

INSPECTION REPORT

VALLEY NURSERY SCHOOL

Blakenall, Walsall

LEA area: Walsall

Unique reference number: 104137

Headteacher: Ms. Dawn Kelly

Reporting inspector: Alison M Cartlidge
OIN 23609

Dates of inspection: 8th – 9th May 2000

Inspection number: 192662

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:	2-4 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Blakenall Heath Blakenall Walsall West Midlands
Postcode:	WS3 1HT
Telephone number:	01922 710518
Appropriate authority:	LEA
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. Tom Perrett
Date of previous inspection:	10/ 02/ 97

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Valley Nursery School is situated in the town of Walsall in an identified area of social and economic deprivation. Children are admitted to the nursery from the age of two years and most stay for two years. There are 89 children on roll with 39 children attending full-time and 50 part-time. Most children live in rented accommodation and 55% are entitled to free school meals. This figure is higher than average. There are 22 children on the school's special needs' register and this is also higher than average. The school admits a greater number of children with speech difficulties than at the time of the last inspection, although no child has a statement of special educational need. All children come from homes where English is the first language. Children's attainment on entry to the nursery is well below average for their age. The school has been designated by the local authority as a 'centre of excellence' providing extended day care facilities and working with various agencies to offer additional services for children and their parents.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school and the inspection identified no significant areas for improvement. The excellent leadership and management of the headteacher enable members of staff to provide and deliver a very good curriculum. Good teaching helps children to learn quickly. Whilst children are not on target to achieve by five, the expected national standards in language and literacy, mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world, they make good progress in all areas of learning, with very good progress being made in personal and social development. The parents have outstandingly positive views of the school.

What the school does well

- The headteacher enables members of staff to use their particular strengths effectively
- Teachers and nursery nurses are enthusiastic and hardworking, helping children to learn well
- The well organised and carefully planned curriculum ensures that children are provided with a wealth of exciting and purposeful activities
- The provision for promoting children's personal and social development is very good
- The children develop positive attitudes towards school
- The school successfully helps parents to become actively involved in their children's education

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in February 1997. Teachers' planning has been improved to meet the needs of children of differing prior attainment, record keeping for children with special educational needs is fully in place and the outside area has been developed to provide a valuable resource for extending children's knowledge and understanding of the world. A significant improvement has been the extensive development of links with the community and parents through the 'excellence in partnership' initiative. This has been successful in involving parents further in their children's education.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:		Key Well above average A Above average B average C Below average D Well below average E
language and literacy	D	
Mathematics	D	
personal and social development	C	
other areas of the curriculum	C	

A large number of children come to school with poorly developed speech and their limited vocabulary affects their knowledge in other areas of learning. All children achieve well according to their prior attainment. Well-developed listening skills mean that children learn quickly in lessons. The oldest children develop good independence and confidence.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Children are very enthusiastic about taking part in the activities provided. They concentrate particularly well when working in a group with a member of staff.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Children work sensibly and treat each other and resources with respect.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Children enjoy taking responsibility for tasks around the school. They are polite and courteous and develop good relationships with members of staff.
Attendance	Good. Children are keen to come to school and settle quickly at the start of each session.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Lessons seen overall	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 good in over half the lessons and is never less than satisfactory. All areas of the curriculum are taught well. Personal and social development is taught particularly effectively because of the good example set by members of staff and the inclusion of social training in all planned activities.

Particular strengths are the thorough organisation and preparation for each session, the effective use of resources to support learning, the consistent promotion of new words to extend the children's vocabularies and the successful management of children's behaviour to ensure that no time is wasted. The specific needs of higher attaining children and those with special educational needs are successfully met in lessons and when they are taught in separate small groups.

There are no significant weaknesses in teaching, although the sessions when children talk about the work they have done, are sometimes hurried and are therefore less effective than the sessions when the teacher is directing the activity in a more structured way.

A particular strength in the children's learning is their sustained interest when listening to the members of staff and the successful development of good manners.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Thorough planning and very good organisation, ensure that all children have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The school has established excellent links with the local community to provide children and their parents with valuable learning opportunities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Children are supported effectively and detailed records are kept of their progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Carefully planned activities help to develop children's awareness of religion and spirituality. High expectations of behaviour and responsibility help children to achieve well in personal development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. All members of staff are knowledgeable and well trained in the effective and up-to-date childcare procedures, enabling them to give children very good personal and educational support.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The dynamic headteacher provides clear leadership for the work of the school. She enables each member of staff to take a full and active role in supporting and improving the education provided.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The newly formed governing body is clear about its responsibilities and understands the school's strengths.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Teaching and learning are monitored effectively.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. The headteacher is proactive in gaining additional funding for the school and all grants and funds are directed at initiatives that raise the quality of education provided.

Members of staff work together well as a team. There is a shared commitment to raising attainment. The school effectively applies the principles of best value by working closely with three other nursery schools, comparing attainment, provision and spending.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The good quality teaching • The welcoming and approachable members of staff • The information provided on their children's progress • The partnership the school has with parents • The leadership and management • The way children are helped to become mature and responsible 	There are no aspects of the school's work parents would like to see improved.

Inspection findings confirm parents' positive views.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The headteacher enables members of staff to use their particular strengths effectively

1. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management for the school. As at the time of the last inspection, she has a very clear vision for the future and focuses on school improvement and ways of developing the quality of education. Governors and members of staff share this vision and support her well. Particular strengths in the headteacher's work are the outstanding organisation of the school and the effective way all members of staff are enabled to carry out their roles successfully. Her determination and drive help all members of staff to be inspired about their work and to strive to achieve the very best for the children in the nursery. Parents are very pleased with the leadership of the school.
2. The quality of day to day management has improved since the last inspection. The school day is meticulously organised to ensure that the children gain the maximum time for learning. Each session flows seamlessly into the next with children and members of staff being clear about where they are working next and what they are going to do. Effective use is made of all members of staff to ensure the smooth running of the nursery. The school clerk is hard working and efficient and the caretaker and cleaning staff maintain the cleanliness of the building effectively.
3. There is a very strong climate of reflection and self-review in which each member of staff feels comfortable in questioning her own work and that of others. The headteacher holds professional discussions to consider individual strengths and weaknesses and identify specific training needs. Targets for further development are agreed. All members of staff have clear job descriptions detailing their management responsibilities and they receive thorough training to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. Information from all the self-reviews is brought together to identify whole school training needs for inclusion in the next school improvement plan. The headteacher is very proactive in gaining additional funds and spending is carefully targeted to help raise the quality of education provided.
4. Members of staff work together effectively as a team, planning the curriculum and discussing ways that provision can be further improved. Learning support assistants receive good training enabling them to contribute to lesson planning and work effectively with the children. They carry out evaluations of their work and have designated areas of responsibility. Midday supervisors attend first aid and food hygiene courses to protect children's welfare and they ensure that the children are well cared for at lunchtime.

Teachers and nursery nurses are enthusiastic and hardworking, helping children to learn well

5. The good quality of teaching by teachers and nursery nurses has been maintained since the last inspection. Teaching is good in over half of lessons and is never less than satisfactory.
6. Members of staff prepare well for all lessons and make very good use of a wide range of resources. These are carefully chosen to interest the children and develop a willingness to learn and take part in activities. For example, in a mathematics lesson the nursery nurse had brought into school a wide variety of attractive fruit and vegetables for the children to sort and count. Members of staff explain the purpose of activities making them relevant to the children and this maintains their motivation.
7. Teachers and nursery nurses have a good knowledge of children's individual academic and social needs. They successfully use this information to involve all children in their learning and to plan work that meets their needs. Higher attaining children and those who have been identified as having special educational needs receive additional support both individually and in small groups. For example, older, higher attaining children are taught reading separately. These initiatives enable teachers to provide suitable challenge for all children.
8. Teaching is particularly successful in 'small group times' held at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions. At these times, members of staff work with their group on a particular aspect of the curriculum. These sessions are particularly well planned, introductions to activities are clear and informative and

teachers and nursery nurses make sure that children understand what they have to do. Great care is taken to involve all children in the activity. Members of staff give good individual support to children in these sessions, asking questions that assess and extend learning. For example, in a lesson on 'mini-beasts' questioning helped children to increase their knowledge about the names of various creatures.

9. Throughout the school, members of staff take every opportunity of developing children's communication skills. They are very careful about using the correct vocabulary when introducing a subject and they consistently encourage children to speak clearly at all times. For example, when reading a story about a hedgehog, the nursery nurse successfully encouraged children to use a range of descriptive vocabulary. In a lesson that involved looking at different types of fruit, the teacher was very careful to ensure that all children knew the names of the fruit. She had written the names out so that children could see what the words looked like. This helped children to acquire new vocabulary.
10. At the end of 'work times', when children decide where they wish to work and what they want to do, teachers encourage children to talk about what they have done. However, these sessions are sometimes too rushed to promote quality discussions and are less helpful in identifying what the child has learnt.

The well-organised and carefully planned curriculum ensures that children are provided with a wealth of exciting and purposeful activities

11. Members of staff plan an exciting range of activities based around a theme such as 'living things'. They ensure that children are provided with a relevant, broad and balanced curriculum. Both teachers and nursery nurses take an active role in planning work that is based on the nationally recommended early years' curriculum. Teachers' planning clearly identifies the skills that are to be taught in a particular term in each area of learning. The quality of planning has improved since the last inspection.
12. The development of children's spoken language is emphasised and this has a good impact on learning. Teachers' planning clearly identifies the specific vocabulary that is to be taught in each lesson. They take every opportunity to develop children's numeracy skills. For example, children count the beat during dance lessons and look at different numbers during registration.
13. The curriculum is very well organised. There is a very good balance between 'small group times' when children are taught directly by a member of staff and 'work times' when children are able to choose for themselves where they are going to work. This is effective in enabling children to develop independence and to take responsibility for what they are going to do, whilst ensuring that the teacher is able to teach skills to the children in her group.
14. Teachers carefully monitor where children choose to work in order to ensure that they visit all the areas of learning over the period of one or two weeks. This is very effective in helping children to develop skills in all parts of the curriculum.
15. Children are provided with a wealth of experiences whilst in school. Effective use is made of the wider community to develop learning, through a range of visits and visitors. These extend the children's experiences beyond those available in the immediate environment. For example, children have recently visited a local farm and a garden centre. These activities have a good impact on the development of communication skills introducing children to new experiences and helping them to expand their vocabularies. The school has very good links with nearby schools and children regularly visit each other to join in with different activities.

The provision for promoting children's personal and social development is very good

16. As at the time of the last inspection, there is a positive, welcoming and caring ethos throughout the school. Members of staff successfully promote these attitudes through all aspects of school life. Parents are very supportive of the attitudes and values promoted by the school and the opportunities provided for children to learn about other cultures.

17. The school is very successful at developing children's self esteem and enabling them to become happy and confident members of the school community. Children are successfully encouraged to take responsibility for different aspects of school life; for example each class has a 'daily helper' who fetches the register from the office. Children are very keen to help their teacher and sensibly and responsibly carry out jobs they are given.
18. Teachers have high expectations of how children should behave and use praise effectively to reinforce positive behaviour. Great care is taken to ensure that children with the weakest personal and social skills are given sufficient opportunity to improve their skills in a safe and secure environment. A 'nurture group' for these children provides children with a range of carefully planned activities that are intended to promote the development of personal and social skills. Children in this group are consistently encouraged to behave sensibly and are taught to say 'please' and 'thank you'. This has a good impact on their everyday behaviour in the rest of the school.
19. All children are successfully taught the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and by the time they leave school, most have a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Members of staff act as very good role models. Their own politeness and willingness to respect the opinions of others have a positive impact on the children. Members of staff teach worthwhile values and effectively remind children to apply them.
20. Social skills are well taught. Teachers take every opportunity to ensure that children learn good manners. For example, children are encouraged to eat sensibly at snack times and at lunchtime. Children sensibly select which activity they are going to do at the start of sessions and persevere well. Children learn to care for living things. For example, a hamster was handled with great care by a group of children who were drawing it. Children are kind and helpful to each other.
21. Children's spiritual development is carefully planned and they are given very good opportunities to learn about different festivals and faiths. Every week the school has a 'special time' when children get together to celebrate and think about the world around them. Special times' are very well planned with a good emphasis on practical activities that will hold the children's interest and help them to develop an awareness of the world around them. For example, in a celebration of 'God's creation', children worked in groups, making flower arrangements and thinking about how flowers make the world look beautiful.
22. The school has very good links with the local church and children regularly visit it for celebrations. A recent role-play 'wedding' was enjoyed by parents, staff and children and contributed positively to the children's understanding of the meaning of the marriage ceremony. Children celebrate festivals such as Eid and also raise funds for those less fortunate than themselves. For example, they collect food at harvest-time to send to a town in Bulgaria.

The children develop positive attitudes towards school

23. Children are well behaved and develop very good attitudes to their work. They come to school with an exuberance and enthusiasm that has a positive impact on their learning. They work hard, develop good self-esteem and become secure and happy individuals. The school has maintained the good standards identified in the last inspection.
24. As children arrive at school they are cheerful and happy and are keen to get on with whatever activity has been planned. Children make sensible choices about where they are going to work and each lesson starts with a purposeful buzz as children set about their work. All children, including those with special educational needs, are enthusiastic and very keen to participate in all activities. They listen well to the teacher, persevere with tasks and select resources carefully. Parents report that children are very happy at school and enjoy their work.
25. Children take great pride in their work and are very keen to share what they have done with visitors. Most children are willing to try out new activities and are not worried about making mistakes. This was very evident in a dance lesson where children joined in happily at trying to learn a new dance, even though many of them found it quite difficult.

26. Levels of concentration are high and children are able to sit for long periods of time when required to do so by an activity. For example, during a 'special time', even the youngest children sat still listening to the teacher and joining in with an activity for over 45 minutes.

The school successfully helps parents to become actively involved in their children's education

27. The school works very hard to involve parents in their children's learning. The headteacher has established excellent links with parents and is very successful in making them feel welcome in school. Parents are very pleased with the partnership the school has developed with them. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire are happy with this aspect of the school's work. Parents find members of staff to be very approachable and are given opportunities to meet them as often as necessary. Parents are very pleased with the information they are given on their children's progress including the daily opportunity to look at children's work folders.
28. The school is the first in the local authority to become a designated 'centre of excellence'. The headteacher is pivotal in ensuring that various agencies work together to provide the best possible facilities for the children and their families. Since the time of the last inspection there have been many new developments to enhance provision. There has been an increase in the number of places allocated to children with special educational needs. There is an after school group and the school has started a playgroup in the local community centre to help raise attainment on entry to school and provide children with greater opportunities to develop social skills at an earlier age. Courses are run at school to increase the parents knowledge and these have an impact on their parenting skills. For example, courses on behaviour management, family literacy, first aid, food hygiene and child care have raised the confidence of many parents and encouraged them to become interested in their own and their children's education.
29. A book project is held once a year to focus on the value of reading and parents are very involved with sharing books with their children at home. A service for children and parents is held in the adjacent church once a month and this is well attended.
30. A parents' room has been provided with crèche facilities. A member of staff from the nursery has established a women's group where parents can meet to make friends, support each other and learn new skills.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	0	53	47	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)	64
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	28

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	22

English as an additional language	No of 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	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	16

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	32

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	243

Number of pupils per FTE adult	6
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	4,396.00
Total expenditure	4,396.00
Expenditure per pupil	50.52
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	0

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	89
Number of questionnaires returned	46

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	78	20	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	74	24	2	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	65	25	4	2	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	73	17	3	0	7
The teaching is good.	98	2	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	87	13	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	98	2	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	78	18	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	87	13	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	87	11	2	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	91	7	0	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	93	7	0	0	0