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Catherine Hughes  
Headteacher  
Oxhill Nursery School  
Oxhill  
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County Durham  
DH9 7LR

Dear Mrs Hughes

### **Short inspection of Oxhill Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 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. There have been some recent changes to the senior leadership team and to the governing body, but this has not halted your commitment to move the school forward and continually look for improvements. Since the last inspection, the school has also started to take two-year-old children and is successfully ensuring that they get off to a strong start in their education.

As soon as children and visitors step through the door, the ethos of your school shines through with your commitment that 'Everyone is Special' apparent in a range of ways. You and the staff team see all children as individuals and are constantly striving to ensure that their needs are met and that they make the best possible progress.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the provision for their children. The parents that I spoke to said how much their children enjoyed coming to school and talked about the progress they have made, particularly in the development of their speech. Parents value the range of ways that you share information with them, including suggestions about how they can support their children's learning at home.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the way that adults question children and help them to be more independent. Staff have ensured that children develop their independence in many ways. These include pouring their own drinks, making sandwiches at snack time, and putting on waterproof suits and wellies

unaided. Staff have received training and mentoring so they are now more effective in questioning and interacting with children and challenging their thinking further. However, some newer or less experienced staff are not yet as confident in this approach and this sometimes hinders the development of children's communication and language.

You were also asked to further develop the curriculum so that children had more opportunities to understand the world. One of your responses has been to give children access to large, interactive screens through which they develop their technology skills while learning about the world. You have also created a new on-site allotment where children have learned how to plant and care for seeds and harvest vegetables and eat them in healthy meals. Children also learn how to care for animals as I saw in their gentle handling of the school guinea pigs.

You were also asked to improve systems used to track the progress of all groups of children. You and your staff team carefully monitor groups of children and use this information to adapt teaching methods to ensure that children make the best possible progress.

You have responded to the need to improve planning by developing plans for improvement that include actions that can easily be measured and clear timescales for when they will be completed. This has also helped you to improve governance as governors use this information to hold leaders to account and to check that improvements have had the required effect.

The long-standing members of the governing body have worked successfully to ensure that the required improvements have been made. They have used a skills audit to identify strengths and weaknesses and have consequently recruited new governors with a breadth of knowledge and experience. A range of monitoring activities has been introduced, such as audits, financial checks and visits to the school. Governors plan to extend this work even further so that they continue to develop the high level of challenge and support to the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. There are secure systems in place to log and track concerns and staff are confident in what to do if they suspect a child may be at risk. There is a designated safeguarding lead in the school, and several safeguarding deputies, who staff go to for advice and support. Referrals are made to the relevant agencies when needed. Leaders ensure that vulnerable families receive strong support.

Risk assessments are in place to check the safety of the indoor and outdoor areas and children are taught to make early assessments of risks they might face, for example when going on a trip. The school has provided parents with information on 'risky play', to outline the benefits of children taking risks in a supportive environment.

Staff receive regular training and updates on safeguarding. Senior leaders have attended training on radicalisation and the government's 'Prevent' duty. However, not all staff have been trained to recognise the signs of extremism.

All parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe, well cared for and happy in their learning.

## **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection, I wanted to find out the extent to which you had maintained a good quality of education. I also wanted to check how all areas of learning and development were taught and to assess your progress in addressing your improvement priorities. In addition, I wanted to explore whether all children were making strong progress from their different starting points, particularly children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. Finally, I wanted to see how effectively the funding for disadvantaged children was being used.
- Staff ensure that all areas of learning and development are planned for carefully and covered in an appropriate way so that children make good strides in their learning. This is done through thoughtfully planned and relevant activities. This careful planning was evident in a cookery lesson where children were deciding what to cook, making a shopping list, walking to the supermarket, following a recipe and talking to staff about what they had made. Staff also identify key skills that need to be taught directly, for example using scissors and how to hold a pencil correctly.
- Leaders and staff have made sure that children have access to high-quality resources in the indoor and outdoor learning areas. The school is continually reflecting on what is available to children and how the learning areas can be developed further. Using last year's assessment information, the school has had a focus on the development of literacy. This has resulted in a wide range of exciting and engaging books on offer in all parts of the classroom, as well as in the attractive and inviting 'book nook'. Children's curiosity is promoted through the use of well-chosen adult non-fiction books that spark their imagination further. Opportunities for children to practise their early writing skills are also well planned.
- Teachers do much to enhance children's personal, social and emotional development. Children learn about how to care for each other and for a range of living things. Staff are building positive relationships with the local community so that children learn about the place in which they live. For example, children visited local older residents last Christmas to sing carols, and now visit regularly to have a chat and see if residents need anything from the supermarket. Local police community support officers also visit the school regularly so that children understand their role and how they help the local community.
- Typically, children start at the school with skills and understanding below those typically seen for their age. Through effective teaching and targeted support, the majority of children make strong progress, so that they leave close to age-related expectations in most areas. Children with SEND achieve well, as staff are skilled

at identifying their needs and putting appropriate support in place. All staff members carry out a range of observations and assessments on children. However, the analysis of these assessments is completed by teachers. This means that not all key workers know about the developmental level of all children, making it difficult for them to plan the children's next steps in learning.

- The funding for disadvantaged children has been well spent on the identified needs of children, supporting their physical development and their listening and attention skills. Innovative strategies such as yoga, forest skills and 'Sing to Speak' have been put in place and are improving the learning and development of disadvantaged children. The staff team now have the skills to carry out these activities themselves, so that all children at the school are benefiting from these experiences. Last year, disadvantaged children left the school with skills appropriate for their age in the identified areas of learning and development. The funding for disadvantaged children is monitored and evaluated and the school plans to develop this scrutiny even further.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- through training, they further develop staff interactions with children, so that children make the best possible progress in communication and language
- all staff are fully informed about the developmental needs of all children, so that they can provide for the next steps in learning
- staff at all levels are trained to spot the signs of radicalisation.

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

Helen Hussey  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, teachers and support staff. We reviewed your plans for improvement, safeguarding records, information on children's progress and your evaluation of the school's performance. You accompanied me on visits to classrooms, where I observed children as they played inside and outside. I also met with members of the governing body and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I met with parents at the start of the day and looked at the 20 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, as well as one letter from grandparents.