

6 January 2010

Mrs S Short
Acting Headteacher
Fulwell Infants' School
Ebdon Lane
Fulwell
Sunderland

Dear Mrs Short

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 13 December 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/nursery teacher, the substantive headteacher (to take up post in January 2011) and the senior teacher; scrutiny of relevant documentation, including assessments of children's learning; discussions with pupils from Year 1 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 with some outstanding aspects.

Achievement

- On starting in the nursery, children's attainment is generally as expected for their age. Children achieve well, especially in personal, social and emotional development because of the prime focus on encouraging them to be independent and self-reliant.

- As well as coming from the school's nursery, children starting in the three Reception classes originate from as many as 16 different providers. Overall attainment on entry is broadly typical of four-year-olds. A small proportion of children are higher attainers. Children's achievement is good overall with boys very slightly outperforming the girls; this is against the national trend. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the support targeted to their personal and language needs.
- On moving into Year 1, over the past three years the proportions of children who reached the stage expected have been well above national figures in all strands of personal, social and emotional development and in three of the four strands of communication, language and literacy. In 2010 the figure for writing dropped to below average for the first time.
- A good proportion of children do well for their age, especially in emotional development, and in language for communication and thinking. In 2010, only a small proportion achieved really well in reading and writing. Following an analysis of why this might be, the school has set challenging targets to boost children's achievement and to ensure consistency in assessment of attainment. Data show that this term children have made at least the progress expected.
- Achievement is good because the routines, organisation, activities and themes foster the children's interest and promote self-confidence and independence. Nursery and Reception year children know the pattern of the sessions. They get on well together and learn to take care of their own needs; they are happy to choose from the activities available and are confident and willing to work with adults. Nursery and Reception year children were engrossed in Christmas-related activities. Nursery children talked about what they could do to find Rudolph; their ideas included posters for a lost reindeer with a red nose and putting out carrots. There was much excitement later when the carrots disappeared and 'we must just have missed him'. Many Reception year children spent considerable time as elves in the igloo tents and Santa's workshop, absorbed in wrapping presents and making labels.
- Several Reception children enjoyed a lotto game, sounding out the three-letter words on the teacher's cards and matching them to pictures on their base boards. All were keen to work out the words and later some showed developing ability in writing the words unaided, drawing on their awareness of some letters and using alphabet strips to help them form some letters correctly, such as *b* and *d*. A few children in a different class also wrote simple descriptive phrases independently.

Quality of provision

- The Early Years Foundation Stage staff work very well as a team. There is a strong sense of purpose and willingness to share ideas. As a result,

there is a high level of consistency in approach and in the quality of the provision. The rooms are welcoming, with displays of the children's work and well-organised areas that enable the children to select and find what they need.

- Much time and care are given to setting up areas and preparing activities to capture and build on the children's interest, and also to sharing situations to initiate the children's ideas and actions. Nursery children were agog when a letter arrived from Santa asking for their help to find Rudolph, and staff picked up on their suggestions throughout the day, such as laying a trail of food to attract the reindeer. Reception children were similarly fascinated by the ice outside and some spent a long time using different tools to chip away blocks. Indoors, others queried whether ice would change back into snow, how long a snowman would last and what items looked like trapped in ice.
- Teachers' flair shows in some simple, but very effective ideas to prompt the children to solve problems. A good example was when a teacher asked the children outside to help her keep warm. The boys and girls were quick to point out that the teacher had no coat on and then shot off to find items of clothing hanging on fencing or lying on benches. This led into a joint discussion of where and how they could create a warm house for the Inuit lady in a story they had read. While the teacher's questions and comments sustained the play, the children had their own ideas about what to do and they were quick to organise one another. Three cooperated well to carry a large rug over the play area to the log cabin with the comment, 'Come on be careful on the ice. You take that corner.'
- Staff had provided a good selection of story books and tapes on the Christmas theme. It tended to be girls who spent most time looking at books and retelling stories to a soft toy or to other children as they pretended to be the teacher. The Nursery children are developing an interest in print because of the focus on recognising their first names, clapping sounds in names, using stories as a theme and fostering mark-making as part of play. However, there is scope for the adults to model the process of writing in the different activities. This also applies to the Reception classes where chances had been missed to include key Christmas words and related print examples in other activities that could have helped those children who wanted to write labels or letters.
- Daily sessions led by adults ensure the systematic introduction of letters and sounds (phonics) as well as key words. Staff used a range of materials including cards, small whiteboards and games to engage Nursery and Reception children in recognising names, letters and blending sounds.
- The school is very effective in gaining parental support in helping children to develop early reading and writing skills. Children take story books home each week with a book for parents, if they wish, to comment on how their children responded. Examples seen showed children's drawings and often

very helpful and detailed remarks from parents on children's reading behaviours.

- Parents have open access to their children's 'My Learning Journey'. These files are a mix of items selected by staff, children and parents and provide a growing record of things done and progress made. Staff use photographs well along with samples of children's work and comments arising from observations of children. There is some inconsistency in how material is annotated; it is not always clear why it has been included and some strands of personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy are covered less well than others.
- The staff use their observations and assessments of each child's progress to plan the next steps for the child and for changes in the provision.

Leadership and management

- Leaders have rightly identified that there is room for improvement in children's reading and writing. Although the staff did not benefit from external training in the use of national guidance in the teaching of phonics, they have drawn on effective practice through discussion, visits to other providers and selection of commercial materials. As a result, the school has and is introducing materials and approaches which have proved effective elsewhere in fostering children's facility with language and their skills in reading and writing.
- As part of a pilot project requested by the local authority, the appointed headteacher has been working with the acting headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage staff to refine the systems to assess the children's stage of development and to track progress. This has sharpened the staff's awareness of the criteria for each stage in each strand of learning and what counts as relevant evidence. The school is gaining detailed data on children's progress throughout Nursery and the Reception year. The outcomes from this term have already been analysed to pinpoint where support and/or challenge may be needed for some children to ensure that they catch up or meet their full potential. As a consequence, leaders are making informed decisions about how best to deploy staff and which programmes may make a difference.
- The development of learning outdoors is a continuing priority with regular reviews of how best to supervise children's time outside given the difficulties of open access from all classrooms.
- The school draws on its links with local authority services and agencies as well as with other schools to ensure support for children with particular needs. For example, staff have sought advice and undertaken training to help them provide support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and speech and hearing needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that adults model reading and especially writing as part of indoor and outdoor activities
- explaining what might be expected of children if they select certain activities, especially in relation to reading and writing
- fostering children's skills in explaining what they intend to do and in reviewing what they have done
- ensuring that there is consistency in the use of 'My Learning Journal', especially in the selection of material and annotation of the content.

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

**Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector**