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Mrs J Leese
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Leese

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 the visit on 22 September 2011 by Alison Storey HMI and my visit on 5 and 6 of March 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 parts of four lessons in Year 1 and a phonics session in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Key findings

- Staff assess children's levels of attainment on entry in the Reception Year according to age-related expectations. However, links with pre-schools are underdeveloped; consequently information about children's stage of development from pre-schools is limited.
- Children make satisfactory progress by the end of the Reception Year from their starting points, but too few reach a good level of development,

particularly in reading, writing and in linking letters to the sounds they represent (phonics). Progress in Year 1 is satisfactory and improving; it accelerates in Year 2, leading to broadly average levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1.

- The school is improving the rigour with which it tracks and monitors the progress made by pupils. This is done particularly well for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. This contributes to this group of pupils receiving well-targeted and effective additional support which enhances their learning and progress.
- Staff share information about pupils on transition to Year 1, but not always enough focus is on pupils' capabilities, especially the more able.
- The teaching of phonics has become more consistent, and pupils are making more rapid gains in their reading as a result. However, the teaching of phonics for reading does not link systematically enough with the skills that will help pupils with their early writing. A stronger focus is placed on developing pupils' language and literacy skills than that on developing their mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Despite some improvements, teaching in Year 1 remains satisfactory. Typically, teaching includes good opportunities for pupils to be creative, work collaboratively and to participate in stimulating practical activities. However, there is not always enough challenge for the more able.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to improve the quality of daily lesson plans. This is because learning outcomes are not sufficiently clear and this leads to pupils and staff being more focused on activities than on learning. Furthermore, planning does not include enough detail about the progression of skills expected for different groups of pupils.
- The Year 1 curriculum is planned around themes which lead to memorable learning experiences, such as pupils learning about the five senses by smelling, tasting, feeling and looking at different types of food and herbs. However, mathematics is generally taught as a discrete subject and not enough mathematics is included within class themes.
- Senior leaders have developed a transition policy and improvement plan. These are aimed at further improving transition arrangements. The improvement plan does not include interim milestones against which the impact of the school's plans and the progress of pupils can be measured.
- Senior leaders make effective use of partnerships with other schools to help them to identify what needs to be improved in the Reception Year and how this can be achieved. This is helping to compensate for the gaps in the knowledge and expertise within the leadership of this part of the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the rigour with which the attainment of children on entry to the Reception Year is assessed by developing greater links with pre-schools

and increasing the information about what children already know and what they can do

- increasing the proportion of children who reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year, particularly in reading, writing and in linking letters to the sounds they represent
- ensuring that more teaching is consistently good or better in Year 1 by:
 - improving the quality of daily lesson plans so that a sharper focus is placed on what pupils are expected to learn and a clear identification of the progression of skills for different groups of pupils
 - providing greater challenge for the more able pupils
- ensuring that the progress made by the more able pupils is tracked more closely in the Early Years Foundation Stage as well as in Year 1, so that this information can be used effectively to promote greater levels of challenge for this group of pupils particularly when transitioning from the Reception Year to Year 1
- increasing the focus on raising standards in mathematics, and planning more opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum
- refining plans aimed at improving transition between the Reception Year and Year 1, so that the impact of the school's actions and the progress made by pupils can be measured at regular intervals
- increasing the capacity among middle leaders to help drive and sustain improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector