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Mrs J Dunnet
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dunnett

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 12 October 2011 and 28 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 including assessments of pupils; and observation of six lessons.

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

Key findings

- Staff worked effectively at the start of the year to organise a late change in class organisation as the school received new pupils at short notice. Pupils have been happy and well settled throughout the transition. However, at the start of the year, as a result of this alteration, and the wide range of needs and maturity in the mixed Year 1 and 2 classes, activities in lessons for Year 1 pupils were not always precisely matched to their learning or social needs which reduced their progress.

- However, as the year has progressed, and teachers have become more secure with the range of needs in their classes, there has been clear improvement, and pupils' needs are much more closely met. Staff are more confident in using recent National Curriculum assessments of pupils to guide their planning effectively than they were with the Early Years Foundation Stage assessments they had at the start of the year. Consequently, Year 1 pupils in all groups make at least satisfactory and improving progress.
- The lessons observed were all well managed and suitably paced. However, teachers tended to dominate. This had the effect of reducing pupils' opportunities to think for themselves or to improve and apply their learning in different contexts. For example, in a good literacy lesson, Year 1 pupils worked enthusiastically to learn about and think of adjectives to describe a giant, but had limited opportunities to improve their writing further by choosing different sentences in which to use the adjectives. Their independent learning skills gained from the Early Years Foundation Stage were underused to help their learning. In discussion, pupils say that their opportunities to make choices in Year 1 are much more limited than in Reception.
- The curriculum in Year 1 is suitably broad and motivates the pupils. Specialist teaching in music and physical education, together with a wide range of educational visits and lively topics, are exciting and interesting. They provide a strong basis for raising pupils' attainment further. Phonics is taught using consistent materials from Nursery to Year 2. Logistical difficulties make it hard for the school to manage this so that pupils in different classes, but with similar needs, work in groups together. The school recognises the need to continue to develop ways to target phonics teaching as precisely to pupils' needs as possible.
- A strong and positive culture exists in the school of staff sharing ideas and working together, as a team, to improve their practice. Teaching assistants are a full part of the teaching team and make useful and well-focused contributions to pupils' learning. You encourage this sharing well. The school offers well-considered training and development opportunities to staff, which are then successfully shared. You recognise that this needs to be taken into further depth and that teachers and subject leaders need to gain further experience in the requirements of both Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.
- Parents and carers understandably expressed some concerns about the late change in class arrangements at the start of the year. However, they note that their children are well settled and enjoying school life.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the independent and problem-solving skills pupils gain in the Early Years Foundation Stage are better used in Year 1 so that pupils can take more responsibility for their learning, and how it is applied, and increase their progress
- considering teaching phonics more fully across classes and year groups, so that the teaching is more precisely targeted to each pupils' needs

- using Early Years Foundation Stage profile assessments of each pupil more closely to inform teachers' planning and raise expectations of what pupils can achieve in the earlier stages of Year 1.

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

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector