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Mrs Helen Dummett
Executive Headteacher
George Dent Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Dummett

Short inspection of George Dent Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 nursery was judged to be outstanding in February 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Upon your arrival at the school in September 2018, you swiftly identified priority areas for development and successfully addressed these, for example reviewing the outdoor area to better support quality interactions between staff and children. Staff feel highly valued. This is clearly evidenced through the extremely positive responses to the staff questionnaire. They know that you are as concerned about their welfare as you are about the children's. You identified your priorities for the development of the nursery. You also took time to consult with the staff and take their views into account, as well as those of the parents, carers and children. All staff are known as educators, demonstrating the value you place on their contributions to children's learning.

You and your senior team have ensured that all teaching is extremely strong. It is noticeable, from the inspection evidence, how all staff value the children and their work. For example, they ask the children whether they are happy for comments to be recorded on their work, or whether they want the comments recorded separately. Staff all follow the same effective practice consistently. They effectively question children to deepen their thinking or understanding. For example, they ask children what they think, rather than instantly giving an answer to queries. The recording of observations and teachers' planning clearly demonstrate how children lead their learning and how staff support the children's development. This is particularly the case when developing children's problem-solving and critical

thinking. During the inspection, we observed a group of children transporting heavy buckets of water from one end of the extensive grounds to the other. The educator was continually verbalising her thoughts, wondering how problems could be solved. This resulted in the children finding a trolley to use to transport the full bucket to the sandpit. Then, when attempting to push the trolley over a lip, realising that, by one of them getting off the trolley, it would be light enough to move. Throughout, the educator was effectively introducing mathematical language about size, weight and speed.

Behaviour is outstanding. Children are never off task because they are absorbed in the learning opportunities created for them. They know the high expectations for behaviour set by staff and respond well to age-appropriate resolutions to any low-level disputes. Parents of children with behavioural problems state how effectively the nursery supports their children with additional resources and staffing. They value the positive impact this has, both for their learning and for their behaviour at home. Staff promote independence in all aspects. For example, children dress themselves ready for outdoors and, in the two-year-old provision, children wash their hands independently after using the toilet. Resources are made readily available. Consequently, if a child needs a pair of scissors for the work they are doing, they can access them, and return them after using.

Children make rapid progress from their different starting points. All leave the nursery at least at age-related expectations, with a significant number being above this, demonstrating the excellent progress they make. Parents spoken to during the inspection said how well prepared children are for the next stage in their education. Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are effusive about the additional support their children receive and the progress they make. The nursery ensures that other professionals are swiftly engaged, either on or off site, so that children receive the support to which they are entitled or need.

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. This means that all staff are well informed and up to date in their practice and knowledge.

Effective procedures are in place to ensure that, should a child be missing from nursery, every effort is made to contact their parents. Parents spoke of how you will contact them by text message if they have not informed you of any absence. You have strong relationships with other professionals. 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 know that their children are safe in your care. They know the safeguarding procedures you must follow and are confident that you would robustly follow these.

The most vulnerable children in your care are of the highest priority. All paperwork fulfils requirements and is of high quality and detailed. It tells the story well. The

nursery always attends relevant meetings about these children and sends reports. Partnership working is very strong, for example with the paediatrician, meaning that any concerns are quickly shared and acted upon.

Inspection findings

- Attendance rates have improved dramatically since the last inspection and are now closer to national levels for primary schools. Key messages are given to parents about the importance of attending regularly and parents say these have had an impact on their recognition of the importance of this. They say their children enjoy coming to nursery and are upset if they cannot attend. You recognise there is still more work to be done in this area, but that the current approach is having a very positive impact.
- Provision for two-year-old children is of extremely high quality. The support for staff in developing their skills, knowledge and qualifications has been very effective. Children in the provision make exceptional progress from their differing starting points. They have a firm foundation for entering the three-year-old provision. Throughout observations during the inspection, children were on task. They were effectively supported to develop their resilience and independence by highly skilled educators. For example, two children were working with an educator to dress a doll. The educator talked through how to do this, then suggested that if they worked together and kept at it, they would succeed. She then moved to support a child cutting up a potato. The children continued trying and then approached another adult for help. She gave them the same strategies to use and, eventually, they were successful. You ensure that the statutory two-year-old development check is completed after the first half term. Due to the strong and long-standing working relationships with health visitors across the area, you can quickly refer children if there are any concerns identified. Other professionals, for example speech and language therapists, also regularly visit and advise. You rigorously follow up any referrals to ensure that actions are being taken so that children are receiving the support they require.
- Since the nursery federated with Borough Road Nursery, outcomes for all children have continued to improve. Children lead their own learning, with educators introducing resources or prompts to develop their understanding. For example, a child felt that the cars were dirty and needed cleaning. This was developed by the educator wondering how cars could be cleaned, leading to a discussion. Children then used the internet to research car washes and used resources in the nursery to build a model. They were effectively challenged through questions such as 'Why do you need that?' Children noticed two-dimensional shapes, such as circles and squares, which the educator then developed further by introducing the language of three-dimensional shapes, such as cylinders and cuboids. This extended learning means that the vast majority leave ready for the next stage in their education, with a significant majority above this, in all areas. The sharing of good practice across the federation is having a beneficial impact. However, this sharing of good practice could be developed and extended to others working in the sector, further developing the skills of your staff.

- Children who are disadvantaged are making even better progress than their peers. This is because the additional funding the nursery receives is effectively spent on activities that have proved to be successful. For example, rhyme and rhythm sessions for children and parents have been funded. Observation clearly evidences the individuality of learning that you and all the educators provide. For example, a small group of children were observed working on the story 'Peace at Last'. While one child was making their own version of the story, focusing on the sequence of events, another child was identifying individual letter shapes and matching them to their name. While this was happening, children set their own challenges, such as 'What happens next?' and 'Where might you find that letter?'
- During conversations, parents spoke of how each child is treated as an individual, and how friendly, honest and approachable all staff are. Parents feel confident that if there are any issues, staff will let them know. They also noted how much their children enjoy being at the nursery because the school provides such a rich and engaging environment for learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- best practice is shared more widely across the early years sector.

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

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Dorrity
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held a variety of meetings with you and your staff. We observed four sessions and activities in the nursery. I considered a range of evidence, including the school improvement plan and leaders' self-evaluation. I also reviewed other documentation.

I met with four members of the governing body and spoke with two representatives of the local authority. I considered the 19 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and I spoke with 13 parents. I also took account of the 16 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.