INSPECTION REPORT

HOUGHTON COMMUNITY NURSERY SCHOOL

Houghton-le-Spring

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108746

Head teacher: Mrs J Bulmer

Reporting inspector: Mr D H Maddocks 1502

Date of inspection: 17 February, 2000

Inspection number: 191609

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

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 3 to 4

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Nesham Place

Houghton-le-Spring Tyne and Wear

Postcode: DH5 8AE

Telephone number: 0191 553 6557

Appropriate authority: Sunderland LEA

Name of chair of governors: Mrs C McRoy

Date of previous inspection: January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Houghton Community Nursery School is located in the centre of Houghton-le-Spring, a small town between the cities of Durham and Sunderland. There are 79 children on roll; 78 children attend part time in the morning or afternoon and one attends for the whole day. Children start at the school in the September after their third birthday and remain for the full academic year. Children come from a wide area and from a mixture of private and local authority housing. There are very few ethnic minority children in the nursery at present. When children start at the school, some are only just three years old. Assessments made at the start of the school year indicate that children have had a wide range of experiences and some have low levels of attainment. Just over one in five children have been identified as having special educational needs, and there is one child with a statement of special educational need.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Houghton Community Nursery School is an excellent school that fulfils its motto to "open the door to learning", not just to the children but to their parents and the wider community. Children make an excellent start to their learning and are very well prepared for work in the reception classes when they move on to their next schools. The quality of teaching is very good. This enables most children to achieve standards that are at least in line with what can be expected for their age, with many achieving beyond this, particularly in terms of their language, mathematical, personal and social development. Children make very good progress and, when they leave the school, are on target to reach standards that are at least in line with the standards expected by the time they are five. The school is exceptionally well led by the head teacher, with very good support from the staff and governors. Teachers and nursery nurses work as a close-knit team, to the extent that it is difficult to tell the difference between them. Relationships are very good and staff are committed to improving the learning opportunities for all children. The school is very well managed and day-to-day organisation is particularly good, with staff and children knowing the school's routines very well. The school does not yet have a delegated budget. It receives annual funding from the local education authority to meet the cost of learning resources. These funds are well managed and decisions for spending are monitored well to make sure that the school gets the best possible value.

What the school does well

- The school is effectively led and managed by the head teacher.
- The quality of teaching is very good.
- The school provides an excellent start to children's education, by providing a very rich and fulfilling learning environment and, as a result, they make good progress.
- Children's personal and social skills are developed very well. As a result they have excellent attitudes to learning and their behaviour is excellent.
- It has excellent links with parents and the community.

What could be improved

• The outside environment – by implementing the plans that are already in place to provide a small "adventure playground".

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in January 1997 when it was identified as a very good school. The school has improved at an impressive rate since then, particularly considering its high starting point. It has produced useful policies to guide the work of staff, students and parents. The head teacher's heavy workload has been eased by reducing the number of key worker groups and reviewing the allocation of responsibilities. In addition to successfully addressing all the issues for action identified in the previous

report, the school has improved its procedures for monitoring the curriculum and other areas of school life and continued to develop its already good links with the local community.

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	В
Mathematics	В
Personal and social development	A
Other areas of the curriculum	В

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

Standards in the school are high and all children are challenged by the activities they are given. All of the children in the nursery still have two terms before they move to the reception classes of local primary schools. Most of the children are likely to at least meet the early learning goals identified for their age in all of the areas of learning by the time they leave the nursery. Children make good progress in developing their language and mathematical skills and make particularly good progress in their personal and social development. As a result of the school's curriculum and the high quality of teaching, children are happy to work independently and show considerable maturity for their age. Children with special educational needs are rapidly and accurately identified and are supported very well. As a result they make good progress in relation to the targets set for them.

PUPILS'ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent - children are excited about coming to school. They listen attentively to adults and are very eager to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent - this is a strength of the school. The behaviour of the children is very impressive, both in group work and when independently working or playing with others.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent - this is a priority of the school and results in children who display considerable maturity for their age.
Attendance	Children enjoy coming to school.

Children develop excellent attitudes to their learning and respond extremely well to the stimulating range of activities that are provided for them at the school. The rich curriculum, and the enthusiastic way in which it is taught, encourages children to want to learn. They build excellent relationships with their classmates and adults, and this promotes their personal and social development. Children rapidly learn to take turns and share resources, waiting very patiently until it is their turn. Even the youngest children work independently, choosing activities and taking responsibility for collecting equipment and cleaning up after they have finished.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Lessons seen overall	Very good

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 quality of teaching is very good. Eighty per cent of the lessons seen were very good. The remaining 20 per cent were good. This very high proportion of very good teaching is the key to the effectiveness of the school and is the reason why children have such positive attitudes to school. The quality of teaching is such that it is difficult to tell the teachers and nursery nurses apart. The teaching of language and literacy is very good. Every member of staff, and other adults working in the school, encourage children to develop their speaking and listening skills in all the guided activities they undertake. Children's mathematical development is encouraged very well, enabling many of them to have a secure grasp of early mathematical skills. Teachers and nursery staff develop children's personal and social skills particularly well, putting a high priority on encouraging children to work independently, to become self-confident and also to build positive relationships with other children. Children with special educational needs are identified at an early stage and are supported very well, enabling them to make good progress against the targets that teachers identify for them. Teachers and nursery nurses keep careful notes of all children's achievements and the key worker system works extremely well, ensuring that staff know the children very well and match the tasks accurately to their specific needs.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is very well planned and organised to provide an extremely rich and fulfilling learning environment that includes a wide range of
	experiences designed to interest and excite young children.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Very good. These children are clearly identified at an early age. Very good individual education plans and statements are written for them. These are implemented well and regularly reviewed.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision for children's personal development is a strength of the school. The provision for children's spiritual and cultural development is very good. The provision for their moral and social development is excellent.
How well the school cares for its children	The school provides very good care and support for all its children. The management of children's behaviour is excellent. The assessment and recording of all aspects of children's progress is excellent.

The school works very effectively in partnership with parents, providing very clear and high quality information about the activities their children will be undertaking and the progress that they are making. As a result, the school has excellent relationships with most parents. The school provides a rich educational environment that includes a wide range of stimulating activities that cover all areas of learning, enabling children to make good progress and be prepared very well for the reception classes in their next school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment		
Leadership and	Excellent. The head teacher has set a very clear educational direction for		
management by the head	the school. The head teacher has built a strong team who work very		
teacher and other key staff	effectively together. This ensures a very effective learning environment that		
	is monitored well. The special needs co-ordinator is very effective.		
How well the governors	The governing body is very supportive but has only been in place for 2		
fulfil their responsibilities	months. The local education authority has yet to delegate responsibilities to		
	governors who are currently learning the roles and responsibilities		
	associated with a governing body.		
The school's evaluation of	Monitoring and evaluation are mainly carried out by the head teacher. She		
its performance	has a very clear idea about how well the school is doing and how it can		
	improve further. This has been shared with all staff.		
The strategic use of	Excellent. The school makes very effective use of its resources. Although		
resources	the school does not have a delegated budget, decisions on spending are well		
	linked to its educational priorities.		

The school has adequate numbers of well qualified teachers and nursery nurses who work exceptionally well together. The school's accommodation is excellent and is very well organised to enable children to become involved in a wide range of activities. The school is well resourced and staff make effective use of these resources. The school is extremely well led and managed by the head teacher who balances her teaching commitments and her management role very well. Governors are very supportive but have only recently been appointed and are still learning their roles and responsibilities. The school does not have a delegated budget but does apply the principles of best value to the few spending decisions it can make.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
The school is well managed.	
• The head teacher and staff are very	
approachable and are always willing to discuss	
their children's progress.	
• Children's behaviour in the school.	
• The school's links with parents and the local	
community.	
Their children are encouraged to become	
responsible, independent and mature for their	
age.	
Their children enjoy coming to school.	
The progress made by their children.	
• The information they are given about their	
children and the progress they are making.	
The quality of teaching and the way in which	
teachers have high expectations of the children	
in their care.	

No major concerns were raised by parents at either of the two parents' meetings, or in the returned questionnaires. A very small number of parent's felt they were not kept informed about their children's progress and their children were not given enough homework. Inspectors strongly agree with the very positive comments made by parents. Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress

and children are provided with the right amount of work to do at home.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school is effectively led and managed by the head teacher.

- The head teacher has very high expectations of both staff and children. The school's aims are clearly stated and are well summarised by the school's motto "Open the door to learning". The head teacher has reduced her teaching commitment since the last inspection, and no longer teachers during group work sessions. This has allowed her to devote more time to her management responsibilities. Despite this she still works alongside staff, acting as an exemplar and ensuring that the staff work as a very tight team.
- The head teacher has devised a successful key worker scheme, where each member of staff is responsible for the pastoral needs of a group of children. The key worker takes the group session at the start and end of the session and consequently gets to know her children very well. The key worker is responsible for collating the notes written about each child's progress by the rest of the staff during the day, and this method is very effective in ensuring that children's progress and needs are monitored effectively throughout their time in the nursery.
- 3 The head teacher has introduced an effective programme of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, including the school's curriculum and the quality of teaching. As a result she has a very clear view of the strengths of the school and has accurately identified how the school can maintain the high quality of education it provides.
- 4 The school development plan is a clear and useful document that sets out the school's priorities and targets, clearly identifying how it will know whether these targets have been successfully met.
- 5 The head teacher is providing excellent guidance to the newly appointed governing body, who are currently learning about their roles and responsibilities before these are delegated to them by the Local Education Authority.

The quality of teaching is very good.

- The quality of teaching has been maintained at the high levels identified in the previous inspection. Eighty per cent of the lessons seen were very good and the remainder were good. Teachers and nursery nurses work together so well that it is difficult to tell the difference between them. Staff are enthusiastic and provide activities that capture children's imagination. These activities are a good mix of teacher-directed, teacher-guided and self-selected activities.
- Teachers and nursery nurses develop children's personal and social skills particularly well, putting a high priority on encouraging children to work independently, to become self-confident and also to build positive relationships with other children. The start of each session is a group activity, where each member of staff discusses the day's activities with their key worker group. At the end of this session, children choose the area of the nursery where they wish to begin their activities. Later in the year, children are asked to plan the rest of their day and, at the end of the session, discuss and evaluate what they have done with their classmates. Staff take every opportunity to promote children's personal development, for example, while telling the story of Goldilocks, emphasis was placed on discussing whether it was right for Goldilocks to have gone into the Bears' cottage.
- 8 The teaching of language and literacy is very good. Every member of staff, and other adults working in the school, encourage children to develop their speaking and listening skills in all the guided activities they undertake. For example, while working with some children in the role play area, the nursery

nurse dressed up as "Mother Bear" and the children dressed up as Goldilocks and the other bears. The nursery nurse encouraged the children to retell the story in their own words, stressing that they should speak with the right voice and expression for the character. Children are encouraged to copy or write their names on all their work and, when they have finished an activity, discuss it with a member of staff who annotates the work for them.

- The teaching of mathematics, particularly numeracy is also very good. A wide range of number games and practical activities are prepared for children. For instance, when children work in the role play area, they are encouraged to count and sort bowls, plates and chairs according to their colour and size. Teachers and nursery nurses plan a range of more focussed mathematical activities that include a variety of number and matching games. For example, children were asked to match a number of model teddy bears, according to size and colour. They were then encouraged to draw their own bears and write their own numbers. Most of the children could recognisably form the numbers 1, 2 and 4, although many reversed the numbers 3 and 5.
- During the day, teachers and nursery nurses are responsible for a particular area of the nursery. They keep careful notes of the work done by the children who work in their areas, and discuss this work with the children, often carefully annotating the work using the children's own words. For example, after working in the role play area, one child drew a painting and discussed it with their teacher, saying "The 3 bears mammy made some porridge. It was too hot so they went out for a walk. Goldilocks came, she tasted the porridge, she tried the chairs, she was too big for the little chair and it broke so she went to bed. The bears came back and scared her. Mammy is medium. Daddy is big. The little bear is little". At the end of the day examples of children's work are collected in their "Big Book" and these are shared with parents. The notes are shared with the child's key worker who maintains a very useful record of each child's progress and achievements. This system works extremely well, ensuring that staff know the children very well and match activities accurately to their specific needs.
- 11 Children with special educational needs are identified at an early stage and are supported very well, enabling them to make good progress against the targets that teachers identify for them.
- The very good teaching in the school is the key to the effectiveness of the school and is the main reason why children have such positive attitudes to school and contributes well to the high standards they achieve.

The school provides an excellent start to children's education, by providing a very rich and fulfilling learning environment and, as a result, they make good progress.

- When children start at the school they have had a wide range of experiences and some have low levels of attainment. They are given a very rich curriculum that is focussed on learning through play and first hand experiences. As a result, this rich learning environment enables most children to make very good progress in all areas of learning.
- 14 Children are given a range of activities, some of which are chosen by adults and others are chosen by the children. When working in small groups with teachers or nursery nurses, challenging questions are asked, which enable children to identify what they have learnt.
- In language and mathematical activities, guided activities are used very well to develop children's knowledge and understanding. These activities are reinforced by free-choice activities that are carefully linked to the themes and topics being taught. For example, after discussing the story of the "Three Billy Goats Gruff", children working in the small world chose a doll and models of bridges and goats to retell the story to each other. In one group, the three children said "The little one goed across the bridge. He was sad because he didn't want anyone to go cross his bridge he should let him go across 'cos it's not his, the

Trolls. The medium size and big one cross the bridge then they was eating grass all the time". This effectively reinforced the work they had been doing earlier listening to a story and comparing the size of items. As a result, they were making good progress.

In other areas of learning, children make equally good progress. For example, when investigating materials that were attracted to magnets, children's comments included "Well, I tried with the key and it stuck to the magnet. I tried the paper clip and it did too. I tried with the comb and it didn't stick so I put a sad face sticker on because it was only plastic. Metal keys, paper clips and nails stick to magnets because they are metals." Other pupils investigated how two magnets reacted and said "When you put the red and blue parts together they stick together but they don't have glue on. We're trying to stick the reds together but it's like there's a bubble there and we can't burst it and put the ends together".

Children's personal and social skills are developed very well.

- The development of children's personal and social skills is a high priority in the school. As a result, children learn to work independently and demonstrate a high degree of maturity for their age.
- 18 Children have a very clear awareness of the day's routines. For example, when they come through the doors at the start of the session, they go straight to their group room, select their own mat and sit on it until the teacher or nursery nurse arrives to start the day. During this time they chat animatedly with each other about what they hope to do later in the day.
- Activities are prepared very well to encourage children to work independently. For example, the listening corner is set out with a tape recorder and a range of suitable cassettes. The cassette recorder has been modified to allow even the youngest children to use it without help. For example, a three year old patiently explained "Press the red button, it opens up. Put in tape, close it and press green button. It starts to sing a bit and tells you a story. You choose the right book and turn the pages. There's different pictures to read while the story's told". Similarly, the painting area is set out with wide a range of brushes and poster paints. Water is supplied in babies' feeding bottles, and this allows children to choose the brushes and paint they want to use and carefully control the amount of water they use when mixing the paints on their own.
- At the end of the group work session, some children are guided towards a particular activity. The remaining children are expected to identify and plan which activity area they wish to work in. If the area is already full, they automatically choose another activity and wait for their turn. Later in the year, children are expected to plan a sequence of activities and, later, to discuss and review what they have done with their classmates.
- Children's attitudes to learning are excellent. They listen very attentively to their key worker during the group work at the start and end of the session. They are very eager to contribute to discussions, but usually take turns in making a contribution and do not interrupt their classmates.
- Children's behaviour is excellent, and this is a direct result of the staff's high expectations and the good organisation of the nursery. For example, during a group music lesson, one child started to play with a tambourine before the teacher had finished talking. The other children in the group said "Put it on the floor, we're not ready yet you're being rude!".

The school has excellent links with parents and the community.

Since the last inspection, the school has maintained excellent links with parents. Parents and carers really value the work of the school and have very positive views about the quality of education provided by the school. These are best summarised by a parent's comment "It's great – you only have to

watch the children arrive at the school in the morning. They race in without a backwards glance to their parents!".

- There are excellent arrangements to encourage parents to become an important part of the nursery. These start before their children are due to start at the school. For example, a "Mothers and Toddlers" group uses the community room and, in the term before they start at the school, children and their parents are invited to come to the "Parents and New Starters Group", where children are gradually introduced to the nursery and the staff they will meet when they start at the school.
- Parents are welcomed at the start and the end of each session, and have an excellent relationship with the staff of the school, particularly the head teacher and their child's key worker. Parents can spend a session with their child at any time, sharing their activities and working alongside them. In addition, a number of parents work alongside the teachers and nursery nurses, helping to support specific activities such as painting or working on the computer.
- Parents are provided with a wealth of information about the day-to-day life of the school, through newsletters and brochures that are sent home, and also through the displays in the school's foyer. Parents are also kept very well informed about the progress their children are making. They are encouraged to talk to staff at the start or end of a session, and parents' meetings are held at regular intervals throughout the year.
- The school has very good links with the local community. The community room is used effectively to offer a range of services. For example, the school hosts a support group for local childminders, who come to the school to allow the children in their care to use a wide range of toys. In addition, parents and childminders are offered a range of courses, some of which are validated by a local college.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The outside environment.

The school has an excellent covered outdoor area that is used daily to promote children's physical development through outdoor play. Large transparent shutters can be raised, during clement weather, to allow access to an outer hard play area, a small garden and large grass areas. The outer hard play area is covered with a safety surface, but there are no fixed climbing frames or other adventurous play equipment. The school has plans to develop an outdoor adventure playground and parents have raised a significant amount of money to purchase the necessary equipment.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The excellent quality of education provided by the school means there are no major issues that need addressing in the school. However, in order to further improve, the school should implement its plans for developing an outdoor "adventure playground".

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	15
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	10

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	80	20	0	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	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	17

English as an additional language	No o	f pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language		0

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	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	0

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and support staff

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.5
Total number of education support staff	4

6.5

Financial information*

Financial year	1998 - 1999	
	£	
Total income	2,113	
Total expenditure	0	
Expenditure per pupil	0	
Balance brought forward from previous year	0	
Balance carried forward to next year	2,113	

^{*} The school does not have a delegated budget

Number of pupils per FTE adult

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	79
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.	70	26	2	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	58	37	0	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	63	37	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	38	45	7	0	10
The teaching is good.	81	12	0	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	65	28	7	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	86	14	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	29	2	0	7
The school works closely with parents.	60	37	2	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	79	21	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	64	33	0	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	26	9	0	29