

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



1 December 2010

Mr C Chamberlain  
Headteacher  
Sherwell Valley Primary School  
Hawkins Avenue  
Torquay  
Devon  
TQ2 6ES

Dear Mr Chamberlain

### **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 17 November 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 included: interviews with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, the assistant headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage leader; scrutiny of relevant documentation, including assessments of children's learning and planning; 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 start in the Nursery and Reception with attainment broadly typical for their age, and achieve well in all strands of communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. In 2010, the proportion of children who reached the level expected at the end of the Reception year rose to well above the national average.

- The proportion of children doing even better has also risen in the last year. This improvement, above the national trend, is set to continue because staff are making good use of observations and assessments of children's progress to plan experiences that rapidly move on the learning of individuals and groups. Several Reception children, for example, were encouraged by their teacher to write their own sentences about what they enjoy doing at school to accompany pictures taken of their class learning. Another group was using a tape recorder to record their conversations and worked with an adult to extend their vocabulary. The more able children drew on their growing knowledge of letters and sounds to spell words and knew how to end sentences with a full stop.
- Boys have closed the gap on girls in linking sounds and letters as a result of the expert teaching that follows a carefully planned and tightly structured approach to teaching phonic knowledge and skills. This good practice has yet to translate into improved reading outcomes, particularly for boys, because there are missed opportunities to practise the skills. The school has rightly identified this as an area to develop.

### **Quality of provision**

- The provision in the classes is of good quality. Resources are of a high quality. They are varied, engaging and of interest to the children. Adults give a strong focus to independent learning, which is evident in the children's enjoyment. A group of Reception children, playing on their own with a leaf blower, were enraptured by the behaviour of the leaves. The activity encouraged plenty of decision-making, problem-solving and turn-taking amongst the children. Outside a girl became highly absorbed in producing fillings for pies that she delivered to a group engaged in flag-making.
- Detailed planning of activities takes into account the findings from observations of children at play and in adult-led sessions. The strengths of the provision lie in the good level of thought given to the learning environment that provide opportunities for children to engage in purposeful talk and develop their social skills. There is scope to widen further the natural creativity of their play, particularly in encouraging more reading and writing.
- The quality of teaching of letters and sounds observed was of a high quality. The emphasis given to speaking and listening during social and emotional skills sessions makes a significant contribution to children's' vocabulary, and lays a strong foundation for their reading and writing.

### **Leadership and management**

- The outstanding leadership over the last two years has built impressive teamwork and brought about significant changes in practice, a marked rise in outcomes and a higher profile for the Early Years Foundation Stage in the school as a whole.

- The monitoring of children's achievement is finely tuned. Systems for the frequent moderating of children's learning and development are rigorous and ensure that provision is constantly evaluated to maintain the very good rates of progress.
- The school's commitment to training and development ensures that staff have an impressive understanding of early learning. This results in an excellent capacity to sustain and build on the improvements already made.
- The partnership with parents and carers is enriched through high-quality communication of children's learning and development. The range of formats encourages parents to become involved and share with staff the learning that is going on in the home setting. For example, through their contribution to the Nursery 'passports' and the use of 'special books' and 'learning together books'.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:**

- finding ways to encourage children to extend their creative play across all the areas of learning
- providing more opportunities to extend and challenge the more able readers.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Jonathan Palk**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**