

Southway Early Childhood Centre

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109416
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	377917
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2012
Lead inspector	Mike Thompson

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Nursery
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robin Thomas
Headteacher	Sanchia Lyon
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2009
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Age group	3–4
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Introduction

Inspection team

Mike Thompson

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector sampled five and a half hours of learning during seven observations of 'free-choice' activities combined with focused teaching. Members of the nursery team, which comprises a teacher and four early years educators, took these sessions. The inspector looked at a sample of the children's records of achievement (Learning Journeys) and spoke to children about their work. He held meetings with the headteacher and a senior member of staff, and members of the governing body. The inspector looked at documents including the school's improvement planning and data showing the progress made by children. He analysed questionnaires returned by 26 parents and carers and seven members of staff, and held informal discussions with parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized nursery. It provides both part-time and full-time places, and children are admitted after their third birthday in three intakes per year. About half of the children are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. The balance between these groups constantly changes as a significant proportion of children either join or leave the school part-way through the taught year. The proportion of children in the early stages of learning English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of disabled children and those identified as having special educational needs is similar to that found nationally. The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals is above average.

The school regularly supports students as part of their training as early years educators and actively encourages volunteers for work experience in either the day care provision or the nursery. The period since the last inspection has been one of considerable uncertainty because local authority proposals for the reorganization of nursery education have raised questions about the future viability of the school.

The school offers on-site 'wrap-around' childcare, managed by the governing body, for children from three months to five years of age. This provision, known as Southway Day Care, was not included in the inspection because it was recently inspected under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It educates children well within a caring ‘family’ environment in which they are warmly welcomed and equally valued. It is not yet outstanding because there is inconsistency in the promotion of children’s skills in speaking. This is because leaders and managers’ expectations of students and volunteers in modelling good language are not made clear enough. Individual records clearly illustrate the good progress made by most children. The progress of different groups of children is less evident because of the way in which data are presented. Consequently, trends in the performance of groups cannot be quickly and easily identified.
- An outstanding feature of the school’s provision is the daily staff meeting to review children’s learning. From these discussions, planning for the following day is carefully adjusted so that individual children are provided with well-judged ‘next steps’ in their learning. Children achieve well and enjoy their learning greatly because they benefit from a wide range of carefully planned learning experiences, both indoors and outside.
- Teaching is good. A key factor in the good progress made by children is the large amount of individual attention each child receives because of the good ratio of adults to children. Adults manage children’s behaviour well and children demonstrate an appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- The headteacher leads the school well. She has high expectations, which are shared by a committed staff team. Despite uncertainty over the future, staff morale is high. There is a common sense of purpose in supporting children and their families, and in striving for improvement.
- Parents and carers greatly value the school. The outstanding provision in the ‘Family Room’ and its outreach into the local community makes a significant contribution to the lives of many families.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

By September 2012:

- Improve induction procedures for students and volunteer helpers so that they

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become more effective in developing children's skills in speaking.

- Improve the school's system for checking on children's progress and ensure that:
 - the data relating to the children's progress can be quickly and easily accessed
 - any variation in the progress made by different groups of children can be more easily identified in order to improve the monitoring of the school's effectiveness.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

On entry to the nursery, only a very small minority of children have the skills and knowledge expected for three year-olds in literacy, numeracy and personal development. In most cases, their skills and knowledge are, at best, below age – related expectations. By the time children leave, their attainment is often broadly in line with what is expected at this age.

Inspection evidence shows that parents are fully justified in their overwhelmingly positive views about the good progress made by their children. The children's clear enjoyment of school is evident in their enthusiasm to make a start on the activities set out as soon as they arrive. The children make good progress because tasks planned for them are accurately pitched, and the interaction of adults is well judged and varies according to need. In many instances tasks effectively capture and hold children's imagination and interest, and help develop their skills in a number of areas of learning. For example, a group of children were engrossed in their learning in the outdoor area. Seated in a 'car' and equipped with a road map, clipboard, pencil and paper they announced that they were going to Iceland 'to see the penguins'. They knew that Iceland was a long way away and that their map would help them get there. While some children looked at the map, others made 'notes' about the journey. Activities such as this provide many opportunities for children to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world while using their early reading and emergent writing skills to plan their imaginary journey. A member of staff effectively developed learning in this activity through skilful questioning.

As a result of the good ratio of adults to children and the skills of the staff in accurately assessing children's achievements, all groups of children make good progress. This results from the daily adjustments made to provision for each individual, informed by observations of previous learning. For example, the response of one child to the effects of magnetism when exploring the linkage of toy train carriages prompted discussion and agreement among staff about provision on the following day to build on this learning. Because each child is well known to all adults, disabled children and those with special educational needs benefit from tailored

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provision in the same way as all other children. Similarly effective learning is evident for the children who speak English as an additional language. Very careful daily adjustment of provision helps ensure that any gaps in the skills and development of different groups of children are closing.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers are clear in their views that their children are taught well. Effective teamwork and excellent relationships are consistent features of the good teaching observed. The many active and practical learning opportunities appeal greatly to the boys, but equally challenge the girls. All members of the staff team demonstrate secure understanding of the ways in which very young children learn and their curriculum planning clearly demonstrates this good level of understanding. Planning is carefully matched to children's individual learning needs to help ensure that they learn at a level appropriate to their stages of development. This means that more-able children are successful in reaching their potential, while disabled children and those with special educational needs benefit from the well-informed, individual attention they receive. The impact of teaching on all aspects of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It results in children using imagination and creativity as they investigate.

The school rightly places a clear focus on encouraging children to talk about their experiences in order to improve their speech. To help achieve this, members of the staff team are skilled in sustaining a flow of conversation as they work with the children. However, students and volunteers sometimes miss opportunities to correct immature speech patterns, particularly when they are supervising activities rather than interacting with the children. Members of the staff teaching team are good at developing children's confidence as learners and in enabling them to become independent in making choices and organising their own methods of working. For instance, the good dialogue between an adult and children making bread encouraged children to choose different herbs to add flavour. The following day, this activity was adjusted as spices such as cinnamon and cardamom were introduced, and children then experienced greater opportunities to smell ingredients as they used a pestle and mortar to crush them. Children with little or no English skills benefit greatly from this type of activity by following the actions of others. Where necessary, staff members provide dialogue in the children's home language, but the large majority of the teaching is delivered in English with picture cues to help understanding.

Early reading skills that link letters and sounds are taught well. Direct teaching takes place in small groups. This ensures that all children benefit from the individual attention they receive. All members of the staff team are adept at picking up on opportunities to reinforce children's learning of letter sounds as well as using activities to reinforce children's learning of number.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

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Parents are unanimous in their views that their children feel safe at school, behaviour is good, and that the school deals with any instances of bullying effectively. Inspection evidence fully supports these views. Children work and play together amicably, and show great respect for all adults and for one another. They respond well to the good quality of care provided for them within the school's calm, caring and orderly environment. They make good progress in developing their personal and social skills and have positive attitudes towards learning. Their behaviour is invariably good, supporting enquiry and investigation well. There are occasions when individual children experience emotional and social difficulty because they have yet to develop the range of skills needed to cope with upsets either at home or in school. The staff show good skills in responding to these situations. Parents' appreciation of the school is evident in the regular attendance of most children. Children have, for their age, a good understanding of safe practices. They move confidently around the indoor and outdoor areas safely and use tools carefully, for instance when using the outdoor climbing apparatus or digging in the sand.

Leadership and management

The headteacher leads the school well. She has high expectations of what the children should achieve, which are shared by a committed staff team. Despite the uncertainty regarding the future viability of the school, staff morale is high. There is a common sense of purpose in supporting children and their families, and in striving for improvement. Staff training in initiatives such as 'Every Child a Talker' has had a positive impact on teaching and on children's achievement, and typically demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve further. Induction procedures for students and volunteers working with the children do not place sufficient emphasis on the importance of developing children's skills in speaking. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is promoted effectively. The curriculum meets individual children's needs particularly well because of the way in which planning is constantly reviewed and adjusted. Monitoring and evaluation by the headteacher is thorough, and the performance of all staff members is carefully checked to maintain good quality provision. Governance is good. The governing body is well led and effective in supporting school development. The Chair of the Governing Body has a very clear understanding of issues to be tackled and works well in partnership with the headteacher in providing strategic direction. These features further support the school's good capacity to improve. All requirements for ensuring children's health, well-being and safeguarding are in place, regularly reviewed, and rigorously implemented. The school pays careful attention to ensuring the good care and welfare of the children at all times.

A key factor in the school's strong partnership with parents and carers and to safeguarding is the outstanding contribution of the family support worker. Her initiatives help to reduce the social isolation of some families as well as providing practical support. Activities provided include opportunities for young mothers to improve their parenting skills and to gain recognised qualifications in English and

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mathematics. Appreciative comments from members of the young parents group included: 'This place is a home-from-home, we feel very welcome here.' and 'What I have learned helps me to budget better.' Currently, 66 families benefit from the support available.

Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is at the heart of the school's work. The progress of children is closely monitored to ensure all have the same opportunities to achieve well. Although monitoring of individual children's performance is good, the way in which summary data is presented does not provide a clear enough picture of the performance of different groups of children, such as spring or summer term, entrants.

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 pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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 pupils. 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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 pupils' 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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 pupils 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 pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' 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.



25 April 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Southway Early Childhood Centre, Bedford, MK42 9HE.

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to visit you. You go to a good school where you are taught well.

- I loved seeing you working well with each other. You enjoy learning, and you find out a lot from all of the interesting things you can do and explore. I particularly liked watching some of you making bread. You really enjoyed getting your hands sticky and smelling some of the herbs and spices that you used.
- You behave well. All of the adults at your school take good care of you and make sure that you are always safe. You told me that you feel safe. You help keep yourselves safe by being sensible while you are playing.
- All of the adults who look after you take very great care in planning what you are going to do each day so that there is always something new for you to learn.
- Your parents and carers told me that they really like coming to school as well. They enjoy all of the things that there are for them to do while you are busy learning.
- Your headteacher and all of the adults who work in your school are doing a good job. They help make your school such a friendly place to be.
- To make your good school even better, I want all of the grown-ups who work with you to make sure that you talk more about what you are doing so that you become more expert in speaking. I also want your headteacher to find a better way of keeping her records about how well you are getting on in your learning.

I am sure that you will carry on enjoying your school and learning more in the future. You can help to make your school even better by always listening carefully to what your teachers ask you to do.

I wish you lots of success and happy learning

Yours sincerely

Mike Thompson
Lead inspector

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