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Mrs H Berry
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Berry

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 visit on 13 March 2012 and during Pat Kime HMI's earlier visit 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; discussions with Year 1 parents, carers and pupils; discussions with senior leaders and teachers in Reception and Year 1; scrutiny of relevant documents; observation of two lessons and the teaching of phonics.

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

Key findings

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Year 1 achieve well. They make good progress in Reception, and by the time they are ready to move on to Year 1, most have attained standards that are broadly expected for their ages. This good progress is well maintained in Year 1 with pupils on target to meet national averages by the end of Year 2.
- In recent years there have been significant demographic changes to the context of the school and now most children start school with skills that are well below that expected for their age. Their personal, social and

emotional development and their communication, language and literacy skills are particularly weak. Standards have been significantly below the national average at the end of Year 2. However, systematic steps have been taken to accelerate pupils' progress and survey findings confirm that these measures have been effective in raising standards. Small proportions of the more able pupils are on target to exceed national averages.

- In the past, girls, and in particular those who are entitled to free school meals, have not achieved as well as boys in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. As a result of a more focused approach to developing their personal, social and emotional skills, the girls are steadily gaining confidence and have greater aspirations; this is reflected in improving standards.
- Children are taught well in Reception and this quality is maintained in Year 1. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and make their lessons interesting and meaningful. There is a good emphasis on pupils assessing their own learning and this is used well to inform teachers' planning. An outstanding feature of the lessons seen was the way in which visual hand prompts were used to reinforce teacher exposition. For example, by pointing to her watch and then linking her hands together, the teacher was able to demonstrate the concept of time connectives. Bullet points were exemplified by consecutively punching dots in a downward manner. However, at times when pupils are required to sit inactive for too long or a task is allocated an excessive amount of time, the pace of learning slows.
- Teaching assistants are used well to support learning and provide individual guidance where necessary. They are particularly effective in supporting those pupils who are disabled and/or have special educational needs.
- A consistent approach to teaching phonics ensures that pupils build their early reading and writing skills systematically. This is successfully achieved by organising the phonic teaching sessions into ability groups across the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2. This ensures that all pupils move along at a suitable pace which matches their development and individual needs.
- Assessments are carried out regularly and monitoring information is analysed systematically to identify the progress that individuals and groups of pupils are making. Pupils' progress is clearly evident and enables robust and challenging targets to be set and reviewed regularly. Books are marked regularly and pupils are given pointers towards further development. However, pupils are confused between the notes teachers make in their books for assessment purposes and the marking comments which are intended to help them with their next learning steps.
- The Year 1 curriculum is broadly based around the areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The teacher plans for a balanced range of formal teaching sessions and opportunities for the pupils to explore

stimulating and memorable activities. The open-plan nature of the school effectively facilitates the shared use of the outdoor learning and role-play areas to promote learning. For example, a group of Year 1 pupils were observed working on a set of instructions to find a teddy that had got lost in the forest role-play area.

- The positive attitudes of the children in Reception to their teachers, to each other and to their learning activities are well maintained as they move into Year 1. Their good behaviour contributes to their enthusiastic engagement during most lessons.
- School leaders and managers demonstrate a very good understanding of the significant role played by the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 teachers in building the strong foundations for future learning. They ensure that their work is never marginalised, thus enabling them to provide a high-quality environment. They consider transition to be 'a process rather than an event'.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the transition from the Reception class into Year1. They say that they have been well kept well-informed through weekly letters, workshops and informal coffee mornings and these have enabled them to prepare their children well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- devising a marking system which is distinctive from the notes that teachers make when they are assessing pupils' work
- ensuring that all pupils fully participate in whole-class sessions by making the sessions shorter and more focused

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

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector