

25 February 2011

Miss D Thompson
Headteacher
Pirton Hill Primary School
Butely Road
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU4 9EX

Dear Miss Thompson

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: nurture groups

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and children, during my visit with Maureen York HMI on 10 February 2011 as part of our survey of the use of nurture groups for pupils who are vulnerable to underachieving.

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.

This letter briefly summarises our discussion at the end of the visit.

Strengths of the nurture group provision

- Senior leaders and governors demonstrate a firm commitment to inclusion and to meeting the needs of those pupils whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to underachieving. They have a clear and well-articulated vision for inclusion and are careful to ensure that all pupils have the best possible opportunity to learn and develop. Senior leaders place a high priority on raising levels of attainment and promoting positive behaviour and these expectations are at the heart of the nurture group. The work of the nurture group contributes strongly to the school's improvement plan.
- Staff have developed a small nurture group, named the Mercury class, which provides an emotionally secure setting which enables pupils to develop self-confidence, build trusting relationships with adults, take responsibility for their own behaviour and make good progress in their learning. Parents and carers speak highly of the Mercury class and the difference it has made to their children's learning and behaviour, perhaps best captured by one parent who referred to the staff as her child's 'second parents'.

- The inclusion manager, working closely with other staff, has a clear overview of the pupils' emerging needs. After discussion with parents and carers, pupils are selected for the Mercury class if it is clear that it will help them develop skills to be able to access learning in their classrooms and with their peers. Evidence provided by the school shows that most pupils make good progress in their behaviour and in their learning.
- Staff place emphasis in equal measure on pupils' learning and on their emotional, social and behavioural development. This is reflected in the physical layout of the Mercury class which has a 'Smart Room' which focuses on literacy, mathematics and other learning and the 'Discovery Room' which provides opportunities for developing social skills, anger management, artwork and play.
- Staff in the Mercury class are very skilled in working with the pupils. They create a calm and purposeful learning environment and set consistent expectations and boundaries with gentle and sensitive firmness. They use praise and encouragement, enabling pupils to recognise the steps they have made in their learning and behaviour, and at the same time, how they could improve further. This is exemplified in regular comments such as, 'lovely reading; how could you improve it?'
- Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the Mercury class are multi-faceted and rigorous. Senior staff observe the quality of learning and progress through a series of drop-in sessions and more formal lesson observations in the Mercury class. Pupils' written work is regularly scrutinised as part of a whole-school approach. Staff pay close attention to the progress the pupils are making in respect of sharply defined targets set out in their individual plans.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- considering targeted lesson observations, when pupils return to their mainstream classes, which have a specific focus on the quality of teaching, and personalised support for these pupils and the impact it has on their learning and progress
- providing more opportunities for parents and carers to observe and celebrate the successes of their children in the Mercury class.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop this aspect of the school's work.

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 will be sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector