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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



13 November 2018

Mrs Claire Nicholson
Headteacher
Pennywell Early Years Centre
Portsmouth Road
Pennywell
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR4 9AX

Dear Mrs Nicholson

Short inspection of Pennywell Early Years Centre

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 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 school was judged to be outstanding in November 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your passion and commitment shine through your leadership and management of the nursery. This clearly energises your team and the governing body. You all know the strengths of the school well and are always looking for ways to improve. You have effectively addressed the recommendations from the previous inspection. You are always looking to develop practice and the learning environment. You continue to innovate, taking the best from new initiatives or training and adapting them to meet the needs of your children. You give staff time to reflect on what they have delivered and how they could do this even more effectively. You and your team have skilfully designed the outdoor area to support learning in all aspects of the early years curriculum but particularly in language and mathematics. Your deep knowledge and extensive experience mean you are seen as a leader of early years practice in the authority. You regularly share that expertise with all in the sector, through your training programme and through effective one-to-one support, both within and outside the local authority.

You make sure that staff are highly skilled in all aspects of the delivery of the curriculum. Staff know the children in their care extremely well. They know how to engage them in learning and ensure that all make at least good progress, at an individual level. Staff choose exactly the right moments to ask a question to promote thinking and when to model language to develop the children's understanding and vocabulary. Children are consistently engaged in learning. Staff know exactly what will interest the children and this means children's concentration

is high. They stay on activities until they are completed. At no point during the inspection did I see anyone off task, either when working with an adult or when learning independently. Children are confident, polite and are aware of each other's needs. For example, when playing a jumping game, children knew to take turns without prompting from a member of staff. They willingly share resources and even the youngest are beginning to play and work together.

Parents and carers who spoke with me said that the support for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is exemplary, with specialist support being initiated swiftly. They could identify the rapid progress their children were making.

All this highly effective teaching and learning means that, from very low starting points, all children make excellent progress and leave the nursery with, at least, levels of skill typical for their age, many with levels better than typical.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governing body follow best practice when appointing staff and maintain detailed records. All procedures are fit for purpose. You have put in place termly refresher training for staff in all aspects of safeguarding. Beyond this, they also access external training in addition to that provided by the local authority. This means that all staff are well informed and up to date in their practice and knowledge. You make sure that they are always alert to any possible issues through weekly safeguarding staff meetings and random questions.

Effective procedures are in place to ensure that, should a child be missing from nursery, every effort is made to contact their parents. You ensure that the most vulnerable children in the nursery are safe. You have strong relationships with other professionals and you react swiftly to any issues that may arise. Consequently, you ensure that the children in your care are always protected from harm. Parents said they received regular and relevant information to support awareness of keeping children safe.

Inspection findings

- Following the previous inspection, there is now a clear focus on different cultures and backgrounds. For example, the topics children learn about range from the International Tall Ships Race, linked to boat building in Sunderland, to Yiddish music being played for children as a stimulus for them to make their own music and dance. Children are engaged in their learning because of the rich environment and the skilled support of staff focusing on the basics. Staff support the children exceptionally well and identify numerous opportunities to develop maths and language. For example, together we saw that, when building a castle out of blocks, children stayed on task for an extended period. A member of staff deepened their mathematical understanding by careful questioning and challenge, such as how to make more space in the castle, or how they could make the castle walls taller. At the completion of this work, children were then

encouraged to record the outcome by taking photographs for their learning stories. I saw this with the younger children developing story telling in the outdoor area with a member of staff effectively modelling language which the children then used independently.

- Throughout the nursery, all learning opportunities are seized. For example, when a plane is spotted in the sky, children are asked about where it is going and where it has come from. They show their widening awareness in their responses about a plane landing because it is going down, that would be going up if it was taking off and that it had come from the opposite direction to the current position. Elsewhere, a child was pegging socks on a line and developing fine motor skills for writing through using the pegs correctly and prompting staff to develop language through repetition and modelling.
- Children are taught exceptionally well to keep themselves safe. Staff build strong and trusting relationships early, with both children and parents. Emotional well-being is at the heart of all you do. For example, staff were heard talking to the children about creating safe spaces and how to jump from rocks without injuring themselves. Children were confident in talking to adults and clearly felt safe. Parents are asked, through surveys, about how effective the nursery is at keeping their children safe and any improvements they feel could be made. This parent safety questionnaire reassures them that their children are safe in the school. One parent stated that, in response to her comment that she would like to see more on road safety, 'Last week, I was pleasantly surprised that they are having a dress-up day with a road safety theme.'
- Parents I spoke with talked of how they now do things at home which they would not have done before. This is because they had attended many of the courses and sessions run for them by the nursery. For example, chopping vegetables with their child or using scissors. They described how supportive the nursery is and how they are given useful ideas to use at home to support their children's learning. For example, a parent talked about their child who was not interested in reading books. They were advised by the nursery to make up stories with their child and, as a result, the child now engages with reading. You ensure that all sessions are evaluated by parents in ways that effectively engage them, from simple written formats to one-to-one conversation.
- Individual children's learning is closely monitored and tracked. Any gaps are narrowing as progress is accelerated. The majority of children eligible for additional funding left the centre with skill levels at, or above, those typical for their age. The children who did not achieve this were those who had additional vulnerabilities or SEN and/or disabilities.
- There are robust processes in place for developing the priorities in the centre's development plan. These include tracking the progress of children in all areas of the curriculum during their time in the nursery. Recommendations from external consultant reports, a wide knowledge of the local community, the review of reflective practice commentaries, and the views of children, parents, staff, governors and other professionals all feed in to the writing of the plan and the identification of priorities for the coming year. However, the information gathered on children's outcomes needs refining to better support the strategic view of

leaders and managers and the development of more measurable targets.

- The strength of your nursery is exemplified in the response of one parent in the online questionnaire: 'This school has helped me so much. All my children have attended this nursery and, in my opinion, it's one of the best. Staff are fantastic and are with you every step of the way with your child's education.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the analysis of children's outcomes is refined to support their strategic overview of the effectiveness of the centre.

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

Geoffrey Dorrity
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The focus of the inspection was to check whether the outstanding standards identified at the previous inspection had been maintained and to find out how well children were progressing. I held a variety of meetings with you and your staff. I observed adult-supported learning, jointly with you in the nursery, and observed a number of other activities. I considered a range of evidence, including the school improvement plan and leaders' self-evaluation. I also reviewed other documentation.

I met with two members of the governing body and spoke with the head of school improvement and an external consultant. I considered the 18 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke with five parents. I also took account of the 17 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.