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Mrs Helen Fearn
Headteacher
Ashgate Nursery School
18 Stepping Lane
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Dear Mrs Fearn

Short inspection of Ashgate Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2017, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since the school's federation with Central Community Nursery School in September 2016, and your appointment as executive headteacher, you have wasted no time in stabilising the school after a period of turbulence in its leadership. You worked quickly to gain a secure understanding of what the school was doing well, undertaking a thorough and comprehensive audit of all its practices. You have then set about updating any aspects of procedures and policies wherever this has been necessary.

At the same time, you have worked impressively with staff to renew the school's aims and vision, and have quickly gained their trust, respect and approval. In close partnership with your assistant headteacher, you have made clear your expectations for all children. The quality of teaching is improving because you are providing additional training and guidance to help staff who are less confident to improve what they do. They say that this is helping them.

Governors share your ambition for the school to become a beacon of excellence in early years education. Like you, they have no sense of complacency and are determined that the brisk and impressive current pace of improvement must, and will, continue. Your school development plan shows sensible actions to address any aspects of Ashgate Nursery School that you feel are not yet good enough.

Leaders have ensured that the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been effectively addressed. For example, inspectors asked you to

improve the teaching of mathematics because outcomes were not as high in this area as they were in others. Information you provided to me shows convincingly that children's progress in mathematics has improved and is now the area where they make the fastest progress. You have also ensured that you give good advice and support to parents about how to support their child's learning at home. Parents I met during my visit confirm that they meet with staff regularly to explain the gains their child is making. Staff then use this information to plan the next steps in children's learning.

Teaching is good and is improving. Staff understand that children arrive in school with levels of skills that are below those typically found in other children of a similar age. Both teachers and teaching assistants collaborate well together and are particularly skilled at modelling good language and encouraging children to communicate, and to play and learn together. Classrooms and outdoor spaces are bright, attractive learning environments, and staff plan exciting activities in them which make children want to learn and find out more. Children are eager to show what they can do.

As a result, children make good overall progress from their starting points. This was shown both in detailed information that you provided to me during my visit and confirmed in children's learning journals that I saw. However, you agree that the progress of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not yet consistently good against all aspects of learning. Though you have attended to this swiftly by deploying a teacher from Central Community Nursery to coordinate their provision, there is further work to be done to ensure that they receive tasks which are precisely matched to their needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff understand fully their responsibilities to report any safeguarding concerns they have to you or, if necessary, directly to the local authority. They are able to describe accurately a range of warning signs that may suggest that a child may be, or is at risk of, being abused. This is because they have been well trained in safeguarding, including in areas of recent national concern such as extremism. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. They show that communication to external agencies, including social care, is brisk. Parents are always kept fully informed unless doing so would risk further harm to a child.

Children feel safe at Ashgate Nursery School. They behave in safe ways around the school, and are taught well by staff, in a way that is appropriate for their age, about a range of risks. For example, they are taught the importance of washing their hands after visiting the toilet, and the need to always walk safely when near roads.

Inspection findings

- You and your assistant headteacher are creating an energetic culture of success, high expectations and increasingly effective teaching. Staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire unanimously agree that they are led well, and are now clear about the school's aims. They feel respected and

are proud to work at Ashgate. Your process for the appraisal of staff is rigorous. Good training opportunities, tied to an expectation that teachers' performance in the classroom will continue to improve over time, means that children are receiving increasingly better teaching. Staff are also working well, and sharing skills, with staff at Central Community Nursery. They are engaging in joint projects with them to, for example, improve the use of tools in developing children's motor skills across both schools.

- The rate of improvement is being accelerated by the work of the new, shared governing body, who are holding you and your deputy to account effectively for all aspects of provision and for the gains children are making in their learning. Like you, governors have analysed a wide variety of evidence to justify, accurately, why the school is good. Led by a knowledgeable chair, who has brought governors together through the process of federation, they perform their strategic role well. This is because governors now have a raised level of skills and expertise.
- The quality of teaching in the school is good. Staff are kind, caring and considerate, and know children well. Teachers and teaching assistants plan and assess effectively overall, and ensure that they continually communicate with children so that children's low levels of language improve quickly. Staff remember to use all opportunities to build children's vocabulary and to question them continually to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Those staff who teach two-year-old children are well aware of their needs and plan exciting activities to ensure that they get off to a good start.
- In all areas of learning, a majority of children enter the school with levels of skills that are below those typically found in children of the same age. In communication and language, and in making relationships, for example, this proportion is around two-thirds. Around four in ten children entering the school at the age of two have skills in reading which are particularly low. However, good teaching ensures that children overall, including the most able, make good progress and catch up well. Over time, a majority of children leave the school broadly in line with at least the expectations for their age.
- Those children who are disadvantaged are well supported and make particularly strong progress. You ensure that you spend the early years pupil premium well to help these children to catch up from their starting points. There are too few disadvantaged children among the most able children to report on their progress without the risk of identifying them.
- Staff ensure that children also develop a strong, early love of reading. Children I spoke with told me how much they enjoyed books. During my visit I saw several examples of staff and children sharing books well together, with children learning new words and being very keen to join in telling the stories.
- Prior to federation, the school lacked a named teacher to coordinate provision for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This meant that activities planned for this group of children were not sufficiently well matched to their needs. Consequently, referrals to external

agencies for additional support were not as timely as they should have been. As a result, the progress of these children has not been consistently good across all areas. In particular, they do not make good gains in their understanding, managing feelings and behaviour, and in health and self-care. The new shared coordinator, who now monitors provision for these children across the federation, is effective and skilled. She is meeting regularly with staff at the school to improve planning and teaching for these children. As a result, provision has begun to improve. However, this is still at an early stage and needs further development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress that is consistently good across all areas of learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, representatives of the governing body, the assistant headteacher and the teacher who coordinates, across the federation, provision for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. We visited both classes to observe teaching and learning where I noted children's behaviour and observed children reading books with staff.

At the time of the inspection, there were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, for statistics to be analysed. However, I read the two comments received through its free text facility and considered the views of parents who had replied to the school's recent questionnaire. I also met with parents who came to bring their children to the afternoon session. I examined responses from those members of staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire. I read a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, your school development plan and information on outcomes for children currently in the school. I studied anonymised examples of teachers' appraisal and examined safeguarding records and policies. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.