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Mrs Karen Sharman
Headteacher
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Northamptonshire
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Dear Mrs Sharman

Short inspection of Ronald Tree Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 23 November 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You are determined that your school must continue to improve, as well as always be a happy one where children can thrive. You have a high-performing team of staff who work positively and closely together. All of those who responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire said that they enjoyed working at Ronald Tree and that they receive good training to improve further. Children see that staff work in shared ways alongside each other. They know, therefore, that they will receive the same friendly, helpful and polite approach, no matter which adult they are near. Children also notice how staff model continual, polite cooperation. This shows children how to learn and play together in positive ways, as well as new skills, such as taking turns and considering the feelings of others. Staff know children very well, and relationships are warm. As a result, children settle into the nursery very quickly. Staff also take care to place equipment at a height that is always accessible for children. As a result, they can locate and use the interesting resources independently.

The 'Ronald Tree Rangers' sessions show children how to work together outdoors to explore the wonder and joy of nature. They learn to use natural materials to make paint, construct dens together, utilise natural surroundings to act out stories, and to make a campfire on which they can toast marshmallows. These much-enjoyed sessions teach children to think about, and to take, controlled risks, while ensuring

that staff carefully consider and minimise any risk of harm. Due to effective planning and delivery of this activity by staff, children build their confidence and make positive early relationships with each other.

You have attended well overall to the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. Staff ensure that children's attention does not wander. This is because staff plan exciting activities for them that sustain their interest. For example, children learn to record the different sounds they can make by beating different pots and instruments, or use a peeler to shave carrots for a vegetable soup. Staff praise children by using phrases such as 'good listening' and 'smart sitting'. Where a child does disengage from their learning, staff quickly notice, and refocus that child's attention quickly. Staff also develop children's early reading and phonics skills well. They read with them so that they will develop an early love of books, or plan small groups where children learn to listen intently for different sounds.

The planning that staff complete is effective overall, because staff ensure that they have a clear idea of what they want children to learn. They tell children what this is at the start of an activity. However, planning does not consistently promote rapid progress, because staff do not ensure that they take full account of how much children of different abilities have learned, when thinking about which activities to provide next.

Staff use good language to help children to understand, or to offer them choices. For instance, an adult will ask them which weight they should put on the scale next to try to make it balance, or explain to children how they should use a spade efficiently to dig for worms in the soil. Staff also use good phrases such as 'the sly fox' to improve children's vocabulary. However, you agree that staff sometimes miss valuable opportunities to extend children's language further, because staff's questions frequently require only a single word or short response.

Children make brisk overall progress from low overall starting points. Staff place particular emphasis on promoting children's personal, social and emotional development. Where their progress is less strong in any area of learning, you and your staff are quick to adapt the curriculum. For example, because achievement in writing last year was not as high, staff now give children more opportunities to mark make, and in many different ways. During my visit, I saw how children were writing for a number of different purposes, as well as independently compiling a tally score on the floor to show how many times they had thrown a hoop together.

The governing body performs its strategic role well, checking that, for example, the early years pupil premium is well spent to improve the attainment of disadvantaged children. Governors receive very useful information from you regarding the achievement of children, which enables them to ask you searching questions. The chair of governors supports new governors to undertake their duties effectively.

You, your school and staff receive, unsurprisingly, high levels of praise from parents in all respects. Those who I met during my visit, along with all the comments and responses submitted to Parent View, were unanimously positive. Parents are

particularly complimentary about how you keep them informed about their child's progress. One parent summed up the view of others by saying, 'Excellent staff. I receive feedback about my child regularly and they have worked incredibly hard to put him at ease and teach him new skills. I cannot praise them highly enough.'

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff have a very strong commitment to the safeguarding of children. You have ensured that they have received good and regular training, including in areas of recent national concern, such as radicalisation. They are vigilant for any signs that a child could be being abused, and use the school's system to report immediately any concern they have. You, in turn, are unafraid to make a referral to external agencies, including social care, in order to protect a vulnerable child. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All parents I met, along with those who responded to Parent View, believe that the school keeps their child safe. School records show that parents are also kept informed of any accidents or injuries that happen to children.

Inspection findings

- The assessments staff make of children show that the majority enter the nursery with levels of skills that are below those typically found in other children of the same age. By the time that children leave the nursery, almost all children are broadly in line with the expectations for their age, with a good proportion exceeding these.
- A large majority of children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make strong progress from their starting points in most areas of learning. This is also true for children who speak English as an additional language. A high proportion of these children leave the nursery having caught up, due to highly effective work by staff to develop their language skills.
- Disadvantaged children make consistently good gains during their time at Ronald Tree. Your data shows that, as a result, a very large majority of these children leave the nursery with skills that are at least in line with others of the same age.
- The outdoor space allows children ample areas to run around happily and stay healthy in the fresh air. There is a good range of equipment to help pupils develop their motor skills energetically, such as climbing frames, as well as a track where they can ride scooters and tricycles. As well as ensuring children's physical well-being, the warm and caring relationship staff have with them means that children become resilient and confident as they grow. Staff encourage children to have a go, and to keep trying if they cannot do something the first time. Children know that they can also approach an adult if they are ever upset. This builds children's inner sense of security and desire to try new things.
- Planning is not as effective as it could be in all respects. Although staff evaluate what children have learned from an activity, they do not consistently use this information well enough to consider what next steps they will plan for children of different abilities. This risks occasions when some children will be moved on before they have a secure understanding of something, or the most able children

being given a task that is not sufficiently challenging for them.

- While staff ensure that they develop children's communication skills well overall, they sometimes miss chances that will require children to respond at length. For example, they do not ask children frequently to explain things or to give reasons for their opinions. This means that children's language and thinking skills are not developed as rapidly as they could be.
- Children are taught to keep safe in a wide variety of ways that are appropriate for their age. For example, staff use the zebra crossing in the nursery to teach them the importance of road safety, as well as how it is important not to run about indoors. Older children are taught how to tell someone politely but clearly if someone upsets them, and about the risk of strangers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that staff:

- more consistently make sure that the next steps they plan for children take full account of children's different abilities
- use questions more effectively to extend children's language development and thinking skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. 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 and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with members of the governing body, and the nursery's teacher. I examined data you provided for me regarding the achievement of different groups of pupils. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the school's most recent questionnaire to parents. I met with a group of parents at lunchtime and scrutinised the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. We visited all areas of the nursery together. I looked at staff's planning of the activities they organise for children. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and its plans for further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding and for children who have SEN and/or disabilities. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information. I observed children's behaviour in lessons.