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Ms Trisha Wood
Early Years Leader
St Christopher's Early Years Foundation Stage Unit
Europa Road
Gibraltar

Dear Ms Wood

Short inspection of St Christopher's Early Years Foundation Stage Unit

Following my visit to the unit on 13 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

Since taking up your role in September 2016, you have successfully maintained the good quality of education for the children who attend St Christopher's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Unit. You have an accurate understanding of the effectiveness of the EYFS unit and have rigorously tackled the areas that were identified as needing improvement at the time of the previous inspection. You continue to build effectively on the strengths of the EYFS unit. This is despite unavoidable staff changes and your commitment to the planning of, and imminent move to, a new purpose-built provision for 0 to 5 year olds.

This small EYFS unit has a very big heart which is appreciated by the families it serves. Parents who responded to the online inspection questionnaire highlighted the way in which you 'deal with a transient population extremely well' and provide 'a warm, welcoming and stable environment'. The vast majority of parents confirm that they 'would have no hesitation recommending the unit to anyone posted in the future'. As one parent explained: 'It's a little family.'

You and your early years practitioners are knowledgeable and skilled in developing young children's learning. There is a clear understanding that, in order for them to learn, they need to feel safe and secure. You achieve this with aplomb. Pivotal to this is the way that you make sure you know your children and their families well. This enables you to tailor provision to meet their specific needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

Despite the challenges that your extensive accommodation and surrounding building works present, you and your staff ensure that children are kept safe and free from any potential dangers in this environment.

Appropriate checks are carried out before new employees are able to start their job. All staff at the EYFS unit make effective use of their safeguarding training to ensure that children are kept safe. Knowing the families well enables staff to recognise any signs of concern quickly. Working closely with specialists, both within the military services and locally in Gibraltar, you make sure that vulnerable children are given the appropriate care and specific attention they need.

Before any potential member of the school governance committee (SGC) is allowed to commence their role, rigorous checks are carried out. On successful completion of these checks, new SGC members receive appropriate training to ensure that they have a secure understanding of their role in safeguarding the children who attend the EYFS unit.

Children know that all the adults who work alongside them will help them if they have a minor accident or disagreement with a friend. They understand why they must always wear a hat to protect them from the sun when they are playing outside. They sensibly select appropriate clothing when working with water or sand. Parents and carers know that staff keep their children safe and secure.

Inspection findings

- On appointment, you quickly identified that, although many of the children attend St Christopher's for only a short period of time, not all were achieving their full potential during their time spent at the EYFS unit. In particular, you recognised that boys were not making the progress of which they were capable. This was because they were not sufficiently challenged in their learning and expectations of behaviour were not consistently applied.
- Your introduction of a more consistent approach to behaviour management is ensuring that children have a much clearer understanding of what is expected of them. This is helping them to manage their feelings better and interact more positively with each other. Consequently, they are making faster progress in their learning. In particular, evidence from your electronic tracking system shows that boys are now making much stronger progress in their personal development. This is because adults have higher expectations of the children. The children are very proud to report when they are praised for their behaviour and accept that, if there is a misdemeanour, they will get the chance to make amends.
- You and your early years practitioners have also adopted a more focused approach to the teaching of phonics. Extensive training for all staff is ensuring that daily phonics sessions are taught systematically to all children. This is accelerating the progress children make in their literacy skills. Extra sessions for those children who have recently joined the EYFS unit, or who may be struggling with some aspects of phonics, support their individual progress well and help

them to catch up with their peers.

- You make sure that all early years practitioners prioritise the sharing of good-quality literature with the children, including traditional tales and nursery rhymes. Skilfully woven into their topic work, stories such as 'Jack and the Beanstalk' and 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' help children to not only extend their vocabulary, but also deepen their understanding of the printed word. A strong emphasis on developing the children's writing skills, such as exercises to make their fingers supple, secure appropriate pencil grips as well as regular practice at creating sentences, is accelerating their progress. Consequently, current Foundation Stage 2 (FS2) children write at length with accuracy, using capital letters and full stops.
- Working alongside other early years settings within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) schools, practitioners are gaining a better understanding of the expectations for children at the end of their EYFS education. Nevertheless, you recognise there is a need to make sure that your early years practitioners encourage children to move between activities more quickly so that best use is made of all available learning time. You also know that practitioners need to build on their expertise by taking on more responsibility and leading initiatives which will further improve provision.
- Reorganising the outdoor area into different learning zones has enabled children to access opportunities more easily. Resources are readily available to them and this keeps the children motivated and engaged in their learning. Literacy and numeracy skills are promoted well in all of the outdoor zones using number lines, questions and instructions.
- The early years practitioners carefully plan activities that make best use of the outdoor environment, but that also link closely to children's indoor learning. For example, the creation of a small outdoor garden area is successfully supporting the children's understanding of life cycles and growth. In particular, boys demonstrate a deep interest in this area. They enjoy digging the soil and planting seeds. The boys then take responsibility for watering the plants and carefully measure them as they grow. They proudly dig them out or cut them down to make tasty soup or add their freshly grown lettuce to a sandwich.
- The outdoor mathematics zone is particularly successful in motivating and extending the children's skills. For example, they eagerly help themselves to objects they can sort and count. They access equipment that enables them to measure and weigh. Early years practitioners work alongside children, effectively promoting the correct mathematical terminology and asking questions which make them think deeply about what they are doing. The area for wheeled toys also provides extra challenge, such as routes and ramps which the children work out how to navigate.
- Although most members of the SGC are newly appointed, they are clear about their role. This is because they have received relevant training and guidance. You keep them well informed and they make regular visits to observe teaching and learning for themselves. Consequently, members know the strengths of the early years provision and are clear about the areas that need to be developed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- early years practitioners are fully involved in taking responsibility for further improvements in the EYFS unit
- early years practitioners encourage children to move swiftly between activities to make best use of learning time.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the SGC and the senior principal of MOD schools. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you to discuss the EYFS unit's effectiveness. I had discussions with six members of the SGC, including the chair. I met with all staff and considered seven responses from the online staff survey. I had a telephone discussion with your MOD schools inspector adviser. We visited both the indoor and outdoor learning areas together and I observed the teaching of phonics. I examined documents, including information about the safeguarding of children and the progress that they make in their learning. I also discussed the EYFS unit's self-evaluation document and improvement plan with you. I considered 17 responses to Parent View and nine free-text comments. I also met some parents when they arrived to pick up their children after the morning session.