

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs R Bibby
Headteacher
St Finbar's Catholic Primary School
South Hill Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L8 9RY

Dear Mrs Bibby

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 22 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 made 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 is good.

Achievement

- From a very low starting point, children make good overall progress in personal, social and emotional development and in communication, language and literacy skills. Standards, by the end of the Reception year, have risen for the last two years but are still below average.
- The children's progress is normally particularly good in their development of positive dispositions and attitudes to learning and in their social development. For example, they progress very well in developing independence, building positive relationships and learning self-control.

- Within communication, language and literacy, the children make best progress in their ability to link sounds and letters, a key skill for reading. Attainment in this element of learning improved dramatically last year, to a broadly average level. This followed a concerted effort to teach phonic skills more systematically and rapidly.
- Children's writing skills have been poor for some years. However, there are early signs of improvement with the current Reception children. A number of them have started using recognisable letter shapes in their attempts at writing and, with adult support, can use their phonic knowledge to write the correct first letter in a word.
- Children enjoy learning in the attractive and well-organised Early Years Foundation Stage unit. They gain in confidence and play purposefully. They have excellent relationships with the staff.

Quality of provision

- The Early Years Foundation Stage Unit provides a rich learning environment in a welcoming and supportive atmosphere. There are lots of interesting activities provided for the children indoors and out.
- Staff understand the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage and how young children learn most effectively. The teaching observed was of a predominantly good quality, as would be expected from the children's progress over time. Staff are quick to capitalise on opportunities arising in children's self-selected activities to get them thinking and communicating and to extend their vocabulary.
- The provision to develop children's spoken language and their early reading and writing skills is improving. For example, many opportunities for writing are built into play activities and children enjoy having conversations over the 'talking tubes' outside.
- Staff know where children are up to in their learning and note significant achievements made by each child. The arrangements for recording assessments of children's progress in learning have improved this year. Previously, they were too cumbersome to use to guide planning. Nonetheless, senior staff are aware of the need to review procedures and further refine them to ensure that they provide all the information necessary to steer the provision and planning for improvement.
- The school has strong partnerships with the children's parents and carers which enable them to contribute to their children's progress and promote their well-being. The school provides much additional support for children with particular difficulties and for their families.

Leadership and management

- The school has succeeded in improving attainment and the quality of provision through staff changes, an increase in the number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and structural alterations.
- Teamwork is strong and staff have a clear shared sense of direction and aspiration for the children.
- The newly appointed Early Years Foundation Stage leader has a clear view of the strengths and areas for improvement in the provision and there are sound plans for the future.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving children's achievement in writing
- refining and embedding recently introduced assessment procedures to ensure that the information obtained:
 - influences overall curricular planning and day-to-day planning of activities for individuals and groups of children
 - is used to underpin planning for improvement.

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

Pat Kime
Her Majesty's Inspector