

28th June 2019

Dear Mr Boulton,

Thank you for inviting me along to visit your school on 27th June 2019 to discuss the Early Years Basic Skills Quality Mark. I would like to extend my thanks to all school colleagues, pupils and parents for making the visit so purposeful and pleasurable. The preparation and presentation of evidence to support the process and show impact was exemplary and embracing. I am delighted to recommend the school for the Early Years Quality Mark and congratulate you on your success. The award will last for 3 years.

The process was conducted over the course of a day and involved:

- Examination of key evidence
- A focus on all 10 key elements
- A thorough learning walk throughout the school focused on basic skills.
- Discussions with yourself
- Discussions with key stakeholders including governors and senior leaders

I have summarised below key judgements that have supported my decision based on the evidence provided prior to and on the day:

- The parents interviewed spoke passionately about the ways in which their children are supported at school and in the nursery. They expressed that they are well informed about the ways in which their children learn through the use of the Tapestry online learning journal tool and through regular conversations with the staff. When asked about their children's favourite books the parents spoke about the ways in which children are immersed into stories through sensory experiences. One of the parents described a pirate story that her child had enjoyed. The staff went to great lengths to help the child feel involved in the story through sensory play and even setting up a plank for him to walk!
- Communication between school staff and parents/carers is a key factor in the school's ability to effectively support children's progress and to meet their individual needs. The parents, governors and staff interviewed each made reference to the support that is offered to parents/carers and the positive impact that this has on children's outcomes. All staff appreciate the importance of supporting not only the children themselves but their families also and value the contributions that parents/carers make.
- The school's Family Liaison Officer is committed to building strong relationships between home and school. Play and Stay sessions for under 2s are offered including a multi-sensory impairment group. Many children who have attended the sessions have gone on to take up a place at the school. This means that children are well known to the school staff before they enter

the nursery provision and therefore are fully supported to make smooth transitions into the nursery. Some parents of older children within the school have been trained to support newer parents through a Befriender Service. This helps to ensure that parents/carers are fully supported by other parents/carers in similar situations to their own. The Befrienders offer pastoral support as well as more practical support for example navigating referral processes.

- Quality resources enhance the learning environments both indoors and outdoors across the EYFS. A lot of the provision available to the children offers them a multi-sensory experience including talking buttons, musical equipment, switch operated cause and effect toys and interactive story resources. A sensory room provides the children with interactive equipment that they can use to gain an awareness of colour, shape and space.
- Children who access the EYFS provision have a wide range of special educational needs and disabilities. Those in reception all have some form of visual impairment. Each of the children have individual and personalised planning and the priority for the staff, as well as parents/carers, will often be related to children's wellbeing, welfare and their progress in the prime areas. However the EY Lead ensures that all adults working with the children have high expectations of them and that children are fully supported to reach their own potential. Staff plan activities in extremely creative ways to suit the needs of each of the children to ensure that they are given opportunities to access and make progress in all areas of learning including literacy and mathematics.
- The interactions observed during the learning walk in all rooms were extremely positive. Adults communicated sensitively with the children and were skillful in the way that they approached activities, adapting their language, gestures and position according to each child's individual needs. The staff's ability to so readily react and respond to each child demonstrates that they know the children well and plan meticulously to ensure that opportunities to support each of the children in the best possible ways are not missed. A calm atmosphere was felt in each of the rooms and, as a result, all children were observed to be settled, happy and fully involved in their different activities.
- The 2 year old children were taking part in a sensory story activity at the time of the learning walk. The adult leading the session was animated and enthusiastic in her delivery and had a wide range of resources connected to the story well prepared. She was able to involve the children by passing around objects that appeared in the book's illustrations and added other sensory elements to bring the story to life including water that was gently sprayed over the children to represent the seaside setting. The children were sat in a group and managed to hold their attention on the activity for several minutes, excited to find out what was going to happen next. Similarly high levels of involvement were observed in the next room. The children were being read a story about the seaside. The adult leading the session had the sound of crashing waves playing in the background and was using a bag book to involve the children in touching and exploring real objects to represent the

illustrations from the story. Differentiation became evident as the activity moved on. Some of the children moved outdoors to explore the play dough. Adults supported them to squash the dough, using fine motor movements. Positional language and vocabulary related to size and shape was modelled by the adults as one of the children began to push the dough inside a shell. The third room visited saw the oldest of the EYFS children taking part in a maths based activity. The children began by singing seaside songs before exploring sand and digging for treasure. The treasure turned out to be coins with numbers written on. Differentiation was clearly evident as some children worked in a small group with an adult to find the coins while others worked 1:1 with an adult who would introduce counting and number recognition. In the final room children were exploring switch operated toys. One child was using a touch screen PC to explore and name pictures. The children were engaged and showed high levels of curiosity. Children were well supported in each of the rooms and the creative way in which the children were being taught was truly inspirational.

- A high priority for the staff is to support all children in being able to communicate in ways that are most appropriate to them. A significant number of children in the EYFS are non-verbal or have very limited communication skills and, as a result, a wide range of communication routes are made available to them. The EY Lead works closely with the speech and language therapy team at Alder Hey Children's Hospital and has supported staff to implement a range of strategies to enable children to communicate including Makaton signing, PECs and objects of reference to name just a few.
- Despite the fact that some children are non-verbal, all children are supported to have a voice. The adults working directly with the children talked to them and waited for a response which came in various forms. Some children could smile and show enjoyment on their faces, others could select from 2 given options by pointing and others could use words to explain what they were doing. Children were able to express that they were enjoying their activities and could seek adult for support or comfort when needed. One of the children was enjoying his play dough activity so much that he insisted the adults join in by taking their hands and sharing out his dough. Another was exploring sounds in the outdoor area and shrieked excitedly as he discovered that he could make not only a sound but also a vibration if he tapped hard enough on a metal post. The adult supporting him joined in and responded by taking turns to tap on the post with him.
- In relation to early reading a wide range of strategies have been adopted including adults reading stories aloud, Bag Books, Moon and pre-braille resources for children with visual impairments as well as multisensory stories.
- The EY Lead has recently introduced a weekly maths challenge across the EYFS. All rooms are given instructions about how to set up and differentiate the activity. The EY Lead ensures that there are sensory and maths elements to each of the challenges. This week's challenge was to make and play with a number jelly. Plastic numbers were hidden in the jelly and the children were

asked to retrieve the numbers using their fingers or tweezers depending on the level of challenge that they could access.

- In terms of literacy development the EY Lead appreciates the importance of supporting children's growing phonemic awareness and plans activities that will underpin children's ability to read and write, if and when they are ready. Phonics groups have recently been added to the timetable and short sessions are used to introduce children to phase 1 phonics activities and Jolly Phonics songs. The children are encouraged to listen to environmental sounds and will progress on to identifying initial letter sounds as appropriate. Sensory play naturally evolves into early mark making for those children who are able to control their gross motor movements independently. A wide range of resources are made available to the children to support their fine motor development including foam, dough, chunky chalk, paint, pens, different sized pencils, sand and tweezers. Children are given the opportunity to explore such resources at their own pace and for their own purposes. Some children will need to develop fine motor skills for mark making while others will develop tactile discrimination skills which they can apply if they go on to use tactile code or braille for reading.
- Technology is used creatively and effectively to support children's development of basic skills. Equipment including touch screen PC's, switch controlled toys, interactive floor mats and colour activities in the sensory room all contribute to children's development across the prime and specific areas of learning. iPads have also been purchased using EYPP funding to support early communication through specific apps.
- Children access a wide variety of activities which enhance their curriculum. Weekly cookery sessions, soft play, swimming and music therapy are just a few examples. These experiences were described by the staff as building blocks for learning. The EYFS children also visit the local community regularly. They take walks to the local shops and visit Costa Coffee. They also performed songs for residents of a local care home at Christmas time.
- Children participate in national literacy events including World Book Day and Nursery Rhyme Week. The EYFS is also included within whole school events including the whole school read.
- Detailed and ongoing self-evaluation and action planning shows how EYFS contributes to whole school priorities and demonstrates the EY Lead's commitment to continuous quality improvement.
- Staff are passionate about the work that they do to ensure that all children are safe, settled and happy. The parents and governors interviewed during the visit spoke highly of school's early years unit and expressed strongly their view that the EYFS provides quality practice and provision for all of the children who attend. It is clear that all who are involved with the school are dedicated to providing the best possible care and education for all of their children. One only needs to walk into one of the classrooms or outdoor spaces and observe the children happily engaged in their activities to see the impact of the passion and dedication that is poured into the school by each

member of staff as well as the governors, outside agencies, volunteers and students.

Children's wellbeing and involvement is at the heart of early years practice and preparing children for learning is an integral part of practice in the EYFS at The Royal School for the Blind. It has been an absolute pleasure and privilege to assess the EYFS unit for the Early Years Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone on behalf of School Improvement Liverpool for your strong and continued commitment towards improving pupils' basic skills.

Yours sincerely,

Kim Salisbury

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Quality Improvement Officer (EYFS)