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26 November 2009

Miss D Heath  
Norcot Early Years Centre  
82 Lyndhurst Road  
Tilehurst  
Reading  
RG30 6UB

Dear Miss Heath

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 November 2009 to look at work in mathematics.

The visit 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: discussions with you and other staff; observation of activities throughout the centre; scrutiny of children's profiles and assessment data; and observation of a 'learning through nature' walk with a small group of children.

Features of good practice observed

- The curriculum is planned exceptionally well to provide a range of stimulating experiences that builds on children's interests and extends their understanding. Children are given excellent opportunities to apply their learning in a variety of adult-led or child-initiated activities.
- The 'daily diary' meetings at the end of each day enable staff to discuss observations of individual children and the success of the activities provided. As a result, planning for the next day is adjusted to take account of gaps in children's understanding or to extend their learning where appropriate. This is a significant factor in supporting their good progress.
- Staff work very well as a team and share their expertise and experience to benefit the children and further enhance opportunities for learning wherever possible. Adults, including students and volunteers, are deployed

effectively to lead or support a variety of activities to enhance children's early understanding of mathematical concepts.

- Very good attention is paid to meeting the needs of children who may need extra support, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those learning English as an additional language. The emphasis on practical experiences, such as sorting shapes and exploring capacity using a variety of containers in the water tray, enables children to access the curriculum at any appropriate level. As a result, all benefit from the wide range of opportunities for learning and development.
- Excellent use is made of the outdoor environment to extend children's experiences. Their understanding of mathematics in the world around them is enhanced through, for example, bringing vehicles to the 'garage' to get fuel; they learn to check the number on the pumps and use cash or sign for payments.
- The introduction of regular 'learning through nature' walks has had a significant impact in improving children's attainment across a range of areas, including mathematics. On the walk observed, children's understanding of the language of measure was enhanced through activities such as ordering leaves according to size and comparing their own heights to that of a variety of trees and saplings.

#### Areas for development

- Include subject-specific vocabulary in planning so that all adults involved in activities are aware of the key terms to introduce and use.
- Ensure that in practical number-related activities, support materials such as number lines are readily available to encourage children's recognition of number and skills in recognising number order.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the centre.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Billington  
Additional Inspector