

INSPECTION REPORT

ASHMORE PARK NURSERY SCHOOL

Wolverhampton

LEA area: Wolverhampton

Unique reference number: 104279

Headteacher: Mrs. Angela Giles

Reporting inspector: Brian McCutcheon
2420

Dates of inspection: 3rd - 4th April 2000

Inspection number: 191584

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	LEA
Age range of pupils:	3 – 4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Griffiths Drive Ashmore Park Wednesfield Wolverhampton
Postcode:	WV11 2LH
Telephone number:	01902 558116
Fax number:	01902 558116
Appropriate authority:	Wolverhampton M.B.C.
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Pat Purchase
Date of previous inspection:	3 rd February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Lizzie Forster	Lay inspector
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The school is well led by the headteacher, who receives good support from the nursery teacher. Teamwork is a significant strength. The overall quality of teaching is good and no teaching observed was less than satisfactory. Children achieve very good standards in personal and social development. Good provision is made for the development of children's skills in language and literacy, and mathematics. The school has a very strong partnership with parents and successfully involves them in supporting their children's learning. The high quality of care for children provides a secure environment in which they flourish.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ashmore Park Nursery is a local authority school, which shares a site with a Medical Centre in the middle of a large estate in Wednesfield. The school is a single storey, prefabricated building, constructed in 1970. The children who attend the school live in nearby post-war housing, which is now mainly owner-occupied, or in pockets of more recently built private homes. Pupils are admitted in September and January following their third birthday and there are 80 on roll. All children attend part-time for either five morning or five afternoon sessions, with mixed age groups in both. One pupil has identified special educational needs; and the school has one pupil with English as an additional language. Some children enter the nursery through referral from the local authority's Early Years Special Needs Team and eventually transfer to other establishments. The majority of pupils transfer to the neighbouring Oak Meadow Primary School and the two schools share a governing body. There is a wide range of attainment on entry with some children able to speak fluently, in well-constructed sentences, and others who need additional help with basic speech and language skills. In addition to the headteacher, the school is staffed by a teacher and three nursery nurses.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

In the last OFSTED report (1997), Ashmore Park Nursery was identified as a good school with significant strengths and this remains the case. The children settle quickly into well organised routines and make at least sound, and mainly good, progress. By the age of five, nearly all attain the national learning objectives set for children of this age. Standards in language and literacy and mathematics are sound, overall, and there is a significant proportion of good achievement in early writing skills and oral number skills. Ashmore Park is a very caring school and, as a consequence, children make particularly good progress in their personal and social development. The school is well led by an experienced and conscientious headteacher who receives good support from a hardworking and committed staff; and the governors make a valuable contribution to the life of the school. The school does not have a delegated budget.

What the school does well

- The school is well led by the headteacher, who receives good support from the nursery teacher. Team work is a significant strength.
- The overall quality of teaching is good and no teaching observed was less than satisfactory.
- Children achieve very good standards in personal and social development.
- Good provision is made for the development of children's skills in language and literacy, and in mathematics.
- The school has a very strong partnership with parents and successfully involves them in supporting their children's learning.
- The high quality of care for children provides a secure environment in which they flourish.

What could be improved

- The monitoring of teaching and learning.
- Use of the outside area to promote the physical development of children.

The many strengths of the school outweigh the weaknesses. The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan which will be sent to all parents and carers of children at the school.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has improved on the quality of provision outlined in the last OFSTED inspection report of February 1997. Action has been taken on all of the key issues identified in the previous report. The policy and scheme of work for 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World' has been revised and the school is taking full account of the recently introduced recommended 'learning goals' for children under five. The arrangements for outdoor play have been reviewed and staff are aware of the need to intervene, in order to extend learning opportunities, as well as to supervise the children playing outside. Planning for these activities has been improved and there is now a clear focus for each session which enables children to have more opportunities to use their imagination. However, they need more regular access to a range of equipment which challenges their physical skills. Access to books is now good and the range available has also been improved since the last inspection. 'Story sacks' have been successfully introduced for the younger children, older pupils continue to make weekly visits to the local library, and a wide variety of 'big books' has added another dimension to the children's introduction to basic literacy skills. The school has responded to the need to extend the timescale of the development plan by projecting some priorities beyond the current year. However, there is scope to develop a more comprehensive nine term plan which includes outline planning for a greater range of priorities across the full three year period.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about the achievements of pupils in relation to the national early learning goals by the time they leave the school.

Performance in:	
Language and literacy	C
Mathematics	C
Personal and social development	B
other areas of the curriculum	C

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The above grades show that by the age of five, the majority of children reach standards that are average in most areas of learning with some good attainment in early writing and counting skills. Whilst attainment in other areas of the curriculum is satisfactory, children's progress in developing gross motor skills is uneven and, overall, is just adequate. However, their attainment in personal and social development is above the expectations of children of a similar age. As a result, they adjust well to school routines, learn to co-operate and work independently, and respond well to adults and to one another. By the time they enter statutory education they are well prepared for school in most areas of learning.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children are well motivated and sustain interest and attention. They have excellent attitudes to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The school has high expectations and a consistent approach to promoting good behaviour and, as a consequence, standards of behaviour are very high. The children are polite and well mannered.
Personal development and relationships	Children help one another as a matter of course; and share and take turns well. They conscientiously undertake simple responsibilities with a sense of pride.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Parents bring children to school on time and sessions get off to a brisk start.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Lessons seen overall	Mainly good, sometimes very good, and otherwise satisfactory

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The good standard of teaching, identified in the last OFSTED report, has been maintained and this is a strength of the school. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and, in four out of every five lessons, it is good and sometimes very good. Staff are conscientious, work effectively together and know the children very well. There is a good balance between child initiated and teacher led activities and, when appropriate, adults participate effectively as role models, in play activities, to extend language and imagination.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a secure foundation for the statutory curriculum. Strong emphasis is placed on children's personal and social development and on the development of their language and early reading skills. However, pupils require more regular opportunities to develop physical skills such as climbing and balancing, outdoors.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for children with learning and behavioural difficulties is good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall, the school makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for children's moral and social development is very good while that for their spiritual and cultural development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Parents are unanimous in their praise for staff not only for the care and support given to their children but also in addressing their own needs. The very close relations established with parents, and the effective use of assessment to inform planning, ensures that there is good support for children's pastoral, behavioural and learning needs.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is efficiently managed and very well led. The headteacher is conscientious and has considerable experience in working with children of this age. She gives clear and positive direction to all the work of the school and is well supported by the nursery teacher.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are supportive, well organised and work well together for the good of the school. They receive informative reports from the headteacher and a 'link governor' has been appointed to ensure that the nursery is well represented on all committees. Their general awareness of the workings of the school is sound, however, they recognise that there is scope to develop their role as 'critical friend' to the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The headteacher monitors the work of the school by analysing the results of Baseline Assessment and through the use of entry and exit profiles for individual children. The school development plan appropriately identifies the monitoring of teaching and learning as an area for improvement.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of all its resources and this has a positive effect on standards and progress. Staff are deployed well and the range and quality of resources are good. Nursery equipment has been acquired through careful management of funding, in order to obtain best value, and is well used to support the curriculum.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are easy to talk to and concerns are shared. • The caring and friendly atmosphere • Children are happy and independent. • Parents are encouraged to be involved in their children's learning. • Children are acquiring good ICT skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No concerns

Inspection judgements fully support the positive comments of parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting and the views expressed in the responses to the questionnaires.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school is well led by the headteacher, who receives good support from the nursery teacher. Teamwork is a significant strength.

1. The school is well led by a professionally able and caring headteacher who works closely with the governors and all members of staff. She provides a very good model through her own teaching. When introducing a 'big book' to a group of four year old children, for example, she uses pertinent and well focused questioning, designed to extend the children's thinking and skills of prediction; and then skilfully enables them to retell the story by using carefully chosen and interesting resources. The headteacher has good analytical skills and a clear vision of how she wants the school to move forward, with an appropriate emphasis on raising standards and the quality of teaching. She has a collegiate approach to leadership, where all contributions are valued and this has promoted the development of a cohesive team who share a common purpose. One nursery nurse, for example, has been encouraged to take a lead in organising and managing a successful weekly parent group, while another has been instrumental in developing the use of information technology in the nursery. The nursery teacher demonstrates consistently good teaching skills and provides very good support in the management of the school. She makes a significant contribution to curriculum planning and assessment; areas which are strengths of the school. All staff show a commitment to the school and to improving their own knowledge and skills and this helps to sustain school improvement.

The overall quality of teaching is good and no teaching observed was less than satisfactory.

2. The overall quality of teaching is good and this has a positive impact on the children's learning. All the teaching observed in the nursery was at least satisfactory and, in four out of every five lessons, it was good and sometimes very good. The teaching is shared by the headteacher, nursery teacher and three nursery nurses who work well together and create a carefully planned learning environment. Teaching is mainly good in language and literacy and mathematics; and in personal and social development it is very good. All staff have a clear understanding of how young children learn and routines are well established so that no time is wasted. They know the children and their families well, value the contribution of every child and provide good support for children with special educational needs.
3. In the best practice, good use is made of questioning which promotes pupils' thinking and extends their vocabulary. For example, the nursery teacher used items brought to school by a group of children to focus their attention on numbers. She effectively promoted their knowledge and use of number names, and their understanding of counting and ordering, by encouraging the children to describe toy and real telephones, number books and calculators. Important words such as 'more/less' and 'greater/smaller' were carefully introduced and consolidated and, through the teacher's skilful questioning, the children also began to use the vocabulary associated with addition and subtraction.
4. Planning is very thorough and effective use is made of on-going assessment. As a consequence, the activities are well matched to the learning needs of the children. Staff appropriately employ a wide range of teaching strategies so that there is a good balance of adult focused large and small group work, as well as individual and self selected activities, both indoors and in the outdoor area. They provide regular times when children work with adults on structured activities to enable them to acquire new skills and knowledge. At other times, the adults often participate in role-play, effectively extending children's imagination and their use of language. The staff manage the children well and behaviour is handled in a caring and sensitive manner. Recent improvements in

equipment, and staff confidence and expertise, have resulted in the more effective use of information technology to support learning.

Children achieve very good standards in personal and social development.

5. The nursery staff have a strong commitment to children's personal and social development, including important aspects of their spiritual and moral development, and this underpins the whole nursery programme. As a consequence, children's personal and social development is very good. Relationships between the children and the staff are a particular strength and children are happy and secure in school. They concentrate well when playing at their chosen tasks, amicably sharing resources. The children show a high level of independence and confidence in using and caring for equipment; and good personal independence in matters of hygiene and dressing.
6. The programme of activities provides a good balance between self-selected tasks and those directed by adults. The staff ensure that within this balance, they provide opportunities to extend the children's creative and imaginative development and encourage them, with just the right degree of adult intervention, to persevere, solve problems and use their own initiative.
7. The children respond well to the high expectations of behaviour and any minor infringements are carefully dealt with. They are taught to value their own efforts and the work of others. The children are able to express their feelings and learn about the wider world through the sensitive use of literature and information books, and through celebrating the festivals of world cultures and exploring the wonders of nature.

Good provision is made for the development of children's skills in language and literacy, and in mathematics.

8. The school makes good provision for children's language development and their literacy skills also receive high priority. All the nursery staff are engaged in planned and spontaneous opportunities to help children learn through listening and talking, with imaginative role-play being a particular strength. The success the children experience in their emerging literacy and language skills is very evident in the confidence and enjoyment they show when they engage in the good range of activities on offer.
9. Meaningful opportunities are provided for children to develop their writing skills. For example, they write lists and take telephone messages at the 'fire station' and make appointments for their pets at the 'animal hospital.' They also make books based on well-known stories. As a consequence of the breadth of writing opportunities, the children develop a good understanding of the range of purposes for writing and they achieve good standards in their early writing skills. Most children can read their names and many of the four-year-olds can also write their names. Some children are beginning to use their knowledge of letter sounds and shapes to attempt plausible invented spelling.
10. The nursery provides a good range of books and props such as soft toy book characters, which are strategically placed, so that whatever activity a child is engaged in, a selection of books is near by. This results in children often spontaneously dipping into books. They turn the pages, talk about the stories and often retell them, using the pictures to help them remember the plots. Older children have weekly visits to the local library; and younger ones take home story sacks containing books, toys, games or puzzles. Stories, poems and rhymes are a daily feature of the nursery, and puppets are often used to encourage the children to retell stories. As a result of this intensive but varied approach to reading, the children have a good understanding of the language of books. Their recall of stories is good and they are able to sequence the events.

11. In mathematics, children develop a sound understanding through the provision of a wide range of well-prepared activities and purposeful play. Daily opportunities are provided for children to use mathematical language; and one day each week is set aside to provide focused teaching for all children in order to develop their mathematical understanding. As a consequence, most children attain good number recognition and can count confidently and accurately to ten; and a significant number count well beyond this by the time that they leave the nursery. The majority successfully sort, match, order and compare numbers of objects. The activities and resources set out at the start of each session, and during the free-choice period, are also carefully selected so that learning can be reinforced. For example, a small group join the headteacher at a table as soon as they arrive at the nursery and respond positively to her encouragement to sort a pile of plastic mini-beasts according to different criteria. Through her skilful use of questioning they make good progress in sorting, estimating and counting.
12. In their creative work children are appropriately encouraged to make patterns and many can recognise and recreate increasingly complex sequences. Familiar counting rhymes and songs are reflected in children's paintings, for example, of five little speckled frogs or of golden daffodils. Activities based on stories such as "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" are also effectively used to promote counting skills and to consolidate their understanding of pattern. During carefully organised sand and water activities, children begin to understand basic concepts related to capacity as they play with containers and develop their understanding of correct mathematical vocabulary such as 'full/empty,' and 'bigger/smaller' when making comparisons. One group observed during the inspection enjoyed 'fishing for numbers' and organised their own collection of foam numerals, which they identified and ordered accurately.

The school has a very strong partnership with parents and successfully involves them in supporting their children's learning.

13. Parents have very positive views of the nursery which derive from the strong partnership which the school effectively fosters. They are unanimous in their praise for the staff and their approachability. From their first contact with the school, parents are encouraged to be active in supporting their children's learning. In addition to clearly written documentation about the school they are given the themes for the term, information about nursery rhymes, and activities that parents can share with their children at home. The younger children are particularly enthusiastic about the story sacks that they take home on a regular basis. They are asked to make simple assessments about how much they have enjoyed the books, games and toys in these sacks. This encourages worthwhile discussions between parents and children about literature, as well as letting the school know their value.
14. Parents are asked about their expectations for their children when they start at the nursery and the staff are always keen to share children's achievements with parents or suggest areas which might benefit from particular attention at home. A 'special' book containing annotated examples of children's work, and photographs of their activities, gives parents a very good indication of how they are progressing and becomes a treasured possession when the children move on to primary school.
15. The headteacher has encouraged a nursery nurse to train in the promotion of quality play by parents and carers and this has resulted in a weekly 'pockets of play' initiative. This lively session not only suggests worthwhile activities for parents to share with their children at home, but gives parents the opportunity to meet with others and to talk about any parenting or health problems with the staff. For their part, parents are very supportive of the nursery and, although there is no formal parents association, respond generously in raising funds for nursery resources and occasionally for charitable causes.

The high quality of care for children provides a secure environment in which they flourish.

16. The school provides very good care for the children. The close relationships established with parents enables staff to build up a detailed knowledge of the children and their needs. All staff keep pertinent notes on children's learning and this ensures that there is good support for pastoral, behavioural and special educational needs. Relationships with the children are consistently very good and the way in which all staff value children's contributions fosters their confidence and self-esteem. Teachers carefully explain the range of activities from which children may choose and there is a strong emphasis on good manners and high standards of behaviour. This consistent approach ensures that all children understand what they may do and creates a secure environment in which they flourish.

17. The school has devised orderly procedures for the delivery and collection of children, despite the limited space available, and these enable staff to greet each child as they arrive and to speak to parents. Good attention is paid to health, safety and the establishment of routines for hygiene. For example, in a group activity on tasting fruit, children were reminded of the need to wash their hands first and that sharp knives can be dangerous and are therefore best handled by adults. The various themes chosen for role play also allow for life skills and aspects of personal safety to be effectively taught. There are well established procedures for dealing with accidents and appropriate records are kept of any incidents. The buildings and grounds are regularly inspected for potential hazards and detailed risk assessments have been prepared to cover all aspects of school life.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The monitoring of teaching and learning.

18. While the school has made an appropriate start in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, these initiatives have not yet had a significant impact on practice.
19. Due to the small size of the nursery, the headteacher has successfully supported teaching through her own example; and staff have also benefited from audits of teaching and planning by the local authority inspector. In addition, the headteacher has undertaken some classroom observations and provided verbal feedback to staff, either on an individual basis, or through discussion of teaching strategies during staff meetings.
20. In order to establish more rigorous and effective procedures, the headteacher is completing a year long 'Management Development' course and has focused on improving the monitoring of teaching and learning. This is involving all staff in a review of policies and planning, work sampling and lesson observations. A new policy for teaching and learning has been formulated as the basis from which the school can create an agreed system by which teaching and learning are systematically monitored for quality and high standards. In addition, the school is to be involved in the 'Effective Early Learning Project' with the aim of improving staff techniques in the observation of children; and of providing a focus for enhancing children's independent learning. As part of this project, it is anticipated that all staff will gain experience of being observed and of observing the teaching of others.
21. It is clear that a good start has been made in raising the awareness of all staff about the value and methods of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in the nursery. The school's development plan will need to carefully plot the implementation of more effective procedures.

Use of the outside area to promote the physical development of children.

22. The school has a small grassed area at the rear and a slightly larger outdoor play area, with grass and a hard surface pathway, at the front of the building. The outdoor play area is used to extend the indoor activities and to provide a greater range of opportunities for children to develop their physical skills. However, there is no permanent large climbing equipment available to children. During the inspection, groups of children pedalled bikes and other wheeled vehicles around the pathway while others engaged in role-play, for example, as fire fighters or as employees and customers at the 'library.' Some simple balancing activities were also provided. However, the space on the hard-surface areas is very limited and, during the winter months in particular, it is not easy to offer a wide range of learning experiences which result in good physical development. The staff attempt to compensate for this by incorporating times for physical activity indoors and by using portable climbing equipment outside, when possible. Despite their efforts, opportunities for children to travel around, under, over and through balancing and climbing equipment are limited.
23. The school has appropriately identified the development of the external environment as a priority. Funds have been raised to create an adventure area at the front of the building and to improve the environmental area at the rear. In collaboration with local authority staff, a 'moated' structure has recently been erected in the front garden area to reflect a medieval moat discovered in the local shopping precinct. The nursery staff are currently evaluating the potential for play activities provided by this structure and, in particular, those which will promote children's physical development. They recognise that further alterations will be necessary in order to improve the use of the outside area in fully promoting the physical development of the children.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to improve children's standards and achievements, and aspects of leadership and management, the school should include in its post inspection action plan the following issues:

- (1) Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning by implementing the more systematic and rigorous procedures for classroom observations, and effective feedback to staff, which are currently being discussed and agreed.

(see paragraphs 18, 19, 20 and 21)

- (2) Provide better opportunities for children to develop their physical skills by ensuring that they have daily access to climbing and balancing equipment, which is appropriately challenging.

(see paragraphs 22 and 23)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	16
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	37	44	19	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	40
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	N.A.

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and support staff

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	94

Number of pupils per FTE adult	8
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	130,588
Total expenditure	127,667
Expenditure per pupil	3,191
Balance brought forward from previous year	N.A.
Balance carried forward to next year	N.A.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	80
Number of questionnaires returned	43

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	86	14	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	79	16	0	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	58	35	0	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	21	2	0	49
The teaching is good.	86	14	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	51	35	14	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	81	19	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	30	0	0	14
The school works closely with parents.	53	40	5	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	88	12	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	70	26	0	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	26	7	0	26