

4 November 2010

Mrs J Overs
Headteacher
St Mary's CofE (VA) Primary School
Wintringham Road
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Cambridgeshire
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Dear Mrs Overs

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 15 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 Early Years Foundation Stage leader and key staff in EYFS; interviews with parents; 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 good.

Achievement

- Children start in the Nursery with skills and aptitudes in personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy skills that are well below those typically expected for their age. As a result, since 2008, the proportion of children who reach the expected levels at the end of the Reception year has fallen. Overall, children make good progress and achieve broadly in line with national expectations by the time they transfer to the next stage of their learning.

- Children are making progress year on year because staff draw well on information from observations and assessments of children's progress to plan experiences that develop the learning of individuals and groups.
- Although in recent years girls have outperformed boys, the gap has closed in the last year because the staff have provided plenty of outdoor activities to develop boys' social and literacy skills. However, a learning focus for these activities is lacking and, as a result, opportunities to extend children's learning or reinforce newly acquired skills are missed.
- New children settle quickly into the class routines and all show a good level of confidence and independence in choosing what they wish to do. They sit quietly in group and class sessions and when having their mid-morning snacks and drinks.
- The children acquire new skills quickly, especially when the adults demonstrate, explain clearly and give just enough assistance for the children to manage on their own. For example, the majority of Nursery children are developing good personal care skills demonstrated in their ability to dress themselves following a PE session.

Quality of provision

- Planning takes into account the findings from observations of children at play and in adult-led sessions. The staff know the children and their families well and are quick to share any concerns about their progress as well as to celebrate their achievements. The learning environment is well-equipped and successfully supports and reflects children's backgrounds and learning needs. A good range of resources, both indoors and out, is available. However, the intended learning for activities is not made explicit and, as a result, opportunities for learning are sometimes missed.
- Planned activities meet the needs of individuals well. For example, good questioning from the teacher ensured children maintained interest and enjoyment in opening up a box full of 'mini-beasts' and shared their thoughts and feelings with one another.
- Occasionally, adults miss opportunities to extend learning through providing activities for children to apply their newly learnt skills through independent learning activities. This partly accounts for why outcomes in emotional development and language for communication and thinking are not stronger.
- The school follows national guidance in structuring the development of children's awareness of the links between letters and sounds (phonics). Reading, mark-making and writing is encouraged daily. The children have open access to books and take home book bags each day. Staff work enthusiastically with small groups of children to ensure that the rate of progress meets individuals' needs. The school acknowledges there is scope to involve parents more in their children's learning, particularly through the use of books, texts and print.

Leadership and management

- Leaders reflect honestly regarding the outcomes for pupils and any barriers there might be to children making progress in their learning. Strengths and weaknesses within the current provision have been accurately identified. For example, plans are in place to open up the learning provision further to allow children greater free-flow between learning environments. Leaders are aware that further training for staff is necessary to improve the quality of provision further
- Staff training and development needs are clearly identified, provided for and monitored through the school's performance management systems. Leaders are able to demonstrate how they are raising children's achievements and building good capacity to improve further because they possess a secure knowledge and understanding of the children and their learning needs.
- Resources are deployed well, including extended services, to improve outcomes for children. Strong links exist with parents/carers and other agencies and partner schools to strengthen and sustain provision for children.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that there is a learning focus for planned activities to support staff in extending children's learning
- encouraging children to practise their newly learnt skills through independent learning activities

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 inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

David Edwards
Her Majesty's Inspector