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Ms Mallon
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Mallon

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 8 November 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 staff; 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's starting points in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development are well below those expected for their age when they start in the Nursery. Their early writing skills and their ability to use language for thinking are particularly weak.
- All the children make good progress from joining the Nursery to leaving the Reception class, with especially rapid progress in Nursery. There has been a trend of improved attainment in recent years. By the end of the Reception year, children's attainment is not far behind the average for

their age. However, they generally still lag behind in the elements of their learning which were weakest on entry. Their understanding of cultures and beliefs is also behind other aspects of their learning.

- The school's records show that children's attainment has improved considerably in their ability to link sound with letters, a key skill for early reading.
- Children settle into Nursery quickly and respond very well to the wide range of interesting activities on offer, which they enjoy greatly. They have positive attitudes to learning and develop their ability to sustain concentration. They make excellent progress in developing self-control and consideration for others and behave very well in school.

Quality of provision

- Teaching is good, with some that is outstanding, because staff have a good understanding of young children's learning and development needs.
- Learning activities are planned with care across the Nursery and the Reception classes. Plans take account of the children's needs and interests and how they have responded to previous activities. As a result, the activities on offer interest the children and provide continuity and progression in their learning.
- A particularly strong feature is the way that staff plan and support learning in children's self-chosen activities. The impact of this is seen in staff's judicious participation in children's play, developing their vocabulary and their social skills, such as turn-taking.
- Children have opportunities to develop their awareness of a range of cultures and beliefs, but the school recognises that this is an underdeveloped element of its provision.
- Although planning for provision is thorough, on occasion the intended learning outcomes for different pupils are not identified clearly enough.

Leadership and management

- The Early Years Foundation Stage team leader has introduced the statutory requirements for this stage very successfully. She has secured strong teamwork from reflective practitioners who have embraced the national requirements and guidance, and have the skills to implement them successfully.
- Staff at all levels have high aspirations for the children. They are committed to providing high-quality education and care and are always looking for ways to improve further. To this end they undertake a good amount of carefully selected additional training which has had a very positive impact on the quality of provision.
- Staff have built outstanding partnerships with children's parents and carers. They are welcomed as partners and supported extremely well.

They are kept very well informed about what their children are learning and are enabled to help their progress.

- In many ways, oversight of the Early Years Foundation Stage is well-developed and is clearly effective. However, senior staff acknowledge that assessment at the end of Reception for last year's children was not effective enough. As a result of over-zealous interpretation of guidance for assessment, these final assessments underestimated children's achievements and did not align with the staff's ongoing picture of what the children could do.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enabling children to make accelerated progress in their ability to use language for thinking and their early writing skills
- providing more opportunities for children to learn about a range of cultures and beliefs
- accurately aligning the various assessments of children's attainment and progress, and developing the strategic use of assessment data to influence long- and medium-term planning of the curriculum.

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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime
Her Majesty's Inspector