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Mrs D Massey
Headteacher
Howe Dell Primary School
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Dear Mrs Massey

Ofsted 2011–12 survey inspection programme: transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to primary schools

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visits on 4 October 2011 and 21 - 22 February 2012 to look at your work in transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

The visits 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: responses from parents in Year 1 to a questionnaire; interviews with Year 1 parents, carers and pupils; discussions with leaders, including a governor, staff from the nursery and children's centre and teachers in Reception and Year 1; scrutiny of relevant documents; and observation of four lessons.

Overall, the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 is good.

Key findings

- From their low starting points when they join the school, pupils make good progress, particularly in reading, speaking and listening, as they move through Year 1. Consequently, although their attainment by the end of Year 2 is below average, the gap narrows between their attainment and what is expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- You focus strongly on breaking down barriers to learning and supporting pupils, and their families, whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

This is having a positive impact on raising expectations and developing positive attitudes to learning so pupils achieve well.

- Pupils' achievements are regularly celebrated and family learning opportunities promoted effectively through special events, home visits, links with the children's centre and day care. Partnership working builds trusting relationships with families and makes a strong contribution to a smooth transition to school for pupils.
- Parents and carers are confident that the support their children receive as they move from Reception to Year 1 helps them to settle quickly into their new classes and make good progress in their learning, behaviour and personal development.
- Regular and effective communication between Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners and Year 1 staff ensures that the needs of all pupils are assessed accurately. Additional, relevant support is carefully planned and put in place quickly.
- Well-established Early Years Foundation Stage practices, such as the use of role play, puppets, child-initiated activities and outdoor learning, are continued in Year 1. This helps pupils' to develop their language and communication skills well and promotes their confidence and independence effectively.
- A key feature of the well organised, creative curriculum is the strong emphasis on developing pupils' personal, social and emotional skills so that they have the attitudes and dispositions for learning as they move through Key Stage 1.
- The rich, outdoor learning environment is used extensively to provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop their reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills. These opportunities make a significant contribution to the inclusion of all pupils and their enjoyment of learning.
- Teaching in Year 1 is good and supported by a clear understanding of how pupils learn and develop. Teaching assistants are used effectively and interesting, practical tasks are matched well to pupils' age and ability. However, a clear focus on what pupils are learning is not consistently evident through all parts of the lesson to maintain a challenging pace and accelerate progress further.
- Leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils and understand the community that the school serves well. Detailed assessments and systematic monitoring are analysed diligently to inform accurate self-evaluation. Information is used well to modify provision and target resources to meet the diverse needs of different cohorts of pupils as they move from Reception to Year 1. Gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and development are identified and steps taken quickly to address them, including through the early involvement of other agencies. This contributes to the good progress that pupils make in Year 1.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the focus on learning is clear and sustained through all parts of a lesson to maintain good levels of challenge and pace so all pupils achieve consistently well.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop transition at your school.

As 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

Jackie Krafft
Her Majesty's Inspector