INSPECTION REPORT

OXCLOSE COMMUNITY NURSERY SCHOOL

Oxclose Village, Washington

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108751

Headteacher: Ms E Robinson

Reporting inspector: Mrs Sandra Carter 20459

Dates of inspection: 20-21 June 2000

Inspection number: 192223

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: Community

Age range of pupils: 3 - 4

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Brancepeth Road

Oxclose Village Washington Tyne and Wear

Postcode: NE38 OLA

Telephone number: 0191 2193618

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs K Knowles

Date of previous inspection: 17-19 March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Mrs Sandra Carter	Registered inspector
Mrs K Anderson	Lay inspector

The inspection contractor was:

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6-11
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	12
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	16
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	17
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	19

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Oxclose Community Nursery School is situated in the centre of Oxclose Village in Washington about five miles west of Sunderland. It is a 80 place Local Education Authority Nursery which offers flexible attendance and extended hours. Children come from a wide range of backgrounds and attainment on entry is equally wide, but generally average, reflecting the national picture. The school has a high number of children with special educational needs, 19 altogether, and 2 children with English as an additional language. The school serves the whole community and has well established links with a wide range of local community groups and businesses.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a highly effective school where childhood is treasured and enjoyed by adults and children alike. All young children are valued as individuals and are able to access a wonderful range of exciting learning opportunities. Learning is fun and standards are good. Teaching overall is very good and the headteacher provides excellent leadership.

The strengths of the school far outweigh its weaknesses.

What the school does well

- The headteacher is charismatic. She provides strong and determined leadership and vision, ensuring that the school ethos and aims are evident in all areas of school life.
- Overall, teaching and learning is of a very high quality and standards are high, particularly in personal and social development.
- Rich, stimulating and exciting experiences make learning fun.
- Children are highly valued and cared for as individuals; the inclusion of children with special educational needs is a significant feature of the school.
- The attitudes and behaviour of such young children are very good because of the excellent provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Links with parents, the community and businesses are outstanding and add significantly to children's learning.

What could be improved

- Tracking and recording children's experiences and achievements systematically.
- The quality and range of display.
- Training, development and involvement of the governing body.
- Administrative and technological support.

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 March 1997 and has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in that report. Policies and guidelines have been produced to support teaching and learning and all staff have continued to further develop their skills and expertise through attendance at training courses. One member of staff spent a year in a special school on secondment to improve her knowledge and expertise in this field. There is a clear system in place for disseminating information to all staff following attendance at such courses. Key learning objectives have been identified and record sheets devised to record childrens' experiences and skills but these are still not completed as systematically as they could be and further revision is needed.

The school has continued to develop the strong partnership with parents, the community and local businesses. It is currently fundraising for an extension to the community room to house the growing amount of equipment needing to be stored as a result of the increasing use of this facility. They have almost reached their target. Involvement in the Quality Time Initiative has resulted in the production of home library packs for nursery and pre-school children. These packs are having a positive impact on children's language and literacy skills.

A new governing body was established in November 1999 for the first time. Committed and enthusiastic, it is still very unsure about its role and responsibilities, although it has been well supported by the school. Governors have not had sufficient external training and support. Administrative time is used effectively but there are still too many routine functions being undertaken by the headteacher. There is not enough time or technological support for the secretary to cope with the ever increasing demands; particularly in relation to day-to-day financial management.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about the achievements of children in relation to the national desirable learning outcomes by the time they leave the school.

Performance in:	
language and literacy	В
mathematics	С
personal and social development	A
other areas of the curriculum	В

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

Many of the children are achieving beyond the level normally expected for their age, particularly in language and literacy, knowledge and understanding, and creative and aesthetic development. Standards in personal and social development are particularly high. Standards in numeracy are average. Overall children achieve beyond the level normally expected. Baseline assessment in the nursery was introduced in November 1999 and is therefore not a totally accurate reflection of where children started from. End of year baseline assessments show that all children make good progress and that the school adds much value. Internal recording

systems are used to inform the baseline assessment process and to aid planning but they are not systematic enough. The school has excellent procedures in place for promoting good behaviour and supporting childrens' personal development, including outstanding links with parents and the community and these result in the very high standards achieved in personal and social development.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children come to school happily; they are eager to learn and enjoy their experiences.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good; children enjoy working with adults and with each other.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships throughout the school are excellent. Children display initiative and exercise a high degree of personal responsibility, particularly in food preparation and distribution at snack time. The inclusion of a high proportion of children with special educational needs adds significant value to this area.
Attendance	Attendance is very good because parents and children value their time in the nursery.

Children are very settled and secure; they demonstrate a strong sense of independence which is evident in their ability to exercise clear choices with regard to the wide range of experiences open to them to pursue. During the inspection, there were no incidents of mis-behaviour or disagreement; children and adults value and respect each other. Children with quite severe special educational needs are equally valued.

The outstanding community links also provide an added dimension to the childrens' experiences; the use of the school by the childminders' network and parent and toddler groups, together with the home-visits and induction programme mean that the children benefit from links with the nursery prior to their schooling. This smoothes the transition from home to school. From the outset, the importance of regular attendance is stressed and the school is extremely vigilant in pursuing absence. The flexible attendance pattern and extended hours facilities offered to parents is a contributory factor to such high attendance levels because the school is meeting the needs of parents as well as those of the children in their care.

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.

Teaching overall is very good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching; 89% of teaching was good or better and 56% was very good or better. 11% of teaching was excellent. A particular strength of the teaching was the consistently high quality by all staff. The quality of teaching in language is a strength and early number skills are also well taught. The teaching of and provision for personal and social development is excellent. Classroom display does not sufficiently promote or extend early literacy and numeracy.

The high quality of teaching is clearly linked to well-planned, stimulating and exciting activities which engage and captivate all children and make learning fun. The physical layout of the nursery is superbly organised to reflect all areas of learning. There is ample space for children and adults to engage in activities purposefully and easily. The outdoor area is an outstanding feature; enabling children to physically and creatively explore a wide range of activities in both fine and inclement weather. All resources are of the highest quality, designed to withstand constant use and to appeal aesthetically to young children. Overall, there is a good balance between adult intervention and children determining their own learning. A strong feature of the high quality teaching and learning is the very rich diet which children find exciting and fun.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Detailed planning identifies framework themes around which activities are developed. These are wide ranging, covering all curriculum areas and provide a very rich diet which meets the developmental and learning needs of all children. All learning is based on first-hand experience and designed to challenge and motivate children of all abilities. Community and business links enhance the provision and are a significant feature.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is a significant strength of the school, which attracts high numbers of children with special educational needs because of its policy on inclusion.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for childrens' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and a strength of the school. Independence and social responsibility are strongly promoted; adults and children respect and value each other as individuals. High expectations of behaviour contribute to the overall ethos.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school motto 'We Care' is evident in all aspects of school life. The school is a pivotal part of the community and staff know children and their families well and are therefore able to offer

good support. All appropriate procedures, including those for child protection are in place to ensure childrens' safety and welfare at all times. The school also encourages children to take responsibility for their own safety through the promotion of
specific activities.

Children with special educational needs are very well supported with appropriate additional and often very specialist help and are highly valued as individuals. Adults and children have learnt to sign to support a profoundly deaf child and support for two other children with English as an additional language is also provided.

Liaison between home and school is excellent and there is a genuine partnership which enables all children to make very good progress.

Links between parents, the community and business are an outstanding feature of the school and make a significant contribution to children's' learning and the high standards achieved.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides strong leadership and vision. The staff work effectively as a team in managing their roles and responsibilities.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The newly formed governing body have not yet had sufficient time or external support and training to fully understand their roles and responsibilities. The headteacher has provided training relating to the organisation and management of the school which has been helpful and supportive.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has clear processes in place for evaluating its work. It undertakes surveys of parental responses to initiatives such as flexible attendance and extended hours provision. It knows what it does successfully and where it needs to focus next.
The strategic use of resources	The school does not yet have a delegated budget. The grants available to the school and the monies available through fundraising are used exceptionally well to support learning for children and the community and promote high standards.

The school is very effectively led and managed by the headteacher but because the governing body is new, it is not yet fully involved in strategic management or development of the school. The resources available to the school are fully utilised to ensure maximum benefit to the children and community alike.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
 High standards of achievement. That children are valued as individuals. Staff have high expectations. Involvement in children's learning at home. Flexible attendance and extended hours. High community profile. Physical provision e.g. outdoor play area. Good reputation within community. Inclusion of children with special educational needs. 	No significant concerns.

The views of the parents at the parents meeting and the high percentage of questionnaires returned indicate that parents value the school greatly. They made a conscious decision for their child to attend Oxclose; they like the high quality education that is provided and the school's philosophy that "learning is fun". They feel the school values them as parents and goes out of its way to be supportive, through the introduction of flexible attendance, extended hours and provision for meeting with them outside of normal school hours. They especially value the community nature of the school and the inclusion of children with special educational needs. They feel this adds a valuable dimension to their children's education. These very positive comments are reflected in the inspection findings; this is a very effective school, highly valued within the community.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The headteacher is charismatic. She provides strong and determined leadership and vision, ensuring that the school ethos and aims are evident in all areas of school life.

- 1. The headteacher leads the school with enthusiasm, dedication and dynamism. She is held in high regard by staff, parents and the wider community. She is a highly effective and experienced early years practitioner with a clear philosophy of how young children learn. This philosophy is communicated clearly and effectively to staff who are equally committed and work well together as a team to ensure that everything they do reflects this.
- 2. The mission statement "To further the all-round development of the individual child in a warm supportive and secure environment which positively promotes equality of opportunity. To extend this philosophy to the parents and wider community, to recognise our position within that community and to develop to meet its needs" lives and breathes in the day-to-day work and achievements of the school.
- 3. The headteacher teaches for a large part of each day and this enables her to act as a very good role model both in terms of high quality teaching and also in ensuring that her philosophy and vision are interpreted into realisable achievements.

Overall, teaching and learning is of a very high quality and standards are high, particularly in personal and social development.

- 4. Teaching and learning is consistently of a very high quality and this directly contributes to the achievement of high standards. All staff are skilled early years practitioners who clearly understand how young children learn. They use time effectively to ensure that maximum learning takes place and sessions which are adult led are well paced, with staff demonstrating the use of an appropriate range of strategies and effective questioning skills.
- 5. Joint planning means that all staff have an in-depth knowledge of activities that are to take place each week and can contribute their ideas in developing the 'framework themes' around which the activities are built. There are strong links between different areas so that key objectives are continually reinforced, such as spotty patterns in number work; matching spots on cards to those on the dice, recognising spotty and striped patterns, icing biscuits with spots and stripes, wearing spotty and striped clothes and developing the theme through telling the story of the spotted pig.
- 6. Excellent relationships between adults and children lead to a climate in which there is trust and respect for each other; children are secure and confident and staff actively promote independent learning. All children are able to exercise a degree of choice relating to the wide variety of activities across all areas of learning on offer at any one time. They tackle new experiences with confidence and are able to work for sustained periods, either alone or in a small group setting.

- 7. There is a good balance between allowing children a period of time in which to investigate and explore and adult intervention to further develop their learning.
- 8. Standards on entry are typical of those found nationally, but by the time children are ready to transfer to the Reception Year, many are achieving beyond that, particularly in the areas of language, knowledge and understanding and creative and aesthetic development. Standards in numeracy are average whilst standards related to personal and social development are very high.
- 9. Children are able to join in with stories and rhymes that they know; pursue scientific investigations relating to floating, sinking and dissolving; identify holiday countries on a world map, use apparatus with imagination and care and play a range of percussion instruments loudly, softly, quickly and slowly.

Rich, stimulating and exciting experiences make learning fun.

- 10. The range of experiences available to children is rich and diverse and there is a wide variety of activities on offer at any one point in time, all of which have been carefully planned and devised to fit together and match the key learning objectives identified. All of the activities involve children gaining first-hand experience, supported where necessary by an adult.
- 11. The physical layout of the nursery is excellent. It is spacious and includes a superb outdoor area, incorporating a range of moveable and fixed apparatus, part of which can be covered in with roller shutters if the weather dictates. Internal space is imaginatively divided into discrete areas by careful planning of furniture and equipment. During the inspection week a wooden platform and tower construction were converted into the Tower View Hotel and adapted accordingly.
- 12. In the outside area an 'assault' course was provided which involved children in following arrows to access different equipment in sequence and children were able to experience washing the large vehicles which they did with great care and enjoyment. A particular highlight was the construction of a transparent plastic fish bowl which went from floor to ceiling. Children donned suitable clothing, including wellingtons and painted huge blue stripes using rollers and assorted brushes. This activity supported the water based theme well and reinforced the concept of pattern. This kind of experience demonstrates clearly that learning is fun, especially when all the participants went home with the inevitable blue streaked hair. Not a single parent complained!

Children are highly valued and cared for as individuals; the inclusion of children with special educational needs is a significant feature of the school.

13. The school motto 'We Care' is evident throughout all aspects of school life. All children are highly valued as individuals both by staff and by each other. There is a genuine respect for young children and a strong belief that their needs are paramount. Children are encouraged to investigate and experiment, to tackle new experiences and to develop their own interests and strengths. Planning sheets identify specific activities for some individuals to ensure that learning is consolidated and extended.

- 14. The school enjoys a reputation for its philosophy on inclusion in relation to children with special educational needs. There are a high number of children in this category, some with quite severe special educational needs. The school offers outstanding support, seeking appropriate external specialist support where necessary and all staff and children respond with care and respect. One member of staff is undertaking a specialist course in British Sign Language and supports other staff and children who automatically sign to a child who is profoundly deaf. The impact of this means that the child is confident, secure and progressing well and his peers are gaining skills and understanding as part of their early childhood development.
- 15. Another child is severely autistic and has dedicated one to one support, both at home and at school. The school has gone to enormous lengths to adjust and integrate with the requirements and philosophy of the very specialist nature of this support, and this is recognised and valued by the parents.
- 16. Because of flexible attendance patterns, the school is able to provide additional time for those children whose needs indicate that this would be beneficial. This has a very positive impact on the progress of these children.

The attitudes and behaviour of such young children are very good because of the excellent provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- 17. Throughout the inspection, irrespective of the session, or activity, the attitudes and behaviour of the children overall was very good. They show great respect for each other.
- 18. At the beginning of each session children come to school eagerly, looking forward with anticipation to the experiences that the day will bring. They settle easily and confidently into routines which are well established and are secure enough to tackle new experiences with confidence. They enjoy the rich diet on offer and remain involved for substantial periods of time.
- 19. They display a sense of wonder at the disappearance of finger puppets during an action rhyme session; "That was magic" said one child, when the teacher hides the puppets down the back of her trousers! They sustain quite intense concentration and fascination when they observe, handle and draw a crab brought in by the teacher.
- 20. Children share equipment and materials well and clearly understand the high expectations that staff have of them. Nursery lunchtime was a pleasure to behold, twenty four three and four year olds experiencing family service and participating in a social occasion with a high degree of maturity. Again, the staff have high expectations and value the social contribution that these young children bring and they are amply rewarded.
- 21. When moving around the nursery, both indoors and outside, children move sensibly and purposefully; when it comes to tidy time they follow instructions well and take responsibility for clearing away.
- 22. At snack time they take turns to distribute the food and milk and they follow social

- conventions well, saying please and thank you. This is a valued social occasion as well as a learning experience, made all the more effective because some children are always involved in preparing the snack.
- 23. Children value and enjoy the range of cultural experiences that they participate in.

 They are delighted when Japanese visitors allow them to dress in Kimono's and when a uniform day is arranged and community representatives come dressed in their work uniforms.

Links with parents, the community and businesses are outstanding and add significant value.

- 24. There are well established links with parents, the community and a wide variety of local businesses. These links are particularly beneficial to the children in that they considerably enrich the curriculum. The school as a whole has benefited from the additional funding generated through these links which has enhanced the physical provision.
- 25. Communications with parents are particularly good, and staff go out of their way to accommodate the wishes of working parents when arranging parent-key worker discussions. Parents are well supported through the flexible attendance and extended hours provision and feel valued in their own right. This provision means that many are able to return to some form of paid employment.
- 26. The school serves the wider community and uses its community room facility for the benefit of a wide range of groups. Several of these groups involve childminders and parents and toddlers and they value the support of the school, especially the headteacher, in not only providing the venue but also in helping them get established. A range of parenting classes takes place in the community room and it is also used for exchanging the library and toddler packs which supports literacy work at home.
- 27. The school has very good links with several businesses, notably TRW Automotive Systems who have donated generously to particular projects, most recently towards the funding of an extension to the community room to house the ever growing range of equipment and materials generated by the range of groups using it.
- 28. The headteacher is an active member of the local community and serves on the executive committee of the local business forum and lifelong learning forum. She is also actively involved in a range of other groups and this involvement undoubtedly brings enormous benefits to the school. It ensures not only tangible benefits but places the school at the heart of the community it serves.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Tracking and recording childrens' experiences and achievements systematically.

29. Initial information about a child is gained from the home-visit made by staff prior to

- children starting school. Some information is briefly recorded and this information together with that gained as a result of the induction process is used to aid planning.
- 30. The school has introduced individual record sheets, covering all areas of learning. These provide a range of information relating to childrens experiences and achievement. These records are used as a basis for completing the end of year baseline assessment sheets which go with the child when s/he transfers to primary school.
- 31. Although the record sheets provide some basis for summarising children's' achievements, they are not completed on a sufficiently regular basis to ensure that they are used to guide long and short term planning for children's' learning. Alternative rough records, in the form of index cards, are currently used by staff as an aidememoir, but again these comments are not systematically transferred to the main record sheets.
- 32. The range of learning experiences and activities on offer is wide and a major factor in the high standards attained. However, it is still possible for some children to miss a key experience because of the lack of systematically recording the experiences they receive. For example, at the time of the inspection there were no recorded entries for some individual children against scientific or musical experiences. It is not sufficient for staff to know what has been experienced and achieved by children.

The quality and range of display

- 33. The physical environment and the use of imaginative ideas to define discrete areas within the nursery is very good. However, the quality of classroom displays does not match this or the superb activities on offer.
- 34. Displays are minimal and lack vibrancy. They do not sufficiently enhance the learning environment; there are too few labels, pictorial instructions or opportunities for children to help reinforce key vocabulary, including their names.
- 35. Book corners lack book posters and the promotion of key words and there is minimal evidence of display linked to early numeracy.
- 36. There are clear verbal rules relating to the use of the woodwork bench which have been shared with the children but no pictorial reminders to ensure that tools are handled safely.
- 37. Opportunities to celebrate individual children's work are missed, as paintings and models on display are not matched with the child's name.

Training, development and involvement of the governing body.

38. The governing body was newly established in the autumn term of 1999 along with governing bodies of the other nursery schools. It met for the first time in November and held a second meeting in March. It does not yet have a full complement of governors; it currently has no Local Education Authority governor.

39. The governors are committed and enthusiastic about their new role and have been well supported by the headteacher in understanding how the school functions. However, the governors have had no external training or support and do not have a clear understanding of what their precise roles and responsibilities are. They are unaware, for example, of when they can expect to receive a delegated budget and what the impact of this might be. Consequently they are not yet sufficiently involved in strategic planning or management.

Administrative and technological support

- 40. The school secretary is highly efficient and manages her role effectively. The amount of administrative time is small and insufficient for the increasing amount of responsibility that she is now taking for maintaining some nineteen budget heads. Her role has become increasingly more demanding and governors are concerned about workload and are monitoring the situation.
- 41. Administrative time in school has been agreed by negotiation between the secretary and the headteacher and is designed to allow her to be in school for both some mornings and afternoons in order to establish links with all the parents. However, this results in two days when there is no administrative support at all. As a consequence, the headteacher is frequently disrupted by the telephone and visitors during teaching time. There is currently no answering system in place or an awareness of when the headteacher is not available to take calls.
- 42. Although there is a computer in the headteacher's office, there is not one available to the secretary. All financial transactions and reconciliations are manual; there is no facility for a computerised system. Financial delegation is due to take place shortly but there is no clearly identified timescale or training programme yet in place. This is causing some anxiety.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 43. The school should now:
 - (1) further develop systematic ways of tracking and regularly recording childrens' take-up of key experiences and achievements;
 - (2) improve the quality and range of display so that it more effectively supports learning and promotes early literacy and numeracy skills;
 - (3) seek ways of providing governors with appropriate training to help them understand their roles and responsibilities more fully to enable them to be more effective in strategic management;
 - (4) review the existing administrative and technological support systems and seek ways of increasing the time allocation and information technology equipment.

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	17

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)	35
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0

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	19

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	3

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	N/A

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	N/A

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	16

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	75

Number of pupils per FTE adult	6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Tinanciai injormation	
Financial year	1999-00
	£
Total income	8003
Total expenditure	N/A*
Expenditure per pupil	N/A*
Balance brought forward from previous year	1163
Balance carried forward to next year	N/A*

^{*} No delegated budget

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	62
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.	71	29			
My child is making good progress in school.	57	40			2
Behaviour in the school is good.	62	36			2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	37	47	8	3	5
The teaching is good.	69	26			5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	62	31	7		
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	71	27	2		
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	41	7	2	2
The school works closely with parents.	60	33	7		
The school is well led and managed.	68	29			2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	64	36			
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	54	34	7		5