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Mrs N Will
Headteacher
Stag Lane Infant and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Will

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: early learning

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and children, during my visit on 11 October 2010 to evaluate the provision and outcomes for children in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with you, the Early Years Foundation Stage leaders and deputy headteacher; scrutiny of relevant documentation, including assessments of children's learning; and observation of sessions in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The effectiveness of meeting the children's communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional learning and development needs is outstanding.

Achievement

- Children achieve well in communication, language and literacy and in their personal, social and emotional development. The large majority start in the Nursery with low skills for their age and limited language. They make rapid progress, particularly in their personal and social development and in their speaking and listening skills. After just a few weeks in Nursery, most come in happily and soon settle into activities. They usually understand

what adults say to them and can make their needs known. They are learning new words and starting to join in with familiar rhymes.

- Attainment for children entering the Reception classes is low because almost half join the school at this point, often with no pre-school experience. Most settle quickly into the routines and virtually all children are keen to choose from the range of activities on offer. They sustain interest for considerable periods of time whether playing alone or with friends. Children respond well to adults joining in their play and are willing to participate in group and class sessions.
- Standards in all three strands of personal, social and emotional development at the end of the Reception year have improved since 2007 when they were below those found nationally. By 2010, standards overall were broadly in line with the national average. The gap in emotional development has halved, although attainment remains below average. Similarly, children's communication, language and literacy skills have improved so that standards overall in 2010 were in line with those found nationally. The structured teaching of phonics has had a positive impact on children's early reading and writing skills. Their use of language for communication and thinking remains weakest and is below average.
- The school has identified that more recently, in contrast to previous years, boys have not done as well as girls in most areas. Plans have been put in place to monitor their participation in activities and to capture their interest, for example through outdoor activities.

Quality of provision

- The key strengths of the provision include the well-established routines which foster children's personal and social development, a rich learning environment, both indoors and outside, and the use of observations of the children at play and in adult-led sessions to plan the next steps in children's learning. Language and literacy activities are high profile. Children have access to books, mark-making and writing activities indoors and outside and each class has an area for listening to stories on CD. Phonics is a regular part of the daily routine. Sometimes it is taught to a whole class and sometimes to a group of children at a similar level of development; the school has considered grouping children across the Reception classes to tailor teaching to individual needs even further.
- Staff share a good understanding of effective early years provision and a common purpose in wanting the best for each child. They regularly praise the children, cultivate their interests to personalise learning and are quick to discuss any concerns about their progress. However, sometimes the adults miss chances to prompt the children to say more, to share their thinking or explain what they need to do. This may partly explain why outcomes for the use of language in communication and thinking are not higher.

- Individual needs are met well. Planning takes account of different levels of development, although occasionally it is not clear that the more able children are challenged sufficiently in practice. Effective partnerships with other agencies ensure that those children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well.

Leadership and management

- Your expertise in early years has been a key driver for improvement. In recent years, practice has changed significantly, strong partnerships have been forged with parents, including the recruitment of parent ambassadors from the main groups in school and there has been a marked improvement in outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A strong commitment to equality and diversity manifests itself, particularly in the value placed on children's home languages.
- Careful recruitment and a commitment to the professional development of staff have embedded improvements. Even in the face of significant staff changes this year, the quality of leadership and provision are being maintained. Constant review and reflection are the norm. Systems are in place to track individual children's progress and check the performance of different groups. Boys' attainment has recently been identified as a concern. However, there has been insufficient probing so far to identify exactly what boys find difficult, particularly in emotional development and reading where the gaps are the greatest.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- implementing plans to further tailor phonics sessions
- developing staff's expertise in fostering children's extended answers and encouraging them to explain their thinking
- more detailed analysis of data to investigate why boys are not achieving as well in emotional development and reading.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the Early Years Foundation Stage in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector