

Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109748
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	377978
Inspection dates	5–6 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Rob Crompton

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3-4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neil Barr
Headteacher	Sarah Mitchell
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 June 2009
School address	Blagdon Road Whitley Reading RG2 7NT
Telephone number	01189 015425
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Email address	head.blagdon@reading.gov.uk

Registered childcare provision	Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	24
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	15 July 2009

Age group	3–5
Inspection date(s)	5–6 October 2011
Inspection number	377978

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They made 14 observations of children's learning involving 13 members of staff, including teachers and early years practitioners. They met with children, staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, policies, and assessment and tracking systems, safeguarding procedures and children's work. Inspectors examined questionnaires from 58 parents and carers, as well as those from 25 members of staff.

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

- The accuracy of the school's judgement that the overall outcomes for children are outstanding.
- The impact of partnerships between the different types of provision across the Nursery and Children's Centre on children's learning and personal development.
- How well the school has coped with the recent changes to funding arrangements, particularly in regard to the consequential reduction in staffing levels.

Information about the school

Blagdon Nursery and Children's Centre consists of the Nursery School, the Willows Day Nursery, and the Family Support Centre. Together, they provide integrated nursery education and day care for children between birth and five years. The day nursery provides childcare all year round. Provision in the family support centre was subject to a simultaneous but separate inspection. There is a breakfast club, after school club and holiday club. All the provision within the school and children's centre is managed by the governing body. Most of the children are of White British heritage. About a quarter of the children are from other ethnic backgrounds. The largest of these is Black African. Around 20% of all children speak English as an additional language, with a few at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most of these children have speech, language and communication problems. The school has received the 'Reading Quality Award'. Recent changes to funding arrangements led to a reduction in the number of staff and a restructuring of the management and provision in the Nursery.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre provides an outstanding quality of education. Parents and carers are extremely happy with all that the Nursery and the Willows Day Care Unit provides. Their comments included, 'My daughter has made an excellent start', 'I have seen a huge positive growth in my son's confidence' and 'The teachers have been brilliant, I could not have done without them'.

Children thoroughly enjoy attending the school; they listen carefully and are diligent in carrying out the tasks they are asked to do because staff promote a calm, friendly and supportive learning environment from the very outset. As a result of outstanding care, guidance and support, children develop into confident and independent learners who get on very well with each other. They apply themselves diligently and contribute as much as their age allows to all aspects of school life. They gain an excellent idea of a healthy lifestyle. They participate enthusiastically in physical activities and make healthy choices at snack time. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They gain a strong sense of right and wrong, and willingly share and help one another. They demonstrate a high degree of trust in the staff and move around with the confidence that comes from feeling thoroughly safe and secure. Learning and playing alongside classmates from a wide range of backgrounds, and through stories and celebrations of religious and other festivals, children develop a good awareness of the customs and culture of different faiths and countries.

Effective teaching is based on highly accurate information about what children know and can do, and activities are generally well matched to children's interests and needs, underpinning their good progress. From the moment children start, staff ensure that learning activities engage their interests and enthusiasm. This begins in the day care unit, where adults surround the youngest children with care and affection, and continues throughout the Nursery. As they move to primary school, children's personal, social and emotional development is especially strong. Despite making good progress from their starting points, children's communication skills are relatively weak. Staff are, rightly, concentrating on helping children to gain confidence in speaking in order to provide a secure foundation for their early reading and writing skills. They have introduced 'talking partners' and have set up areas for role play, for example. Occasionally, opportunities are missed for children to engage in such activities.

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The staff team work exceptionally well together under the inspired and dedicated leadership of the headteacher. The strength of the team's drive and ambition is evident, not least, in the outstanding curriculum they have devised. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is excellent. Development planning builds very well on the priorities identified through highly accurate self-evaluation. The school has successfully implemented the recommendations of the previous inspection and has moved forward in several other ways. The governing body is extremely well informed and highly supportive of the school. They have established excellent safeguarding procedures. Members keep a close eye on children's progress and play a significant role in strategic planning to help ensure optimum value for money. The school's engagement with parents and carers is outstanding, as illustrated by the high level of satisfaction expressed in their responses to the inspection questionnaire and in their written comments. Excellent partnerships across the family centre, day care unit and Nursery, together with highly beneficial links with outside agencies, are key elements of the school's support for children and their families.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve children's communication skills by
 - fully embedding the use of talk partners
 - providing further opportunities for children to develop their speaking and listening skills through role play.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

As they start in the Nursery, children's skills, knowledge and understanding are below those expected, particularly in early language and number skills. Many have a very limited knowledge of the world outside their immediate home environment. They make good progress, responding very positively to the wide range of stimulating activities. Children enter the school in eager anticipation and are soon engaged in their chosen activities. During one lesson, children were preparing for 'Teddy's Birthday Party'. They were very keen to show what they were doing. One explained, 'I'm writing an invitation for Little Teddy.' Others proudly pointed out the birthday cards and bunting they had made. Most children are confident in initiating conversations. For example, when asked which birthday Teddy was celebrating, they were quick to respond. 'He's two but I'm four on my next birthday', said one. 'My birthday's after Christmas', offered another. Later, after helping to mix ingredients for making cupcakes, a child pointed out how the adults had to wear oven gloves when baking. Not all children are as confident in speaking which, for some, makes progress in early reading and writing hard won. That said, those children with speech difficulties and those at an early stage of learning English make good progress, albeit in small steps. This was evident for, example, as a child with very little English became animated and keen to express his thoughts as he saw photographs of himself on the previous day's farm trip.

Children enjoy using all of their senses. For example, mixing cake ingredients enables them to develop their skills of observation and dexterity and to acquire new vocabulary. They rapidly learn to count, as evident when they 'help' staff count the number of children present and match this number to the number of milk cartons. Children cooperate well, for example, when using the computer or when working in pairs to attach funnels and tubes in the water tray. They help and encourage one another as they play on the high-quality outdoor climbing apparatus. Here, they assess the risks involved and set themselves challenges.

Children's enjoyment of learning and their good achievement owes much to their exemplary behaviour. They soon settle in due to the excellent transition arrangements and quickly become confident and independent. Children get on very well with adults and develop a very strong sense of their own identity. Most children make outstanding progress in their personal development, a key element in their preparation for the next stage of education. Many parents and carers commented on how much their children have changed after attending just a few sessions. One remarked, 'My son joined only recently but I have seen a huge growth in his confidence and happiness.'

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

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
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	2
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

From the minute staff meet the children, they engage them in purposeful dialogue and interesting tasks. They observe their interests, note their capabilities and use this information to plan the next steps in learning. The assessment records kept in the day nursery are exemplary. They provide staff, parents and carers with a detailed account of children's early development. Similarly, detailed individual records of achievement in the Nursery are supplemented by a learning journal containing photographs illustrating significant steps in children's development. This systematic assessment is used very effectively by staff in both settings to plan suitably challenging activities for all groups of children. Indeed, Nursery children are often involved themselves in devising success criteria and reviewing their own progress towards them. They helped to draw up the rules for 'good talking partners' suggesting: sit in front of your partner; no squashing and always listen carefully. Children also have a strong influence on the curriculum. Topics frequently start with a discussion about 'What we know and what we would like to find out'. Children's initial ideas about dinosaurs, for example, included, 'They are really big and they eat dogs and cats'. Following a visit to the Natural History Museum, they were much better informed. Many such opportunities are taken to extend children's knowledge of the wider world. Visits, such as those to a Tudor mansion, the seaside and a farm, extend their horizons and stimulate lots of engaging activities.

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

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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Teachers and support staff are skilled in adapting their outline curriculum plans as children's needs and interests emerge. They provide vibrant, relevant and stimulating activities for children both indoors and outdoors. Underpinned by extremely positive relationships, this results in a hive of purposeful activity. Language and number skills are given a high priority, the school's success in promoting reading skills being recognised by a national award. A gap between the progress made by boys and girls in writing has been mostly eliminated due to a strong emphasis on promoting early writing, with strategies, such as encouraging flowing hand movements and 'pretend' writing with a wide range of implements. Photographic evidence indicates that role play areas are usually set up later in the school year. During the inspection, there was little role play in evidence, so children lacked opportunities to practise speaking and listening in imaginary contexts. 'Talking partners' were being used successfully in small groups, to stimulate discussion on specific issues, but this strategy was not being used when adults were leading large groups. This limited the chances for all children to contribute, particularly those who are less confident and somewhat daunted by a large group.

The Nursery and day care unit provide a warm and secure learning environment where children's welfare is taken exceptionally seriously. Outstanding care and guidance are given to any parent or carer requiring support. The breakfast, after school and holiday clubs provide a safe haven for children and are much appreciated by parents and carers. Specialist help is called upon when necessary. For example, a speech and language therapist spends a day each week providing individual support for children and guidance for staff and parents. Parents and carers are most appreciative of the good range of workshops offered to them, such as those about managing behaviour, reading and healthy eating.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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How effective are leadership and management?

Under the very effective leadership of the headteacher, the school has flourished and children's achievement has improved year on year. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate, and planning for improvement is measured and thoughtful. The headteacher makes certain that everyone is well placed to contribute. Information about how well children are progressing is used to set suitably challenging targets for individuals and groups. The way in which the school promotes equality of opportunity for all eliminates all types of discrimination. The provision for children 0–3 years old fully meets the conditions of registration.

The governing body makes a major contribution to school improvement. Members are well informed about the school's performance and contribute very effectively to planning for improvement and evaluating the quality of provision. They have worked very successfully with senior staff to minimise the impact of new funding arrangements. Some tough decisions had to be made, including staff redundancies, restructuring of the management team and the organisation of classes. Despite these difficulties, the school has sustained its many strengths.

Policies to ensure that children are safe are followed precisely and consistently. This was illustrated by the attention given to children's safety as they visited a farm during the inspection. The services provided by the family centre complement the work of the Nursery and day care unit in promoting harmony and cohesion across the diverse community they serve. Excellent use is made of support agencies, especially to help children and their families facing difficult circumstances. Liaison with parents and carers is exemplary and the school works very effectively to help them to support their children's learning. Parents and carers are made very welcome and are confident to approach the school, should the need arise.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
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	1

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of questionnaires returned was around the national average. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers were extremely positive in their views of the school. All respondents were happy with their children's overall experience and unanimous in their views that their children enjoy school and are kept safe. There was no pattern to the other issues raised by very few of the parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Blagdon 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 58 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 116 children registered at the school and day care unit.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	72	16	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	41	71	17	29	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	57	20	34	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	66	14	24	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	37	64	18	31	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	53	19	33	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	55	23	40	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)	24	41	21	36	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	32	55	20	34	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	48	22	38	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	57	19	33	2	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	36	62	18	31	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	71	16	28	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



10 October 2011

Dear Children

Inspection of Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre, Reading RG2 7NT

Thank you very much for making us welcome when we visited you last week. We enjoyed hearing all about what you were doing.

We think your school is fantastic. All the staff look after you extremely well and you are exceedingly happy and hardworking. They make sure that you have really interesting activities to choose from and they keep a careful check to see that you have a go at everything that is on offer. They help you with your learning and set up activities that you really enjoy.

We were very impressed by how well you get on with one another and with the adults who help you. They take great care to be sure that each one of you makes good progress. Those of you who need it get extra help and there is always someone for you to talk to when you want to.

It was great that you have talking partners and we have suggested that you could share your ideas in this way more often. We have also recommended that the adults provide more places for role play as we saw how much you enjoy dressing up and acting things out.

Please carry on being cheerful, friendly and working hard.

Yours sincerely

Rob Crompton
Lead inspector

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