or girls. Those children who were identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities made outstanding progress and many of these children reached standards closely relating to their age.
- Leaders ensure that children gain a sound understanding of the diversity of British culture through the inclusion of visits to different places of worship and through inviting visitors into school to work with the children.
- The learning environment is well looked after and very clean. The exciting and challenging indoor and outdoor areas ensure that children are engaged and learning from the moment they come into school. Children's learning is celebrated in displays and in the stickers they receive recognising their achievements. Children are clearly proud of their new uniforms and enjoy wearing them.
- Strong links with external agencies such as the local authority and with agencies providing special needs support mean that children get any help they may need quickly. No time is wasted in supporting children and their parents. This ensures that children make the progress they should in learning.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all adults allow children the time they need to respond to learning opportunities before intervening to support them
- the governing body develops external systems for self-review so that it gains a secure understanding of its effectiveness in contributing to the school's 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 Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jan Connor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteacher and a special educational needs early years educator. I spoke with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with a local authority representative. I toured the school visiting all the classrooms to observe teaching, to speak with children and to look at the activities available for children. I observed children's behaviour both indoors, outdoors and around the school. I considered a range of school documentation including assessment information, the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation documents. I took into account the 41 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and the 17 free text responses from parents. I took into account the 14 staff responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire and the school's own parent and child questionnaires. I checked the single central record of recruitment checks and other documentation relating to safeguarding. Currently, the school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

During the inspection I considered these key lines of enquiry:

- how well has the leadership and management challenged the most able children so that they achieve their full potential before moving to primary school?
- is the leaders' self-evaluation accurate and do they take the necessary steps to ensure that outcomes for children continue to improve, particularly for disadvantaged children? Do leaders have the capacity to improve further?
- if the school continues to be an outstanding provider, how effective is the quality of support provided by the school to other schools and early years settings?