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Mrs Susan Conron
Headteacher
Duke Street Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Conron

Short inspection of Duke Street Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your leadership has continued to motivate staff to give of their very best and make sure that children thrive in the nursery. You have excellent relationships with parents and carers. They say how welcoming you and your staff are. They have every confidence that you will always listen to any concerns and deal with them swiftly. Your nursery is very much at the heart of the local community, working with partners from a wide range of services to improve the lives of children and their families.

Your skilful team of staff are very well supported in developing their professional knowledge and the quality of their teaching. They have a clear understanding of how young children learn best and constantly adapt their practice to meet children's individual needs. You value your staff and understand how difficult it can be sometimes. Staff comment that they are proud to be part of the team. They share your vision for excellence in all areas of the school's provision and have high expectations of all your learners.

The nursery continues to go from strength to strength. Collaborative working with another local nursery enables you to build and share the strong practice in both nurseries and further enhance your leadership skills. It also helps to secure the long-term viability of the school.

Indoor and outdoor learning areas are stimulating, exciting and appealing to young children. Leaders focus on giving children real experiences, such as building dens,

playing in the mud, and learning to take risks by balancing on the play equipment. Staff are highly skilled in building on children's interests, extending their thinking and encouraging creativity. For example, some children cutting up a runner bean were surprised to find seeds inside and wondered what would happen if they planted them. Following a discussion with the teacher about what seeds need in order to germinate, they went off to find a plant pot and some soil to try this out for themselves.

Many children attending the school are vulnerable learners, sometimes owing to difficult circumstances at home. These children are especially welcomed, and school staff leave no stone unturned where there is a need to provide extra help and support. Leaders and staff know that helping vulnerable children frequently means helping the whole family. They give unstintingly of their own time to support families and make sure that children feel safe, comfortable and ready to learn.

Your work to support children with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is exemplary and highly valued by parents and the wider community. You are keen to extend this provision because many families in the area struggle to find places for their children. You are working with the local authority to try to secure the necessary funding for this.

Since the last inspection, you have strengthened the role of the governing body. Governors know the school well. They ask searching questions of you and make sure that you continue to provide a safe, secure environment where children can achieve to the best of their abilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There are appropriate systems in place to check that adults at the school are safe to work with children. All staff have paediatric first aid certificates and receive annual training on child protection, including how to protect children from radicalisation. Additionally, safeguarding is an item on the agenda for each staff meeting where up-to-date information is circulated and discussed. Consequently, staff are acutely aware of the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a child.

All staff understand that safeguarding underpins everything that happens in school and is they recognise that it is everyone's responsibility. All concerns are carefully recorded and meticulously followed through. Careful daily checks ensure that the premises are safe, including the outdoor play areas. Children learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy, for example through hand washing and hygiene routines before touching food at snack times.

Most children really enjoy coming to nursery and attend regularly unless they are ill. Where children are absent, leaders always check with families to make sure that children are safe and involve children's social services if they are still concerned.

Inspection findings

- The main focus of my visit was to check whether the high standards identified at the previous inspection have been maintained and to find out how well children currently in school are doing. Together, we observed learning in all the classrooms and outdoor areas. We also visited the 'nest' provision for children with complex needs. I saw at first hand how children make outstanding progress from their generally low starting points. Almost three quarters of children move on to the next stage of their education with skills that are typical for their age.
- The major reason for this superb progress is excellent teaching. Teachers are skilled at adapting activities to the needs of the children. Teachers have high expectations of children's social and academic progress. They are ambitious for children and passionately believe that a first-rate experience in nursery is the best possible way of improving their chances in later life.
- I also wanted to find out how you have designed and organised a curriculum to meet the needs of children with so many different abilities, interests and experiences. You explained that children work together in small 'family groups' led by an adult who welcomes them with a smile each day, keeps in close contact with parents and, importantly, knows each child very well.
- Leaders use this information to plan a curriculum that builds on children's interests and gives them real and relevant experiences. You are particularly keen to ensure that children have plenty of time to play outside, exploring nature and developing their imagination. For example, I watched children playing with herbs, smelling flowers, building a castle based on the story of Rapunzel, busily washing windows and using magnifying glasses to find out about soil.
- You showed me recent pictures of children in the wooded area, building dens, painting leaves, sticks and stones and even enjoying a cup of hot chocolate while they listened to the rain pattering on the shelter. Children also enjoyed being part of the recent Royal Society for the Protection of Birds birdwatch where they used clipboards to record sightings of birds and were especially delighted to see a chaffinch.
- The nursery is rich in opportunities to promote children's language and communication skills, as well as their personal and social development. Staff constantly ask questions, model answers and encourage children to talk about their thoughts and feelings. As a result, children are quickly ready to learn to read, write and understand numbers. Children swiftly pick up on the sounds that letters and combinations of letters make because well structured phonics sessions are part of their daily routine.
- The curriculum provides effectively for children eligible for the early years pupil premium. These children make as much progress as they can, because the additional funding is spent effectively, targeting any individual barriers to learning, particularly language and communication.
- Those children with SEND are quickly identified and expertly supported in school. When required, any additional services are rapidly put into place. These children make the same progress from their differing starting points as the rest of the

children in the nursery. Parents really appreciate the support they and their children receive.

- The support for parents is a strength of the school: from 'family fun' sessions to the annual trip to Blackpool Zoo, parents are successfully encouraged to be part of their children's learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to expand the provision for children with complex needs so that even more children can benefit from the school's excellent practice in this area.

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

Yours sincerely

Janette Corlett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and four other leaders. You accompanied me on visits to classes and the outdoor areas, where I observed learning that was led by adults as well as when children were playing independently. I spoke with a representative of the local authority and three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. I considered school improvement action plans and leaders' self-evaluation. I also checked on the contents of the school's website. I spoke with parents on the school playground and considered the 49 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the 37 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility and the 18 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.