

INSPECTION REPORT

WEOLEY CASTLE NURSERY SCHOOL

Weoley Castle, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103133

Headteacher: Mrs Rita Brown

Reporting inspector: Mrs Judith Hicks
2063

Date of inspection: 5th – 7th March 2001

Inspection number: 195040

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	County
Age range of pupils:	3 - 4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	109 Weoley Castle Road Weoley Castle Birmingham
Postcode:	B29 5QD
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Appropriate authority:	Birmingham LEA
Name of responsible officer:	Mr M Hiscox
Date of previous inspection:	June 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Area of learning responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs Judith Hicks 2063	Registered inspector	Communication, language and literacy Knowledge and understanding of the world Creative development	What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements How well are the children taught? How well is the school led and managed?
Mr Eric Langford 19727	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its children? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mrs Jo Greer 22805	Team inspector	Personal, social and emotional development Mathematical development Physical development Special educational needs Equal opportunities	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to the children?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Weoley Castle Nursery School provides full-time places for 52 three- to four-year-olds. Most children are admitted at the start of the school year in which they reach the age of four and spend three terms in the nursery before transferring to one of a number of infant schools in the area. The school serves a pleasant suburban estate of mixed private and rented housing. The intake is socially mixed, and includes a few children from professional families as well as a proportion from less advantaged backgrounds. About one third of the children are entitled to receive free school meals. Most of the children are white and of UK origin, with a small number of mixed heritage. There are only two children from minority ethnic groups, both of whom speak English at home. Attainment on entry varies considerably but is below average overall. There are seven children on the register of special educational needs (SEN) of whom one has serious problems requiring a statement of SEN. A further child is in the process of being statemented.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school where children are happily settled and progress well. The standards achieved are at least average for the age-group and better than this in some areas. The headteacher provides clear and committed leadership, and teaching is generally good. The nursery does not have a fully delegated budget, but staff make effective use of the limited funds they do manage.

What the school does well

- The children greatly enjoy coming to school and develop very positive attitudes to learning.
- With mainly good teaching, the children make better than average progress in basic skills and in many other areas of learning.
- Provision for the children's personal, social and emotional development is a strength. As a result the children are considerate and well-mannered, and they form constructive relationships.
- The school establishes a highly effective partnership with the children's families.
- Provision for immature children and those with special educational needs is a significant strength.

What could be improved

- The outdoor space is poorly designed and not used as effectively as it might be.
- There are not enough opportunities for the children to plan and review their activities, or to select the resources they need independently.
- The school is not good enough at evaluating teaching and learning in order to identify areas for improvement.
- Teachers are not taking a strong enough lead in managing the areas of learning for which they are responsible.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The last inspection took place in June 1997. Improvement has been satisfactory since then, despite the disruption of a move to a new building. Steady progress has been made in improving systems for assessment, record-keeping and planning, but there is still further to go. Greater priority is now being given to the development of basic skills, and as a result standards have risen and the progress children make has improved. Teaching is much better than it was at the time of the last inspection and is having more effect because the balance of activities during the day has been adjusted. Punctuality is no longer an issue.

STANDARDS

From a below-average starting point, the children comfortably reach the average for children in their age-group, and there are some areas where attainment is above average. The children are well on course to achieve nationally agreed learning targets (the 'Early Learning Goals') by the end of their reception year, in eighteen months' time. Overall progress is good, with very good progress in emotional, social and personal development. This is a particular strength and provides a strong foundation for the children's learning in other areas. Because of the high quality of provision for those with special educational needs, these children make particularly good progress.

Language and literacy skills are broadly average for the age-group. The children listen carefully and take turns when contributing to group discussions. They are confident to talk to one another and to adults, and many both ask and answer questions relevantly. The children greatly enjoy listening to stories and browsing with books. Basic literacy skills develop well. The children recognise their own names and some can read the names of other children. They learn to hold a pencil correctly and attempt to write by themselves. Mathematical development is also good, with overall standards well up to expectations for the age-group. The children's understanding of number and recognition of numerals is above average, but the use of mathematical language, understanding of shape and space and facility with patterns is not as secure.

In the other areas of learning attainment is at least as high as would be expected. Above average standards are achieved in the use of computers, knowledge of the local environment and music. Progress is generally good in these areas, except in physical development, where it is only just satisfactory. Partly because of the limitations of the outdoor area, the children are not receiving a full range of appropriate experiences.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The children's positive attitudes to learning are a strength. They are readily interested and engaged by good teaching, listen carefully and concentrate very well.
Behaviour	This is very good. The children are helpful and considerate towards one another and do as they are asked by adults at all times.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. The children are sensible, confident and independent. They form strong relationships with staff and with one another.
Attendance	Families value the nursery and ensure that children attend regularly. There is no general problem with punctuality.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Sessions 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.

Teaching is good overall, but there is some variation in quality. During the inspection more than one in five of the sessions seen was very well taught, with an additional third judged good. Most of the rest of the teaching was satisfactory, but two sessions (6%) were unsatisfactory. Staff manage the children very well and have high expectations of their behaviour. As a result they learn to behave calmly, to listen with attention and to concentrate for long periods of time. The children are often completely absorbed when playing alone or with others. The explicit teaching of social skills and good manners, such as saying 'thank you', is a particular strength, and the children's spoken language and vocabulary are effectively developed in the course of many activities. Staff nurture enjoyment and interest in books, and basic skills such as holding a pencil correctly and recognising letters are effectively developed. Mathematical understanding is well taught, especially accurate counting and recognition of numerals. Most activities provide a suitable level of interest and challenge for all the children, but outdoor activities are not at present sufficiently well planned. The teaching of children with special educational needs is a particular strength, especially in small group work. All staff make every effort to ensure that these children are fully involved in all activities.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. Visitors to the nursery and short visits in the neighbourhood make an important contribution to the children's learning. However, the children do not have enough opportunities to plan and reflect on their work. The physical area of learning is not as well developed as the rest, partly because of a need to develop the outside play space.
Provision for children with special educational needs	This is a strength. The school makes very good provision for these children, and this is reflected in the progress they make.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Provision for the children's spiritual development is sound, and there is very good provision for moral and social development. Children are taught to be polite, considerate and to care for one another.
How well the school cares for its children	The school's provision for the care, welfare and safety of the children in its charge is very good.
Partnership with parents	The school is particularly successful in establishing good relationships with families and carers. Parents are genuinely welcomed and encouraged to involve themselves in the work of the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides good overall leadership with clear strengths, helping to create a sense of purpose and a welcoming atmosphere. Curriculum leadership and management by teachers with promoted posts is not strong enough.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	There is no governing body, and this disadvantages the school in some respects. A group of unofficial 'friends' provides valuable general support, practical help and links with the community.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is a relative weakness. There is limited analysis of the school's performance and formal evaluation of teaching is at an early stage of development.
The strategic use of resources	Financial management of the limited funds for which the school is responsible is very competent. Staff use resources well and are shrewd when purchasing goods and services. They seek to obtain the best possible value at all times.
The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources	Staffing levels are adequate but not generous. The accommodation has many very positive features, but lacks storage and has a badly designed outside area. Resources for learning, including computers, are good.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children very much like coming to school. • The teaching is good. • Staff are accessible and friendly. • The school is well led and managed. 	<p>Parents have no criticisms of the school, but some say that if possible they would appreciate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A brief written report at the end of the school year. • Further information about the activities planned each week.

Members of the inspection team entirely agree with the points made by parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and children's achievements

1 From a below-average starting point, the attainment of most children is well within the average range for four-year-olds as they approach the end of their second term in nursery. In some specific activities standards are above average. The children are well on course to achieve nationally agreed learning targets (the 'Early Learning Goals') by the end of their reception year, more than four terms ahead. Overall standards are similar to those identified at the time of the last inspection, but there are now more strands where attainment is starting to rise above average. Basic computer skills, for example, were criticised at the time of the last inspection but are now better than average for the age-group.

2 Overall achievement is good, and the children make very good progress in their emotional, social and personal development. This is a marked strength and provides a strong foundation for the children's learning in other areas. Because the children know just what is expected of them, they work and play purposefully, with little time lost. They are familiar with school routines and respond well to direct teaching in small groups. Amongst other benefits, this is improving a range of basic skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as such areas as music. Staff are sensitive and responsive to individual needs and differences, so that children in different social circumstances and those from minority groups achieve just as well as the others. Because of the high quality of provision for immature children and those with special educational needs, these children make particularly good progress.

3 From a below average starting point, the children make good progress in communication, language and literacy, with levels of attainment that are broadly average for the age-group. The children are explicitly taught to look at one another and make eye contact when speaking, and this helps to build their confidence. They learn to listen carefully and take turns when contributing to group discussions. Most talk fluently to one another and to adults, especially in the context of imaginative play. The average and above average children both ask and answer questions relevantly. The most mature children ask the meaning of words they do not understand and, with adult encouragement, they are starting to offer explanations and explore ideas. All the children, including those with special educational needs, very much enjoy listening to stories at an appropriate level. Many choose to browse with books either alone or with a friend, telling themselves the story from the pictures and sustaining concentration for a lengthy period. Basic literacy skills develop well. The children recognise their own names and some can read the names of other children, often referring to the initial letter. They learn to hold a pencil correctly and attempt to write by themselves.

4 Mathematical development is also good, with overall standards matching the average for the age-group as children progress through the nursery year. The children's understanding of number and recognition of numerals is above average. Many can count objects reliably to five or more, whilst the most capable children have a secure understanding of number to ten and know 'one more' and 'one less than'. The children gain practical experience of larger numbers when they count those present in their group and set out the drinks at break time. Most children are starting to read and write numerals to five or more. The use of mathematical language, especially to describe shapes, and facility with mathematical patterns is not as strong.

5 The children's knowledge and understanding of the world about them is broadly average, with above average standards seen in information and communication technology and in the children's knowledge of the local environment. Good progress is made in this area

of learning. This is similar to the findings of the last inspection, except that children's computer skills have now improved significantly. All the children, including those with special educational needs, are thoroughly competent in use of the computers, have good control of the mouse, independently access menus and select the programs they want. Information and communication technology makes a good contribution to the children's learning. Other technological skills are about average. The children use construction kits deftly, but do not have as much opportunity as they should to plan, select materials for themselves, evaluate and improve upon their efforts. The children are developing a good understanding of their environment. They are observant and are beginning to offer explanations for what they see and experience. General knowledge about life in the immediate neighbourhood is good for the children's age, and is very well developed by visits and visitors.

6 Standards in physical development are broadly average on entry and remain average, with steady progress made in the children's manipulative skills. There is good attention to the control of tools such as writing implements and scissors. The children have plenty of opportunity to work with clay and dough and to develop their hand and eye co-ordination, for example by threading beads or pasta shapes to make a 'necklace'. Provision for some aspects of physical development is only just satisfactory, however, and this is having some effect on achievement. Partly because of the limitations of the outdoor area, the children are not receiving a full range of appropriate experiences, with limited opportunities for challenging climbing, scrambling, swinging and jumping, for example. They do show an appropriate awareness of space as they ride tricycles under control and without collisions. In formal movement sessions most children respond promptly to instructions to walk, hop, skip, jump and stop. Because they do not change into lighter clothing and footwear, however, the freedom of their movement tends to be restricted.

7 The children have good opportunities for creative development, achieve well and reach standards that are at least average for the age-group. Attainment in music is above average. The children are developing a good repertoire of familiar songs, accompany themselves with simple percussion instruments and are developing an understanding of dynamics. The children draw, paint and print with enjoyment, expressing their ideas confidently. They are learning to look carefully at difference colours, textures and shapes. They involve themselves deeply in imaginative play, and become particularly absorbed in playing with 'small world' toys such as the dolls' house, train set and playmats.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

8 Children acquire very good attitudes and values and make very good progress in their growing maturity and independence. This is a further improvement on the positive picture described at the time of the last inspection.

9 All parents and carers agree that the children enjoy coming to nursery. They are happy to leave their parent or carer when they arrive in the morning. An interesting range of activities is available so that the children quickly settle down, showing a firm sense of purpose. Many children remain with an activity for a long time, and this is contributing to the quality of their learning. For example a small group of boys spent nearly an hour building vehicles with a large construction set. It was delightful to see how well these children shared components and helped each other to find the pieces they needed. They used their imagination well as they pretended to fly the finished aeroplane and drive the truck around. Many similar incidents of good concentration and co-operative play were observed. If children are unsure what they want to do, they are quickly drawn into an activity by another child or an adult. There is no aimless wandering about, and children do not 'flit' from one activity to another without purpose.

10 As a result of very good training in sharing and taking turns, the children rarely squabble and never snatch toys or equipment from others. If children want something already in use they refer to an adult for help, and are readily persuaded to wait for their turn. The children are increasingly aware of the needs of others and move away as soon as they have finished a given activity. When playing outside, the children are considerate in the way they use tricycles and other wheeled toys, with collisions and accidents very rare despite the confined space. Behaviour is of a consistently high standard, both indoors and out.

11 The children learn to respect one another. They are aware that some children find some things difficult, and go out of their way to be considerate and helpful. They readily join in clapping each other's successes. No unkind behaviour or incidents of racism are seen. Children respond very well to all the adults working in the nursery and are consistently open, friendly and trusting.

12 Children respond very well to the good opportunities to take responsibility and learn good manners. They take turns to hand out drinks at playtime and to serve lunch and drinks to each child at the dinner table. They politely thank the server and wait until all are served before beginning. Children treat toys and equipment with care and help to tidy up at the end of each session. Almost all parents strongly agree that the nursery helps their child become mature and responsible.

13 Children develop very good personal and social skills. They learn to become independent and to make their own choices from a range of activities provided. They do not demand adult attention inappropriately but ask for help if they need it. Many children are confident enough to talk to visitors and share their activities with them, although just a few are still shy and reserved. Children learn to put on coats independently and do them up with little, if any, adult help. They manage their own toilet and hand washing needs sensibly and without fuss.

14 The children enjoy coming to school and settle quickly into their classroom activities. Their attendance levels are good and punctuality is satisfactory. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. The school has established a staggered start time in the morning to fit in with family needs and to ensure that all can be personally welcomed at the start of the day. However, a few children continue to be brought to school after the end of the staggered time period and are collected slightly before the end of their child's planned time in school.

HOW WELL ARE THE CHILDREN TAUGHT?

15 Teaching is good overall, but there is some variation in quality. During the inspection 94% of the sessions seen were satisfactory or better, with 33% good and 22% very good; 6% were unsatisfactory. This is very much better than the last inspection, when 25% of the teaching was judged unsatisfactory and no teaching was of high quality. Most of the unsatisfactory features described in the 1997 report are no longer evident. In particular, children are seldom allowed to drift and there is no 'flitting' from one activity to another. The children are not bored or under-occupied, and there is plenty to interest and challenge them indoors.

16 Although there has clearly been a very marked improvement in teaching, there are still a few occasions when teaching is either unsatisfactory or only just satisfactory. There are a few regular reasons for this. Firstly, problems with the design of the site have led staff to regard outdoor play as a chance for the children to enjoy the fresh air and physical space rather than as an opportunity for structured learning. As a result sessions lack planning, and equipment is sometimes set out without enough discrimination; in particular too many

wheeled toys are sometimes put out together. There is good supervision and attention to safety, but not enough adult intervention to challenge the children and extend their learning. This is having some effect on the rate of their physical development. Secondly, although group sessions and focus activities are normally planned and managed effectively, a few lack variety and pace and the children's interest then flags. In 'free flow' sessions, adults occasionally fail to notice what is going on around them, or do not intervene swiftly enough to raise the level of play or to correct mistakes. In one case, for example, a member of staff noticed that a child was writing her name in mirror writing but did nothing to tackle the problem.

17 Unsatisfactory features are not typical, though, and teaching in general has many strengths. The staff show thoroughly secure understanding of the learning and developmental needs of three- and four-year-olds. Basic skills are effectively developed, especially spoken language. Staff carefully introduce the vocabulary associated with the topic in hand, for example tactfully correcting a child who refers to 'a circle' when she means 'zero'. They are particularly skilled at coaxing contributions from children who are quiet, shy or immature. In one special needs group the teacher put on such an enthusiastic and convincing performance of a story that normally inarticulate children contributed excitedly with suggestions of what might happen next. On another occasion a reserved child from an ethnic minority group was drawn out of himself when a member of staff quietly shared a book with him on a one-to-one basis. The regard for pupils with individual or special educational needs is a strength, and care is taken to extend every opportunity for learning to all the children.

18 Good teaching of basic skills is seen when the children are helped to write their names using a correct pencil hold and in group sessions where they identify the first letter of their names. In one successful session a nursery nurse effectively taught the children how numbers greater than nine are written down by combining different numerals. In this challenging session there were high expectations of what the children could achieve, a brisk pace and an effective use of large flash cards to focus attention. The children rose to the high expectations, concentrated hard and made good progress in their understanding. Afterwards the older children could talk about what they had learned and were pleased about their new knowledge.

19 Some teaching is particularly well designed to promote thinking and develop understanding through first-hand experience. In one successful activity, for example, the children washed the dolls' clothes, choosing either liquid soap or soap flakes. The teacher encouraged the children to observe what happened as the soap flakes mixed with the water. She offered the vocabulary 'the soap flakes are dissolving', to which one child responded with excitement, 'Look, they're melting!' All children in this group observed carefully and talked about the colour and texture of the water as it changed. The clothes were then put on airers to dry, one outside and one in the boiler house. Later in the day the activity was reviewed and the clothes were compared to see which had dried best. The children were amazed to find that both sets had dried well, and began to offer reasoned explanations about why. However, no one could explain why a thick woolly jumper was still damp, and several children said that it must have rained, just on the jumper. At the end of the session the teacher suggested that the difference might be in the thickness of the fabric, and this idea was immediately grasped by the most mature children, thus taking their thinking forward.

20 Skilled management of the children and very good attention to their social development, behaviour and relationships, is a strength of the teaching throughout the school. Staff are encouraging and patient with the children, providing a very good example of courteous behaviour. Good manners are taught explicitly. For example, children are taught to address others by name when thanking them, and to look directly at them. They respond very well to this direct teaching: in one group a child said, 'Yes, I have learned that now.' Staff have

very high expectations of the children's behaviour, and as a result the children are consistently purposeful and absorbed in what they are doing. As a result they develop a long attention span and sometimes put a lot of effort into what they are doing. For example, an able child contributed to a communal work of art, taking a good twenty minutes to complete carefully a self-portrait in felt-tipped pen, talking to himself all the time about what he was doing.

21 Nursery nurses make a significant contribution to the good teaching in the school, whether taking a small group, leading a focus activity or overseeing general activities. Alongside teaching staff they participate in planning and take responsibility for assessing target children and monitoring selected activities. Teaching is planned by the staff working together, both as a whole team and in their 'classroom' groups. The planning of group work and focus activities is good, with clear objectives for the children's learning. However, some elements in the 'free flow' sessions, when the children choose freely between different activities, are not tightly enough planned to provide maximum challenge for all the children. On some weekly plans the only reference to an activity is the resource that is set out, for example 'Mobilo' or 'farm set'. This shortcoming is partly offset by the professional skill and experience of individual members of staff, most of whom are good at spotting when to intervene to take the children further. Children are not regularly enough asked in advance to say what their plans are or to evaluate what they have done.

22 Generally good use is made of resources, especially 'props' such as dressing up clothes of high quality. Computers are used particularly effectively to develop basic skills such as counting, matching and identifying differences. Day-to-day assessment is sound, and the staff now make good use of targeted observation to inform them about the children's stage of development and level of understanding. This is an improvement since the last inspection, enabling staff to know the children well as individuals. There is very good involvement of parents to reinforce the children's learning in school, especially since the introduction of graded book bags.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO THE CHILDREN?

23 The nursery provides a curriculum which is broad and balanced, as at the time of the last inspection. It is appropriately planned to cover the six areas of learning for children in the Foundation Stage (i.e. the nursery and reception age-group). Staff take account of new national targets for children's learning by the end of the reception year, the 'Early Learning Goals', but these are not yet fully reflected in schemes of work and other school documentation. Great care is taken to ensure that all children, including those with learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural problems and physical disabilities, have equal access and opportunity to benefit from the full range of experiences provided.

24 Teachers plan the curriculum through a good mix of small group times, stories, 'circle times' and sessions when children choose between a wide range of activities throughout the nursery or within their own class base. The balance and variety of the day has improved considerably since the last inspection. In particular sessions in the early afternoon when children stay in their own class bases provide an opportunity for freely chosen activity within a relatively quiet and intimate learning environment. Although the principle is a good one, the problem is that the two rooms have specialised functions so that children do not have access to the same full range of activities during these otherwise valuable 'class' sessions. The school has tried to address this by arranging for an exchange of rooms on a term by term basis, and then once a week within each term. This is not enough to ensure a good balance and further adjustment is needed.

25 During the 'free flow' sessions adults focus on particular activities and monitor which children visit them; one day, for instance, a student recorded which children visited the jigsaw puzzles and what they were able to do. Adults may target individual children to observe their progress. During one session a teacher observed the social interactions of a little girl as she engaged in various activities during the afternoon. A nursery nurse recorded how targeted children responded to a picture storybook in the reading corner. During taught sessions, staff note any significant evidence for the whole group or individual children. This information is conscientiously entered up onto children's personal records, but there is no formal mechanism for linking it with planning.

26 There is a rich variety of indoor activities available for the children during 'free flow' sessions, but, because they are encouraged to operate independently and make their own choices, teachers cannot be sure that each child experiences a suitably balanced curriculum all the time. With very little limitation on choice, popular activities can be swamped. During the inspection, for example, far too many children wanted to play in the 'clothes shop' at the same time, with a consequent reduction in the quality of the experience for all. Many of the activities provided have the potential to promote progress for children at different levels of maturity, but planning does not show how adults might intervene to challenge the more capable or to support those with learning needs. Because most activities are child-led, progress can be uncertain except when a well-briefed adult intervenes, as generally happens after a while. One shortcoming is that children have no opportunity to plan their activities by sharing ideas with an adult and then selecting the resources they need. Equipment such as a specific construction kit or item of 'small world' play is invariably set out for the children, in line with a weekly plan. This limits their independence to some degree. The system allows limited opportunities for the children to review their work except on a casual one-to-one basis. Occasionally, however, 'circle time' is used effectively for this purpose.

27 A strength of the curriculum is the emphasis on children's personal, social and emotional development, attention to children's speaking and listening skills and their enjoyment and appreciation of books. Very good use is made of computers to support learning and develop manipulative skills. The outdoor facilities are limited, under-equipped and difficult to supervise so that time outside is little more than a group 'playtime'. Even so, it is unsatisfactory that there is no planning of this time. This is a missed opportunity for the systematic development of physical skills and for play outdoors to contribute to each area of learning on a planned basis.

28 Long and medium term planning are based on half-termly topic themes. There is a policy statement for each area of learning, with detailed objectives for some areas. Knowledge and understanding of the world and physical development in particular lack the necessary detail. Policy documentation does not yet map out the expected learning in sufficient detail, on the basis of recent curriculum guidance. Medium-term planning shows what activities will be provided to support each of the six areas of learning. All staff meet regularly to review practical activities and taught sessions and to consider how well individual children are developing. They know the children well. Nevertheless the planning is not specific enough about how the activities will be used to develop children's skills, how they will be adapted to cater for the wide differences in children's stages of development. Planning is not yet appropriately referenced to steps and stages of learning such as the new 'stepping stones'.

29 A real strength of the curriculum is the nursery's involvement with the community. The Birmingham Education Business Partnership has helped to develop a reading trail and number trail for parents to use with their children, and is developing a 'big book' about the area. Children have many opportunities to visit shops and other amenities in the locality. There are valuable links with the local library, and the librarian regularly supports story

sessions in school. Adults with many different skills and resources visit the nursery, including a puppeteer, parents from different ethnic groups, who share their dress and cooking with the children; and an 'animal man' who brings in small wild animals for the children to observe. These all contribute to the richness of children's experiences while they are at the nursery. There are effective links with other nursery schools to share good practice and for training purposes. Good links are established with local infant schools to ease children's transfer.

30 There is very good provision for children with special educational needs, whether they have learning, physical, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Significant adaptations have recently been made to the building to accommodate children with severe physical disabilities. Regular individual and small group sessions and the great patience shown by all adults enables all these children to develop well. They have appropriate individual education plans to meet their special needs. More able children are also targeted to provide extra challenge and extend their skills. At present no children who speak English as an additional language attend the nursery, but staff are alert to the personal and cultural needs of children from minority ethnic groups and those of mixed ethnicity.

Provision for the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

31 Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, with significant strengths in moral and social development. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Each day the children have a few moments of quiet to join in a short grace before eating lunch. Activities are provided to encourage a sense of wonder when children watch bulbs and seeds growing, as they look after pets in the classroom and when they visit the local area using their senses. They delight in blowing bubbles and guessing what is inside a 'feely bag'. They hear stories about Jesus, and a local minister visits each term.

32 Provision for moral and social development is very good. Great emphasis is placed on understanding right from wrong. Children are taught to take turns and share resources. They learn to work together and co-operate in joint activities. There are clear expectations of their behaviour which are consistently applied by all the adults. Adults provide very good role models and encourage honesty, fairness and respect for others and care for those with difficulties. Children are given responsibility and encouraged to be independent. They are expected to tidy toys and equipment away, to help serve meals and clear away at lunchtime. Adults encourage children to dress and undress themselves and manage different fastenings on their clothes. Children gain confidence in social relationships through the many contacts with adults, visitors to the nursery and their visits in the locality.

33 Cultural development is good. The children learn about society through their frequent visits to shops and businesses in the locality. They learn about different festivals throughout the year. Visitors to the nursery introduce them to music, dance, drama and puppets. Books, toys and equipment appropriately reflect the multicultural society of Britain. Children are introduced to stories and rhymes from around the world during story and circle times.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR THE CHILDREN?

34 The school's provision for the care, welfare and safety of the children in its charge is very good and is a strength of the school. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

35 Very good child protection procedures are in place, which are well understood and acted upon by staff in the best interests of the children. Staff are well trained and alert to the need for regularly monitoring the well-being and welfare of the children in their care. All staff respond in a discreet and sensitive manner to any personal queries or questions raised with them by the children.

36 The school has highly effective strategies for identifying and supporting those children with special educational needs and for the ongoing review of their targets and progress in consultation with their parents. Excellent provision is made for a child with serious disabilities, fully in line with requirements set out in the statement of special educational need.

37 Very good health and safety procedures are in place that cover all eventualities. There are effective arrangements for termly health and safety audits to be undertaken with any issues arising being made known to the LEA for action. A number of risk assessment exercises have been completed to ensure the safety and well-being of the children. School evacuation drills are held termly and statutory health and safety inspections are undertaken annually. The whole school site is well maintained and provides a safe and secure environment for both children and adults alike.

38 An adequate number of staff are trained first-aiders, and good arrangements are in place for the effective management and reporting of any bumps or minor injuries that do occur. Good procedures are in place for the management and administration of medicines to those children identified with chronic conditions. All children are reminded of the need to work and play safely. They demonstrate a good awareness of hygiene and know how to use tools such as scissors correctly.

39 Good systems are in place to record and report children's attendance and absence patterns. Since the last inspection the school has put a lot of effort into promoting the benefits of good attendance and punctuality to parents. The timing of the afternoon session has been changed to suit parents with children at other schools. As a result overall attendance has improved, but despite the efforts of staff one or two children continue to arrive late and a few parents collect their children early. Arrangements for registration have improved, with a system of badges to ensure that staff know which children have arrived at the start of the day.

40 Good and well-established behaviour management strategies help to promote the self-confidence of the children and contribute greatly to their very good attitudes to learning. Great emphasis is placed on encouraging good behaviour and the school has effective systems in place to praise and reward children's good work and individual behaviour. The clear and simple behaviour rules are understood by the children and their parents alike. They are applied in a fair and consistent manner by staff and successfully used to promote the very good behaviour to be seen in and around the school. There is no evidence of any bullying or harassment amongst the children.

41 Teachers and support staff know their children well and make the best possible provision to support them in their personal development. All staff display a high level of care and concern for the children and there is much evidence of the very good rapport and respect that exists between the children and staff.

42 Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress have improved since the last inspection, and are now satisfactory, but assessment information is still not used systematically enough when planning the teaching programme. Records now give a clearer picture of children's individual attainment from the time of entry onwards, and the use of parental perceptions alongside the LEA's 'baseline' instrument is a positive feature. There is not enough analysis of the outcomes of these assessments to provide a clear overview of attainment on entry for the whole group, so that overall progress can be evaluated objectively. Individual checklists are regularly updated, and each child has a portfolio of drawings, writing, mathematics and creative work, appropriately dated and annotated. There are sound arrangements for recording the outcomes of observations, but the checklists used in

individual files are in need of updating to match the requirements of the new curriculum.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

43 Parents are very supportive of the school, hold the staff in high regard and believe their children receive a very good quality of care and education. The school has a reputation for preparing children well for mainstream education. As a result places are over-subscribed and a number of children attend from beyond the immediate neighbourhood. The school is very successful in encouraging and promoting parental involvement in the work of the school and the positive features highlighted in the previous inspection report have been successfully built upon and further developed.

44 Many parents and friends voluntarily provide extra support and input to children's learning, both in school and on out-of-school visits and activities. These include two volunteers who run the weekly 'book loan' library and the many other parents who give one afternoon each week to make learning resources for the children such as dressing-up clothes. Valuable shared learning opportunities are provided for parents and children through the introduction of 'book bags'. These have been colourfully made by parents and are used to hold a variety of books, games, learning aids and toys for children of different levels of maturity. This project is very effectively geared to raising levels of attainment and consolidating the children's learning by reinforcement at home.

45 Parents are genuinely welcome in school at any time and a meeting room is made available for their use. One Thursday afternoon each month the school organises guest speakers to talk to interested parents on a variety of topics such as behaviour management, the sleeping needs of children, the nursery curriculum and so on. These sessions are well attended and highly valued by parents and serve to strengthen the links between family and school.

46 The headteacher and staff make themselves available at the start and end of the school day to meet and talk informally with parents about their children as they arrive. As a result many parents are complimentary about the willingness of staff to listen and talk with them about their children. Two formal teacher-parent consultation meetings are organised each year to discuss children's attainment and progress; these are highly valued and attended by all parents.

47 The range of information provided to parents is good. Parents are kept well-informed on a regular basis about all aspects of school life, including school events and activities, topic themes and children's achievements. A well-established home-school book scheme is used effectively for the exchange of comments between parents and teachers about the children's learning in language and literacy. Photographs in the entrance hall give a flavour of a range of nursery activities, but a few parents say they would like more specific information about what their children are taught. Some would appreciate a written summary of the report provided for the receiving primary school when their children move on from nursery. This last point, in particular, is not unreasonable. There is no formal system of home-school agreements, which are not a requirement for nursery schools, but the informal reciprocal understanding between staff and parents is good.

48 The ongoing development of the school's partnership arrangements with parents helps to promote the reputation of the school and to raise a positive awareness amongst parents to the successes being achieved in their children's academic and personal development. This represents a trend of continuous improvement in the school's parental partnership links since the last OFSTED inspection.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

49 As at the time of the last inspection, the leadership provided by the headteacher has clear strengths. The nursery is run on the basis of a coherent set of principles, with very high priority given to the social and personal development of each child. As a result of the headteacher's lead there is a firm commitment to equality of opportunity, and the school is particularly successful in encouraging and nurturing the least mature children and those with special educational needs. The school is welcoming and purposeful, with a calm ethos and high expectations that influence the children's behaviour and relationships very much for the better. The headteacher makes it a priority to get to know each family well, and the parents in their turn respect her leadership and support her efforts and those of her colleagues. All the staff work hard and teamwork is good. The headteacher, teachers and support staff alike show unquestioned loyalty to the school and commitment to the best interests of the children. A strength of the management is the way in which the school's aims and values are implicitly reflected in every aspect of its work, right down to details such as the lunch-time organisation.

50 Self-review and strategic planning are relative weaknesses. The school development plan now has a satisfactory format, better than at the time of the last inspection, but targets remain short-term and there is too much listing of practical tasks and recurring priorities such as settling the children in. There is not an explicit enough focus on standards, achievement and learning, and limited efforts to analyse or quantify the children's progress as a whole. This is not to say that all priorities are missing the mark. For example the current plan rightly identifies that there is need for more rigorous self-evaluation, but this is not broken down into the steps and stages that would demonstrate clear understanding of the processes involved. The headteacher is well aware that not enough has yet been done to evaluate teaching and learning systematically and within an agreed framework. This is now becoming a matter of some urgency as the school works towards implementation of its performance management policy.

51 Despite the limitations of its paper planning, the school does have the will and the capacity to improve. School development since the 1997 inspection has been satisfactory, but has been affected to some degree by a problematic move to the present building two years ago. Key issues at the time of the last inspection included assessment, record-keeping and planning. Steady progress has been made in all these areas, especially in developing regular observation of the children, but there is further to go. Since the last inspection greater priority has been given to basic skills and as a result standards have improved, especially in the children's understanding of number, control of writing implements and computer skills. Teaching is having a greater impact on children's learning, partly because the balance of the school day has been adjusted. Punctuality is no longer the issue it was.

52 A major criticism contained in the 1997 report was that curricular responsibilities were not appropriately delegated to the two part-time members of the teaching staff, both of whom were (and are) in receipt of a small responsibility allowance. Although job descriptions have been appropriately modified, there has not been enough progress in this area. This is a school where staff have traditionally done everything together. This is a strength in some respects, but in practice tends to inhibit the development of individual teachers as curriculum leaders and managers. Sound guidelines have been produced for language, literacy and mathematics, but not for other areas of learning. Staff do not take personal charge of assessment, review, target-setting or establishing development priorities in the areas of learning for which they are responsible. Indeed, the areas of learning barely feature in the development plan at all.

53 The school meets all statutory requirements that apply to nursery schools. Day-to-day

organisation is good and routines are planned carefully, so that staff know just what they are doing at all times. This ensures that the nursery runs smoothly and calmly on a day-to-day basis. It also enables considerable numbers of extra adults, both students and volunteers, to be absorbed and productively deployed to support the children's learning. Staffing levels are adequate but not generous, and so this is a real benefit. A new member of staff has received an appropriate induction, whilst students on placement are very well supported. New requirements for the performance management of teachers do not yet apply to nursery schools, but the school is in a reasonable state of preparation for implementation of the new system in the next school year.

54 The school has no governing body, leaving an inevitable gap in the external support available and in accountability. The headteacher has made an imaginative effort to overcome this difficulty by recruiting a group of 'friends', including people prominent in the neighbourhood and representatives of nearby educational institutions. With manifest good will, this group provides valuable general support and practical help, keeping the school closely in touch with the local community. It is no substitute for a governing body, however. For example, annual setting of performance objectives for the headteacher has to be undertaken by education officers with necessarily limited knowledge of the school. This is far from satisfactory.

55 Financial management is very competent. The school does not have a fully delegated budget, but was given partial delegation at the start of the last complete financial year. With good support from the designated LEA finance officer, these arrangements are bedding in well. As a result of increased delegation the headteacher has been able to make savings and, for the first time, to carry forward funds. The current carry-forward is on the high side, but is intended for a very necessary major project, the development of the outside area. With the help of an efficient part-time secretary, office routines, day-to-day handling of money and ordering are effectively managed. Good use is made of information technology to support financial management and general administration. A recent local audit has gone well. The finance officer, headteacher and secretary are currently acting on minor recommendations contained in the draft audit report.

56 Grant funding and resources for special educational needs are used appropriately and for the intended purposes. The headteacher has been energetic and successful in seeking additional funding for special purposes such as security fencing and development of the site. These resources are being shrewdly managed, and staff are well aware of the need to obtain 'best value' from the funds at their disposal. For example, good value has been obtained by commissioning ICT training for all staff in conjunction with two other nursery schools.

57 The nursery moved to a new building two years ago. This accommodation has many positive design features, but lasting difficulties have been created by a lack of adequate storage space and by an unsuitable and poorly planned outdoor area. Too much of the headteacher's time has, unavoidably, been taken up in tackling the consequent problems. Progress has been made with the acquisition of fitted storage units, but funding has only just been allocated to improve the space outside. As matters stand the physical layout is an important factor in the present limited opportunities for learning outdoors. The indoor space is of an interesting design and is generally well used. However, the library area is not used regularly enough except for group work and is often not accessible by the children.

58 The school has some resources of very high quality, including state of the art computers, attractive and inviting books and an exciting collection of dressing up clothes. Resources for learning are at least adequate in most other respects, but many of the wheeled toys for use outdoors are in need of refurbishment and equipment for physical development is barely adequate. Overall the school has kept too many resources that are

past their best and need discarding. Combined with the lack of good storage space, this contributes to an impression of clutter in some rooms.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

59 This is a good school because secure professional practice is underpinned by shared values and objectives. With slightly more time and attention given to review and analysis, performance could be still better. Staff are aware of those areas for development that already feature in the school development plan, but are not as alert to the other issues identified. In order to sustain the present steady improvement the headteacher and staff should, with the support of the LEA:

- **Develop the outside area as a resource to support learning in all areas of the curriculum, in line with the target in the current school development plan.**
(See paragraphs 27, 58, 88, 90-92, 100.)
- **Provide more opportunities for children to plan their activities, select the resources they need independently and evaluate what they have achieved.**
(See paragraphs 21, 26, 62, 65, 87, 97.)
- **Develop and implement formal systems for the evaluation of teaching and learning in order to identify areas for improvement. This is already a target in the current school development plan.**
(See paragraphs 50, 73, 79, 88, 93.)
- **Ensure that teachers take a stronger lead in managing their areas of learning, especially by:**
 - Completing long-term plans or schemes of work for each area of learning.
 - Monitoring overall standards and achievement.
 - Reviewing progress systematically and contributing a brief sub-section on each area of learning to the school development plan.
(See paragraphs 28, 52, 73, 79, 88, 93.)

60 In addition the following minor issues should be considered for inclusion in the post-inspection action plan:

- Improve planning, provision and resources for the children's physical development.
(See paragraphs 27, 57, 58, 90 – 92.)
- Tighten up the planning of 'free flow' sessions to ensure that activities provide maximum challenge for all the children.
(See paragraphs 21, 26, 28.)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	33
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	21	33	39	6	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

Children on the school's roll	Nursery
Number of children on the school's roll	52
Number of full-time children eligible for free school meals	17

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	7

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	0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and support staff**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	65

Number of pupils per FTE adult	13 : 1
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/00
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	£
Total income managed by the school	22,139
Total direct expenditure by the school	18,894
Expenditure per pupil	363
Balance brought forward from previous year	nil
Balance carried forward to next year	3,245

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	52
Number of questionnaires returned	28

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	79	21	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	64	29	0	0	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	68	29	0	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	43	32	0	0	7
The teaching is good.	79	21	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	68	29	4	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	93	7	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	32	4	0	4
The school works closely with parents.	82	14	4	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	96	4	0	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	82	14	4	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	64	11	4	0	21

Note: Because of rounding not all percentages add up to exactly 100. Where 4% appears in the table, this represents one response.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Personal, social and emotional development

61 Standards are above average for the age-group and social development in particular is better than would be expected. Assessments on entry to the nursery show that many children are below average in their personal, social and emotional development at the start of the nursery year. In the course of only six months very good progress is made by all the children, including those with special educational needs.

62 The children are interested in a wide range of activities and are keen to learn. They concentrate very well, often for long periods. During the inspection, for example, one group spent an hour making vehicles from a construction set, whilst on another occasion children played together in near-silence with the train set, showing close involvement and sustained concentration. The children are relaxed and purposeful when working on their own, as when they look intently at a picture book or work independently on the computer for lengthy periods. They respond with interest and excitement to new experiences when they test the magnets to see what materials can be picked up or when they are shown how to make stripes by applying paint with a roller. They have a sense of achievement when they complete an activity, as when they put a finished picture to dry, and more mature children are developing an understanding of what they have learned.

63 The children establish very good relationships with one another. Good examples of collaborative play are seen when children share equipment and play together with 'small world' equipment such as the large dolls' house or the multi-storey carpark. They respond confidently in imaginative role-play, as in the 'clothes shop', where they help one another into various garments, place orders and answer the telephone. In group work and circle time the children take conversational turns and learn not to call out when questions are directed to an individual child. Children using the computers take turns to control the mouse, only occasionally needing to be reminded to do so. They show good levels of independence in the way they direct themselves during 'free flow' activity sessions. When choices of equipment or materials are available they choose confidently, but they do not often have the opportunity to access resources for themselves.

63 The children have a developing awareness of their own needs and those of other people. This is particularly seen in their positive and helpful response to those with difficulties and disabilities. The children recognise that different facial expressions represent feelings, such as a happy, sad or angry face, and they can talk about these emotions, for example when they encounter them in a story. They learn to control their own feelings and know what is acceptable behaviour, so that no examples of disruptive behaviour, aggression or disobedience indoors or out were seen at any stage of the inspection. Those children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are starting to form appropriate relationships with staff and other children. Adults are very alert to children who have difficulty controlling their behaviour and intervene quickly to give them extra support and divert their attention if necessary.

64 The children are beginning to develop a sense of right and wrong, especially in their awareness of the nursery's social rules. They have a clear understanding of what is expected when they put away equipment, and most tidy up well. There is a good regard for safety; for example the children are very careful to stay in a single line and hold the banister when

coming down the stairs at the end of their group time. All the children dress and undress themselves independently. Many need a little help with the zip fasteners on their coats, but most cope with other fastenings competently. Some can manage socks and shoes. Many instances are seen of children helping one another and caring for those with disabilities.

65 Teaching in this area and social training in general is consistently good, and this area of learning is well planned and managed. Regular staff discussions ensure that all adults adopt the same strategies and give consistent messages to the children. Drink and mealtimes are used particularly effectively as opportunities to teach good manners and care for others, with appropriate attention to courteous forms of language. All children have the opportunity to serve one another and, during the inspection, staff were at pains to enable a physically disabled child to take his turn in serving the meal to others on his table. At story times many staff are skilled at directing the children's attention towards the feelings of the characters, so that they become more aware of emotions and the reasons why people sometimes act as they do. There are good opportunities for the children to develop a sense of personal identity, family and community and for them to learn to respect others. The only significant shortcoming is the lack of built-in opportunities for the children to plan their work in advance, select resources for themselves and evaluate what they have achieved.

Communication, language and literacy

66 From a below-average starting point on entry to school, the children make good progress towards the Early Learning Goals in this area of learning. Most are reaching at least an average level for the age-group in communicating, speaking and listening, and in their understanding of reading and writing. Standards are much the same as those described at the time of the last inspection except that the children's understanding of letters and sounds and their early writing skills are developing more securely.

67 Most children talk freely to one another, to staff and to visitors, with only a handful who are shy or reserved. Almost all give a quiet 'running commentary' as they engage in imaginative play with 'small world' toys and sometimes as they are painting or drawing. A relatively small group of above average children are highly articulate and have real confidence in initiating conversations with adults. Most others communicate simply but effectively in short phrases and sentences, volunteering information and taking turns in discussion in the context of a small group. Almost all listen carefully and answer the questions they are asked relevantly, with only occasional confusion. Many children ask questions when they are seeking help or information, as when they are working on the computer. Some are beginning to ask questions about words and meanings. In one group session, for example, the teacher opened a suitcase, commenting as she did so, 'Now I'm undoing the catch'. Immediately a child put in, 'What's a catch?' When this happens the children are learning very effectively.

68 The teaching of communication, speaking and listening is generally good, and these skills are given appropriately high priority. The importance of facial expression and eye contact is explicitly taught, for example when thanking another child. In all their activities the children are encouraged to express their ideas and offer explanations in turn. Skilled questioning often ensures that all the children have a chance to express their ideas and are effectively encouraged to listen to others. During the inspection this was a particular feature of groups working on investigations, as when the children tested the best material for Teddy's raincoat. Staff are good at promoting the accurate use of vocabulary, especially in small group work and 'focus' activities. For example the children looked at a collection of attractive scarves, and were helped to pick up the vocabulary they needed to describe the designs: 'stripes', 'stars', 'spots', and so on. There was particular success with a child with special educational needs, who, with adult help, looked very carefully and started to talk about the colours and patterns that he could see. In a separate art session, the teacher promoted an

accurate use of mathematical language when she helped a child to use the term 'wider' rather than 'bigger' to describe the stripes he was looking at. There was a missed opportunity, however, when children were asked what a cook's hat was and they were allowed to get away with answering, 'It's a cooking thing'; but this was not typical.

69 When adults involve themselves in imaginative play with the children they are often very effective in sustaining roles and modelling appropriate language for them: 'There's a telephone call for you. Will you take it over here?' Stories are also used as a powerful means of promoting spoken language. These are sometimes told or read entertainingly and with great gusto, so that the children are spellbound. With the least mature of the special needs children, picture books provide a stimulus and they are encouraged to say what they can see using single words or short phrases. In this way their language development progresses well, albeit by small steps.

70 Literacy skills develop well and the children achieve standards well in line with others in this age-group. Most children by now recognise their own name on a flash card, and many can pick out the names of others. At least half know the first letter of their own names and some of the more mature children identify other letters by name and sound. The children develop a real enjoyment of books, especially stories, and many choose to spend time browsing on their own or with a friend. They enjoy poems and stories in rhyme, and notice at once if an adult substitutes an alternative word that does not fit the rhyme scheme. Most know the terms 'title', 'author' and 'illustrator', and the most capable children suggest what the title of a book might be on the basis of the cover illustration. All the children, including those with special educational needs, hold books the right way up, start at the front and turn the pages one at a time, attending closely to the illustrations. Most of the children know that the text is different from the pictures and that this is the part that adults read, but very few can show where to start reading on the page. Only one or two very capable children have any understanding of the direction of print. These children can pick out a few familiar letters in the text, but most of children are not yet making a connection between the letters and words that they write, the name cards that they can read and the print in books. They do, however, correctly interpret picture symbols and single words such as 'OK' when they use the computer.

71 The children draw and paint with interest and enjoyment, usually ascribing meanings to the end product. Most are beginning to make representational drawings, and many attempt to write their own names. Above average children write their whole name legibly, with some correctly formed letters. Others write the first letter or letters only, mixed with letter-like 'pretend' script. Many use writing and mark-making extensively in their play. One child, for example, sat for a lengthy period of time at the entrance to the 'clothes shop' with a telephone on one hand and pencil and notepad in the other, making extensive 'notes'. An understanding of the purposes of writing is well promoted by good teaching. In one session the children worked on 'shopping lists', identifying with adult support the first sound of the article they wanted and then finding the letter to match the sound. The children have good opportunities to make their own illustrated 'books' with adult help. The children are taught to hold a writing implement correctly and most do so for much of the time. Where they have an immature grip they often change this when reminded. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

72 Basic literacy skills are effectively taught. Staff are particularly good at promoting enjoyment of stories and books at group times and as a focus activity during free flow sessions. A collection of high quality, well-illustrated children's books is available, with comfortable and inviting areas for browsing. Specially attractive books are set out as a specific activity with adult input on regular occasions, and act as a magnet for many of the children. Information books are not used as effectively as they might be to support learning and investigation across the curriculum, however, although the school has a good selection.

Information books are regularly included with stories in book bags for home. The book bags are carefully graded and are making a very good contribution to children's learning by involving parents.

73 The teacher responsible for communication, language and literacy has been in post for only a short time and has not yet had time to come to grips with this responsibility or to make a start on the evaluation of standards, teaching and learning. However, she does have good ideas for future development of this area. The policy and guidelines are sound but need some updating in the light of new curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage. Checklists for assessment need a thorough overhaul in the light of these new requirements.

Mathematical development

74 As at the time of the last inspection, overall standards of mathematics are in line with expectations for the age-group. There are strengths in number recognition and counting, with above average levels of numeracy, but other aspects of mathematical development are no better than average. The starting point on entry to nursery is mainly below average, and children make good overall progress in this area of learning.

75 A small group of the youngest and least mature children have difficulty counting more than two or three objects correctly. However, even those with significant special educational needs can match one-to-one, for example when placing the correct number of passengers into the carriage of a wooden train. The rest of the children count objects reliably to at least five and the more able count correctly up to ten objects or more. The most capable children know 'one more' and 'one less than' up to ten, and this is reinforced by favourite number rhymes and songs such as *There Were Ten in the Bed*. Many more children use language such as 'more' and 'less' in their day-to-day activities, as when they are working with building blocks. One above average child, was able to explain confidently that the computer screen showed five faces, four with red noses and one with a blue nose. Many children count by rote to 20 or more, especially when supported in a group. They become accustomed to numbers greater than ten as part of their regular group activities. In a practical context, such as matching up socks, the children are beginning to understand that two make a pair. The children have been taught the term 'zero' and most use it correctly.

76 Almost all the children recognise written numbers to three and most can identify numerals to five. About half the children identify numerals to nine, but there is the usual tendency for them to confuse nine with six. The older and more capable children order these numbers correctly when working with cards or magnetic numbers. A few very able children are beginning to recognise how numbers beyond nine are constructed by combining numerals. A number of children are beginning to write recognisable numerals but these are often reversed; insufficient attention is paid to correcting this.

77 The children are less confident in naming simple shapes, although they match up 'shape dominoes' confidently. Most know the terms 'circle' and 'star', and about half the children recognise a triangle, but few recognise a square or rectangle without prompting. The children do not know any of the solid shapes. On the other hand, children in one group sat in a semi-circle and volunteered that this was half a circle. Virtually all the children understand what is meant by a straight line and they use positional language such as 'behind' and 'in front of' confidently. About half the children readily order three objects by size and know vocabulary such as 'bigger/smaller', 'taller/shorter'. During the inspection none of the children was observed to compare heavier and lighter weights, or to use these terms. Most children can match a simple repeating pattern, but only the most able can continue or create their own regular patterns.

78 The teaching in this area of learning is good as far as understanding of number is concerned, but less consistently strong in other aspects of mathematics. Staff usually make the most of everyday opportunities to practise counting objects and counting by rote. This was seen when taking the register, checking if all the children in a group were present and seeing how many drinks were needed at break time. Direct teaching of mathematics in group sessions is often challenging, as in one ambitious session on recognising numbers greater than ten. Computers are used very effectively to support counting, pattern making, shape recognition, matching and identifying the odd one out. Good incidental teaching of mathematical ideas is sometimes included in art activities. On one occasion, for example, the teacher effectively reinforced the idea of 'wider' and 'narrower', rather than 'bigger' and 'smaller', stripes. A nursery nurse drew the children's attention to the large and small circles that helped to make up an eye-catching collage. Opportunities are occasionally missed, though; for example on one occasion no-one suggested that the children might count how many bricks had been used to build a very high tower. Little use was made of sand and water play during the inspection to develop the children's understanding of weight or capacity.

79 Mathematical development is competently planned and managed on a day-to-day basis, but there is much further to go in monitoring the children's overall achievements systematically from the time of entry onwards. There has been very little formal monitoring of teaching in order to strengthen this area of learning further. The school's policy and guidance for mathematical development are adequate, but documentation has not yet been revised to match recent curriculum guidance and the new Early Learning Goals. Although the system of checklists provides a broad indication of individual progress, there is no formal assessment procedure recording in small steps and stages how individual children are making progress towards each goal.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

80 The range of children's attainment in this area of learning is broadly average, with above average standards achieved in information and communication technology and in the children's knowledge of the local environment. This is similar to findings at the time of the last inspection, except that children's computer skills have now improved significantly.

81 The children greatly enjoy exploring, investigating and manipulating a range of materials. They use magnets to test whether or not different objects are attracted, carefully working their way through the collection of articles provided for this activity. Magnifiers are used to look carefully at a patchwork collage, and with effective adult help the children observe the different textures of the fabrics and the way in which sequins shine and reflect light. Activities with clay and dough, sand and sawdust enable the children to gain experience of the different feel and characteristics of these materials. With good teaching and adult prompting, the children are observant and begin to show an awareness of change. This happened when a group washed the dolls' clothes. They watched carefully as soap flakes dissolved in water and then as the water changed colour. Later they made predictions about whether or not the clothes would dry best outside in the sun or inside the boiler room, and the most mature children gave simple reasons to support their ideas. With support the older and more capable children were beginning to talk about what they observed with good attention to detail.

82 There are daily opportunities for the children to work with construction materials during 'free flow' times, using blocks, construction kits or recycled materials, although these activities are predominantly chosen by boys. Skills with construction kits are at an average level. The children manipulate building components competently and work on their own ideas, sometimes collaborating with one another as they do so. High quality adult intervention sometimes raises the level of achievement. When a group decided to build some very high

towers, for example, the teacher extended their thinking by suggesting that they should try to make the bases more stable. Another group made gingerbread people from dough, handling rolling pin and cutters competently with just a little help from an adult. The end products were appropriately finished with currants for eyes, nose and buttons. During the inspection the children used a range of tools competently, including scissors, cutters, paint rollers and spatulas to apply adhesives.

83 The children's ability to use everyday technology and computers is above average for this age-group, a significant improvement since the last inspection when computer skills were judged to be barely adequate. All the children, including those with special educational needs, are now thoroughly confident as they use a range of computer programs to support their learning. They work independently, needing minimal adult help as they engage in matching and 'odd one out' exercises, complete jigsaw and pattern-making games and work on letter and numeral recognition. Most of the children know how to end an activity, access the menu and select another without assistance. Their control of the mouse is very assured. The children choose to work in pairs as often as they work alone, sometimes offering one another sound technical advice. They are familiar with tape recorders and can use the school's listening centre. The only gap in their experience is control technology, since the school has no floor turtle or other programmable toys.

84 As at the time of the last inspection, the children demonstrate an above average knowledge of their immediate environment and neighbourhood, and can talk about visits to the shops and library. As part of their topic on clothes, they identify protective clothing used by the lunchtime staff, and recognise parts of a policeman's uniform. In one group session an average child explained the function of industrial goggles in keeping dust out of the eyes and explained that the men in a garage would wear dungarees to keep their clothes clean. The children are aware of changes in the weather and know the appropriate vocabulary. They show interest in the plants and animals kept in the nursery and know that plants need water and sun, whilst the guinea pigs need regular feeding and cleaning out. They are aware of themselves as individuals with feelings and emotions, know that they are growing up by reference to their birthdays, and point out photographs of themselves as babies on the display board. Following a visit from a mother and child they can explain that babies need constant attention and cannot walk or feed themselves.

85 Most of the children make good progress overall in knowledge and understanding of the world, with very good progress in information and communication technology. There is plenty to interest and challenge the older and most mature children. The achievement of those with significant special educational needs is occasionally limited by lack of experience and the right vocabulary. When exploring magnets, for example, one child did not understand an adult's question 'What do you think this is made of?' and persisted in thinking that the question was about the colour of the object. The adult, a volunteer, found it understandably difficult to explain what was meant. Even so, these children mainly make good progress, and their competence with the computers is often as good as that of others.

86 Teaching is mainly good, with plenty of provision for learning at first-hand through a wide variety of experiences. In an example of simple but effective activity in the water trough, for example, a group of children soaked different fabrics and dripped, squeezed or wrung the water out into various containers. With guidance from a well-briefed student the children started to understand that some fabrics absorbed much more water than others. They became increasingly aware of differences in texture and the feel of the fabric as they worked, and learning was very effective. In small group sessions staff often make effective use of a range of 'props', as when one group looked at and tried out various different fasteners for clothing. Here there was good incidental development of relevant vocabulary. The use of books for information is not as effectively developed. For example, no relevant reference

books about plant growth, pets or magnets were available at appropriate points in the nursery during the inspection.

87 The lack of encouragement for children to plan and evaluate their efforts is a shortcoming that particularly affects technological activities. The children do not have enough opportunities to develop original ideas, and have no regular and independent access to a wide range of tools, adhesives and materials to support their work in designing and making. Staff provide opportunities for one-to-one feedback, but there are not enough formal opportunities for evaluating the children's finished work.

88 Provision for this area of learning is good in many respects. In particular effectively planned visits and visitors make an important contribution to learning by extending the children's experience. Documentation, especially detailed long-term planning is lacking, however, and should be developed to ensure that there are no gaps in the curriculum and that all new requirements are met. There are very limited arrangements for monitoring standards, teaching and learning in this area. Since the move of building there has not been the opportunity to develop the outdoor space effectively as a resource for learning about the environment.

Physical development

89 Children's overall physical development is in line with expectations for the age-group, as at the time of the last inspection. From an average starting point on entry, progress is generally satisfactory. The children have many opportunities to develop good manipulative control. They use a range of tools and materials, including scissors, safely and under control. Children using the computers show good mouse control, for example to move a fish through a maze and to point and click at selected objects. Children use malleable material to form shapes, rolling it out firmly, then cutting and moulding it to make 'food' for a picnic. They apply glue, sometimes in over-liberal quantities, using a spatula with reasonable competence. The children have plenty of opportunities to develop their hand and eye co-ordination, for example by threading beads or pasta shapes to make a 'necklace'. The children's control of mark-making implements is average for the age-group, an improvement since the last inspection. They show good levels of independence when they manage fasteners such as buttons and zips.

90 In formal indoor movement sessions the children move around with sound control. Most follow instructions to walk, run, skip, hop, jump and stop. A few children are less well co-ordinated and find some of these movements difficult, however. Children are becoming aware of their bodies in space when moving about the room and avoid bumping into one another. In circle time children find rolling a soft ball to a friend difficult, so that the ball rarely reaches the intended target. Outdoors they control tricycles and go-carts well, steering them deftly to avoid collisions. However, opportunities for sustained physical effort are limited by the restricted outside space. During one outdoor session, a small group of children balanced a bean bag on their heads and hands when walking around. They had more difficulty aiming bean bags into a basket.

91 Provision for some aspects of physical development is only just satisfactory, and this is having an effect on achievement. There is limited space indoors and out for physical activity and no opportunities for children to move spontaneously between the indoor and outside environments. The equipment available is barely adequate, with little provision for challenging climbing, scrambling and swinging. Because the time spent outside is short, mainly taking the form of brief 'playtimes', there are few opportunities for the children to repeat and practise important skills. Too little time is given to developing skills with a range of large and small equipment, such as jumping off an object with a controlled landing or kicking

a ball. Regular formal movement sessions indoors are some compensation for the otherwise limited provision in this area of learning.

92 The design and layout of the site is an important factor contributing to less than satisfactory opportunities for physical activity outside. Staff are very well aware of this and appropriate plans are currently being developed to improve the position. There are other shortcomings, too. When teaching is competently planned, for example when a small group works on a specific skill, it is generally sound. Staff invariably give good attention to safety, but there is no short-term planning for teaching and learning outdoors. With learning intentions unclear, equipment is set out on an *ad hoc* basis; sometimes there is too much, so that unused toys get in the way of other activities. It is unsatisfactory that children do not change their clothes, and particularly their footwear, for indoor lessons, as this limits the freedom of their movement.

93 This area of learning is not effectively enough co-ordinated at present. There is a brief policy statement, but this does not match recent curriculum guidance or the Early Learning Goals. There is no scheme of work or matching assessment procedures to record children's development. Some important strands are missing from written planning, for example learning the effects of exercise on the body. As with other areas of learning, there is as yet little formal monitoring of teaching.

Creative development

94 The children have good opportunities for creative development, achieve well and reach standards that are at least average for the age-group. Attainment in music is above average. Teaching is often good in this area of learning.

95 The school provides a rich environment where the children have plenty of chances to experience and enjoy beautifully illustrated books, artefacts and natural materials. There is an appropriate cultural breadth in the visual images and materials that the children are surrounded with, and time is given for them just to look. When for example, the children explored a striking collage incorporating many different materials, patterns and textures, they were given plenty of time to talk quietly about what they liked, to feel the different surfaces and to admire how the sequins glittered. Here the teaching was unobtrusively effective, with a lot of encouragement to use the language of shape, size, colour and texture. On another occasion the children looked at a well-chosen collection of 'special' scarves, which they handled and felt before deciding how to make their own striped or spotted patterns. The children's portfolios show that they have had opportunities for observational drawing, for example looking closely at flowers before drawing them. Some of the finished work is of a good standard for the age-group.

96 The children draw, paint and print with enjoyment, expressing their ideas confidently. There is a wide range of attainment, according to the children's stage of development. The least mature children are still just enjoying the sensation of making marks on a surface, but many average and above average children are beginning to create patterns, to use colour deliberately and to represent figures and scenes that have meaning for them. In one large-scale communal drawing many children produced self-portraits and 'signatures', using felt-tipped pens and chalks with good control. Some of the children worked very carefully, with deep absorption in the task. There was limited teaching input here, but none was needed. On another occasion the children printed designs using paint pads and small rollers. The teacher struck a good balance between instruction in specific skills and encouraging the children to use the techniques in their own way to develop individual ideas.

97 Planning and finished artwork around the school indicate that the children have an

appropriate range of experience of exploring different media, including dough and clay. During the inspection the children worked with a volunteer to make gingerbread people, which they cut out and decorated with skill and care. Painting and drawing are usually freely available, but the children tend to be presented with a limited choice of materials when it comes to activities such as collage. There is scope for encouraging the children to plan more independently and to access their own resources for creative work on at least some occasions.

98 Music is effectively taught, mainly in small group time. The children are developing a good repertoire of familiar songs, including traditional nursery rhymes and action songs, which they very much enjoy singing. They accompany themselves with simple percussion instruments, which most can name. The children hold and play the instruments correctly and with good self-discipline. Almost all join in with gusto, although a few find it difficult to play and sing at the same time. A few talented children have a good sense of rhythm and can already pick up and keep time with the pulse accurately. The children understand the difference between playing and singing loudly and softly; they understand instructions and can follow a lead well.

99 The children involve themselves deeply in imaginative play, both alone and with other children. The 'clothes shop' was a particular attraction during the inspection, partly because of the very good quality of the resources available, including dressing up clothes beautifully made by volunteers. A selection of wigs added to the fun. The children enormously enjoyed the role-play, which they threw themselves into whole-heartedly. Boys as well as girls were to be seen ironing the clothes intently, whilst others admired themselves in the mirror, took telephone calls or organised the cash payments. The success of this activity was in part due to effective and well-judged adult input into the play. The children become almost equally involved and absorbed in playing with 'small world' toys such as the dolls' house, train set and playmats.

100 Provision for creative development is generally good and is making a strong contribution to the children's personal development. Although it was not possible to observe dance and movement, these activities are regularly planned for. At present there are few activities outdoors designed to stimulate the imagination, however. This area of learning will need to be taken into account when the outside facilities are developed.