

Highfield Nursery School and Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121784
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	359083
Inspection dates	12–13 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Jo Curd

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	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paula Whitworth
Headteacher	Josette Mallon
Date of previous school inspection	8 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Twelve situations of learning were observed involving both of the school's teachers. Discussions were held with parents, carers, children, staff and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at children's work, assessments, case studies of children's progress and development, local authority reviews, planning and 40 questionnaires from parents and carers and 17 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- To what extent all groups of children are achieving more successfully than others of their age in all six areas of learning and whether this justifies the school's judgement of attainment and progress as outstanding.
- Given the fact that the school's evaluation of children's personal development, including behaviour and how safe they feel, focuses more on what the school provides rather than what the children display, whether direct observations support the school's judgement of this area of learning as outstanding.
- The extent to which both areas for development from the last inspection have been addressed, which centred on the improvement of assessment and tracking from when children start at nursery to when they leave.

Information about the school

This is a medium-sized nursery. Most of the children start in either the September or January after they are three years old. Just under half the children are of White British descent. Others are from a range of 14 different minority ethnic backgrounds. The biggest group is of Polish descent. Just over a third of the children have English as an additional language; most of these are at early stages of learning English. These children represent 13 different languages, the most prevalent being Polish, Bengali and Gujarati. A small proportion of children are on the school's register of special educational needs, mainly for speech, language and communication difficulties. None have statements of special educational needs. The nursery was designated a children's centre in 2007, providing additional support and opportunities for children and families. The children's centre is inspected and reported on separately. The nursery provides a breakfast and lunch club. Accommodation has been extended since the last inspection.

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

This is a good school where children make good progress in all six areas of learning. Children enjoy their time at the nursery and develop high levels of confidence, independence and self-esteem. They develop outstanding attitudes to health and their comments, confidence and facial expressions indicate how extremely safe they all feel. Parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were exceedingly positive about all aspects investigated. One expressed the views of all saying: 'My daughter has loved her time at Highfield. She is very happy, highly stimulated and has been well supported by the friendly helpful staff'.

All groups of children achieve well because teaching is effective and they all engage in a wide range of suitable, stimulating, practical activities. The school's strong emphasis on well-being and emotional development contributes effectively to children's personal, social and emotional development. This provides them with a firm foundation for later life and learning. Staff are highly skilled in identifying children's experiences, likes and dislikes. They plan successfully and adapt activities to meet children's emotional needs and preferences. They do not always use their assessments and knowledge of children to build on and extend learning in other areas quite so proficiently, challenges are not sufficiently finely tuned and a few opportunities for learning are occasionally missed. Outcomes are therefore not quite as good as the school evaluates. Accommodation and resources are suitable and used well even though a few are jaded and worn, for example, in some aspects of the outdoor area and some resources for imaginative play, particularly outdoors. Leaders have clear plans of how they want to develop these and now have sufficient funds from the school and money raised by parents, carers and other friends to implement these. Staff do not always encourage children to be fully involved in the preparation, care and storage of resources and equipment, therefore missing a few opportunities for them to contribute and help. Overall personal development is good. Children's feelings of safety and awareness of health are, as the school judged, outstanding.

The headteacher and two nursery teachers work well together as senior leaders and managers. In response to the areas for improvement raised at the last inspection, they have successfully developed clear, detailed systems for assessing and recording children's progress. Staff use these well to plan and adapt activities to meet children's needs even though this is not sufficiently finely tuned. Leaders have successfully driven other improvements, including extending the building and securing funds to renovate the school garden. They have not always received enough challenge from the governing body, however, to ensure that they identify the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately. Their self-evaluation is slightly overly positive. Governors are committed and supportive of the school but do not have sufficient knowledge of all aspects to identify and address areas for future development. They act quickly when areas of relative weakness are

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identified however and, during the inspection, began to take a more challenging approach to provision and booked themselves onto further training courses.

Strong teamwork and effective leadership has enabled the nursery to develop its provision and maintain its good reputation in the local community. Its track record of development, the speed of action taken when areas of relative weakness are highlighted and the skill and commitment of staff indicate that capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the governing body's knowledge so that governors are able to support and challenge the school even more effectively.
- Raise attainment over the next year by making even better use of assessments to ensure consistently effective challenges for all children.
- Review resources, particularly for outdoor role-play, ensuring the range and quality are sufficient to promote engagement and progress, and involve children more in the preparation, care and storage of them.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

2

All groups of children achieve well. They enjoy nursery and are keen to attend. They start nursery school with knowledge, skills and understanding lower than expected for their age especially in communication, language and literacy and personal and social development. Children make good progress and leave with attainment that is broadly in line with the national expectations for their age. Children who are more experienced or who learn more quickly or easily benefit from the very good range of open-ended activities and opportunities to explore and use materials in new ways. Observations of children developing their knowledge and understanding of the world using batteries, buzzers and wires to create electric circuits are examples of this. Children who have English as an additional language benefit from daily songs and rhymes, visual, practical activities and skilled interaction from all staff, including the school's experienced bilingual support worker. Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well by school staff and external professionals such as speech therapists. They also benefit from watching and playing alongside others. During the inspection children were seen deeply engrossed in highly creative art work, absorbed in imaginative play indoors with others and bravely swinging on a newly installed tyre suspended from mature trees in the garden. Progress is inconsistent at times because staff occasionally miss opportunities to challenge and extend learning; for example, by providing numerals during number songs and rhymes and through the use of a wider range of words and letters.

Children know that visitors require a 'special badge' to show that they can visit the nursery and they understand that in occasional disputes and disagreements they 'have to tell a grown-up' who can help sort them out. Children behave well and are kind and helpful to each other. They develop an extremely good understanding of health through the school's strong emphasis on well-being, emotional development and physical outdoor play. They are well prepared for later life and learning because they are confident, independent, well-behaved and most have basic skills in line with national expectations for this age.

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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	2
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attendance ¹	2
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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?

Teaching is good because staff plan a wide range of stimulating practical activities which are suitable for all the children. They pay particular attention to children's prior and wider experiences, preferences and learning styles, and successfully extend and develop these. Warm, friendly, supportive relationships and effective use of praise successfully help motivate children and add to their enjoyment. Staff use assessments well to vary questions and stimulate discussion but not effectively enough to raise attainment beyond average. Opportunities to promote learning are occasionally missed, for example in consistent encouragement to take good care of resources and to tidy up. Relationships are good and children are keen to learn.

Strengths of the curriculum include many varied activities inside and out. Celebrations of special days, including religious festivals and visits to a local church and temple each year, contribute to good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and help prepare children well for life in diverse Britain. Imaginative role-play is linked effectively with life, such as an ice-cream shop and beach huts at an imaginary sea-side. Some resources and aspects of accommodation are rather worn, however, and do not provide for the highest quality of learning possible. This was particularly evident in the play house outside. Few children worked or played here, where there were few resources to inspire discussion, imagination or creative play.

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Staff know and care for individual children and families well. Good pastoral, practical and health support is provided through effective partnerships with other agencies. Case studies and observations show that staff work well to assure children's day-to-day health and safety and that systems to safeguard them are adequate. The staff who run the breakfast and lunch clubs provide good support to children who access these.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Effective leadership and management have successfully driven some improvements to the nursery since the last inspection. Stakeholders including children, families, governors and staff are proud of the nursery and ambitious for its development. The nursery is popular and has a good reputation. Leaders know it well and continue to develop provision and outcomes even though high levels of praise from outside the nursery have led to slightly over positive self-evaluation. Leaders monitor lessons and provide praise to staff to reinforce strengths so that teaching is consistently good. The governing body supports and questions the nursery on aspects it is aware of and acts quickly when it is aware of deficiencies. Governors receive most of their information from within the nursery, however, and do not always have sufficient knowledge to challenge all aspects and ensure that self-evaluation is accurate. Nevertheless, they fulfil their statutory duties satisfactorily.

Systems to safeguard children's health and safety are adequate. Policies and procedures are appropriate, although not always easy to access. Even so, children are well cared for and mechanisms to support more vulnerable children and families are secure. Staff are checked for their suitability to work with young children and they undertake appropriate training. Leaders work well with other professionals and the local community, such as leaders in the church and temple, and other schools. Staff in a local secondary school visit to develop their understanding of pupils' well-being and the headteacher has trained and supported colleagues sharing the nursery's successful work promoting emotional development in children from a broad diversity of cultures.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is developing but currently at an early stage, especially at a national and international level. Relationships between different children and families within the nursery are good and the staff are successful at helping them all to understand diversity in the locality, for example, through special days and outings. Leaders effectively promote equality and tackle discrimination. All children and families are valued and differences in the initial attainment of different groups are closing.

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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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of responses to the questionnaire were positive about all questions investigated. The most positive response was to whether the school keeps children safe. Ninety per cent of parents and carers who responded, strongly agreed with this. A very small proportion of parents or carers left a very few questions blank. Parents and carers spoken to during the inspection were equally positive. This reflects inspector's findings of a very positive supportive nursery where all children and families are welcomed and valued and all groups are making good progress. No negative comments were received orally or in writing and parents and carers are confident that staff will answer any queries or concerns they have.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Highfield Nursery and 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 40 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 120 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	88	5	13	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	36	90	4	10	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	33	83	7	18	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	85	6	15	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	37	93	3	8	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	70	12	30	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	78	9	23	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)	29	73	10	25	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	75	9	23	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	65	12	30	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	73	10	25	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	34	85	4	10	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	88	5	13	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



14 July 2011

Dear Children

**Inspection of Highfield Nursery School and Children's Centre Wellingborough
NN8 4AB**

Dear Children

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited your nursery recently. It was good to see many of the exciting things you do. We could see why so many of you enjoy it so much.

We think it is a good nursery where you all develop well and learn a lot. We think that teaching, learning and activities are all good. We are pleased to see how well you are cared for and supported. You know that grown-ups work hard to find out what you do and do not like and what sort of things you do outside nursery. They use this information well to plan and vary activities to meet and extend these interests and ways you learn. They do not always help you to extend your learning in other areas quite as much. We have asked them to improve this. You can help by continuing to work hard and telling grown-ups what really helps you in your learning.

We were glad to see so many of you playing actively outside and know that this helps you all develop excellent attitudes to living healthily. Some of the garden area has become quite worn however and we are glad to hear that this is going to be improved. Some of the things you have, particularly outside in the play house, are also a bit worn and we have asked staff to look at these and see what needs replacing. You can all help by continuing to take good care of things and by helping to tidy up at the end of sessions.

We can see that your nursery is developing well; for example, in new parts of the building, the way grown-ups keep records of all that you learn and in plans to renew the garden. Grown-ups, including some special visitors called governors, do not always know how they can develop it even further or about all the things that they have to do to run the nursery. We have asked them to learn more about these things so that they can help to make the nursery even better for you all and so that governors can make sure that grown-ups who work in the nursery are doing all the right things. You can help by continuing to talk to the governors when they come to visit the nursery and telling them anything that would make it even better.

Yours sincerely

Jo Curd

Lead inspector

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