

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



7 March 2012

Mrs B Pye
Headteacher
St Matthew's Catholic Primary School
Highfield Lane
Prudhoe
Northumberland
NE42 6EY

Dear Mrs Pye

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, parents, carers and pupils, during my visits on 5 October 2011 and on 22 and 23 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 and carers in Year 1 to a questionnaire; interviews with Year 1 parents, carers and pupils; discussions with senior leaders and teachers in Reception and Year 1; scrutiny of relevant documents; observation of five lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work.

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

Key findings

- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage from their starting points which are below those typical for their age. They continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2 to reach standards that are above average by the end of Key Stage 1. Some pupils make outstanding progress from their individual starting points.
- Pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language or whose circumstances may make them vulnerable also continue to make good

progress. Their needs are identified early, their progress is carefully monitored and effective support is provided when needed. For example, a higher level teaching assistant moved into the Reception/Year 1 class with the pupils and effectively supported them during the transition.

- Year 1 pupils are in two mixed-age classes, one with Reception and Year 1 pupils and the other with Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. Leaders and staff rigorously monitor pupils' progress and hold valuable discussions, including with parents and carers, when placing children in the appropriate class. These placements are constantly re-assessed as pupils mature and progress.
- Staff work very effectively together to plan the curriculum to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met across the two classes. There is a strong emphasis on developing key skills through a creative and exciting curriculum which fully engages pupils in their learning. The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, as appropriate, is carried on into Year 1 to ensure continuity and progression in learning, particularly for those children who need further reinforcement in the first term.
- The quality of teaching in these two mixed-age classes is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Misconceptions are handled very sensitively by staff and pupils learn from any errors they make and quickly move on in their learning. Teachers in both classes plan carefully together on a weekly basis to meet the needs and different learning styles of pupils. There are many practical activities and experiences, such as when pupils worked in groups to create dinosaurs with a wide range of materials and then each group did a presentation to the class using adjectives to describe their dinosaur. Pupils often learn basic skills through singing songs as well as through drama and dance which does much to promote their enjoyment in learning.
- Support staff are deployed effectively to support individuals and groups of pupils in lessons. However, during whole-class sessions they are not always as actively involved as they could be. School leaders acknowledge that their time could be used more productively at these times, for example to observe and monitor the progress pupils make in their personal, social and emotional development during lessons.
- While systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the progress children make in their personal, social and emotional development through the Reception Year, this is not continued into Year 1 and further through the school.
- You and other school leaders have a very good understanding of the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1, particularly as the two teachers in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes are also the literacy and numeracy coordinators. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader and the special educational needs coordinator are also very knowledgeable and involved with the transition process for younger pupils

although they currently teach in Key Stage 2. Consequently, there is a whole-school approach to meeting the needs of pupils during transition.

- Parents and carers express very positive views about the transition process and feel their children are placed appropriately in the mixed-age classes according to their individual needs. Parents and carers say they are kept very well informed of their child's progress, particularly through homework books and home-school reading diaries. They also say their children appreciate the 'buddies' who are assigned to support them through the transition.
- The school 'goes the extra mile' to engage parents and carers who may find it difficult to come to the school, such as those who are ill or unable to travel as well as parents and carers who are in the Armed Forces. Regular contact is made with these parents and carers through letters, reports, photographs and telephone calls where appropriate so that they can be informed of their child's progress.
- Children have very positive attitudes to learning in the Reception Year and this is very well maintained and built upon as they move to Year 1. Their behaviour is very good and pupils say they feel safe and can talk to adults if they need any help.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- deploying teaching assistants more effectively during whole-class sessions
- introducing effective systems to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress in their personal, social and emotional development as they move through the school.

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

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector