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30 November 2010

Mr C Danks
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Danks

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 16 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 deputy headteacher 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 development needs is outstanding.

Achievement

- Children achieve well over their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage in language, communication and literacy and in their personal, social and emotional development. From entering Nursery with extremely low skills for their age, especially in speaking, dispositions and social development, children catch up well.
- Progress is particularly rapid for many in the Nursery. From often only using one- or two-word utterances when they start in the Nursery,

Reception year children chatter confidently, explain themselves clearly and initiate conversations with adults and others. This lays a strong foundation for progress in reading and writing.

- Standards rose markedly in 2008 and again in 2009 and were close to expected levels in all strands of communication, language and literacy, and in dispositions and attitudes and emotional development. In 2010, however, a marked increase in children with extremely low levels of skills stalled the upward trend. Nevertheless, all children in this cohort made good and often exceptional progress from their starting points.
- The gap has narrowed significantly between boys and girls because staff take effective steps to develop the boys' knowledge, skills and understanding through activities that catch their interest.
- Children really enjoy the wide range of interesting activities indoors and out. New children settle quickly into the routines and learn from others' extremely good behaviour and positive attitude. All participate willingly in adult-led sessions and often concentrate for long periods on self-chosen activities.

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.
- Consistently high-quality teaching and a strong focus on independent learning with excellent use of adult support typifies the provision in the Nursery and Reception classes. This is developing independence and a willingness to learn amongst all the children. There is consistency in the high quality of adults' talk with children that successfully models spoken language.
- Each child's progress is carefully monitored, with outcomes used to identify the next steps in learning. All the children make the progress they could in the adult-led and key worker sessions because teachers' skilful review of children's understanding focuses adults' talk and expectations to have maximum impact.
- The continuous provision is modified daily to reflect how children are learning and accurately captures their interest. A play box crammed with all that was required to set up a birthday party was introduced into the 'home corner' to build on Nursery children's interest. The adult's high-quality participation encouraged good progress in talk and social development.
- Staff have given considerable thought to how to make best use of the extensive indoor and outdoor areas. Resources are available openly and

labelled clearly, which promotes children's independence as well as their speaking, reading and writing. Well-equipped sensory areas in the Reception classes enhance the inclusive approach to meeting all children's emotional development needs.

- Staff know the children as individuals and keep a close eye on those with particular needs, including those who speak English as an additional language, and those whose language is slow to develop. They liaise with other agencies and make effective use of ideas and practices that have proved successful in fostering children's language. For example, the use of book projects and the creative learning programme.
- Children make marked progress in their language for communicating and thinking, reading and linking sounds to letters in the Reception year partly because of good, structured teaching of letters and sounds (phonics). However, there are missed opportunities to use writing that would stretch and challenge the more able.

Leadership and management

- Outstanding leadership in the last three years has resulted in significant changes in practice, a marked rise in outcomes and a higher profile for the Early Years Foundation Stage staff in the school's strategic development. The Early Years Foundation Stage is a high priority in the school's development plan and is pivotal to raising the attainment of all pupils across the school. As a result, resources, including staffing, are thoughtfully developed.
- Transition arrangements between the Reception Year and Year 1 are innovative. They include shared planning and provision as well as long-term involvement in moderating assessments across all areas of learning.
- The partnership with parents and carers is good. Parents have responded well to the offer of multi-agency workshops. They support their children's learning through ensuring attendance at the holiday sessions prior to starting in the Reception class. This ensures the gains made in the nursery class are sustained.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage leader, working with the knowledgeable support from the headteacher and deputy, has an accurate view of what has worked well and where action is needed to improve the quality of provision further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- incorporating what the observations tell practitioners about the children's preferred learning styles more explicitly into the provision plans
- tailoring programmes, including guided writing, more closely to individual needs, particularly the more able.

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