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Mrs Ailsa Higgins  
Headteacher  
Hetton Lyons Nursery School  
Hetton-le-Hole  
Tyne and Wear  
DH5 0AH

Dear Mrs Higgins

### **Short inspection of Hetton Lyons Nursery School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 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 good in April 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have continued to place the welfare and happiness of children and their families at the heart of your school's work. This makes everyone, regardless of their background, feel welcome and included in the nursery. This creates a calm and positive environment in which all children can learn and develop successfully from their starting points.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They said that their children are well looked after, happy and safe. Those parents with children who are new to the setting say that their children have settled quickly because strong bonds have already been formed between them and their key workers. Your constant focus on securing children's personal, social and emotional skills is particularly effective. Many parents commented that their children had gained in confidence and become more independent in only a few weeks. Certainly, during my visit, I observed children to be kind, considerate and have good manners. Children's behaviour is excellent.

You have an acute understanding of the community you serve and a willingness to work beyond the boundaries of your nursery for the benefit of all children. The decision to continue to provide the vital services previously offered by the children's centre, such as the toddler group, is clear evidence of this. Parents particularly appreciate the support of the family support worker, who is quick to engage with prospective parents. Most children benefit from these strong, early relationships and stay with you from being babies until they are ready for the Reception class in

school. This continuity ensures that children make strong progress in their learning, an increasing number reaching above what is typical for their age.

You recognise that striving for the best necessitates a culture of continual improvement. This starts with an appraisal of the nursery's strengths and weaknesses, something which you have done accurately. A regular stock take of the quality of teaching and children's learning helps you to set clear priorities and actions for improvement. This has enabled a well-designed programme of staff training and allowed open and honest dialogue between leaders and staff about what is working well and what still needs to be done.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were tasked with improving the quality of adults' interactions with children as they learn and play. You and your team have addressed this successfully. Adults spend nearly every moment of their time directly involved with children: asking questions, explaining, demonstrating and reinforcing what they are learning. Most staff are working hard to give children the time needed to think of their response to a question before jumping in with an answer. As a result, children's speech and understanding are coming on in leaps and bounds. You recognise rightly that these improved communication skills need to be applied to other areas of learning. A focus on developing children's mathematical vocabulary, specifically around shape, space and measures, is already bearing fruit.

While you have tackled many of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, your development plans do not identify the precise gains in children's learning and development you wish to see. This means that while your plans are targeted at the right areas and propose detailed actions to bring about change, leaders, especially governors, are not able to evaluate fully and with accuracy how big a difference these are making to children's learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that policies and practice keep abreast of recent legislation and good practice. Staff attend update training regularly so that they are vigilant and mindful of the potential dangers children may face, including those that are specific to the community in which you work. These are addressed through your curriculum, additional interventions, such as nurture groups, and the specific work you are undertaking to raise children's awareness of the different people who live near to the nursery, for example the local residents of sheltered accommodation.

Child-protection issues are handled effectively and with sensitivity. Your close links and active working with other professionals, such as health and social workers, ensure that referrals for more specialist support are made promptly. You ensure that both the child and their family are safe and supported. The nursery plays an important and successful role in helping children to understand and cope with the complex circumstances often surrounding their young lives.

## Inspection findings

- Staff plan lively and creative learning experiences that capture children's imagination, such as making magic potions or hunting for worms in the mud. Children's interests are at the heart of the planning process so that their engagement and motivation are high. Importantly, staff are unafraid to teach. They ask questions, impart knowledge, help children to recall past learning and explain why things happen. Nearly every moment of the day is devoted to purposeful and timely interaction. As a result, children make strong progress from their starting points.
- Improving children's communication and language has been your recent priority. Staff model speaking and listening skills effectively as a result of concerted training. They encourage the use of accurate and interesting vocabulary, including in mathematics where, during the inspection, a teacher encouraged children to use the words 'longer', 'wider' and 'further' when describing how far the fire engine had travelled down different-sized ramps. Children are quickly becoming confident and independent communicators.
- Staff know their children well, but this does not always translate into consistently challenging activities, especially for the most able children. While staff regularly gather information about what children know, understand and can do (or not), this does not always lead to the identification of accurate next steps, especially when children are operating above what is typical for their age. This makes it difficult for parents to contribute to their child's teaching and learning. The most able children, in particular, are capable of achieving much more during their time in the nursery.
- Your nursery is highly inclusive. Staff regularly use signs and symbols to help them communicate with all children, including those who have speech and language delay or an identified special educational need and/or disability. Additional money, such as the early years pupil premium, is used well to secure additional resources or provide experiences that children would otherwise have gone without. Funded two-year-olds make the greatest progress when they follow through into the nursery. While they often enter as reluctant and passive observers, staff work effectively to develop their confidence, self-esteem and communication skills so that they can play with their friends quickly and effectively.
- Parents are well supported and fulsome in their praise for your work. Although the offer of additional, free hours for three- and four-year-olds (30-hour offer) is in its infancy, it has been well received by those parents who are eligible. They particularly appreciate the range of options you have provided so that they can work more flexibly. They also value the wrap-around care at the beginning and end of each day, and especially how hard you have worked, alongside governors, to keep this at an affordable rate.
- Governors are passionate about their role and keen to develop further so that they can offer the very best support to you. Members of the governing body hold the right skills and experience needed to make important contributions across all aspects of the nursery's work. Ongoing training is proving effective. Governors

are now far more confident to challenge you directly about aspects of teaching, learning and management. We agreed that there is a need to refine the improvement plan so that it is clearer in the precise gains you expect changes to bring. This would support governors to hold you even more closely to account for the difference you are making to children's outcomes.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- approaches to observation and assessment are refined so that planning for children's next steps is more precise, helping a greater number of children, especially the most able, to make rapid gains in their learning
- improvement planning includes the precise gains you expect to see in children's learning and development so that leaders, especially governors, know whether actions are making as big a difference to children's outcomes as anticipated.

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

Lee Owston  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, two members of staff and the chair and three other members of the governing body. I also spoke face-to-face with a local headteacher who had provided external support to you and your staff over recent months. You accompanied me during two observations, which included more formal, teacher-led activities as well as activities children could choose for themselves. I also observed children and staff on my own. I scrutinised a number of children's learning journals to get a picture of their achievements over time. I also looked at a range of other documentation about the work of the school, especially that relating to your self-evaluation, improvement planning and safeguarding procedures. Only one response to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) was received during the inspection. I did, however, take note of your own parental survey responses and spoke with 11 parents at the beginning and/or end of the morning and afternoon sessions. There were no responses to the staff or pupil questionnaires.