

INSPECTION REPORT

EARLHAM NURSERY SCHOOL

Norwich

LEA area: Norfolk

Unique reference number: 120767

Headteacher: Mrs F Thomas

Reporting inspector: Mr J G Quinn
15676

Date of inspection: 20 March 2000

Inspection number: 195965

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 - 4 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Cadge Road Norwich Norfolk
Postcode:	NR5 8DB
Telephone number:	01603 454271
Fax number:	As above
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr G Wheeler
Date of previous inspection:	July 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school serves the Larkman estate of local authority housing situated to the west of Norwich. It is a disadvantaged area and has been identified as an area of significant need. There are 153 children on the school roll aged three to four years, most of whom attend part-time. There are no children from families of ethnic minorities and none who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of children with special educational needs is very high at 32 per cent, with two pupils who have Statements of Special Educational Need.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is very effective and gives very good value for money. The nursery provides a caring and stimulating environment in which children flourish. Children enter the nursery with low standards. Through a combination of very strong leadership, very good teaching and a stimulating curriculum children make good progress throughout their time in the school and are well prepared to begin full-time education.

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership and clear educational direction. Through a democratic approach she has successfully built a hardworking team which reflects critically on its work in order to improve its performance.
- Teaching is very effective. Staff have high expectations of children and build good relationships with them. Through careful monitoring of children's development and progress staff provide clear guidance and effective support for individuals.
- The curriculum is very well planned. The use of visitors and visits to widen children's experiences and to stimulate their interest is a strong feature.
- The school has worked hard and successfully to build its partnership with parents and, as a result, this is now very good.
- The school grounds have been thoughtfully and sensitively developed to provide a valuable resource for learning.

What could be improved

- Major areas of expenditure for inclusion in the school management plan.
- The understanding of a minority of parents about the nature of children's learning at home and at school.

The school has many strengths and very few areas for improvement. The areas to be improved will form the basis of the governors' action plan, a copy of which will be circulated to all parents.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was previously inspected in July 1997. It was judged to be good at the time of the last inspection. All issues arising from the previous report have been addressed and the school is now even better than it was. Parents are better informed about special educational needs and the outdoor area has been improved with a stronger focus on the development of children's physical skills. Although a small number of children still arrive late for morning and afternoon sessions, the school's modified arrangements for the start of sessions are successful in minimising the disruption which this causes.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:		Key well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
Language and literacy	C	
Mathematics	C	
Personal and social development	C	
Other areas of the curriculum	C	

Children make good progress in all nationally prescribed areas of learning from the time they enter the school, with the result that most achieve standards expected for their age by the time they leave the nursery.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children have very positive attitudes to school and to learning, which make a significant contribution to their progress.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Children behave very well in all activities and around the school generally.
Personal development and relationships	Children's personal development is very good. They share resources amicably and work well with others, when required to do so, under the supervision of an adult.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The new arrangements to minimise disruption at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions are working well.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Lessons seen overall	Very good

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

In the very small number of lessons seen during the inspection teaching was very good overall and contributed effectively to children's standards of attainment. Staff provide well for all children and meet their needs effectively. They establish very good relationships, have high expectations of what children are able to achieve and check closely on the

progress that children make in their learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is very well planned. It matches children's attitudes to learning to skills identified in the nationally prescribed areas of learning. Provision for enhancing the curriculum through visits and visitors to the school is a particularly strong feature.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	There is good provision made for children with special educational needs through the careful monitoring of their particular requirements.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school provides very well for children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural growth.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school makes very good provision for children's well-being. It provides a caring, safe and secure environment within which children learn effectively. Staff check children's progress closely which contributes positively to the support and guidance which they are able to give to individuals.

The school has worked hard and successfully to improve the way in which it works with parents, but, as expressed in the pre-inspection survey, there is still uncertainty amongst a minority of parents about the sort of work that their children undertake in school and at home.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is very well led and managed. The educational direction provided by the headteacher is excellent and makes a significant contribution to the quality of education provided and to the progress of the children. She is strongly supported by the deputy headteacher and by all staff, who work very well as a team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their responsibilities well and work closely with the headteacher and the staff on the development of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is a very strong feature. Through keeping a close and regular watch on the way in which it does its work the school is constantly seeking to improve the quality of education it provides.
The strategic use of	The school makes sound use of resources and available

resources	finances.
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The school development plan contains many very useful elements, but does not relate closely enough to major areas of expenditure identified in the school budget. The school seeks to provide best value in many areas of development, such as that related to the improvements to the school grounds.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That their children like school. • Children make good progress. • Teaching is good. • The information that they receive on how well their children are getting on. • They feel comfortable approaching the school with suggestions or complaints. • The school is well led and managed. • The school helps their children to become more mature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of work which their children are given to do at home.

The inspection findings support the positive views of parents. Inspectors do not regard the amount of homework to be an area for improvement as it is currently appropriate for children of this age.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and clear educational direction. Through a democratic approach she has successfully built a hardworking team which reflects critically on its work in order to improve its performance.

1. The very clear direction and sense of purpose provided by the headteacher make a significant contribution to the good progress that children make in the nursery and to the standards which they attain. The support, which she receives from her deputy, other members of staff and governors, is very good. The headteacher's vision for school improvement, based on developing even greater links with parents and the community, is clearly articulated and is supported by governors and staff. As a result there have been several recent initiatives, such as the provision of a parents' room, the introduction of home visits to ease children's transition into the nursery, and family 'fun days' where parents are able to learn alongside their children. The school successfully promotes a positive image within the community and the headteacher hopes to extend this further; for example, by providing a venue for health clinics.
2. The headteacher has very successfully fostered a spirit of teamwork between staff and with the governing body. As a result teaching and support staff feel themselves and their contributions to the work of the school to be valued, and governors fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Governors appreciate the information which they receive from the headteacher about how well the school is performing, and check aspects of the school's work regularly in order to improve further the education provided.
3. Through a democratic approach to leadership the headteacher demonstrates her willingness to listen, discuss and to act upon suggestions of others, which serves the best interests of the children. She delegates real responsibility very effectively to her deputy and to other members of staff. For example, the deputy headteacher has been at the forefront of major developments to the school grounds since the last inspection and as a testimony to his efforts the external environment is now a rich, varied and stimulating resource for learning.
4. The measures taken by the school to check on how well it is doing are particularly strong features of the headteacher's leadership and consequently staff are constantly looking at how well they teach in order that they might improve further. This is evident in the work undertaken on the Effective Early Learning project. This was a system to encourage the school to look closely at how teachers teach and children learn. It was introduced initially with the support of a higher education establishment and has since been adopted by the school as a valuable tool in checking its own performance. Shortcomings in the areas of mathematical and creative provision were identified and steps taken to successfully overcome the weaknesses. Mathematics and creative development training was organised for staff, the results of which were disseminated to parents in the form of 'family fun days' when parents were able to work alongside their children on carefully planned activities.
5. The headteacher is aware that, as there are very few similar schools within the local authority, opportunities for comparing and supporting good nursery practice are limited. As a result the school now looks beyond county boundaries and has fostered

valuable links with nursery schools in the neighbouring county of Cambridgeshire and in London. It has also recently formed an Internet link with a school in New Zealand which has led to a useful exchange of ideas on the curriculum for young children. In addition, a nationally acclaimed expert in the education of young children is employed to look critically at the work of the school on a regular basis with the result that improvements have been made to such aspects as the provision and use of books. Parents also welcome the opportunity to comment on and influence the work in the nursery through their responses to the many questionnaires that they receive from the school.

Teaching is very effective. Staff have high expectations of children and build good relationships with them. Through careful monitoring of children's development and progress staff provide clear guidance and effective support for individuals.

6. In the relatively few lessons observed teaching was very good overall. It has a positive effect on learning and is a strong, contributory factor to the progress that children make. It remains a strength of the school as it was at the time of the last inspection. Teaching and support staff work hard and successfully to provide a good standard of education and are constantly looking at ways to improve their performance. They operate very effectively in three teams where tasks and responsibilities are shared out fairly.
7. Staff have a sound understanding of the educational needs of the children they teach and employ methods which engage the interest of children quickly. For example at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions the classrooms are thoughtfully arranged with a variety of activities which will attract children as soon as they enter the classrooms. The problem related to disruption caused by latecomers to morning and afternoon sessions, which was a key issue at the time of the previous inspection, has been resolved through these arrangements. Now children settle to activities quickly and no time is wasted. Staff interact with children very well as they work, and question them carefully to develop their spoken language and to encourage them to concentrate well on the task in hand. This was apparent with children who were drawing a ball, colouring each section differently with pastel crayons. Here the teacher talked about the different colours and encouraged children to comment on the relative positions of different coloured segments.
8. Staff have high expectations of children, as is reflected in the way in which they question and challenge children's thinking and foster their independence and self-sufficiency. For example, children from a very early stage are expected to take some responsibility for the way in which they prepare for activities such as painting and water play. They understand that these activities require the use of aprons to cover clothing and they select and use them accordingly. Also children decide when they will take their mid-morning snacks. They choose their milk cartons sensibly and insert the drinking straws without adult assistance.
9. Teaching and support staff build effectively on the very good relationships which evidently exist between children and adults. When children leave their parents at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions, for example, they run to the nursery staff, addressing them by their first names and are eager to relate snippets of news. Staff use the caring and sensitive way in which they relate to children to manage the relatively few disagreements that occur, and as a result children play and work very well together. For example, in one instance where a child was not sharing an item of play equipment with another, the teacher effectively resolved the problem through

reasoned discussion which clearly demonstrated that there were alternatives to a more physical approach.

10. The way in which staff check on how well children learn is very good. Through close observations of individuals they identify how children respond to different tasks and how well they understand what they are doing. This careful and regular checking enables staff to provide appropriate targets for individuals and ensures more effective learning. Staff keep good written records of each child's development and occasionally add to these with photographs.

The curriculum is very well planned. The use of visitors and visits to widen children's experiences and to stimulate their interest is a strong feature.

11. Curriculum planning is thorough and detailed. It covers all the areas laid down by the government for children under five. The curriculum supports teaching well and makes a very effective contribution to how well children learn. The school has considered the development of its curriculum very carefully in relation to the nationally recommended areas of learning for children under five and children's attitudes to learning as identified in the New Zealand syllabus for children of this age. The school has been enterprising and imaginative in developing an appropriate curriculum for its children. Planning clearly reflects how children's positive attitudes of co-operation, pleasure in learning, persistence and curiosity support the way in which they learn. The school has begun to involve the reception staff of the adjacent primary school, to which many children transfer, in its staff meetings and training days in order to ensure that children's learning progresses as it should from one phase of education to the next.
12. There is a strong link between long, medium and short-term planning. Teachers' short-term planning ensures that children's learning is broken down into manageable sections which enable children to build on their knowledge and skills progressively and systematically.
13. The way in which teachers invite visitors and organise visits to places of interest to enliven the curriculum for these very young children is a particular strength. Staff build on these events very well to provide meaningful experiences which contribute effectively to children's progress in all areas of learning. The school visits farms and the seaside annually. There have been visits from local fire-fighters, with an opportunity for children to experience first hand the wearing of specialist clothing such as helmets and the use of specialist equipment such as hoses. On other occasions musicians have visited to provide children with the chance to compare musical instruments. In the week prior to the inspection there had been a visit from circus clowns, the memory of which had evidently not diminished in the minds of children over the intervening weekend. They returned to school keen to try plate spinning, to make large pictures of clowns and to experience simple, but safe, swinging in the manner of trapeze artists.

The school has worked hard and successfully to build its partnership with parents and, as a result, this is now very good.

14. Parents express overwhelming support for the nursery and appreciate what it provides for their children. They in their turn believe themselves well supported by the school. Parents feel valued and welcome the fact that, not only are they frequently consulted on matters related to the nursery, but that their suggestions are

sometimes acted upon. For example, following parental consultation, improvements were made to the school brochure in order to make it more attractive. It now includes more photographs and children's drawings, together with a map of the school. Appropriate measures are also taken to canvas the opinion of those parents who prefer to respond by word of mouth. The quality of information provided by the school for parents is very good. This includes information related to children with special educational needs, which was a key issue in the previous inspection report. The school provides leaflets explaining the nature of special needs and the provision that is made for children identified as having special educational needs.

15. In line with the headteacher's philosophy to develop closer links with parents and with the community there have been several recent initiatives. Through a system of home visits prior to children beginning at the nursery, staff effectively build a relationship of trust between home and school which provides a secure foundation for children's education and contributes well to the progress that children make. The visits also help to ease the transition in that there is a familiar person to whom children can relate when they begin school. This relatively new initiative is widely appreciated by parents, and the majority accept the offer of a home visit.
16. The arrangements for the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions have been revised in the light of the criticism in the last inspection report regarding the disruption caused by late arrivals. As a result the related key issue has been fully addressed. Parents now wait with children until they are settled at one of the many introductory activities provided. This not only eases the start to sessions but also allows parents a valuable insight into what the nursery provides for their children.
17. 'Family fun days' are a valued addition and have been successful in providing opportunities for parents to share experiences with their children in order that they may support their learning. There have been visits to farms and to the seaside, for example, where parents have accompanied their children and which some confess to enjoying as much as the children themselves. Within the school grounds there has been a 'mathematics day' where parents have been able to count, match colours and shapes, and put numbers into sequence alongside their children. Also a 'creative week' involved parents and children in a variety of activities that included visitors with musical instruments, Morris dancing and clog-dancing. More recently, a visit from a group of clowns delighted parents and children and provided a focus for subsequent work.
18. The school now has a parents' room where those delivering or collecting children can meet in relaxed surroundings to share news and enjoy simple refreshments. A very recently elected parent governor has held a coffee morning, which has met with limited success. She nevertheless has other useful ideas of how she might help parents understand what goes on in the nursery.

The school grounds have been thoughtfully and sensitively developed to provide a valuable resource for learning.

19. In response to the key issue in the previous inspection report, the school grounds have been improved very well to provide more effectively for children's physical development and to foster their understanding of the world around them. In addition incidental opportunities are provided for the development of creativity and conversational language through role-play situations, such as that for a circus where

a 'big top' was assembled during the period of the inspection using the trunk of a tree for support.

20. The headteacher has delegated this area to the deputy headteacher who has taken full responsibility. He has been instrumental in designing and constructing the area with the help of the children themselves, older students from a nearby secondary school, the local authority, parents and voluntary groups. The project has been well co-ordinated and has encouraged children to begin to see the value of working together, thereby contributing effectively to their personal and social development. As a result there is now a range of fixed equipment on which children develop their climbing, balancing and jumping skills and clear playground markings to encourage more controlled use of large-wheeled toys. Children use these very well, together with smaller equipment to develop physical skills such as throwing, catching and kicking balls. The school has also developed a soft play area within the school, where children jump, roll, slide and balance with good co-ordination under the watchful supervision of an adult.
21. Staff have given careful consideration to developing the potential for learning in other areas also. For example, through the very recent creation of a sensory walk containing aromatic plants and a willow tunnel, children are encouraged to make greater use of their senses to increase their knowledge and understanding of the natural world. The pond which was created in 1998 has been subjected to vandalism on five occasions in the past, with the result that the school has wisely redesigned the area as a 'bog garden' for growing marsh and bog plants.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Major areas of expenditure for inclusion in the school management plan.

22. The school management plan is well constructed with appropriate targets to be pursued over a three-year period. It relates loosely to the school's aims and provides valuable opportunities for progress to be reviewed. Areas for development in the curriculum, staff training, improvements to the premises, special educational needs, governors' development and home-school links are indicated and some are met appropriately. However, major areas of expenditure are not always included and as a result the plan does not relate closely to the school's delegated budget. For example, only a small proportion of the £5000 identified by the headteacher for expenditure on the development of the school grounds appears in the management plan; also there is insufficient information on how funding is used to support the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs.

The understanding of a minority of parents about the nature of children's learning at home and at school.

23. The way in which the school communicates with parents has improved since the last inspection and it is clear from the parental questionnaires, related letters and points raised at the parents' meeting that parents hold the nursery in high regard. They have very positive views in a number of areas. For example, all returning the questionnaire said that their children like school and almost all believe that their children make good progress. They think that teaching is good and that the school is well led and managed. Most would feel comfortable approaching the school with

suggestions or complaints and the vast majority say that they are kept well informed about how their children are getting on.

24. Of those returning the questionnaire a significant minority believed their children didn't receive the right amount of work to do at home and an even greater percentage felt that they didn't know and were not able to answer. The small number of letters received as part of the parental survey prior to the inspection and incidental discussions with parents confirm that there is a misconception on the part of a minority of parents on the nature of children's 'work' in the nursery. This prevents them from supporting their children's learning as effectively as they might.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

25. The governors, headteacher and staff should address the following:

- (1) in order to improve further the school's strategic use of resources, seek to align the school management plan more closely to the school's budget by incorporating major areas of expenditure including those for particular school initiatives;
- (2) find ways to improve the understanding of a minority of parents about the work that children undertake at home and at school, in order that they might support their children's learning more effectively.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	8
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	4

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
	5	3				

This table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	76.5
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	46

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	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	n/a

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	n/a

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and support staff

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26.8

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	180

Number of pupils per FTE adult	8.5
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	226,100
Total expenditure	217,648
Expenditure per pupil	2,986
Balance brought forward from previous year	14,200
Balance carried forward to next year	22,652

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	180
Number of questionnaires returned	68

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	85	15	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	68	31	0	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	54	38	0	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	22	13	1	46
The teaching is good.	79	19	0	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	65	31	3	0	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	82	15	0	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	41	3	0	10
The school works closely with parents.	62	32	4	0	1
The school is well led and managed.	79	18	0	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	38	0	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	51	26	4	0	18