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Nicky Walters
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Dear Mrs Walters

Short inspection of Plym Bridge Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 good in March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your arrival in January 2019, you have settled very quickly to continue previous leaders' good work. Your expert knowledge of how children of this age learn, coupled with strong guiding principles for effective teaching, ensures that children are well supported to get off to a good start. The particular focus on children's early language and communication development, as well as their social, emotional and personal development, means that children achieve well. Many are ready for school, even those who had entered the Nursery at a level a little below that which is typical for their age.

You ensure that staff work effectively and safely, including in the other on-site amenities associated with the children's centre, such as the day care and the speech, language and communication (SLCN) unit. Your expectation that Nursery staff interact effectively with colleagues from across the children's centre is continuing to build on the existing strengths of the school. Parents and carers recognise this and provide tangible examples of how Nursery staff have worked collaboratively to support their children, including through deeply traumatic events such as bereavement. Leaders' aims and values are reflected in the inclusive behaviours and attitudes of children and staff alike.

Following the previous inspection, leaders were challenged to keep improving the quality of teaching towards being outstanding, particularly by encouraging children to think differently in a range of activities. The Nursery is a 'hive' of purposeful and structured activity which promotes thought, curiosity and growing independence.

However, there are some remaining barriers in achieving the school's and council's ambitions for this to be a 'centre of excellence'. First, the most recent turnover of governors on such a small governing body has created a vacuum of experience and knowledge which needs to be filled. Second, teachers' use of assessment information to raise achievement is too variable. Finally, there is an inconsistent strategy for teaching phonics. As a result, even when some children are able to begin recognising initial letters and the sounds these make, children are not taught how to apply this to decode simple words.

Safeguarding is effective.

Due to your knowledge of nursery education from a previous role, you have been effective in joining the team and developing positive professional partnerships with other agencies. Arrangements for keeping children safe are robust and well managed. However, some administrative errors were noted in relation to the child protection policy, including an inaccurate name for the current designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and link safeguarding governor, both of whom have since retired from their posts in the school. These were swiftly remedied.

Overall, the culture for safeguarding is strong. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable. They know what to do to keep children safe in a variety of situations. Processes for moving the children around the environment and between activities or provision in the children's centre are well considered. The site and access to it are secure, with effective safety measures in place.

Staff are keenly aware of their duties to look after the children and to work alongside vulnerable families. The priority for keeping children safe, including their mental and emotional well-being are reflected in the school's practices and staff's actions.

Inspection findings

- Teachers and staff use what they know about the children to plan suitably tailored activities and sessions. These motivate the children and hold their interest so that they achieve well, particularly in developing their communication, speaking and listening. Furthermore, well-designed activities and routines build the children's confidence in social situations. This helps improve their personal, social and emotional development. Even those children with identified speech and communication difficulties quickly become communicative, engaged and keen to share their thoughts and ideas.
- Teachers also promote the effective development of fine and gross motor skills for application in a range of situations across the day, as well as well-targeted activities to boost children's personal, social and emotional development. As a result, children play well together. They are often busily working together to solve problems or to simply enjoy working side by side.
- Teachers plan learning for the children well, particularly for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, there are occasions when teachers do not consider children's next steps well enough, for example to break

down incremental phases for reading, writing and understanding numbers. The lack of clarity or refinement in the teachers' thinking sometimes prevents the children from achieving more.

- The learning environment is well constructed to enable the children to enjoy the breadth of the early years curriculum. This includes activities which encourage children to explore practical mathematical themes, such as experimenting with positioning objects, measures and capacity. However, visible prompts for counting and ordering numbers are not sufficiently explicit, including in the outdoor environment, to consolidate an early understanding of the meaning of numbers.
- Throughout the inspection, I focused strongly on vulnerable children, including those with SEND and disadvantaged children. You and your team quickly check the starting points of all children to establish what they know, understand and can do. You use this information well to ensure that children are well supported, including if they join from the day care or SLCN unit. You ensure that the children's priorities are identified and then work attentively with parents, other staff and agencies to begin getting the children the help they need. Consequently, vulnerable children are well supported and start to catch up quickly, including in being prepared for school.
- You and your team understand the importance of early reading development. The environment celebrates books and texts, for example through reading corners. Staff also share songs and story times which capture the children's imagination and help them develop an understanding of familiar tales, rhythm and rhyme.
- However, leaders have not yet established or implemented a high-quality approach to the teaching of phonics. A mix of approaches and styles, coupled with some weak subject knowledge, leads to inconsistent practice. As a result, children are restricted in their ability to match the letters to the different sounds they make. This also delays their ability to segment to spell or read key words.
- The recent turnover in governors means that the school's leadership is at a crucial time in continuing the momentum of the school. A new chair of the governing body has been identified and is being supported to take over the post shortly. Currently, strong systems and processes are in place, together with your knowledge and that of those assigned to support the school in the interim. However, roles and responsibilities are not yet fully agreed or delegated, for example designation of the SEND governor. This weakens the school in delivering its core responsibilities. The school improvement plan is out of date and new school leaders have not yet redefined their priorities in a new coherent improvement plan.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- implement and evaluate a coherent phonics strategy to ensure that those children who are ready quickly start using phonics for spelling, reading and writing

- check the consistency and quality of teachers' assessment in planning next steps or challenges for the children
- complete school improvement planning, including designating new governors' roles and responsibilities as a matter of urgency.

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

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We worked extensively through a range of inspection activities to evaluate the key lines of enquiry. This included observing and working with you and other staff in the Nursery and SLCN unit. I checked the accuracy of teachers' assessments and records in the children's learning journeys by comparing these to what pupils know, understand and can do. I also talked with some children and staff during different activities and at various times during the day. I scrutinised safeguarding records and we discussed a wide range of related matters, including staff recruitment, training and vetting arrangements. I also reviewed evidence of various referrals and communications with external agencies for safeguarding pupils.

I met with school leaders and teachers. I also met with a representative of the governing body and reviewed school documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary and a sample of records of governors' visits. I analysed the school improvement plan and records of local authority visits. I took full account of the 12 responses on Parent View as well as reviewing the free-texts received through the inspection. I met with a few parents at the start of the inspection and during the day. Furthermore, I had a discussion with the school's headteacher 'mentor' (also local authority adviser), and held an in-depth conversation with the head of primary education for Plymouth to discuss plans for supporting the governors through the current change to the school's governing body.