

9 February 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Amber and Mica Kindergartens
Aberdeen**

Recently, as you may know, my colleague and I visited and inspected your child's early learning and childcare setting. Throughout our visit we talked to parents and children and we worked closely with the manager and staff. We wanted to find out how well children were learning and achieving and how well the early learning and childcare setting supported children to do their best. The manager shared with us the early learning and childcare setting's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the early learning and childcare setting's recent work including development of outdoor learning and Forest School learning. We also looked at curriculum development and assessment and tracking processes. As a result, we were able to find out how good the early learning and childcare setting was at improving children's education. I would now like to tell you what we found.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children learn and achieve well in Amber and Mica Kindergartens. Children across the setting are confident, happy and settled. They are highly valued and respected by staff who are kind and caring towards them. They quickly adjust to their environment on arrival. Children concentrate well and spend good periods of time involved in interesting and stimulating activities. For example, making Christmas cards for you. Children are engaged and motivated by most of their learning experiences. Staff should now ensure that the children are always involved in appropriate and challenging experiences. They are developing their imaginative play and investigating their environment in the well-developed, well-resourced outdoor play area and on their Forest School outings. For example, pretending that the large swing in the outdoor play area is a rocket ship and making wreaths from natural materials in the forest. All children have personal folders which contain photos. They also have individual booklets with examples of their individual artwork. We have asked staff to develop an individual learner journal for your children bringing together their photos, artwork and staff observations. Children's opinions about what

they want to learn are sought and acted upon. Children contribute through group time discussions. For example, what they already know and what they would like to learn about a particular topic such as craft making. Staff should now help them engage further in discussions about their learning. Children's achievements are celebrated well by children and staff in the kindergarten. For example, children are appropriately praised for helping to build fires safely in the forest.

Children are making good progress in early language and mathematics. Almost all children enjoy listening to stories read by an adult and looking at books independently. They are able to talk enthusiastically about their work, using appropriate vocabulary and questioning each other. Children have knowledge of different languages, through learning from staff and children of different nationalities. Most children are able to recognise their names embroidered on napkin holders. A few children use written marks to express ideas and feelings. We have asked staff to encourage the children to mark-make when carrying out activities both inside and outside by providing appropriate material. Children have a good grasp of early mathematics. They are developing skills in sorting, matching, measuring and counting. For example, they sort different leaves by shape. Children relate their numeracy skills to real-life experiences, for example counting the number of days left till Christmas on the advent calendar. Children are knowledgeable of ecological and sustainable issues through their work indoors and outdoors. They take their waste to the recycling bins in the Camphill grounds.

How well does the early learning and childcare setting support children to develop and learn?

Your child's learning and development is supported well by the skilled staff team who work to support and extend their learning. They understand their roles in keeping them safe. Parents and staff communicate freely. Relationships are strong and warm throughout. Staff provide an attractive play environment with a range of activities and experiences. Staff interact skilfully with children which meets the needs of most children. The outdoor area and the woodlands provides good opportunities for physical development and increasing awareness of the natural world. Staff make good use of the Camphill community and visitors to further support and enrich children's learning. Children who have additional support needs are identified quickly by staff. Staff work well with parents and a range of partner agencies to support children with barriers to their learning. They successfully incorporate advice and resources provided by partners into their planning for individual children.

Staff are still at the early stages of developing a broad curriculum which combines the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence and the Waldorf curriculum. Staff encourage children to use literacy and numeracy through their play and are continuing to develop opportunities for this to happen. Children have a good understanding of healthy eating. They talk about how the food they eat in the kindergarten is often made within the Camphill setting either in the bakery or harvested from the farm. Children are enthusiastic about their learning experience in the nearby woodlands. Staff record observations of children at play. Staff should continue to work together to improve further the quality of their observations and next steps in learning for children. By doing this, some experiences could be more

challenging for a few children to enable them to build more effectively on their prior learning. Children are well supported as they enter the setting. However, staff need to better support children in their move to primary school.

How well does the early learning and childcare setting improve the quality of its work?

Staff are motivated, enthusiastic and work well together. They are committed to the on-going improvement of the setting. A range of approaches have been developed to capture the views of children, parents and staff. Staff should continue to develop opportunities for parents, visitors and children to contribute to improving the quality of the setting. Staff have begun to develop the processes necessary for effective self-evaluation. However, staff recognise that these approaches still need to be refined to ensure that these lead to improvements in children's experiences. Staff meet regularly to discuss aspects of the setting's life. In order to improve the setting further, staff need to continue to develop an effective system to track children's individual progress. The Head of the kindergarten has successfully created a team who are committed to career-long professional learning. Several staff members have achieved or are presently studying for further qualifications. The manager recognises the need to continue to develop the skills of staff and to ensure best practice is developed and applied consistently across the setting. Overall, parents and carers are very satisfied with the work of the setting

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the school/setting had no requirements and one recommendation. From this, the recommendation has been met. As a result of this inspection, there is one requirement and three recommendations.

Our inspection of your early learning and childcare setting found the following key strengths.

- Children who are confident, happy and enjoy their learning experiences.
- Respectful and trusting relationships between children, staff and families, all of which support children's learning.
- Effective use of Forest School outdoor learning to enhance children's learning experiences.

We discussed with staff how they might continue to improve the early learning and childcare setting. This is what we agreed with them.

- Develop monitoring and self-evaluation approaches with all staff to help them identify what they do well and what needs to improve.
- Continue to develop the curriculum to fully reflect Curriculum for Excellence and support children to make the progress they are capable of.
- Further develop planning and tracking of children's individual progress.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the early learning and childcare setting's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of the arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of the early learning and childcare, the local authority will inform parents about the setting's progress.

Noreen Phillips
HM Inspector

Anne McBroom
Care Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations for your setting can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/eyc/AmberKindergartenAberdeenAberdeenCity.asp>.

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

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