

7 March 2019

Mrs Andrea Cooper
Headteacher
Bacup Nursery School
Cowtoot Lane
Bacup
Lancashire
OL13 8EF

Dear Mrs Cooper

Short inspection of Bacup Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 outstanding in December 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

You continue to make certain that children become confident and skilful learners. Leaders and staff plan the curriculum well to teach children to speak, read and write with increasing confidence. At Bacup Nursery School children try activities for themselves and investigate keenly. Staff help children to manage their own feelings and behaviour positively. Children treat one another and adults with respect. They learn to count, use numbers and to solve mathematical problems. Children learn to sing, dance, cycle and climb with self-assurance. By the time that children leave, they are ready to continue their learning in the Reception Year at primary school.

You understand the school's successes and which aspects need further work. You make thoughtful use of the skills and abilities of teachers and teaching assistants to improve the school. Staff work well as a team. They present examples of children's comments and writing in splendid displays on walls around the school. This helps children to feel valued and illustrates the work of the school clearly for parents and carers.

Parents are very complimentary about the work of the school. They praise the staff's work to develop their children's confidence, speaking skills and behaviour. They said that staff and leaders do as much as they can to support the needs of individual families. One parental view, typical of many, was: 'The staff are so

dedicated to making sure my child is the best they can be at the start of their educational journey.'

At the previous inspection, the inspector recommended that the school make much better use of the school's forest area for teaching and learning. This has been achieved. Staff now make skilful use of this part of the school premises to teach children, for example about the natural world.

Since the previous inspection, governors, leaders and staff have set up new provision at the school for two-year-olds. While these children benefit from their activities, they do not learn as well as older children. This is because the quality of teaching and assessment is less well-developed. Leaders have identified this difference and are working with staff to strengthen their skills and expertise.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors make certain that the school's arrangements for safeguarding keep children safe. Staff speak regularly with parents, which helps the school to assist families or children when they need extra help. Children's behaviour at the school indicates that they trust teachers and teaching assistants. Leaders give staff proper training about protecting children. Staff with whom I spoke could explain to me the signs of possible neglect or what might indicate that adults or children are experiencing domestic abuse. Leaders keep a close eye on the needs of children and families and link with other professionals where necessary. Staff teach children often about staying safe, for example when using the internet or when finding inedible fungi on dead trees.

Inspection findings

- To evaluate the work of the school I chose some areas on which to focus my observations and meetings. Firstly, I considered how successfully children are learning in the school's forest area. This was because at the previous inspection, the inspector noted that the area was well arranged but not so well used. Leaders and staff have prudently focused on this issue and transformed it into a strength of the school's work. The school's dedicated forest school leader has attended training for her role and gives strong leadership to this aspect of staff's work. Teachers and teaching assistants give children superb support in their learning. Children thrive during their time in the forest area. They learn to investigate carefully, for example finding a centipede on a huge log and knowing how to study it and by what method to touch it with care. Staff make sure that children have proper reference books and identification information to hand to name the insects that they find. Staff guide and extend children's learning skilfully through their use of questions and their careful use of new language, such as when talking about the armour on the back of woodlice. Staff help children to practise climbing trees then challenge them to solve the problem of safely reaching the ground again.
- My second area of focus was to consider the success with which leaders have designed and developed the curriculum at the school. Leaders and staff have

used evidence from educational research to help them to enrich children's learning. They now teach children to instantaneously recognise the number of objects in a small group without the need to count them, because they recognised that this learning was missing from the mathematics curriculum. Staff know from their assessments of children that they arrive at the school with a mix of physical skills. They make extra certain that children develop the range of physical abilities that they need. Leaders and staff have high expectations for all children. They understand the challenge that some disadvantaged children have, for example in learning to communicate, use books and learning to read. Consequently, staff give these aspects of the curriculum a strong and successful focus. Children leave the school knowledgeable about rhyme and rhythm. They talk clearly and use books for pleasure and finding information. Some of the most able children leave school reading simple words because of the first-rate teaching from staff and the aid from their parents.

- Staff use most of the school day profitably for children's learning. However, on occasion, staff do not make the best use of time to promote children's learning. For example, when three- and four-year-olds gather together with staff prior to leaving for home, their learning is sometimes not well matched to their needs.
- My third area of focus was to evaluate how well staff and leaders support the learning of two-year-old children. Leaders and staff have organised a classroom and outdoor area that gives two-year-olds many valuable learning opportunities. For example, children create role play with toy plastic animals and develop their physical skills through many active games. Staff share books positively with children. They play with children often and speak gently with them. However, in some activities staff ask children too many questions in quick succession before children have time to respond. Sometimes staff do not help children to think about what they are learning.
- Leaders are working fruitfully with staff throughout the school to improve their assessment of children's learning. Leaders are starting to make certain that staff only record information that is necessary and helpful to their teaching. Staff working with two-year-olds assess children's learning regularly and identify clear next steps for children's learning. However, staff do not gather enough information when they complete the two-year-old progress checks required by the government.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff make better use of time to support the learning of three- and four-year-olds when they gather together as a large group
- staff working with two-year-olds fully understand how to support and extend children's language and thinking
- staff working with two-year-olds include all necessary information in their formal progress checks of children's 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 Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, both classroom teachers and with the leaders for forest school work and two-year-olds. I met with a representative of the local authority. I met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body. You and I observed children's learning throughout the school. I reviewed a sample of staff's records of two-year-old children's progress. I considered a range of school documents including leaders' self-evaluation and records of teaching and learning. I checked the content of the school's website. With the school bursar, I checked the school's record of checks on the suitability of staff and governors to work with children. I spoke with some parents and a local childminder as they brought children to school. I reviewed the 13 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire and six free-text responses from parents.