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Mrs P Cook
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cook

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 11 and 12 November 2010 to look at the leadership of the federation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without your consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior leaders, teachers, governors, pupils and a local authority representative; and the scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is outstanding.

Context

Thomas Wall Nursery School and Robin Hood Infants' School formed a hard federation in September 2007. The schools are located on a single site in central Sutton; a busy commuter town with a wide socio-economic mix. The federation is led by one headteacher and two deputy headteachers. Thomas Wall Nursery offers extended provision and a specialist unit for children with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. In September 2008, an on-site Children's Centre joined the federation.

Outcomes

- Around 70% of the children enter the Nursery, every year, working at the expected age range of 30 to 50 months in literacy and numeracy. The remaining 30% enter with skills development that is below national expectations. During their time in the Nursery, children make good progress. The proportion of children working within the 40 to 60 month band is higher than expected in most areas of learning when they leave the Nursery. As a result of the federation, this proportion has risen steadily each year.
- Not all children from the federated Nursery gain a place successfully in the Infant school. The remaining children come from other nurseries within the local community. Generally, these children arrive with skills that are below expectations nationally. Given this variable baseline, pupils make very good progress during their time in school. By the end of Year 2, pupils achieve standards of attainment that are significantly above national averages in all key subjects.
- Behaviour across the federation is outstanding. Pupils are extremely attentive in lessons and move around the buildings in a very orderly manner. Similarly, behaviour at break and lunch times is excellent. Attendance in the Infant school is high. Attendance in the Nursery has previously been low. As a result of federation, the Nursery is now replicating the good practice of the Infant school and the attendance rate is rising.

Provision

- Improved teaching in the Nursery has been aided by the formation of the federation. A drive by the senior leadership team and the introduction of strategies, such as joint lesson planning, peer lesson observations and joint moderation of assessments have all led to improved teaching and learning.
- The curriculum has been enhanced as a result of the federation. There is now greater continuity from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. Curriculum topics are aligned and planned on a two-year cycle to avoid repetition. Resources and staff expertise are being shared better which is impacting on the pupils' learning. For example, Nursery children are now able to use the Infant school hall for physical education lessons. The formation of an Early Years Foundation Stage Unit has been a particular strength resulting from the federation and has enabled close working between teachers in the Reception and Nursery classes.
- Parents, staff and pupils all report that the care, guidance and support provided by the schools are outstanding. The transition from the Nursery to the Infant school is smooth and very effective. Children in the Nursery are able to see good role-models as they come into daily contact with older pupils. The federation with the Children's Centre ensures that

parents and children are prepared better for learning when they enter the Nursery or Infant school.

Leadership and management

- The leadership and management of the federation are outstanding. The senior leadership model of one headteacher and two deputy headteachers is very effective. The headteacher is able to take a strategic overview and oversee the work of the federation. The deputy headteachers manage well the day-to-day running of the Nursery, special educational needs and/or disabilities, the Key Stage 1 curriculum, information and communication technology and literacy between them.
- The vision and priorities for the federation are outlined in a very good-quality development plan. Its production involves a wide range of personnel including senior staff, middle managers, curriculum leaders and governors. There are very good procedures in place for monitoring and evaluating progress against the agreed areas for action. Success criteria are identified for each area for development, although in a few cases they are not always worded in a specific or measurable manner.
- The senior leaders and governors set challenging performance targets for the federation. The governors are very effective and have a clear understanding of the working procedures and issues across the federation. Senior leaders have a good understanding of data and use this effectively to identify areas for improvement. For example, the federation has rightly prioritised writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and writing and personal and social education in the Nursery as areas for improvement over the next year.
- The senior leaders place great value on the provision of continual professional development (CPD) for all staff. The formation of the federation has greatly enhanced the way in which CPD is delivered across the schools and Children's Centre. Staff are able to benefit from the sharing of good practice across all institutions. Much of the CPD is delivered effectively by staff 'in house' rather than by staff having to travel to courses. The federation also makes effective use of the school networks across the local authority, and invite good-quality speakers for whole federation in-service training, as appropriate.

Area for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all development plan success criteria are clearly worded and measurable.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Sharples
Her Majesty's Inspector