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Ms Jo White
Interim Executive Headteacher
Dorothy Gardner Centre
293 Shirland Road
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Dear Ms White

Short inspection of Dorothy Gardner Centre

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018, 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 nursery school was judged to be good in January 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your appointment in September 2017, you have wasted no time in identifying the areas that need further development. You recognised that, while there have been some improvements recently to children's outcomes in language and social development, there are inconsistencies in children's outcomes. Some children's needs are not consistently well met. You have also identified that there are inconsistencies in the quality of leadership, particularly in how well leaders hold others to account. You have prioritised the well-being of staff and improvements to the learning environment. There has been some progress in these areas. However, some of these improvements have been at the expense of other key priority areas, such as developing key policies and improving the quality of teaching.

You have started working on improving the use of assessment information, so that it is more sharply focused on planning for children's progress. This work is ensuring that staff gather evidence of children's precise starting points and identify their next steps in learning. This work is not having the desired effect yet. Children's progress in areas such as literacy and mathematics is too slow, and you agreed that the quality and frequency of phonics teaching is not adequate. You are beginning to address these weaknesses. For example, you are putting a greater emphasis on improving adults' interactions with children and increasing the level of challenge to children's learning. You acknowledge that the curriculum is not sufficiently deep, and this too needs further attention.

Staff are increasingly supportive of your new vision for the school, which is enabling them to focus on improving their practice. But you acknowledge that more needs to be done to improve the quality and consistency in teaching. Governors acknowledge the challenges faced by the school in recent years. They have invested their expertise and commitment to the community in ensuring that the school has secure leadership and direction for the future. They are currently working with you and the local authority to appoint a substantive headteacher for the school.

On the day of the inspection, we saw some children initiating conversation with adults. Some of the children demonstrated interest in other children's play, joining in to collaborate and explore concepts and activities. A few children increasingly showed confidence to try new activities, while others observed curiously from a distance. There was some evidence of strong relationships between adults and children. The majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that their children are happy at the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff receive annual safeguarding training, and they are able to spot the possible signs that may indicate children are at risk from harm. With the support of outside agencies, your staff track and monitor children's welfare. The school is a centre with integrated services, including early help staff. The school has records of referrals and meetings for children who receive additional funding for their needs. However, leaders do not regularly evaluate the impact of this funding. Children's attendance is in line with national averages. Persistent absence is monitored closely and communicated with the local authority's educational welfare team. The quality of record keeping for safeguarding, including policies, needs to be improved.

Governors have knowledge and understanding of their roles in ensuring that pupils are kept safe. The link governor visits the school regularly. The governors are committed to safeguarding children.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus on three areas. The first of these was to see the impact of leaders' actions in continuing to provide a good-quality education for all children. This is because the school has recently been through turbulent times, with changes to leadership.
- You have made some changes to the way the environment is organised and used for learning. There is evidence of a decline in the quality of teaching and learning at the school. Leaders and governors have not prioritised the development of curriculum and assessment systems to ensure that children's progress is monitored accurately from their starting points.
- You have taken effective action in improving the way adults plan activities to enhance children's learning experiences. However, this is not yet consistently effective across the nursery.

- Some adults do not demonstrate a secure understanding of the characteristics of effective learning and development when planning sessions. They do not provide sufficient challenge or take children's prior knowledge into account. This results in slow and inconsistent progress, particularly for the most able children.
- The second area of focus for the inspection was the impact of leaders' actions to provide a good-quality education for the children under the age of three. This provision was not available at the previous inspection, and I wanted to evaluate its effectiveness.
- You have worked with teachers and staff to provide a new dedicated room that is more suitable to the needs of the youngest children. This space gives children good access to the outdoors. You have also ensured that these children have more opportunities to work closer to the older children in the nursery. These changes are already having a positive effect on children's learning, particularly in creating an environment that sparks children's curiosity for learning and the world around them.
- You have started to re-look at your systems that track the progress of the youngest children at the nursery. You acknowledge that this is not used consistently well but that some children are beginning to develop social and language skills at a faster rate than before. A few children are able to interact with others and show interest in activities. In a session that we observed together, we saw that some children were able to pay attention to adult instructions and join in play.
- The third focus was the progress of children with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This is because the school has a higher-than-average number of children receiving additional funding for needs, including those with autistic spectrum disorder. Over time, support for these children has been effective. The nursery links well with outside agencies and other professionals to address children's language needs. Some of the children, including those who also have English as additional language, make good progress.
- Overall, children enjoy positive relationships with staff. Adults help the young children to deal with attachment issues. They seek parental input to initially assess children. However, this information is not fully considered by staff when providing future learning opportunities.
- Your decision to integrate children who have SEN and/or disabilities, including autistic spectrum children, in the mainstream nursery has had a good impact on their outcomes. For example, they have shown improved social and communication skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning is consistently strong throughout the nursery, so that children make good progress from their starting points
- the curriculum and assessment arrangements are used to further improve the

quality of education and children's progress

- the development of children's reading, writing and mathematics skills is a key focus
- the planning and development of activities meets children's needs, including the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Maureen Okoye
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- meetings with you, senior leaders and the chair of governors and a telephone conversation with the local authority representative
- joint visits to classrooms with you and another senior leader
- a review of children's work and observations of children's behaviour around the school and at lunchtime
- an analysis of four parental responses to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, five responses of parents at the nursery entrance and 12 staff responses
- a scrutiny of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, governing body minutes, leaders' monitoring and safeguarding records, and attendance information.