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Miss Juliet Levingstone
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Levingstone

Short inspection of Bentilee Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 outstanding in November 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Your leadership is both dynamic and passionate; governors and staff agree. Your vision of excellence for the school's direction is communicated clearly to everyone. You remain sharply focused on the children's well-being and securing their rapid progress. You are determined to overcome challenges and you relentlessly pursue improvements wherever they are required. You readily acknowledge the pertinent knowledge and expertise of others. As a consequence, staff and governors fully contribute to the school's ongoing improvements and together you have formed a strong team that is determined to succeed.

Children enter the school at different ages, some shortly after their second birthday and others following their third birthday. As a result, the school manages a high turnover of children in any term with high levels of competence. Children begin their day with confidence and smiles and they are evidently keen to get on with activities. They know the routines of the day and settle quickly. Adults greet the children with warmth and sensitivity. They immediately provide reassurance if a child is upset or reluctant to leave a parent. On the day of inspection, all children were calm and purposefully occupied within ten minutes of entering school. All activities are well planned and set out in advance so that children can quickly explore, play and investigate. Some children go to the breakfast table, where they independently use the available cutlery to spread butter and jam on prepared toast. Parents who completed surveys commented, 'It's a fantastic school and I cannot fault it' and 'Staff always have time to talk about how my child is doing.' One parent explained,

'It gives them a head start in preparation for the Reception Year. I'd recommend it to anyone.'

The school has undergone a number of changes over the last three years in response to local priorities. Bentilee moved from full-time to part-time provision for three- and four-year-old children in September 2014 and welcomed two-year-olds in January 2016. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2014 and adeptly dealt with the changing circumstances with speed and confidence. The area for improvement identified in the previous inspection was no longer relevant. Nevertheless, you have continued to lead improvements. You continue to focus on identifying children's needs, overcoming their difficulties and ensuring readiness for their next school. In so doing, your commitment to children's safety and welfare underpins all of the school's work with children and their families.

Together with staff and governors, you persistently seek where improvements can be achieved or adjustments made. The majority of children enter the school with knowledge and skills well below those expected for their age. As a result, you have rightly identified that all staff must relentlessly accelerate children's progress so that they are ready for the Reception Year at their next school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, governors and staff believe that 'safeguarding children is the thread that runs through all that we do.' The deputy safeguarding officer is also the family support worker. She has established excellent links with social workers, health visitors and neighbouring schools so that information and actions are clearly understood and well coordinated. As a consequence, no party works in isolation. In addition, the deputy safeguarding officer ensures that good practice, wherever it is identified, is introduced and implemented in school.

The deputy safeguarding officer has forged excellent relationships with parents and families by visiting them at home, offering workshops and maintaining close contact. You keep detailed records of all support and/or intervention. You frequently review the effectiveness of actions taken to inform what needs to be done next.

Leaders make appropriate checks prior to appointing new staff, volunteers and governors. Access to the school's premises is effectively controlled and visitors must provide proof of their identity before being admitted. You conduct regular checks on the premises both indoors and outside so that potential hazards are identified and amended.

Staff are diligent in observing children and quickly identify potential problems. They receive regular training and updates and are fully aware of the local safeguarding priorities. They know the various signs of neglect or abuse, how to record and report concerns and how to follow agreed procedures. They are clear that children's well-being is everyone's responsibility.

Inspection findings

- You have led significant changes since your appointment three years ago. You know the local community well and recognise the importance of involving and supporting families in order to identify and successfully meet the children's specific needs. You actively seek the necessary expertise to ensure that all children, including the growing numbers of disadvantaged children and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve as well as possible. You have purchased additional resources such as reading books, mathematical equipment, and construction toys to reinforce learning and help children practise necessary skills. You have ensured that all staff share your commitment to improving children's rates of progress. You regularly check on the quality of teaching and learning and provide evaluative feedback to direct ongoing development.
- Children's rates of progress are accelerating in all areas of learning. You introduced systems for staff to accurately assess children on entry to the school. Staff are adept at observing children, identifying learning difficulties or spotting potential. They frequently check on children's understanding and record their findings to inform future planning. Staff consistently plan each activity with a clear learning focus and display the appropriate age-related outcomes to inform their checks on children's progress.
- The two-year-old children enjoy well-planned activities and high-quality resources and tools. Children think they are playing but they are in fact acquiring and practising intended skills appropriate for their age and abilities. Children typically enter school with poor skills in speaking and listening. Adults are sensitive to the children's needs and are skilled at modelling the necessary vocabulary for them to copy and practise. As a result, children quickly move on from single-word expressions to descriptive phrases or explanations. Staff are consistent in their expectations of children's good manners and sensitively correct children when necessary. Children share equipment and take turns. They show an impressive level of care for each other, for example if a child becomes upset. Children explore and investigate with interest, concentration and confidence both indoors and outside. They settle quickly and clearly enjoy their time at school.
- You make good use of additional funding to ensure that all children have the resources and experiences they need. You have extended the range of reading books to help children practise their knowledge of phonics. In addition, you made sure that a range of books engage boys' interests to encourage them to read. You are aware that the large majority of children at Bentilee have a limited experience of the world around them. Staff ensure that children explore and investigate the outdoor areas and arrange opportunities to closely observe natural events, such as caterpillars emerging as butterflies. You and all staff are determined that disadvantaged children will acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding to match those of other children by the time they leave Bentilee.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff focus relentlessly on further accelerating children's progress from their low starting points so that they are ready for the challenges of the Reception Year in their next school.

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

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy safeguarding leader, the school improvement partner, the chair of the governing body and two governor representatives. I observed children learning in a variety of sessions with you. I looked at a range of documents, including your self-evaluation and plans for development, the analysis of children's progress in all areas of learning, minutes of the governing body, link governors' reports and a range of policies, including those for safeguarding and child protection.