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23 January 2019

Mrs Jo Madgwick  
Acting Headteacher  
Etherley Lane Nursery School  
Hazel Grove  
Bishop Auckland  
County Durham  
DL14 7RF

Dear Mrs Madgwick

### **Short inspection of Etherley Lane Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019, 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 March 2015.

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 outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

Etherley Lane Nursery is a happy place. You and your staff have created a bright and clean environment where children feel safe. You have prioritised nurturing relationships so that children frequently seek out adults and delight in chatting and interacting with all staff. During my day at your school, I heard no cries and saw no tears – just convivial, contented children learning securely alongside each other.

You and your governors have recently been through a period of change. Fewer children are attending Etherley Lane because several local primary schools have opened up their own nurseries. This has left governors with diminishing funds to pay for staff. The previous headteacher left to become an educational consultant and you took on the very demanding role of half-time teacher and overall leader. The school business manager has been seconded part-time to the nearby primary school.

At the last inspection, you were asked to encourage all parents and carers to help their child to attend regularly. You have been successful in your efforts to explain the importance of attendance to parents and attendance has improved from well below average to just below average currently. You are not complacent and continue to monitor attendance daily, providing support to those few children who are frequently absent and their families.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Governors and leaders have ensured that safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose and that all staff are up to date and trained to anticipate and deal with issues that may arise. No staff appointments are made without thorough background checks. All staff have completed training to prevent harm to children and families who may be at risk from radical views, and almost all staff have a current paediatric first-aid certificate.

Accident logs are carefully kept and parents sign to say they have been informed about any incidents. There is rigour in recording intimate care. Risk assessments for all activities are detailed, anticipating and mitigating risks to children. Daily checks of outdoor areas are made, hazards are corrected and staff are vigilant in their supervision of the area. I observed some children slip out without coats on, despite the cold weather. They were gently reminded to go back and put their coats and hats on.

## **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection, I wanted to find out how effectively governors had managed the transition to new leadership and to what extent the quality of education had been maintained. Governors are dedicated and very emotionally involved with the school. They have taken some difficult decisions to try and future-proof it from closure. They are challenged by a reduced budget and are exploring a federation with the nearby primary school.
- You have worked extremely hard to overcome some of the difficulties faced by falling rolls and a resulting decline in teaching staff. You are a committed and very able teacher and have continued to develop the capability of staff through training. Staff are dedicated and keen to apply new learning. Together, you have undertaken significant work to ensure the accuracy of assessment. However, leaders' plans for improvement have not been well enough matched to analysis of children's learning.
- Assessment information shows that around half of the children enter the school with skills typical for their age and over two thirds have acquired typical skills and abilities by the time they leave the setting. Currently, boys do less well than girls and children overall make less progress in reading and writing.
- I also wanted to look at how well you and your staff support the learning of two-year-olds. Staff have received training on how to provide for the youngest children. You took the decision to provide for two-year-olds in an integrated way with the rest of the children in the setting. As a result of sensitive interactions by staff and thoughtful use of resources, two-year-olds are developing the characteristics of effective learning well.
- I looked at how effectively children, including those who are disadvantaged, are taught the skills of early reading, writing and number and how successfully they are prepared for their move to mainstream school. Children enjoy their school routines which have helped them to settle well. Trusting relationships with staff are enabling children to take part without fear of failure. Some strong teaching is

ensuring that most children leave the school well prepared for the demands of the Reception Year in a new school.

- Disadvantaged children enter the setting with skills and abilities well below those typically seen in personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language. Due to skilful speech and language teaching, these children make strong progress and up to two thirds are assessed as being at a typical stage of development by the time they leave the setting. Adults are successfully involving children with special educational needs and/or disabilities in their learning, so these children also make secure progress.
- Staff are successfully teaching children early mathematical skills. Staff use resources imaginatively and children are happily counting and identifying shapes in blocks, toys, crates and other objects. Some children can add and subtract simple numbers because of effective mathematics teaching.
- Staff have populated the reading corner with new and interesting books. Books for children's use are new and colourful and often contain rhyme, but not all are phonetically decodable. Some adults are choosing books to share with children that are effectively promoting children's repetition of words and learning of phonics. However, not all teaching of reading and phonics is equally successful and some staff are not sufficiently careful about their choices of resources or use of questions to promote deeper understanding for children.
- Staff have placed writing materials around the school to encourage children to develop their fine motor skills and several girls were observed enjoying drawing, sticking, colouring and painting. However, the resources provided do not consistently entice boys to use them.
- There is some variability in the quality and precision in planning for learning. Planning, particularly for learning outdoors, does not give additional adults enough direction, leaving them unclear what they should do to enhance learning. Overall, plans to support children in the rapid acquisition of reading and writing are not exact enough.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further improve provision to fully exploit opportunities for children to rapidly acquire early reading and writing skills
- ensure precision in planning so that learning in all areas, including outdoors, is purposeful
- improve the progress and attainment of boys.

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

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Butcher  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I was able to discuss the work of the school with you and your staff. We visited classrooms together to observe teaching and learning. I was able to speak with a parent and children throughout the day. Discussions with a school improvement partner and three members of the governing body helped to provide me with additional information. School documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website were also scrutinised. I looked at three responses to the staff questionnaire. It was not possible to consider the results of the online questionnaire, Parent View, as there were too few responses.