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Mrs Kelly-Ann Lee
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lee

Special measures monitoring inspection of Etherley Lane Nursery School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 26 April 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, staff, governors and representatives from Durham local authority, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I visited the Nursery setting, discussed the curriculum with leaders, scrutinised a range of different documents, reviewed your single central record and considered responses to the survey, Ofsted Parent View. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Etherley Lane Nursery School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

The school may appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last monitoring visit, leaders have appointed two new members of staff. You continue to promote your clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality education to all children at Etherley Lane Nursery School. This vision is well understood by all members of staff. Leaders continue to develop the curriculum and ensure that staff receive the necessary training to implement this effectively. Therefore, this monitoring inspection focused mainly on this aspect of the school's provision.

You have made rapid improvements since the last inspection to refine and develop the 'skeleton' of your curriculum. You have identified the exact knowledge and skills that you want children to know and be able to do, so that this will prepare them for primary school. There are now medium-term and short-term plans in place that set out what the children will learn. Staff deliver 'group time' sessions to directly teach children new concepts and vocabulary to build on what they know. For example, staff teach children the names of the body parts through rhymes and looking in the mirror and pointing to their facial features. This prepares them for art activities later in the week when they are learning to draw and paint self-portraits. However, short term plans have not broken down some knowledge in all areas of learning. You continue to develop this.

You have introduced a 'modelling Monday', where staff show children how to play and interact with activities. At the end of the morning and afternoon sessions, staff encourage children to explain what they have enjoyed in these areas. This helps children to use new vocabulary.

You continue to work with staff, so that they better understand the importance and detail of the curriculum in preparing children for their next stage in learning. While staff know children need to be prepared for Reception, their understanding of the expectations of the curriculum throughout school is limited. This programme of training is still in its early stages.

You continue to improve how you identify and support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You work with external agencies, such as occupational health and speech and language teams, to identify the precise needs of children. This enables you to further refine your support for children with SEND. You ensure staff understand the ranges of support that children with SEND can receive to help them progress.

You and the governing body recognise that the previous programme for communication, language and early reading was not working well enough for children. You have raised the profile of early reading significantly since the last monitoring visit. You have worked with staff to implement this programme. You have identified the books that you want adults to regularly read to children. Children listen attentively to these stories and copy words and actions. Children can be seen re-enacting stories in the wider environment. The early

signs of the impact of your reading programme are encouraging. You know there is more work to do to train staff to correctly pronounce the sounds when reading words.

Since January 2023, there has been a notable difference in staff confidence. They are happy and energised by the changes that you have made and the training that they have received. Many staff told us that this training has been effective in helping them to improve their practice. They feel that they have been a part of the journey of improvement and empowered to make the changes that you and your governors have planned. They enjoy being a part of the wider school team through the federation and feel well supported by you and the governors.

You and the governors regularly review the effectiveness of the school's action plan. You use the expertise of the local authority officers to evaluate this and provide further support. This support has been effective in reviewing the curriculum. You are now working with officers from the local authority to develop and implement a new assessment system to track children's progress. This is in its infancy, therefore, it is too soon to measure the impact of this.

Governors have an objective and accurate view of the progress that the school is making. Governors ask suitable questions to help the Nursery progress, particularly relating to the curriculum, assessment and attendance. They understand the barriers to ensuring high attendance rates for children but challenge this when it is low. They regularly check staff well-being through reviewing reports from leaders and speaking directly to school staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Durham local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Thomas
His Majesty's Inspector