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Mrs Kelly Paulowski
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Dear Mrs Paulowski

Short inspection of Whitehills Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your arrival in September 2017, you have wasted no time in driving up the quality of teaching in the school. You have very high expectations of every child. You expect them to make nothing less than good progress from their starting points. Most children now leave the nursery very well prepared for the Reception Year at their next school.

Whitehills Nursery is a very welcoming and friendly school. It puts the well-being and success of children at its heart. Staff are quick to build warm, trusting relationships with the children in their care. As a result, children settle in quickly and learn well. During my visit, I saw children happily learning together. They found out about new things, such as how to use a broom to make soapy water on a large mat, and how jumping onto the mat would make footprints of different sizes and patterns. Other children were mark-making. Others still were singing songs such as 'Old MacDonald had a farm' and beating out the rhythm together on boxes.

The learning environment is appealing to children. They engage well in the activities staff provide for them. Indoors, children learn new skills. They moulded shapes using modelling clay, a rolling pin and cutters to make birthday cakes. These activities help to improve children's fine motor skills which, in turn, assist them in holding items

such as writing pens. The outdoor area is similarly bright and varied, with spaces for children to explore and play further. I noted children busily making 'potato soup' by pouring different amounts of water into pans of soil.

You have successfully tackled all the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. For example, you have revised the school's system for planning learning. The two early years practitioners now plan alongside the teacher. They focus on what children have learned and how they will use this information to decide what to teach each child next. Adults give children help and extra opportunities if they have not gained a secure understanding of an aspect or have not developed a skill successfully. Staff move children who show that they are proficient onto more complex tasks. Planning shows that staff continually assess what individual children can do in each session. They make sure that all children are challenged and that no child marks time. This is also true in small-group activities, where staff model language well and ask effective questions that prompt children to think. Children find learning exciting because there are ranges of good, attractive resources that stimulate their curiosity.

You ensure that teaching is never less than good. You visit all learning areas frequently and undertake regular formal lesson observations. This provides you with a clear picture of how staff are teaching across all areas of learning and the gains that children are making. Staff also observe each other teach and discuss this together so that everyone can improve further. All staff are also part of the school's performance management process, which helps to drive up skills further.

When you joined the school, you became quickly aware that it needed an effective system to track the achievement of children. You quickly investigated a range of options and chose one that meets your needs. This system has now been in operation for around a year. It provides a high level of detail about children's skills across all areas of learning when they join the school. It shows where different groups of children make fastest and slowest progress, and the standards they reach by the time they leave. This data is proving valuable to the governing body. Governors are able to ask you questions about how you are adjusting teaching to improve any areas where pupils do not make quick enough gains. The school's development plan gives details of further actions you are taking to improve children's learning. The plan, however, is not fully effective because it is often unclear when you propose to complete each action. In addition, it does not set out how the governing body can be sure that these actions are having the success you intend.

Parents express very positive views about the school. For example, all those who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school to others. They believe that it is well led and managed, that teaching is good and that their child is making good progress. As one parent explained: 'Each member of staff has a friendly and welcoming manner. My daughter is disappointed when she wakes up on a Saturday and realises she will not be there! I am 100% happy with all aspects they offer.'

You are aware, however, that not all children attend the nursery as often as they

could. The school's work to support those families whose children do not attend regularly is not yet fully effective. You have already put in place a range of measures to begin to improve this.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the other staff are clear that the safety of children is your utmost priority. For this reason, you ensure that everyone receives regular training in all aspects of safeguarding, including in identifying extremism. As a result, staff can describe a wide variety of signs that could indicate if a child is being harmed. Staff are also very mindful of their responsibility to report immediately any concern they might have, no matter how slight. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You make brisk referrals to external agencies when necessary.

You and the other staff also ensure that children develop a keen, early sense of their own safety. Using approaches that will make sense to them, such as stories, you tell children about the danger of, for example, contact with strangers. You also ensure that children learn to carry objects such as scissors, drinking glasses and cutlery around safely. You make sure that they learn how they must always take care when walking near roads.

Inspection findings

- Staff plan children's learning effectively. They always take into account their interests. For instance, parents hang notes on the 'children's voice tree' in the school entrance. These tell staff what their children like doing. Staff incorporate these ideas into their planning to ensure that children are keen to learn.
- Teaching is consistently effective. Staff ensure that children who stay for both the morning and afternoon sessions do not repeat the same activities. For example, staff were teaching a child how to make large patterns with different coloured pens in the morning session. In the afternoon, they taught him how to extend his skills by making much smaller patterns.
- In most areas of learning, children enter the nursery with skills that are at least in line with those found in other children nationally. Around half of the children enter with skills exceeding these. By the time they leave, around eight in 10 children exceed the skills expected for children of that age. Fewer than one in 10 children leave the school with skills that are low for their age.
- Last year, children did not make consistently strong progress in writing. Around three in 10 children made gains that were less than those you expected of them. You have ensured, however, that teachers have adjusted their provision for this area of learning. This year, children are making faster progress in writing.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong overall progress from their starting points. Often these gains are greater than those made by other children in the school. This is because you spend the early years pupil premium effectively overall to accelerate their progress. You are quick to adjust this spending where it does not contribute directly to children's learning.

- Staff are good role models and encourage children to cooperate. As a result, children work well together, for example when they see how high they can build a tower of wooden bricks. Staff also promote children's independence effectively. For example, they showed children how to peel an orange and how to weigh conkers with scales.
- The other staff hold you in high regard. All those who responded to the staff questionnaire confirmed that you treat them with respect. You do all you can to ensure that they remain well motivated. Staff also unanimously stated that you give them good professional development to help them improve their practice. They said that they are proud to work at Whitehills Nursery.
- Children's attendance has improved since last year but some children do not attend as regularly as they could.
- The school's improvement plan risks some actions being missed or delayed. It does not show when all actions are scheduled to take place. The arrangements for monitoring are not precise enough. This means that the governing body is not well prepared to hold the school to account.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they work with parents to raise children's attendance further
- the school improvement plan contains precise timescales for action, and shows who will monitor the actions, when and how success will be measured.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with members of the governing body and the nursery teacher. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the school's most recent questionnaire to parents. I scrutinised the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. We visited all areas of the nursery together. I looked at staff's planning of the activities they organise for children.

I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current

performance and its plans for further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding and for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.

I observed children's behaviour in lessons. We visited the school's breakfast club to check that children were safe, happy and well looked after.