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Mr M Atkinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Atkinson

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 30 September 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 and the Early Years Foundation Stage leader; 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 developments needs is outstanding.

Achievement

- Children start in the nursery 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 2008, the proportion of children who reached the level expected at the end of the Reception year rose to well above the national average. This was sustained in 2009 and in 2010.

- The proportion of children doing even better has also risen. This is in part because staff are drawing well on information from observations and assessments of children's progress to plan experiences that move on the learning of individuals and groups. Several Reception year girls, for example, were encouraged by their teacher to write their own sentences to accompany pictures from a story they had already retold on video. They drew on their growing knowledge of letters and sounds to spell words and knew to end sentences with a full stop.
- Although girls outperform the boys, the gap has closed slightly in the last year because the staff have built on the boys' interests to develop their social and literacy skills. A good example was when several boys concentrated and worked well together outside, discussing sensibly how best to use trowels and wet sand to 'cement' bricks together.
- New children settle quickly into the routines and all show a good level of confidence and independence in choosing what they wish to do. They sit quietly in group and class sessions, are interested in new things and show a ready willingness to participate. When nursery girls confidently sang a rhyme on their own, the others quickly followed the teacher's lead in applauding them.
- The children acquire new skills quickly, especially when the adults demonstrate, explain clearly and give just enough assistance for the children to manage on their own. A group of Reception year boys and girls, for example, much enjoyed eating beans on toast having successfully used a knife and fork to cut their slice into bite-sized pieces.

Quality of provision

- The strengths of the provision lie in the very good level of care and creative thought given to the learning environment, particularly to that outside, the shared sense of purpose among the teaching team and the detailed planning of activities which takes into account the findings from observations of children at play and in adult-led sessions. The staff know the children well and are quick to share any concerns about their progress as well as to celebrate their achievements.
- Individual needs are met well. The use of a quiet corner, with a train set and pictures related to railways, of particular interest to one child, typifies how well the team comes up with ways to foster children's interaction with others. Similarly, staff have built on the Reception year children's interest in space by creating a space station.
- Props, such as a control console made by the children, have stimulated high-quality play by boys and girls, who are also taking a keen interest in stories and books related to space. A group of children was totally engrossed when the involvement of a teacher stimulated the development of ideas and use of new words. Similarly, when an adult took the role of

customer at the outdoors coffee shop, two girls became highly absorbed in taking down orders and serving them carefully and politely.

- Occasionally, the adults miss chances to prompt the children to say more, to share their thinking and to discuss how, what and how well they have done. This partly accounts for why outcomes in emotional development and language for communication and thinking are not even higher.
- High emphasis is placed on encouraging reading, mark-making and writing. The children have open access to books and take home book bags each day. The school follows national guidance in structuring the development of children's awareness of the links between letters and sounds (phonics). The involvement of all key workers with small groups of children ensures progress at a rate that meets individuals' needs. There is scope to widen further the use of books, texts and print and engage the children even more in reading and writing as a natural part of their play.

Leadership and management

- As headteacher, you draw well on your knowledge and expertise in teaching younger children to work with the Early Years Foundation Stage leader in ensuring that all statutory requirements are met and in developing the unit to be the very best. Leaders are looking at ways to deepen links with parents and carers, the Children's Centre and other nurseries to promote early literacy experiences and to develop confidence and independence.
- The time and money invested in setting up the 'village' and in seeking advice, training and consultancy to develop effective practice, especially in communication, language and literacy, are paying off in the children's higher achievement.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage leader knows from her rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the children's progress that there is room for further improvement in some aspects, including the use of language for communication and thinking. While this is reflected in the current action plan, it not clear what difference the planned action is intended to make, especially in relation to the children's performance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enriching staff's expertise in fostering children's extended answers and developing children's ability to reflect on what they have done
- extending further the use of print throughout the unit, inside and out, to encourage children to read and write as part of all activities
- the closer linking of actions and success criteria to the expected outcomes for children in development planning.

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

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector