

25 February 2011

Mrs D Cottam
Headteacher
Shortstown Lower School
Canberra Road
Shortstown
Bedford
MK42 0UZ

Dear Mrs Cottam

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: nurture groups

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and children, during my visit on 1 February 2011 as part of our survey on the use of nurture groups for pupils who are vulnerable to underachieving.

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.

This letter briefly summarises our discussion at the end of the visit.

Strengths of the nurture group provision

- School leaders are clear that the work of the nurture group is central to the school's inclusive approach. They are committed to meeting the needs of all and have developed the group in a way that best supports both pupils and the wider needs of families. It is part of a well-coordinated range of additional provision and intervention.
- Governors are equally committed to the principles and benefits of the nurture group approach and monitor its effectiveness systematically. There is an emphasis on prevention and early intervention and, as part of this approach, the school works with the children's centre to help and advise parents.
- The pupils attend the nurture group for three days a week and spend two days a week in their classes. The nurture group manager takes the role of learning mentor at these times and this is key to ensuring the continuity of approach when the children are back with the mainstream class.
- Class teachers visit the nurture group regularly so that they are also aware of the approaches used and can use them in their own classrooms. This communication between class teachers and the nurture group staff helps to ensure that the approach is consistent wherever the pupils are taught.

The responsibility of pupils' social and academic progress is shared between nurture group and class teacher.

- Parents are very positive about the nurture group provision and understand why the school is giving their children this extra support. They are enthusiastic about the progress their children have made. Parents feel that they can talk easily to both class teachers and nurture group staff; they see no distinction between them.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2, who have been part of the nurture group and are now reintegrated into mainstream, recognise what they have learnt and how it has helped them. They remember learning about trees, butterflies, and telling the time and have fond memories of sharing breakfast together and cooking on Fridays. They are clear that they went back to class when they 'got too clever for nurture'. The school's data show that these pupils are continuing to make progress.
- The assessment of the pupils' social and emotional development is regular and provides a clear picture of their progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the planning for learning outcomes so that the assessment and monitoring of academic learning are strengthened and there is a clearer focus on subject knowledge and skills
- ensuring that evaluation in the nurture group reflects what the pupils have learnt.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop this aspect of the school's work.

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 will be sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Maureen York
Her Majesty's Inspector