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Miss Catherine Barnett
Headteacher
Hylton Red House Nursery School
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Dear Miss Barnett

Short inspection of Hylton Red House Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 15 February 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education and care in the school since the last inspection. Although you were left with no areas for improvement, your drive for excellence and the passion you show for the education of young children has ensured that you did not stand still. As you said, 'We can always be better.'

The strong and caring relationships that exist in the school embody the commitment you have towards placing the well-being of children and staff at the heart of your decision making. This, and the high expectations you set for children's achievement, symbolises the very strong ethos of the school and contributes enormously to the happy, confident and curious children that attend Hylton Red House Nursery School.

Following your appointment in September 2015, one of the first things you did was to implement a robust and detailed approach to assessment. This allows you to check the progress of every child in the school. You are meticulous in your analysis of this information and use it well to inform planning. As a result, children continue to make outstanding progress from their very low starting points.

You acknowledge the role that outstanding schools have in sharing good practice and in looking for new and different ways to improve your own practice. You have established a local network of schools to moderate your assessments to confirm their accuracy. You also have strong links with the local universities. You use these

links well for involvement in research and development projects that enable you to refine your own practice in teaching very young children. For example, you are currently involved in a project with Newcastle University in developing your approaches to teaching children's early reading skills.

You have an accurate understanding of what is working well and what needs to be better and you take decisive action to improve any weaker areas. For example, you know that sometimes the most able children could do even better. You also know that the attendance rates of some children are not high enough. Actions you are taking with staff and parents are already making a positive difference.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding is well established in the school. Staff and governors acknowledge the important role they play in keeping children safe. Annual training for all staff ensures that the most recent and relevant policy and procedures are in place, including the welfare requirements for very young children. You take appropriate steps to ensure that there are rigorous vetting procedures in place for all adults who work in the school. You take swift and decisive action to protect children in your care.

You ensure that the curriculum is used well to support young children's growing awareness of how to keep themselves safe. The outdoor provision in particular is used well to reinforce this work. Children are involved in risk assessing their own activities with lots of opportunities to talk about playing safely and making safety signs. Some of the most impressive work that I saw during the inspection was the work children did during their weekly activity at the 'fire pit'. The school's approach to this activity provides a balance between reinforcing children's awareness of the dangers of fire, and supporting their understanding of how we use fire to cook and keep warm.

Staff and governors make regular health and safety checks to identify any hazards or risks. A designated governor has responsibility for overseeing the school's work in this area.

Inspection findings

- You know your school well and your drive for excellence informs priorities for improvement. All staff know your expectations and work tirelessly to achieve them. You have established your own model of distributed leadership to ensure that there is someone to champion all areas of best practice in early years education. This has created a strong team of like-minded colleagues who want to excel.
- The rigorous checks you complete on the quality of teaching and learning have ensured that they continue to be outstanding. High priority is given to building upon children's prior learning and to promoting their interests. Well-planned activities both inside and out ensure that children are confident in their environment and curious about the world around them.

- At the heart of the school's excellent provision are the exceptional skills of the staff. They understand the needs of very young children and are able to extend children's play through their intervention and skilful questioning, helping children acquire basic skills in a fun way.
- Assessment arrangements are comprehensive. You use this information to check the progress of every child and pinpoint precisely the additional support or intervention needed. You recognise that many of your children enter school with skills that are well below those typically found in children of this age. In using this information well, you ensure that children make excellent progress in all areas of learning. This means that by the time they leave your school, children have made rapid gains in their learning and are demonstrating skills that are broadly typical for their age.
- Disadvantaged children form over half of the school's population. You monitor their progress carefully and you ensure that additional monies are targeted to support their needs. This means that disadvantaged children make the same outstanding progress as their peers and there are no discernible differences in their achievements.
- The very strong ethos of care and support pervades the school so that all children have the very best opportunities to thrive in a safe and secure environment. This is evident in how readily even the youngest children talk about their learning, and how they are happy to share and to take turns.
- Staff are knowledgeable in the care and support they provide for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Strong partnerships with parents ensure that some of the most vulnerable children receive the very best start to their schooling. Parents praise highly this support and are grateful of it.
- Children join the school at the age of two and three years of age. Their varying levels of maturity can make the accurate identification of most able children difficult. You have already acknowledged this as a priority for improvement and you are working on refined criteria to support you further. That said, you ensure that children are challenged to extend their learning and develop their personal and social skills. Children are in the very earliest stages of developing reading skills, but are showing a growing awareness of stories and books. The older children are able to recognise simple words and letters within their own name. Phonics is taught effectively and follows the school's policy.
- The governing body prepares its own detailed action plan against which governors evaluate the impact of their work. Governors are fully involved in monitoring the work of the school and use their collective skills well to challenge and support leaders. This is contributing to the school's continuous improvement.
- Rates of attendance are below the targets you have set. You are beginning to see signs of improvement and have established procedures to support you in this work. You recognise that there is still more to do.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- procedures for early identification of the most able children are refined to ensure that they can make the best possible progress in their learning and development
- the attendance of children at the setting improves further, so that children are increasingly prepared for starting school and your high expectations for good attendance are met.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you and several members of the governing body. Together with you, I observed children in the indoor and outdoor provision. I talked to children about their learning and scrutinised their records of work known as 'learning journals'. I examined your safeguarding documents, and your information about assessment and attendance. I took account of the 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six written responses. I also considered the 13 responses to the staff questionnaire.