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21 November 2017

Ms Susanne Ottens
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Ottens

Short inspection of Hardmoor Early Years Centre

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since the previous inspection, and following the interim headteacher coming to the end of her tenure in July 2017, the school has withstood an unsettled period. During this time, the local authority acted swiftly, brokering your support from February 2017 in order to provide additional leadership capacity. This was beneficial as you bring a wealth of educational experience to bear. From September this year, this partnership strengthened further as you took up the substantive role of executive headteacher. At the same time, the school forged a formal collaboration with your other school, Fairisle Infant and Nursery School. Since your appointment, you have directed the school well, ensuring a welcoming and nurturing environment where children can thrive.

You are thoughtfully and convincingly building a team of staff and leaders determined to further improve teaching and children's achievement. Excellent relationships and effective teamwork are hallmarks of the school's success. Parents are extremely positive about all aspects, including the quality of leadership and teaching and the progress their children make. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend Hardmoor Early Years Centre. Parents' views are sought and acted upon, such as during the recent curriculum meetings.

Most children enter the nursery with skills and abilities below those seen typically

for their age. Children settle well into the daily routines, enjoying all that is on offer and quickly becoming inquisitive, self-assured learners. As a result, children make the same strong progress across most areas of learning. Children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those at the early stages of learning English make progress that is in step with their peers. However, children's progress in developing secure early writing skills is slower than in other aspects of their learning.

Staff plan exciting and appealing activities. Children respond well and develop a strong sense of awe and wonder as they explore the world around them. During the inspection, children collected eggs from the school's chickens. On return to the classroom, a child confidently showed her peers, saying 'Look what I've got. It's a real egg!' Such moments are plentiful as staff routinely generate a tangible sense of purpose and enjoyment.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to further enhance the quality of teaching and learning. From the outset of your association with the school, you raised expectations notably, ensuring that teachers are held more strongly accountable for the standards that children achieved. This new approach led to some changes, with two teachers with responsibility for nursery-aged children leaving in July 2017. Since then, you have recruited two experienced teachers who joined in September 2017. Both bring welcome experience, including one who has worked as an early years advisory teacher. These successful appointments have considerably strengthened the quality of teaching in recent times.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff display high levels of care for the children who attend the school. You are determined that children get off to a great start, enjoying their learning experiences in a caring and nurturing environment. Parents are entirely confident that their children feel safe. One parent commented, 'My child is very happy and settled at Hardmoor and the staff and facilities make her feel safe and secure.'

Children forge trusting relationships with adults and their key workers. The school takes excellent care of its children so that they are happy, secure and want to learn. Procedures for safeguarding children are robust. Key workers ensure that children who have SEN and/or disabilities are equally well supported and helped very effectively, for example to maintain concentration when necessary.

Children's understanding of how to stay safe is excellent. This is because adults' supervision is first rate and combined well with providing encouragement to explore and learn with confidence. Routines are embedded and children respond promptly to adults' instructions. For example, during the inspection very young children reacted promptly to their teacher's instruction of 'back to base' when exploring the school's woodland area.

The site is safe and well maintained. Leaders have ensured that staff keep up to date with safeguarding training and the latest guidance. As a result, staff know

what to do should a concern arise. Adults work closely with families to ensure that wider support, as and when needed, is made readily available. The school's 'opportunities group' provides support for families who face additional challenges from time to time. Such support makes a positive difference to families.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the quality of teaching and learning; and the impact of leaders and managers in driving improvement.
- Working with many newly appointed staff, you have handled their development well, incrementally setting small steps of improvement and ensuring that practice is embedded. Staff are enthusiastic and developing their skills effectively. In doing so, they are strengthening the provision, including some staff taking on leadership responsibility for managing and developing the performance of support staff.
- Creating an appealing and engaging learning environment is a key driver for all staff at the school. At every turn, adults, including support staff, can be seen promoting children's learning. The various activities run very smoothly because staff are deployed well and are skilled at gently guiding the children to get the most out of the tasks on offer. Occasionally, staff are a little too slow to interact with children who have wandered away from set tasks in order to instigate their own activities.
- Adults model language very effectively, readily engaging young children in productive conversation. For example, nursery-aged children were encouraged to explore mathematical words and phrases like 'more than', 'most', and 'how many' when counting out conkers to explore one-to-one correspondence with numbers up to 10. Expert interaction between adults and children is particularly effective in ensuring that children's communication, language and number skills generally move on at a swift pace, including for children who speak English as an additional language.
- Children achieve well and grow in confidence to explore and learn. They make excellent progress in personal and social education because activities are planned so that they play and learn together, making decisions as they do so, sharing ideas and equipment extremely well. For example, during snack time children could confidently handle tongs in order to offer slices of apple to their friends. Similarly, during construction-based activities, children excitedly offered their ideas when deciding whether to build a boat or a bus.
- Children benefit from the support of highly skilled adults, including support staff. Each key worker plays a significant role. One parent commented, 'My child is really well loved and cared for. His key worker is wonderful and he is very attached to her, he talks about her at home and looks forward to seeing her at nursery.'
- Children concentrate well on activities, often for extended periods. They explore and learn with real intent to discover and make sense of the world. For example,

during an outdoor activity children showed great persistence when learning how to raise and lower a bucket using a pulley system. At first, some were a little unsure but with practice and support many mastered the skill during the session. Children showed great delight when grasping how to lower the bucket to the ground under control, rather than letting go and watching it fall dramatically from a great height.

- Children get on extremely well with one another, forming strong friendships. One parent commented, '[The staff] teach the children to be kind to others and they explain things to them calmly and kindly.' There are very few disagreements and learning time is calm and purposeful. When classes mix, such as in the outdoor area, children are adept at making new friends and introducing themselves to one another.
- Governors are extremely active in supporting the school and checking all is well. During governors' meetings and their regular fact-finding visits, they ask searching questions about the quality of teaching and children's progress. Recent training on performance information has further strengthened their skills and expertise. As a result, leaders are held firmly to account for the standards children achieve.
- The local authority knows the school well. In part, high standards have been maintained because of officers' determination to support leaders well during the recent period of change. The local authority continues to provide thorough and insightful support that is helpful to leaders. As a result, the school continues to go from strength to strength.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- adults plan opportunities that enable children to develop their early writing skills more rapidly.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the head of school and four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Together, we observed learning in three classes for the morning session. Alongside two class teachers, I scrutinised children's assessment records. I took account of 16 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including eight written comments. I analysed a range of school documentation, including information about children's achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.