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Mrs Catherine Ardern
Headteacher
Douglas Valley Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Ardern

Short inspection of Douglas Valley Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have created a school where staff, all of whom are proud to be at the school, have an excellent understanding of what it means to make learning personal to each child in their care. Your expertise is recognised beyond the school and beyond your own local authority in the work you do with other nursery settings in the maintained and private sectors.

Parents and carers are very happy with what you do for them and their children. They say they would 'highly recommend' the school to anyone. They talk about how well you support inclusion and teach children the importance of having respect for others, while helping them learn how to be safe and take care of themselves. They also say the school 'fosters a love of learning and investigation' and that their children 'thoroughly enjoy learning'. They are right. Inspection evidence shows that children are very happy at school. They develop exceptionally well academically and personally.

Children are very happy to come to school. They are eager to meet their friends. As they arrived in the morning, several were keen to tell me how many friends they have in school. Children quickly set to work on the many exciting activities planned for them. Their behaviour is exemplary. The importance you place on teaching them how to learn and develop is very evident in their excellent attitudes and in the respect they show for adults and for each other. They persevere with tasks and show kindness in helping others. This was demonstrated when a child made a

model that fell apart when trying to move it. There was no shortage of children rushing to reassure the crestfallen child, pick up the pieces and help build it again.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to refine the systems to monitor the progress children make, to aid staff as they plan to extend learning. You have done this extremely well, especially for children in the three-year-old to four-year-old age group. Here, staff make skilful use of the information gained from the checks they make on children's learning to draw up learning plans that are specific to each child. Similar systems are not in place to demonstrate the progress of children under three as well, but I noted that you are about to begin work on improving these systems.

Safeguarding is effective.

Children's health, safety, welfare and well-being are a high priority for all of you. Leaders have an excellent understanding of everything to do with safeguarding. You make sure the school is safe and secure for the children, indoors and out. You have ensured that secure safeguarding arrangements are in place and records are detailed and of a suitable quality. You also ensure that children are safe and have privacy when having their nappies changed or going to the toilet. Regular newsletters, briefings and staff meetings remind staff to remain constantly vigilant and take appropriate action when necessary. All staff, governors and volunteers are checked to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Visitors are also checked at the point of arrival. All training is up to date.

The school's website and a display in the entrance hall serve as constant reminders to parents of the school's safeguarding procedures. Accompanied by comments from children, the display demonstrates the school's approach and shows why it is necessary. You check attendance carefully and have had considerable success in improving it. You provide high levels of support for the children and, where relevant, their parents, when they find themselves struggling, for whatever reason.

Inspection findings

- My first and second lines of enquiry in this inspection centred on whether children's progress remained outstanding and whether the new frameworks for literacy and mathematics were improving it further.
- I examined children's attainment when they start school and the progress they make from that point. I also looked at how staff check the accuracy of their assessments and how well they use the information in planning. Children do still make outstanding progress.
- You are meticulous in monitoring the accuracy of teachers' checks on children's learning. The work you do within school, with other schools and with the local authority ensures that all assessments are accurate.
- Children's learning is recorded well. Observations, discussions and children's own recorded work, which includes photographic evidence that is dated and annotated, all show how well the children are doing.

- Staff act quickly to close gaps in learning. The new frameworks provide structures that support continuous progress but are flexible enough to respond to individual need. For example, I saw that, where you had arranged short but intensive bursts of support for reading and writing, children moved on rapidly.
- Your work on ensuring that children develop characteristics that lead to effective learning is excellent. Staff teach children to listen, to ask as well as answer questions, to keep trying, and to become curious learners that explore and investigate in order to learn more.
- Children at this school demonstrate high levels of resilience and perseverance. Their sheer joy in learning shone through some early science work as they used, for example, pipettes and other measuring equipment to combine different elements, a bit at a time, and note the changes.
- You and the staff have an excellent understanding of how young children learn and you use it well to ensure they succeed. For example, staff used water play to introduce three-year-olds and four-year-olds to volume and capacity, and to teach the under threes that water flows.
- My third line of enquiry was about whether leaders and managers are able to keep the school outstanding and whether they are clear about how the school might improve even more.
- You certainly have a very strong determination for the school to remain outstanding and a very clear understanding of how to do so. You transmit your passion for each child to do as well as they possibly can to staff, governors and parents.
- Governors know the school and their responsibilities within it exceptionally well. They support and challenge you in equal measure, using their considerable expertise. As stated earlier, parents are highly satisfied with the school.
- The process of self-evaluation involves all members of the school community. It is accurate because it is based on an in-depth understanding of how to remain outstanding by striving for even greater success. It informs the priorities in the school improvement plan which, in turn, lead to targets for staff as you manage their performance.
- Activities to support learning are stimulating and exciting. They do much to encourage the curiosity, enjoyment of learning and investigative skills that you are determined to instil in the children.
- Early reading, writing and mathematics are integral to everything children do. Staff take every opportunity to reinforce these skills, including counting and phonics, and using the correct vocabulary in different areas of learning. This was noted, for example, as children re-told the story, 'The Hungry Caterpillar', and as they learned to use scientific terms in an investigative activity.
- You are committed to deepening children's learning as well as extending it. Thus, you are preparing the children well for Reception Year and beyond.
- You are keenly aware of the backgrounds and abilities of every child. You check teaching and learning very thoroughly and leave staff in no doubt as to what they need to do to improve.

- Staff value the support they receive. They follow your lead in striving to do the very best for each child and, where relevant, for their families so that they too can support the children's learning and development.
- The work you have done on improving the learning of three-year-olds and four-year-olds by building on what they already know and can do has raised the children's achievement in the past three years.
- You and the staff know how well children under three are doing and you use the information in planning. However, as you rightly pointed out, the systems are not as well developed as they might be to give a clear picture of progress from the time children start to the time they leave the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- by building on the systems established for older children, they complete the work on establishing similar rigour in the assessments of children under three, to give a clearer picture of progress from entry to exit.

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

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out a variety of activities during the inspection. I met with you throughout the day and we observed together across the Nursery in the morning. I also visited the afternoon session. With your deputy headteacher, we looked at assessment information and analysed the work in children's files. I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary, the school improvement plan, safeguarding documentation, and records and information about attendance. I met with governors and two representatives of the local authority. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. There were too few responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents (Parent View) to take into account as inspection evidence, but I took account of the comments some parents took the time to put alongside their response. I also took account of the 15 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.