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Miss C Fiddy
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Fiddy

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: early learning

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and children, during my visit on 19 October 2010 to evaluate the provision and outcomes for children in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with you, the assistant headteacher and the Early Years Foundation Stage Leader; scrutiny of relevant documentation including assessments of children's learning; and observation of sessions in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The effectiveness of meeting the children's communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional learning and development needs is satisfactory.

Achievement

- Children start in the Reception classes with attainment broadly typical for their age and make satisfactory progress in their communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. In 2010, the proportion of children who reached the level expected at the end of the Reception year was in line with the national average.
- The school's 2010 assessments show that children's social development was weaker than in other areas of their personal, social and emotional development. As a result, the school has recently introduced a number of

new teaching assistants into both Reception classes to encourage children's social development and use of language.

- Although girls perform better than boys in all areas, other than in their knowledge and understanding of the world, the gap has closed in the last year. This is because the staff have focused on providing activities that build on boys' interests. A good example of this was the individual writing cases that contain a range of pens and writing equipment. Boys used these well to write for a purpose by recording a list of the equipment they would need to build a stage.
- New children settle quickly into school and show a clear understanding of the routines in place. Staff have close links with the local Nursery which helps them to get to know the children and support them to make a smooth transition into the Reception classes. As a result, from the start, children approach activities with satisfactory levels of confidence and independence.

Quality of provision

- Staff create a caring and safe environment and new staff have quickly developed secure relationships with children. Teaching assistants are deployed well to provide support and encouragement to children and to raise the levels of children's learning and development. A group of children, who spoke English as an additional language, enjoyed participating in role-play in a hairdresser's shop. A teaching assistant helped to develop their vocabulary by demonstrating how to book an appointment with the hairdresser.
- Ongoing observations and assessments are used to inform planning. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided with more tailored support. The good transition arrangements ensure that staff know children's abilities and this information is used effectively to involve other professionals. Children with communication difficulties are identified quickly so that they receive appropriate support and their progress is monitored carefully.
- Activities suitably reflect the needs and interests of the range of children. Staff have developed the use of the classrooms both indoors and outside to include role-play and purposeful writing activities. Occasionally, boys are not fully engaged by these activities and spend too much of their time running around in the outdoor area.

Leadership and management

- Areas of weakness have been identified and these have been incorporated into a clear development plan with actions which align closely with the intended outcomes. Local authority support has helped to ensure that these plans are clearly focused on developing communication, language and literacy. The school has responded to previous areas of weaknesses by increasing the number of adults directly working with children and has

plans to use training to further develop staff's knowledge and understanding.

- Leaders and more experienced staff record their observations and assessments of children's learning and development. They have used these alongside information from previous settings to gain an accurate picture of children's individual interests and abilities. However, currently the frequency of ongoing observations and assessments is limited because a number of staff lack sufficient experience and knowledge of the process.
- Leaders have ensured that staff engage well with children and have increased the opportunities for children to develop their speaking and listening skills. Children discussed their ideas in pairs with enjoyment and confidence. When children were asked to think of a type of character to change into they spoke enthusiastically to each other and came up with a wide range of suitable ideas. Teaching assistants were deployed well in this activity to encourage a small group of children to share their ideas and praise them for their contributions. However, these approaches are not used consistently by all staff and across all classes.
- Staff demonstrate the use of language to children but do not consistently follow these up by encouraging children to repeat the language in their own conversations and dialogue. On other occasions, staff question children about their ideas but do not give them sufficient time to respond or their questions only require children to use one or two-word answers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring more frequent recording of observations and assessments of children's learning and development by providing training for all new staff
- raising the standards and achievement of boys in communication, language and literacy by providing a range of engaging activities indoors and outdoors
- developing children's spoken language skills:
 - by leaving pauses after questions to allow children to respond
 - by encouraging them to use and apply their new language
 - by providing a purpose for them to re-enact dialogue.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the Early Years Foundation Stage in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspections. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield
Her Majesty's Inspector