

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Catherine Eardley
Headteacher
Offerton Hall Nursery School
Half Moon Lane
Stockport
Cheshire
SK2 5LB

Dear Mrs Eardley

Short inspection of Offerton Hall Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 8 November 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Since 2007, Offerton Hall Nursery School has been judged to be outstanding on three separate occasions. I am delighted to report that this accolade has been sustained for a fourth time.

You and your dedicated staff team make Offerton Hall Nursery School a wonderful place for children to learn and play. Through your ambition, both as a member of the senior leadership team and now as headteacher, you have made sure that the outstanding provision and highest outcomes have been maintained. Children are at the heart of everything you do and each child is recognised as a unique individual. You and your staff know the children exceptionally well, their likes, dislikes and capabilities. Integrating two-year-olds into your school and developing outdoor learning are testaments to your determination to move the school onwards and upwards.

We also discussed how the demographics of the school are changing with a growing number of families from abroad moving into the locality. For many of these children English is a strange language. Consequently, you recognise the importance of carrying out initial assessments of what children can do in their home language to get a like-for-like comparison.

Your school shares its outstanding practice with others. Staff from other early years settings come to observe, at first-hand, the high-quality education that your school provides. In addition, through placements at your school, you provide mentoring, support and guidance to trainee teachers and students from local colleges who are studying for a childcare qualification.

Parents hold you, and your staff, in the highest regard. They are quite rightly proud of their children's achievements. Parents feel that your school provides their children with 'an excellent overall learning experience'. Those with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities talked about the 'outstanding progress' that their children have made since starting at your school. Parents typically commented that 'Offerton Hall is a fantastic nursery school; the best in the area'. I believe that this is a real testament to the high-quality education that you and your staff provide.

You have the full backing of your staff. From my discussions it is very evident that they work exceptionally well as a team. New members of staff told me that they have been made to feel very welcome and well supported. They talked to me avidly about the transition arrangements both into the Nursery and on to school, which they described as 'seamless and personalised to each individual child'.

Your school provides a calm and tranquil atmosphere for children to enjoy. Standards of behaviour are impeccable and it is clear that children feel very safe and are keen to learn. During my time at your school, I observed happy children with high levels of confidence and independence.

At the last inspection, you were asked to provide better information about the work governors do and the impact of their work on helping the school improve. This recommendation has been met. From my discussion with governors, it is clear that they share your passion and vision. Documented evidence is now available which shows the impact of their work. Although they offer you high levels of support, they are not afraid to challenge you should the need arise.

Safeguarding is effective.

The Nursery has a culture where all members of staff recognise that it is everyone's responsibility to protect children from harm. I spoke to a significant number of your staff. All demonstrated a secure understanding of all issues relating to safeguarding. They talked with confidence about the possible indicators of radicalisation, female genital mutilation and sexual exploitation. Those responsible for safeguarding have completed training at the appropriate level. Staff also confirmed that they have read Part 1 of 'Keeping children safe in education'. Children's safety is further assured because the entrance to the school is secure and the identity of any visitors is closely checked. Within the building there are key fob padlocks on all internal doors. A filtering system is in place to ensure that children are safe when accessing computers. All documentation that I examined during the inspection relating to safeguarding contained all the required detail and was fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- From their different starting points, all groups of children, including those who are disadvantaged and the most able, make rapid progress in their learning and achieve exceptionally well.
- Activities are very well planned and children's progress is very closely monitored. Planning reflects children's interests. Activities are adapted to meet the needs of different groups, including the most able. Those who learn more quickly are also very well supported through targeted interventions which are aimed at raising standards for this group of children to even higher levels. In addition, daily 'reflection' meetings, at the end of the school day, quickly highlight when a child's learning accelerates or falters. Consequently, the needs of all children are exceptionally well met.
- Your local authority adviser told me that you know your school very well and I would agree. You never stop and are continually looking for ways to improve provision and outcomes for children. Plans for continuous improvement have been set out in your school development plan. However, we both agree that some of these targets are not measurable. This makes it difficult for you and your governors to monitor with rigour the progress that the school is making towards achieving these goals.
- You keep a close eye on the quality of teaching. Staff told me that they appreciate the written feedback that they receive from formal observations to further develop their practice. You recognise that feedback to teachers should focus sharply on the progress that individual groups of children make, including the most able disadvantaged.
- Opportunities that children have to learn outdoors and through Forest School activities are superb. For example, children cook garlic bread and popcorn over an open fire. They make musical instruments, such as a kazoo, using carrots and drills. To paint, they make nature brushes using sticks, leaves and string. The safety risks involved in these activities are exceptionally well managed. For example, children learn about fire safety and the importance of not eating berries or mushrooms, or throwing stones. They are also taught to treat the animals that live in the forest with the utmost care and respect.
- Children have just as much fun indoors, where the quality of the learning environment is equally appealing. Key skills, such as good listening and good sitting are constantly reinforced. As they play, children recognise shapes, solve simple mathematical problems and count in sequence to 10 and beyond. Language skills are exceptionally well promoted. For example, while manipulating dough, I heard children, aged two years, telling their key person 'I have made a star'. In the outdoor area, these younger children were digging in the soil and shouting excitedly that they were looking for 'mummy and daddy worms'. New and exciting words are constantly being introduced to extend the language acquisition of older children in the Nursery class.

- Children show a real love of reading. Cosy book areas are available around the school to encourage children to read on their own, with a friend or a member of staff. I listened to the most able children read and was impressed by their skills. They handle books with care and turn the pages correctly. Some know that print carries meaning and are able to talk about what they think might happen next in the plot. Indeed, children were becoming aware of rhyming words as they told me that the words 'hat' and 'pat' sounded the same.
- Great care is taken to ensure that the early years pupil premium is spent wisely to break down barriers to learning. Key workers are very aware of the children in their group entitled to this funding. The money is used well to support children, including the most able disadvantaged, academically and socially.
- Attendance is a thorny issue. You make parents aware that not attending school on a regular basis impacts negatively on children's progress and attainment. Clear procedures are followed when children are absent from school. As a result of the school's concerted efforts, attendance is improving. However, we both agree that more work needs to be done to support a small number of children who are persistently absent from school.
- Collaborative working is a real strength of your school. For example, you have been involved in a national project working with private day nurseries to ensure that they make the best use of the early years pupil premium. In addition, you have been working alongside Manchester Metropolitan University conducting research on how children learn to talk. The results of this project are being cascaded to schools and other early years settings within the local authority. You have also supported local childminders to help them develop children's writing. Such highly effective practice helps to improve outcomes for young children within the local authority.
- You are aware that there are some shortcomings with regard to the information that must be published on your school website and it is on your short-term 'to do' list. However, as I explained, because these omissions are requirements I have to report on them. First of all, there is no special educational needs report or link to the Local Offer. Second, procedures to be followed should parents make a complaint are missing from the website. Third, the impact on children's progress and attainment for those entitled to the early years pupil premium has not been published. Finally, the information relating to governors lacks detail: the date that governors were appointed, their term of office and who appointed them are not listed. Also missing are any business or pecuniary interests that the governors may have, together with their attendance records at governors' meetings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- targets in the school development plan are measurable to allow senior leaders to monitor rigorously how well the school is doing in achieving its goals

- well-targeted support is provided to support the small number of children who are persistently absent from school
- the website is compliant with regard to the information that must be published, and is checked regularly to ensure that it remains so.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and a member of the governing body. I also had informal discussions with a group of parents and staff. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority. I went on a tour of the school to see the learning that was taking place. I listened to children read and observed behaviour at different times of the day. A range of documentation was reviewed including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and its development plan. I also took account of the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires completed by parents and staff.

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 were 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, the spending of the early years pupil premium was reviewed to ensure that it was impacting positively on those children who are entitled to benefit from it. Finally, the work of the governors was considered to assess the level of support and challenge offered to the school.