

Alexandra Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105142
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	377184
Inspection dates	15–16 February 2012
Lead inspector	Anna Dawson

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynne Stokes
Headteacher	Barbara Kenny
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Anna Dawson

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector spent eight hours observing seven sessions led by two teachers and five early years practitioners, eight shorter observations of children's learning were made. Meetings were held with the members of the governing body, staff and a small number of parents. Although there were no formal meetings with children, opportunities were taken to talk to the children and observe them talking during their sessions in school. Observations were made of the school's work, the learning journals of the children, photographic evidence and documentation relating to the children's attainment, provision, leadership and safeguarding. The inspector analysed 82 questionnaires from parents and carers and others completed by the staff. The inspectors also took into account responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).

Information about the school

This is a large nursery situated in an area which has become increasingly diverse since the last inspection in 2008. The nursery has specially resourced provision for eight children with disabilities and those who have special educational needs. Nearly all the children come from the immediate area and from 16 different ethnic backgrounds. There are 60% of children at the earliest stages of learning English as an additional language or with no understanding of English on entry to school. The school holds a number of awards and has achieved Healthy Schools status.

The local authority registered day-care provision in a nearby children's centre is linked to Alexandra Nursery. The childcare provision and the centre are inspected separately, and reports can be found on the Ofsted website.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
 Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	1
Achievement of children	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of children	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- This is an outstanding school. In this inclusive setting, the staff and skilled practitioners give excellent support and care to help children overcome any barriers to learning. Consequently, children achieve extremely well and are very well prepared to enter full-time education. The satisfaction of parents and carers is evident from the positive comments received such as, 'An excellent place for a child to start their learning journey'.
- Children make particularly rapid progress in their language, communication and personal and social skills. The school is successful in closing any gaps in achievement between the different groups of children. As a result, all groups of children, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, achieve equally well.
- Behaviour is extremely good. The nursery has a happy family ethos and relationships are harmonious. The children feel very safe and secure. They clearly enjoy learning and rapidly develop in confidence because they are cared for so well. The attendance for most, although not statutory, is good, with the exception of a few children who have long absences from school, who do not progress as well as others.
- The overall quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers and other practitioners work together as a cohesive team to rapidly develop children's social skills and their understanding and speaking skills in English. Staff are consistent in the methods they use, and provide motivating and exciting challenges that help children learn extremely well.
- The provision is exceptionally well led and managed by the headteacher, supported by the deputy headteacher and senior leadership. Routines are highly successful in providing enjoyable and purposeful learning experiences indoors and outdoors. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely good and planned into the daily circle times, led by the staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Promote further strategies to improve the attendance of the very small minority of children who have long periods of absence from school.

Main Report

Achievement of children

All parents and carers feel that their children make at least good progress and the inspector agreed with this view. The children achieve exceptionally well from their starting points, which are generally below what is typically expected for this age. On entry, children are assessed and grouped according to their level of understanding and speaking skills in English. Personal, social, mathematical and English skills are extremely well planned into all daily activities. Children come into the nursery in the morning keen to find out what new things there are for them to learn. In small group activities, they listen exceptionally well. For example, they eagerly learned positional language such as 'under' and 'over' as they followed instructions to find the insects and small creatures hiding in a model garden the teacher had prepared.

Children learning English as an additional language make outstanding progress. Rapid progress is also made in children's mathematical skills. The staff quickly identify those who may need additional help in learning and provide daily intensive support with excellent help from outside agencies and specialist staff. This results in disabled children and those who have special educational needs making similar progress to other children. By the time children leave, the majority are almost attaining the standards expected of most other children of this age in their language and communication skills. In other areas of learning, skills are broadly in line with those usually expected of most other children nationally. There are no significant differences in levels of attainment between groups of children.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is outstanding. The skilled staff work together as a dedicated team and hold high expectations of all the children's learning and development. They know the children very well and include their particular ideas, needs and interests in planning their activities. Planning is very detailed and thorough, especially for the acquisition of English skills. The assessments of children's learning are used successfully to ensure that activities are challenging and motivating for each child. During 'circle times', staff use a range of resources, methods and repetition to hold children's attention and ensure their understanding for a good length of time every day. For instance, 'circle time' starts with a short period of physical activity, 'brain gym', to settle children down, gain children's attention and ensure they are ready to concentrate. During one session, for example, children were learning about the sound of the letter 't'. They were introduced to, and said 'hello' to their puppet friend 'Tiger Tim'. Listening skills were skilfully developed as their teacher modelled the

letter sound. Children correctly pronounced the letter 't' and then enjoyed playing a matching game, correctly playing and matching the name of an instrument to its sound.

All staff contribute to children's learning journals which build a very comprehensive picture of each child's development in all areas of learning. Early identification of individuals' needs and very close working with outside agencies mean that children receive first-rate support to help them in their learning and development. There is an excellent balance between activities that children choose and those led by adults. Activities motivate children to explore and investigate an exciting learning environment indoors and outdoors. Outdoor play is energetic and promotes physical development very well as children climb, dig in the sand, play parachute games, fill and empty containers of water, grow vegetables, watch and feed birds and explore minibeasts. Inspection findings support the views of parents and carers who, without exception, praise the high quality of the teaching. In a typical comment, for instance, one parent said: 'The staff at Alexandra Nursery School are absolutely brilliant'.

Behaviour and safety of children

Children's behaviour is excellent. Children are completely happy in this welcoming and inclusive environment. They want to come to school and enjoy their activities immensely. The school has a very well-developed key worker system. Relationships are a great strength. Children are provided with outstanding support from their key workers who help them to become confident, creative and independent learners. The children follow their routines and instructions very well. They help to tidy their resources, for instance, and when they go to their 'circle time' groups they demonstrate 'good listening' and 'good sitting'. All of them know the school 'golden rules'; one child, for example, was heard commenting, 'I am trying very hard to have kind hands'. Children feel very safe and secure and are beginning to know how to stay safe outside school by 'holding hands' with a parent or carer, for instance. They move around the nursery sensibly and use tools and equipment carefully so they do not harm others. Children understand how to stay healthy. They know 'water is good for your brain' and enjoy healthy snacks of fruit and vegetables. They have good hygiene, knowing that washing their hands before eating 'keeps germs away'.

There are no incidents of racism or bullying of any kind. Relationships are very harmonious. The school motto of 'Celebrating Our Differences' is evident as children celebrate a range of cultures, and respect and help one another. They regularly consider others as they contribute to a range of charities. The school strongly promotes regular attendance and punctuality. The vast majority of children have good attendance and arrive on time. Lateness and absence are very carefully monitored and followed up with parents and are improving. However, a very small minority of children are absent for long periods, which has a negative impact on their learning.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is very well respected within the local community and with the help of the senior leaders has led a strong drive for improvement. The welfare and safety of children are paramount, and systems and procedures to keep children safe are robust. Safeguarding requirements are met. The headteacher leads a skilled team of highly committed staff. The rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems and procedures successfully lead to continuous improvement. All staff have responsibilities and, with the governors, evaluate and discuss priorities within curriculum teams. Staff plan weekly together and keep up to date with current initiatives. The governors know the staff well and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses as they monitor and evaluate progress towards the school priorities. Governors are supportive but effective in holding the school to account. For example, when children's mathematical skills appeared to be weaker, a greater emphasis was given to the development of children's counting and calculating skills that has resulted in rapid improvement in children's achievement. There has been strong improvement since the last inspection. Because the school is consistently and accurately monitoring its development, there is very good capacity to improve still further.

Curriculum provision is exceptionally good. The rich learning environment and a wide range of visits and visitors expand children's knowledge and understanding by providing them with exciting and memorable learning experiences.

Parents comment positively on the inclusive nature of the school and its family ethos. All staff show a very strong commitment to celebrating and learning from the individual qualities of each child and the cultures of their families. For example, children celebrate the major world festivals, visit community services and different places of worship. They have a very good awareness of other cultures and have participated in dance and music from a variety of cultures. These experiences make a significant contribution to children's exceptionally good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

There is an excellent partnership with parents and other agencies. There are particularly close links with the nearby children's centre, which benefits parents and their children, for example shared staffing and some resources such as playgroup facilities and family learning support. Parents and carers are in a very good position to help their children at home because of the learning resources and information they receive about their children's activities. Parents and carers of children who are disabled or who have special educational needs receive very good support and help. Because the school pays careful attention to each individual's needs, there is equal opportunity for all and discrimination is not tolerated. Transition arrangements are fully effective as children move between the children's centre, the school and on to the nearby primary school. One parent reflecting the views of others comments: 'An excellent outstanding nursery. The head is doing a fantastic job and the staff work really hard.'

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the child's work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the children's attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



17 February 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Alexandra Nursery School, Bolton, BL3 4AH

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming to me when I came to watch you play in the nursery. I know you get on with one another and help one another really well and have lots of fun together.

I am writing to tell you what I found out. Alexandra Nursery School is an outstanding school. Mrs Kenny and the teachers take great care of you and try their very best to help you.

I can see you are very happy in school and feel safe. I was really pleased to see you learning so well in your circle times. You really know how to do 'good listening' and 'good sitting'. I enjoyed listening to the rhymes and stories you know. I saw how you have lots of fun pretending to roll in the mud, and then wash it off the animals when you listen to the story of 'Mrs Wishy Washy'. I was especially pleased to see some of you learning the sound of your letters. I enjoyed reading your learning journals. The many photographs show me what special times you have at Alexandra Nursery. To help your school become even better I have asked your teachers to remind you how important it is that you all come to school and learn every day.

Well done to all of you, your families and your teachers must be very proud of you.

Yours sincerely

Anna Dawson
Lead inspector

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