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20 December 2018

Mrs Amanda Brown  
Executive Headteacher  
Aspiring Foundations Federated Nursery Schools - Ditton Nursery School  
Dundalk Road  
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Cheshire  
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Dear Mrs Brown

### **Short inspection of Aspiring Foundations Federated Nursery Schools - Ditton Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 11 December 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 good in June 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In recent years, the school has undergone a significant period of change. There have been several staff changes, particularly at a senior level, and the school has federated with Warrington Road Nursery School. You are the executive headteacher over both schools, sharing one governing body. Your highly effective leadership contributed to Warrington Road Nursery School being judged by Ofsted to be outstanding in July 2018.

You never stand still and are continually looking for ways to improve. You have really got under the skin of Ditton Nursery School and your self-evaluation is honest, insightful and accurate. Complacency is not an option. You monitor children's progress very closely to ensure that any underperformance is swiftly identified and addressed. Your aim, and that of all your staff, is to make sure that all children make good progress.

Parents and carers hold you and your staff in high regard. Many were queuing up at the start of the school day to talk to me. They are rightly proud of the good progress that their children make. Parents described the transition arrangements into the school as seamless and tailored to the needs of each child. Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those facing challenging circumstances told me about the good levels of support afforded to them and their children. The following comment typically sums up how parents feel about the school: 'I feel fortunate to have found a place in such a wonderful setting

where children are valued, nurtured and encouraged to achieve well.'

Children are delightful, a credit to the school and their families. They skip into school each morning to a welcoming smile from their key person with whom they share a tight bond.

Staff work well as a team and morale is high. They are proud to work at the school and alongside you. Staff feel valued and well supported. With your encouragement, some staff are undertaking additional qualifications to further their careers in education. Comments to me from staff included: 'This school is a fantastic school and, as a team, we are committed to making it even better.'

Several recommendations were set at the previous inspection which you and your staff have resolved. Staff have received training to help them develop children's language skills. They now take every opportunity to develop children's acquisition of language. Staff have also received additional training for the teaching of phonics. As a result, staff have skilfully adapted the way that they group children for phonics to ensure that they more effectively meet their needs. Consequently, the most able children are provided with activities which encourage them to think more deeply. Provision in the outdoor area has been enhanced to provide children with a broader range of activities and resources to develop their awareness of shape, space and measure. As a result, outcomes have improved. Children now have more opportunities to learn about the diversity of the world in which they live through resources and the celebration of cultural festivals. Furthermore, in an age-appropriate and meaningful way, children learn about the different composition of families, such as same-sex families.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff have a secure understanding of the symptoms of abuse or neglect. Most know the procedures to follow should they be concerned about a child's welfare. Some staff can talk with confidence about the latest national concerns relating to the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders and staff have a secure understanding of the risks to child protection that apply locally.

Checks made on new staff are thorough and comply with current regulations. Leaders ensure that swift and timely support is offered to vulnerable families. The school site is secure, and visitors' credentials are closely checked. A filtering system is in place to ensure that children are kept safe when online.

Staff care deeply about the children in their care. During all daily activities, they keep a careful check on children's safety and well-being. Staff have a kind and caring approach towards children. Children know that if they need help to keep safe, they can reach out their hand and an adult will be there to help.

### **Inspection findings**

- Children start at the school with varying levels of skills and abilities. From their different starting points, children make strong gains in their learning and achieve well. As a result, they leave the school as happy and confident youngsters. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education and the challenges that lie ahead.
- Although children make good progress, outcomes in number dipped in 2018. Very quickly the wheels were put in motion to address this issue. For example, there are now more focused activities relating to the teaching of number. You have ensured that numbers are more prominently displayed in the environment, both indoors and outside. There is now a greater focus on promoting the concept of number as part of the daily routine. A new approach to the teaching of number is about to be introduced. As a result of these initiatives, outcomes in number are showing signs of improvement. The challenge for the school is to ensure that these improvements are sustained.
- Children's progress and outcomes in speaking, reading and writing have improved significantly in recent years and are now good. However, you and your staff believe that children are still not achieving to their best with regard to these aspects of their learning. You have taken swift action to address these issues. Reading has been given a higher profile in the environment with books available in children's independent play areas. A home/school library has been created to encourage parents to take a more active part in developing their children's love of reading. To improve speaking skills, staff have recently embarked on a project which involves using unusual objects, such as nut crackers, typewriters and retro-style telephones to develop and extend children's vocabulary and speaking skills. An exciting range of writing opportunities has been introduced to encourage children to make marks and form letters. These initiatives are at an early stage of development and it is too early to assess the impact on children's progress and attainment.
- Good teaching ensures that learning is active and fun. Children are independent and curious learners. Staff provide an extensive range of worthwhile activities which are exciting and promote all areas of learning. For example, when playing outdoors, children develop their musical talents using a wide range of instruments such as cymbals, tambourines and bells. They refine and develop their physical skills as they balance on stilts and negotiate the wooden climbing frame. Children confidently use rakes and wheelbarrows to collect and clear away the leaves in the woodland area. As they learn and play, children show good levels of cooperation and firm friendships are being formed. Such worthwhile experiences make a significant contribution to the good progress that children make.
- You, and your senior staff, keep a close eye on the quality of teaching to ensure that it is of a high standard. Staff appreciate the constructive and helpful feedback you give them. You ensure that any feedback given has a clear focus on the learning that has taken place. There is a strong commitment to ongoing professional development to keep teaching skills fresh and up to date. This ensures that children get off to a flying start at Ditton Nursery School.

- Although non-statutory, you and your staff recognise the importance of children attending school on a regular basis. You strive to ensure that parents understand that if children do not attend school, then learning slows. Although attendance is improving, there are still some children who are not attending school on a regular basis. Staff ensure that any unexplained absences are followed up swiftly and regular attendance is rewarded. However, increasing the rates of attendance for some children remains a thorny issue for the school to address.
- No one can doubt governors' commitment to the school. Governance has improved since the federation and is now a real strength. Those that I met during the inspection are highly skilled and ambitious for the school. They have a secure awareness of the school's strengths and priorities for development. Governors monitor the impact of their actions on improving the school and meeting their statutory responsibilities. They act as a critical friend to senior leaders, offering good levels of support and challenge in equal measure.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes in number continue to improve and are sustained
- recent initiatives to raise further children's attainment in speaking, reading and writing are embedded
- they consider more innovative ways of improving attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, staff, a representative from the local authority and four members of the governing body. I also had discussions with parents to seek their views of the school. I went on a tour of the school to see the learning that was taking place. I looked at some examples of children's work and observed their behaviour in class. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and information on children's progress. I took account of the responses to the online Ofsted questionnaires completed by 14 parents and seven members of staff.