

The Fields Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110593
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	356777
Inspection dates	5–6 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Baker
Headteacher	Gill October
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed seven lessons taught by four teachers and other support staff in the three main groups in the Nursery. Observations were also carried out in the daycare section of the setting. Meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior staff, a group of children and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation including the tracking of children's progress, school improvement planning, the monitoring of teaching and learning, minutes of governing body meetings and samples of children's recent work. They also scrutinised responses to the inspection questionnaires from 33 parents and carers and 32 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- If the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the setting is rigorous enough to identify accurately the quality of provision and areas for further improvement.
- Whether all groups of children and particularly the boys and those from minority ethnic groups make enough progress.
- How well staff use assessment information to provide appropriately challenging activities.
- What the setting does to motivate children as learners and support their personal development.

Information about the school

This is a larger-than-average sized children's centre in Cambridge that provides a very wide range of services for the community. This inspection focused upon provision for children in the Nursery for those aged three and four and daycare provision for those from a few months old to the age of three. The children's centre is managed entirely by the governing body but Children's Centre services are reported upon separately. The proportion of children in the Nursery known to be entitled to free school meals is above the national average. Almost half the children are from a range of minority ethnic groups and more than a third are at the early stage of learning English. A number of different languages are spoken at home particularly Bengali, Hindi and Turkish. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities including those with statements of special educational needs is above average particularly in the area of speech and communication. The school holds Healthy School status, the ICT Mark (for information and communication technology) and Effective Early Learning accreditation.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Fields Children's Centre is a good Nursery school and daycare setting. There are outstanding features in the way staff care, support and guide the children so that they become very happy young learners. This results in growing confidence and excellent behaviour. The children have an exceptional understanding for their age of how to keep themselves and others safe and of healthy lifestyles. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and there is an outstanding range of opportunities to work with other children and adults that improves their social skills. They enjoy learning about others through a simple Harvest celebration and a wide range of other activities that help them find out about different cultures.

Children enter the nursery with very mixed skills and experiences that are often below the expectations for their age. A small number have enjoyed daycare provision from an early age and some access children centre groups whilst others enter Nursery with little experience beyond their home. Many initially are very quiet and have a restricted vocabulary. Several are new to learning English. Children make good overall progress so that when they leave Nursery many achieve age related expectations especially in their personal, social and emotional development. While children from all groups do well, girls often make better progress than the boys. This is so in their ability to communicate with others, particularly in speaking and in early writing activities. Children who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress towards their targets.

The quality of teaching, learning and of the curriculum is good. The centre has extensive links with a range of individuals and organisations including musicians and artists that enrich the curriculum well. Staff use lots of praise to motivate the children to take part in activities and this raises their self-esteem and confidence. At this early stage of the year the staff focus on developing independence and most of the activities are chosen by the children. While some staff manage adult-led activities effectively and develop children's ability to communicate well, others miss these opportunities and fail to lead learning forward sufficiently. Occasionally the balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities does not take sufficient account of the different abilities of the children and sometimes there is insufficient challenge for some boys.

Leadership, management and governance are good as is the capacity to improve further. The headteacher has a clear passion for the role and the school community. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher including in developing the daycare provision. The school identifies areas for improvement accurately. The staff team is actively involved in many projects and continually considers and adapts new processes and practices. This is seen when for instance many children who are vulnerable, are supported well and make

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good progress. However, school self-evaluation procedures are at times overly generous because the programme to monitor the quality of provision is not evaluative enough.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of all children and especially the boys by:
 - providing more structured opportunities for children to discuss their ideas and develop a wider vocabulary.
 - ensuring there are more planned activities where children record their ideas and experiences in simple mark making and early writing activities.
- Ensure there is a more extensive programme of rigorous and accurate monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision and identification of what can be improved further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

Children enter the Nursery from the age of three. School assessment information and the observation of activities confirm that while experiences are varied many have skills, knowledge and understanding that are below the expectations for their age. On entry the highest level of skill is in their physical development. Many have the ability to handle large pieces of equipment such as trikes, scooters and climbing apparatus with dexterity. However, their social and speaking skills are lower and some answer questions in a very few words. The majority of children including those new to learning English and those with additional needs settle very happily and achieve well, which helps prepare them for their future. Progress for different groups is good in all areas of their learning and is best when receiving close support from staff. This was seen in a very effective story session when there was very effective adult input and children took on roles in re-enacting parts of a harvest story. There was a good focus on naming the animals, identifying the noises they make and in matching the number of apples they eat to pictures. While data and observations show that boys do not make as much progress as the girls, the gap is narrowing.

Children enjoy their time in the daycare facility and Nursery very much which is reflected in their excellent behaviour. There are few squabbles and most know how to keep themselves and others safe. Many learn to take turns and understand that when the large sand-timer runs out that they must let someone else have a turn on the trikes. They know that eating fresh fruit and drinking water helps them to be healthy and enjoy very active play outdoors. They like taking on responsibilities including tidying up and helping others, attend out of school activities and represent the setting at concerts and on visits. Their cultural understanding is very well enhanced by an excellent range of opportunities to work with professional musicians and artists. Attendance has been a focus for improvement for the setting and is broadly average.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attainment ¹	3
The quality of children's learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which children feel safe	1
Children's behaviour	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attendance ¹	3
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

There are strengths in the enrichment of learning through extensive links with a range of external groups. This makes a marked impact on children's understanding of others and of life beyond the local area. For the first half-term in Nursery, the staff give priority to the development of the children's social skills with a focus on child-chosen activities and with occasional adult input. However, at times the balance of the activities is not fully effective and does not help to address the initial shortfall in children's communication skills well enough. Some staff miss the opportunities to develop specific skills in activities that they supervise. This is seen in the length of time some boys spend riding round the outdoor area and that they subsequently take part in relatively few planned activities to develop their speaking, listening and early reading and writing skills.

A huge strength of the setting is the excellent levels of care, guidance and support the centre provides for children and their families. This is well illustrated in high quality daycare arrangements. Here the younger children are very well looked after as shown in the great thought in the arrangements to ensure their safety in outdoor play. Here the different areas are separated to ensure the safety of the youngest ones who cannot move around, whilst maintaining the flexibility for all groups to work together at other times. Daycare staff are particularly sensitive to the needs of their charges as seen in the children's happy enjoyment of making a picture with gluey paint. Excellent care is also

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shown in the Nursery particularly for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those at the early stages of learning English.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The long-serving headteacher is well supported by the deputy head, senior staff and room leaders for the daycare provision. This is a very large and complex setting with numerous roles and a huge number of highly effective links with other agencies. Whilst this is a strength it is also a challenge to make sure everyone is 'on board'. Most staff are supportive of what the school achieves but some note in the response to the inspection questionnaire their concerns about communication with leaders and managers. The setting has a very committed group of staff who are involved in research programmes and carefully consider new developments and services to support individuals and the school community. This is especially successful in ensuring vulnerable children and their families have access to opportunities that support their personal development and learning. Equality of opportunity is a major focus for the setting and so different groups achieve well in their learning. The monitoring of teaching and learning is not very frequent, detailed or rigorous enough. It is often focussed on supporting staff and does not always indicate the exact quality of what is provided. The governing body is very supportive of the setting. Governors hold a good number of meetings to carry out their duties but sometimes struggle to stand back from issues and identify what else can be improved.

Links with parents and carers are outstanding and the setting does a huge amount to support and unite groups in the local and wider community. This includes work with playgroups, childminders, Sure Start, the elderly and numerous other organisations including health service groups and clinics. Many activities and links support members of the community who are hard to reach. The 'Timebank' organisation is particularly valuable in enabling people in the community such as young parents and older citizens to meet and to gain mutual benefit. The setting also works with national and international groups that have a positive impact on children's cultural experiences. The setting has good procedures to support the safeguarding of the children and well established systems ensure, for instance, that all are kept safe in their play. Good policies for safeguarding are in place. All the necessary checks are completed on staff. Minor omissions in the recording of those who help in school and in risk assessments have been acted upon quickly.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

A relatively small number of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire but all of those who did were unanimous in their praise for the setting and the way in which it cares for their children. One parent notes, 'I feel very blessed to have the Children's Centre in our neighbourhood.' Whilst another praises the 'enthusiasm and dedication of the staff' and that 'This is a place where all my children have flourished.' There were no areas of disagreement noted by any parent or carer which reflects the inspection findings that the care, guidance and support of the children are outstanding.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at The Fields Children's Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 33 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 98 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	67	11	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	19	58	14	42	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	18	55	14	42	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	48	16	48	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	55	14	42	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	52	15	45	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	45	16	48	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	58	9	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	55	13	39	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	45	15	45	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	58	12	36	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	58	13	39	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	64	11	33	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of children.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

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.



7 October 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of The Fields Children's Centre, Cambridge, CB5 8ND

Thank you very much for making us welcome when we visited The Fields recently. We really enjoyed chatting to you, including the group that I met who were good at explaining what you all do. I liked meeting you in lessons and attending your Harvest celebration. My colleague and I thought how really nice it was to see how happy the very young children are in the daycare rooms. I also enjoyed seeing how much fun you had when playing in the outdoor areas. These are some of our findings from the visit.

Your school is a good school. Most of you make good progress and become much more confident and find out lots of new things. The staff look after you extremely well and make sure you are safe and happy. We were very impressed by your behaviour and how well you get on together.

To improve your school further, we have asked the headteacher and staff to:

- make sure that all of you and especially the boys learn to use more new words and find out how to write more
- make sure that the grown ups check a bit more carefully what is provided for you so that they recognise what else needs to be improved.

To help your school more, you could all try even harder to join in discussion times and with your writing. Best wishes for the future and I hope you enjoy finding out more and more about the world around you.

Yours sincerely

Sue Hall

Lead inspector

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