

INSPECTION REPORT

HORSHAM NURSERY SCHOOL

Horsham

LEA area: West Sussex

Unique reference number: 125809

Headteacher: Miss Hilary Selby

Reporting inspector: Mr George Crowther
18814

Dates of inspection: 20th – 22nd March 2000

Inspection number: 196055

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 5
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Horsham Park HORSHAM West Sussex
Postcode:	RH12 1RN
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Alison Sutton
Date of previous inspection:	March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
George Crowther <i>Registered inspector</i>	Areas of learning for children under five: mathematics; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical. Equal opportunities Special educational needs	What sort of school is it? The schools results and achievements. How well are pupils taught? How good are the curricular opportunities offered to pupils? What should the school do to improve further?
Susan Burgess <i>Lay inspector</i>		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Jo Harris <i>Team inspector</i>	Areas of learning for children under five: personal and social; language and literacy; creative. English as an additional language	How well does the school care for its pupils? How well is the school led and managed?

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The Registrar
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	1
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Children's attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	5
Children's achievements	
Children's attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN TAUGHT?	8
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO CHILDREN?	11
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS CHILDREN?	13
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	14
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	14
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	16
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	17
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM	20

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Horsham Nursery School is a medium-sized nursery for boys and girls 3-4 years old. It has 17 full-time and 57 part-time children. It is the only nursery school in Horsham and draws children from a wide range of social circumstances. Since the last inspection, more children move to primary school aged four, and there are fewer older children in the nursery. About a third of the children attend the nursery owing to a wide range of special needs that have been identified by outside agencies. Taken together, pupils' attainment when they start nursery is below average. The proportion of pupils needing additional support is above average, and the school has additional staff to meet their needs. Very few children are from ethnic minority backgrounds. A few children have English as an additional language and are at an early stage of language acquisition.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Horsham Nursery is an effective school. It fulfils its aim to provide a setting in which children can experiment and express themselves in a happy, caring environment. It meets children's individual needs well, and gives them the confidence to make good progress in all aspects of their learning. Relationships between all members of the school community are a strength. The teaching is consistently good, often very good. Staff know the children very well and respond to their needs effectively. The curriculum is rich and varied, and children are encouraged to be independent in their learning. The staff and governors work well together to sustain the many strengths, but there is not enough emphasis on planning for future development. The school provides good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Children make good progress in all areas of their learning, particularly in developing their personal and social skills.
- The children's very good attitudes, their good behaviour, and the very good relationships they have with other children and staff support their learning well.
- Effective provision for children with special educational needs enables them to make good progress.
- All staff work industriously as a team and provide good quality teaching.
- The school provides a rich and varied curriculum.
- The school has a very caring approach to all aspects of pupils' welfare.
- The school has good links with parents, who support the school and their children's learning.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- There is too little shared planning for the future development of the school.
- The school does not monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning carefully enough, to make these even better.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

When it was inspected last in March 1997, Horsham Nursery was found to provide a good standard of education. Since then, it has sustained its strengths in the calm, positive environment it provides for children's learning, the very good support it offers for children's personal and social development, and good teaching. Some of the action points from the last inspection have been tackled. The school has reviewed the quality of group times, but these do not yet always provide a coherent enough experience for the children. The school now has policies for most aspects of its work, though a few have still to be developed. Plans have been drawn up to improve the entrance to the building, but funds have not yet been provided by the local authority to carry out these improvements. The school has many strengths on which it can build, and is in a good position to raise standards still further.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about the achievements of children in relation to the desirable learning outcomes at the age of five.

Performance in:		Key
language and literacy	C	well above average A
mathematics	C	above average B
personal and social development	C	average C
other areas of the curriculum	C	below average D
		well below average E

Children start nursery with a very wide range of attainment, and a significant proportion has special educational needs. Taken together, their attainment on entry is below average. They make good progress in all areas of their learning and, by the age of five, many reach the expected standards, and a few exceed them. However, a significant proportion of children who have special educational needs do not reach the expected standards, even though they have made good progress. The children achieve well in relation to their prior attainment, and make particularly good gains in their personal and social development.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children have very good attitudes to school; they are very interested in activities and show good levels of concentration and perseverance for their ages.
Behaviour	Children behave well in school and any inappropriate behaviour is soon channelled in to productive activity; the children know the routines of the nursery and respond well to the good role models provided by the staff; there have been no exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between children and with teachers are very good; children grow in confidence and independence during their time at nursery.
Attendance	Attendance varies, with periods when there is significant absence from school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:		<i>Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; sound; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Sound' means that strengths outweigh any weaknesses.</i>
Lessons seen overall	GOOD	

Teaching was sound or better in all the sessions observed. In 24 per cent of sessions it was very good, and in 69 per cent it was good or better. Teaching has a number of very strong features, particularly the very good knowledge the staff have about how young children learn best, the very good management of children's behaviour, and the way in which the staff enrich the children's experience of language. The staff know the children very well and organise activities effectively to meet their varying needs. They gently guide and challenge the children, so that they investigate and learn. Teaching is good across all areas of learning, including early literacy and numeracy, and particularly effective in promoting children's personal and social development. Staff take every opportunity to nurture children's self-esteem, confidence and independence. Teaching meets the needs of all children and is particularly supportive for those who have special educational needs. As a result of the strengths of teaching, children show a high level of interest in their work and play, tackle tasks with confidence and make good gains in learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the nursery provides a broad, balanced and rich curriculum, which enables children to develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding; the freedom given to children to choose their own tasks sometimes results in them not taking full advantage of skilled teaching and planned activities; the oldest children do not have enough focused teaching to prepare them for infant school.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Good: the needs of these children are identified early and they are well supported so that they can take full advantage of the activities provided; their personal and social skills develop very well.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	A few children have English as an additional language and they are well supported so that they can gain full benefit from learning experiences.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good: provision for children's personal development is a very high priority and features in all aspects of the work of the school; provision for children's social and moral development is particularly strong; good provision for spiritual and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its children	The school provides very good care and support for its children through the good relationships it enjoys with families and a range of effective policies and procedures; procedures for monitoring children's achievements and progress are good but time-consuming, and not always consistent or clearly focused.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school has a good partnership with parents, which supports children's learning very well.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and key staff	Good: the headteacher provides good leadership and has a very clear vision for the work of the school; all the staff work hard to achieve the school's aims, particularly those related to giving the children the confidence to mix socially and to learn.
How well the governing body fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body provides good support for the school, even though many governors are new to their role; governors visit the nursery regularly and their work in supporting children with special educational needs is particularly strong; governors do not play an active enough role in planning the future development of the school, or in assisting the school to monitor and raise standards.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, so that these can be made even better.
The use of resources	Financial planning and management, of limited funding, are sound, and principles of best value are followed.
The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources	The school has sufficient staff, who are committed and hard working; optimum use is made of the limited indoor accommodation; the spacious garden area is a real asset; learning resources are very good in range and quality.

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 enjoy going to nursery and make good progress. ▪ Behaviour in the school is good. ▪ Teaching is good. ▪ The school is approachable if parents have problems. ▪ The school has high expectations of what children can achieve. ▪ The school helps children to become mature and responsible. ▪ The school is well led and managed. 	Parents raised no significant issues.

The great majority of parents are pleased with most aspects of the school's work, and inspectors' judgements support parents' positive views.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

Children's achievements

1. When they join the nursery, the children have a very wide range of attainment. Many have distinct special needs, such as a very limited facility with language or emotional and behavioural difficulties. About a third of the children are referred by outside agencies for their place at the nursery because they have special needs. Equally, some children have a good level of knowledge, skills and understanding, and are confident and articulate for their ages, but they are in the minority. Overall, attainment when children start nursery is below average. This is a similar situation to the last inspection, but a marked change is that far fewer children now stay in the nursery until close to their fifth birthday because many start primary school earlier. This has affected the balance of ages and attainment in the nursery, because it is often the older children with special needs who remain, with parents of average and higher attainers deciding that their children are ready for primary school. At this inspection, there were only nine children in the nursery approaching their fifth birthday, including two higher attainers and three with special needs. For this reason, it was difficult to reach secure, overall judgements about whether children reach the desirable learning outcomes by the age of five.

2. In all areas of their learning, children achieve well in relation to their starting points and they make good progress. This is because the nursery provides a rich curriculum, full of opportunities to explore learning. The staff exploit these opportunities very well through skilled teaching, guiding the children and extending their language, skills and understanding. They emphasise the development of children's personal and social skills, and capitalise on this development to encourage all other aspects of children's learning. As a result, most children are confident learners, who enjoy their activities and show a high degree of independence. The school has sustained the strengths noted at the last inspection, enabling children to make good gains in learning.

3. For the many children with special educational needs, achievements are often made in small steps, or they spend considerable time growing comfortable in the nursery before they start to make progress. Once settled, all these children make good, often very good gains in learning, sensitively supported and challenged by the staff. Many have delayed language development, and the staff are particularly skilled in modelling and enriching speech. A child with particular special needs took part in the full range of activities, and was clearly learning all the time, sometimes well supported by a member of staff, but often playing with a friend. Many of these children cease to need the level of support they required when they began nursery, and they are so well integrated that it is often difficult to identify them. As at the last inspection, the school continues to provide a very good setting for children with special educational needs. The few children who have English as an additional language also make good progress, benefiting from similar, high-quality support. There are no significant variations in pupils' achievements by gender.

4. Children make very good progress in their **personal and social development**. Many arrive with limited experience of co-operating, choosing independently or persevering with an

activity, but they soon respond to the expectations of the nursery. Most children are confident, enthusiastic participants in a wide range of well-planned activities, and many persevere with a particular activity for a sustained period of time. Some children find sharing and taking turns difficult, but the staff constantly emphasise the importance of this, with good effect. The provision of role-play areas encourages the children to play together, such as when cooking and washing up in the kitchen. Children develop their sense of right and wrong, as seen during a group time when they discussed gentle and hurting touches. Some children have challenging behaviour but all staff consistently and calmly reinforce the agreed approach very successfully. By the time the children reach five, most will meet or exceed the desired outcomes in this area of learning.

5. Children make good progress in developing their **language and literacy** skills, particularly with speaking and listening, through high quality adult intervention and support. Children enjoy hearing stories well read, and they are beginning to listen to each other, particularly in circle times. Most children listen well to adults who all find time to talk with individuals, encouraging them to respond appropriately. The high quality, constant oral interaction by all adults with the children results in very good gains in their spoken language. Children enjoy sitting close to an adult in a small group or individually, hearing favourite stories. Most of the children can read their own name, and many read the names of others in their group. Some older children write their names, understanding the need for a capital letter to start it. Progress can be seen in the work of the older, higher-attaining pupils as they move from mark making to writing conventional letters. Many children should reach the required learning outcomes for language and literacy by the time they are five, while some will exceed them and others with specific language disorders will not achieve them.

6. Children make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of **mathematics**. Most children develop a good range of mathematical language related to number, size, shape and capacity. For example, in their play with sand and water, they know when containers are full or empty, or which container holds the most. Higher attainers recognise and can name simple plane shapes, and they talk about the number of sides. Most of the oldest children can count to 10 and recognise these numerals, with higher attainers being able to count beyond 20. The oldest, higher-attaining children are beginning to use some simple number operations, for example knowing that six and two more is eight. Children are familiar with number rhymes and songs. They use their understanding of number to solve practical problems, such as whether there are enough chairs for a group of children. There is a wide range of attainment amongst the children approaching their fifth birthday, with about half on course to exceed national expectations, and a few children with special educational needs who will not reach this standard.

7. Children make good progress in developing their **knowledge and understanding of the world**, though gains in the scientific and technological aspects are better than for historical and geographical understanding. Older children can explain what plants need to grow, and are fascinated by the small creatures they find under logs in the garden. Children work with a wide range of materials and learn about the similarities and differences in their properties. They develop their skills in making things, using a variety of tools, and a wide range of construction kits. Children show very good skills in working with information technology, use a 'mouse' well to select items on the computer screen, and explore a range of programs.

Older, higher-attaining children know something about where they live, and can name some special buildings in the town, such as the station and shops. Children are developing a sense of the past. They talk about events that happened when they were younger, and recall memorable moments, such as receiving their presents at Christmas. Of those children approaching their fifth birthday, about half are on course to exceed national expectations in their knowledge and understanding of the world, but a few children with special educational needs will not reach this standard.

8. Children make good progress in their **physical development**. They move confidently in the garden area, playing on the range of wheeled toys. Most develop the balance to graduate from the tricycles and scooters, to the bicycles. All children use the climbing equipment, and some use ladders to create additional challenges. Both indoors and outdoors, children show good development in their handling of tools, construction kits and a variety of materials. All children develop their manipulative skills well in a range of contexts, for example using scissors, saws and hammers in their model making. Children learn how to use various sizes of brushes to paint, from broad brushes used to 'paint' the outside shed with water, to finer brushes in their easel painting. The good development of children's manipulative skills results in many of the older children using pens and pencils well to begin to make marks and eventually to write their own names. All of the children who are approaching their fifth birthday are meeting or exceeding the desired outcomes in this area of their learning.

9. Children make good progress in their **creative development**. Many choose to paint and are confident in their use of colour, making bold shapes and patterns. They enjoy printing too, one pupil hand printing confidently using two colours, while another painted the faces of a box, then printed with both sizes of rectangle. Children explore a wide range of textures, such as wet and dry sand, tea, clay and dough. Their imaginations led them to make birthday cakes from the black dough, and as they explored and squeezed the clay, they expressed how it felt. In role-play areas, children dress up and act out scenes, such as being bears or police. The Story Sack collection of artefacts led to many children re-enacting the story of Goldilocks and then creating their own stories using the characters. Children experiment with musical instruments and enjoy singing well-known songs. Most children are on track to reach the desirable learning outcomes by the age of five.

Children's attitudes, values and personal development

10. As at the time of the last inspection, children have a very positive attitude to school. They are happy and eager to come to the nursery, and most go straight to one of the many activities on offer with every sign of enjoyment. Children are very interested in the activities provided and they move confidently from one to another. They make enthusiastic use of the large and attractive outdoor play area. They are confident in asking and answering questions, and they generally have good levels of concentration and persevere with tasks. Some children, however, find concentration more difficult and need extra guidance from staff to make suitable choices and organise their time. Children with special educational needs are equally as enthusiastic as others and are keen to take part in all activities.

11. Most children choose appropriate resources for what they want to do and listen carefully to instructions. For example, children use a vice, drill, hammer and nails sensibly and they

select ladders from storage in the garden area to create access to a slide platform. Their confidence and high level of initiative enables them to take part in these activities with very little direct supervision, unless this is needed on safety grounds. Children work well in groups and pairs, for example in role-play situations, giving each other rides on wheeled toys, or sharing tools to make playdough into 'birthday cakes'. They are beginning to appreciate how their actions affect others and to consider the feelings of others, as was seen in a group time when children discussed gentle and hurtful touching. Children show respect for property and resources such as Story Sack items, musical instruments and the finished work of others, which is left out ready to be taken home.

12. Behaviour is good, with children moving sensibly in and out of all areas of the nursery. Although there are occasional disagreements, these are soon sorted out and children generally play amicably together. Lunchtimes are relaxed and sociable. Children show respect and affection for the staff, and clearly enjoy working with them. They are polite and confident with visitors. There are very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour and there have never been any exclusions. Although some children have emotional and behavioural special needs, these were rarely evident during the inspection because the staff manage and guide these children so skilfully.

13. Although attendance is not statutory, recent absences have been as high as 20 per cent, with only some due to illness. Punctuality is generally good but some parents bring their children to the nursery up to an hour after the start of the session.

14. Personal development is enhanced by the very good level of initiative that children take, selecting confidently from the wide range of activities and equipment. They respond positively to the high expectations of staff in this respect. Although not all children can be persuaded to help with tidying up and putting equipment away, most do so willingly.

HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN TAUGHT?

15. All the staff in the nursery share the task of teaching the children, and they all have considerable skills. The judgements in this section refer to all their contributions. The quality of teaching is good overall, with a number of very strong features. Children learn within a very calm, secure and encouraging environment and this helps them to make good progress. Teaching was sound or better in all the sessions observed, good in 69 per cent, and very good in 24 per cent. This represents a high standard of teaching compared with the national picture. Teaching is good across all areas of learning, and particularly effective in nurturing children's personal and social development and in encouraging progress in their acquisition of language. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection, and now includes a larger proportion of good and very good teaching.

16. The staff have a very good knowledge of how young children learn best, which is clear from the way in which they interact with them and guide their learning. For example, adults often initiate an activity, or teach a skill, and then gradually withdraw to enable the children to develop their work independently. In this way, children learn how to learn, and develop their own skills, rather than being reliant on an adult. In the workshop area, many examples were

observed of children being taught how to use tools or how to join materials, and then being encouraged to use and develop their new skills independently. The staff know that young children need to be secure and confident before they can learn, and so they provide a very positive environment in which children's ideas are valued, support is offered, and there is much praise for success. The staff know the children very well, and this enables them to judge the right amount of challenge. For example, in a group time, some children were asked to select their own name card and those of others by looking at the initial letters, some were given the initial letter to match to their name, whilst others were guided to their selection. The very good knowledge that staff possess results in good gains in learning for the children, and increased interest and independence.

17. The quality of teaching for children with special educational needs is particularly strong. These children's needs are very well met by the rich variety of activities in the nursery, and staff have high expectations of progress. Adults provide very good support for these children, but they also encourage them to be independent. For example, an adult supporting a child with particular needs encouraged her to work with a friend in the garden area, exploring and riding on a truck, and then discussed the sensation of speed and the noise made by the wheels. Children with special educational needs are gently guided in to productive activity, as was seen when a boy was persuaded to paint because he was unable to settle to another task. Quieter and isolated children are often judiciously paired with others so that they gain the confidence to try a new activity. As a result of very skilled teaching, children with special educational needs are effectively integrated in the nursery and make very good progress.

18. The staff teach basic skills all the time. In language and literacy, adults constantly enrich children's language through conversation and questioning, model good reading skills and, when they are ready, encourage children to write. For example, children made models and parcels in the workshop area and were then asked to write their name on them. All the children made their own attempts to do so. In mathematics, counting, and discussion of size, shape and quantity are integrated in a wide range of activities, from deciding which bear will fit each bed, to counting pieces of fruit at group time. Staff teach children how to use tools, or how to use the 'mouse' to select items on the computer screen, or how to tackle the climbing frame. All these basic skills are well taught so that children understand what they are trying to achieve and can make the next step in their learning.

19. Staff plan the activities provided for the children carefully, they are generally clear about the purpose of each one, and they know what they intend the children to achieve. The best activities are those where staff have a particular focus, such as when children used pegboards and pinboards to explore patterns and shapes. Some activities, such as play in the sandpit, do not always have a clear enough structure to enable children to solve problems or develop particular concepts.

20. Staff have high but realistic expectations of what children can achieve. The emphasis is on providing a gentle challenge, so that children grow in confidence whilst making gains in learning. Often, adults challenge children by their good use of open-ended questions, which prompt a response and extend children's use of language. For example, children playing with the 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' Story Sack were asked a series of questions about the contents that required them to think and respond. Staff also challenge children by making

suggestions about how they might extend their work, and often staff mention a range of choices, so that the child has to consider the best way forward. Above all, it is a strength that staff make no judgements about what children can and cannot achieve. They give children the freedom to make their own choices, and to find their own challenges, and children often spend weeks trying to master a particular skill.

21. Staff use a very good range of teaching methods that are well suited to encouraging young children to learn. They have very good skills in judging when and how to intervene in children's play and learning. Sometimes they leave an individual or group to tackle an activity, and they observe the learning, because they want the children to be independent. Sometimes they work alongside children, posing questions, making suggestions, and assessing progress. Sometimes they lead the learning, directing activities, explaining and asking questions. Staff are very adept at moving from one type of teaching to another. For example, the children's activity in the garden area is largely independent, but staff intervene when necessary to support children's learning. One group of children decided that they would like to use large paintbrushes to 'paint' the shed with water, and an adult helped them to find all the equipment they needed. It was only later that another adult questioned them about what they had been doing and what they had observed. There was a much more focused approach to teaching when children mixed porridge, because the adult wanted the children to observe the changes carefully. The very good organisation of all the teaching areas, and the high level of independence encouraged in the children, enables the staff to concentrate on choosing the best way to support learning.

22. The staff have established warm and positive relationships with the children, which underpin their very good management of behaviour. A number of the children have emotional and behavioural special needs, but these were rarely evident during the inspection. Most of the time, children are well occupied in their activities, and this promotes good behaviour. Occasional disagreements about sharing equipment are sensitively dealt with by the staff, who use explanation and reason to reach a solution. It is clear that the children respect this approach. The staff use praise and encouragement well to reinforce good behaviour.

23. Staff are successful in ensuring a relaxed, supportive approach to children's learning, and so the pace of work is largely dictated by children's choices rather than by adults. In some instances, this means children do not benefit from the very good activities that are provided for them. For example, a very good music time was only experienced by a small number of children, and two adults found themselves virtually redundant in one session because the children did not choose to join their activities. In these sessions, staff time is not used well and too few children are guided to participate. In the group times, staff too often find themselves rushed, and so they do not have enough time for activities, such as sharing a book in sufficient detail. At the last inspection, the timing and purpose of group times was a key issue, which the school has still not fully addressed. The school's wide range of resources is used well by the staff, and every inch of space is used effectively in the rather cramped building.

24. Staff use good, informal strategies to assess pupils' achievements and progress. Key staff have a group of children for whom they are particularly responsible, and they monitor the progress of these children carefully. All staff make jotted notes of observations during sessions and then share these with each other at the end of the day. At their meeting,

however, staff focus more on evaluating the success of activities than on discussing the learning of individual children. This results in some children not being monitored closely enough. The nursery provides a good range of activities for children to do at home, mainly concerned with stories and reading. Many families benefit from the Story Sacks, and comment about how much they have enjoyed them. Some families become involved in particular initiatives, such as the current Family Numeracy Project, with activities designed to help them enrich their children's learning at home.

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

25. The nursery provides a broad, balanced and rich curriculum, which meets the needs of all the children, and effectively promotes development in all areas of learning. There are particularly good experiences to encourage children's personal and social development, enrich their language, and strengthen their practical skills. The curriculum is well planned and organised, around a theme. During the inspection, work 'All about three' was developed well through story, number and practical activities. A great strength is the way that staff integrate children's learning so that one activity promotes knowledge, skills and understanding in many areas. For example, making puppets encompassed language development in discussing the materials to use, and in performing afterwards; mathematical ideas in selecting the shape, size and number of components; practical skills in cutting and joining; and personal and social development in sharing tools or working independently. In this way, whilst an activity has a main focus, all activities contain a balance of learning.

26. The nursery allows children to choose the activities they will pursue and, whilst this has strengths in encouraging independence, it also means that some children may not choose to take full advantage of the broad curriculum. During the inspection, individual children were tracked, and this showed that they chose a narrow range of experiences, or had little contact with adults. Over a longer period of time, records of children's progress show that they do take part in the full range of activities. Adhering to the principle of independence also results in some focus activities not being chosen by the children, and so staff are not able to use their considerable teaching skills as effectively as they would wish. The small number of older, higher-attaining children do not come together for activities that would prepare them for the next stage in their education, and this continues to be a weakness, as noted at the last inspection. Staff and governors believe strongly in the current approach.

27. A large proportion of each session, about two hours, is taken with choice activities, and the final 20 minutes is a group time when children come together with their key worker. At the time of inspection, the school was trialling a Nurturing Programme in group time, and this provided many valuable experiences promoting children's personal and social development. However, these sessions often began late, and staff did not have enough time to pursue all activities to the depth they had planned. The wide range of age and prior attainment in these groups is beneficial socially, but makes it difficult for staff to target their teaching. For example, sharing a book with the youngest children requires a different approach than might be adopted with the older ones. A key issue at the last inspection was the structure of these sessions, and the school has not yet fully addressed this weakness.

28. The curriculum provides many opportunities for children to develop early skills in literacy and numeracy. For example, the rich variety of work associated with 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' stimulated much 'reading', acting of the story, counting, and matching of sizes and shapes. Through its Parents in Partnership group, and capitalising on links with adult education, the school is successfully involved with Family Literacy and Numeracy projects. Although it is difficult for the nursery to arrange visits out of school, owing to the need for a high ratio of adults to children, there are some trips to local places of interest. The school does have a range of visitors from the local community, such as the police and a librarian. Recently, a group of staff and children shared examples of their Family Literacy Project work with Her Majesty the Queen during her visit to Horsham.

29. Children with special educational needs, and those with English as an additional language, thrive on the wide variety of activities provided in the nursery. Their needs are usually identified before they join the nursery, through the very good links the school has with outside agencies, and the involvement of knowledgeable governors. Staff plan for the special needs of these children carefully, support them well, and monitor their progress closely. The school has targets for each child's learning, but these have not yet been developed in to detailed individual education plans. The school is successful in ensuring that all children have equal access and opportunity within the curriculum.

30. There is very good provision for children's social and moral development, which is part and parcel of the daily life of the nursery. Children learn to work and play together, and they are encouraged to take turns and share equipment. The staff use disagreements to teach good social behaviour, and to make moral points about respecting the views of others. Children build very warm relationships with each other and with the staff, which support their social development. The organisation of the nursery helps children to build their independence and use their initiative. Routines such as toileting, hand washing and lunchtimes are used well to teach social skills. In group times, children consider issues such as hurtful and gentle touching, and stories are used to reinforce these messages.

31. Provision for spiritual development is good, with staff taking opportunities to encourage children to marvel and reflect. For example, a spider hanging on its thread caused great fascination for one group of children, whilst others were amazed by the small creatures living under the logs in the garden. Children have a good introduction to the indigenous culture, through popular stories, rhymes and songs, and the school values the diversity of cultures to which a number of the children belong. Nonetheless, the curriculum does not reflect a wide enough range of cultures, for example in the writing on display or the literature available.

32. The school has good links with a range of schools and colleges. Although children transfer to 19 different primary schools, the nursery encourages visits from staff to meet the children, and sustains relationships. A number of students from colleges and secondary schools work successfully in the nursery as part of their courses.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS CHILDREN?

33. The school has maintained the many strengths in the care and support it offers children that were noted at the last inspection. The headteacher and all staff know the children very well and provide a safe, happy and caring environment, as expressed in the school aims. Relationships throughout the school are very good. The school places great emphasis on promoting the children's personal development and procedures are very effective. Staff discuss individual children's progress regularly, ensuring all members of the team are aware of any issues. The recently introduced 'Nurturing Programme' is supporting the school's very good provision, as the children discuss social and moral issues in their group times.

34. The staff pay close attention to the welfare and progress of children with special educational needs. They identify special needs carefully, and provide effective support to ensure that these children gain the most from the activities provided. Support is always thoughtfully balanced with the need to develop confidence and independence. Progress is tracked very carefully, and shared with all the staff, so that there are clear targets for the next stage of these children's development.

35. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very effective. There is a very useful policy, which reinforces the school's wish that all children should be kind, co-operative and considerate, respecting others and their property. It identifies how the school will promote this code of conduct and actions to be taken, if necessary. The policy has been shared with all staff, and is clearly in use throughout the school. Parents agree that behaviour is good.

36. The school uses the Local Education Authority's child protection policy, and staff have been alerted to the issues by the headteacher, who is the designated officer. Fire drills are held termly and the school has recently had a new fire alarm system installed. First aid procedures are good, with several trained members of staff. All incidents are noted and parents called if necessary. The school has drawn up a very good policy for safety in the garden, showing points about which staff should be vigilant in each area and on each piece of equipment. Although a formal risk assessment has not been carried out, the staff are very aware of any potential health and safety issues and these are dealt with immediately, to ensure the safety of all children.

37. Procedures to monitor attendance include contacting parents of children who are away without having notified the school. Sometimes other agencies are involved, though attendance is not a statutory requirement in a nursery.

38. The staff evaluate sessions, both for individual children's involvement and progress, and also to judge the value and success of the activities. They keep very detailed records of the children's progress and achievements in all areas of learning, though there are some inconsistencies in practice. Regular team meetings enable staff to share and note evidence, which is added to the cumulative records. At the same time, they discuss strategies to support individual children, if appropriate. The cumulative record format is useful, with prompts for aspects of each area of learning to guide the assessments. These prompts are helpfully displayed in each room as observation guidelines. A great deal of time is spent in discussing

and compiling these good records. The school is rightly aware that they need to reconsider the manageability and usefulness of such detail. The assessments do not always refer to identified learning intentions and so sometimes lack focus, though they do ensure that all staff have a full knowledge of each child.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

39. The continued strength of the school's partnership with parents since the last inspection makes a considerable contribution to the quality of pupils' education. Parents are very supportive and appreciative of the work of the nursery. All parents at the pre-inspection meeting, and the great majority of those who returned the questionnaire, felt that they are well informed about their children's progress and that the school works closely with them. Parents are agreed that the flexibility of settling-in arrangements is a very good feature, which allows any problems to be easily addressed as they arise. Inspectors agree with all these points. Some parents would like to have more information about the structure and content of the special group sessions.

40. Several parents help in the nursery or in other practical ways. They take washing and ironing home, cover books, go shopping for items the school needs and make very imaginative contents for Story Sacks. The well-established Parents in Partnership project, run by an adult education worker, helps parents to work with their children and is well supported. Most parents read with their children at home and many of those who borrow the Story Sacks make notes on their use for others to share. The Horsham Nursery School Association organises a range of fund-raising events such as an annual sponsored walk, cake sales and a summer fete. About £2000 was raised last year for such items as new resources for the home corner, storage equipment and a digital camera. Funds have also been set aside to provide an extra cabin on the site.

41. Information provided by the school for parents is very good. There are valuable opportunities for informal discussions with parents at the beginning and end of sessions. The gradual induction process ensures that parents know exactly how their child is settling in. A meeting is arranged during a child's first term to discuss any problems and to assess progress. In addition, the head teacher holds regular meetings with parents whose children have special educational needs. Final written reports are prepared prior to children going on to the next stage of their education. Newsletters are friendly and informative about what the children will be learning. Useful information about the curriculum is also displayed on the notice board in the school entrance.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

42. The leadership and management of the school are sound overall, with particular areas of strength, and others requiring improvement. All the staff work hard to achieve the school's aims and are particularly successful in providing a safe and secure environment and giving the children confidence to learn and to mix socially.

43. The headteacher provides good leadership. She has a very strongly held vision for the work of the school, based on valuing children, parents and staff and providing a friendly, well resourced environment where children will learn happily. She has created a strong, committed team of teachers, nursery nurses and support assistants who all work industriously for the benefit of the children. Parents feel the school is well led and managed and express their sadness at the imminent retirement of the headteacher.

44. The headteacher also co-ordinates effectively the school's provision for children with special educational needs. She has good relationships with a range of outside agencies, which ensure that special needs are identified early and are addressed in the nursery. She keeps staff well informed of any matters concerning these children, though the formulation of individual education plans and targets requires some development. Other records are well kept, and parents are closely involved in supporting the progress of their children.

45. Many members of the governing body are recently appointed. They are very supportive, interested and involved in the life of the school. They meet at least once a term and all manage to visit the school during the working day, which the staff welcome and appreciate. Governors recognise that their visits are informal and often unannounced and are considering whether they should formalise the process more and identify a particular focus for a visit. They are developing an understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but are not yet monitoring the work of the school systematically. They are benefiting from attendance at training sessions and are currently working hard to prepare for the important task of appointing a new headteacher.

46. Although the headteacher has drawn up the outlines of a school development plan, this has not been shared with staff or governors. The priorities for development identified are appropriate, but they have not been expanded into action plans. Consequently it is not clear how they will be addressed, who will be involved and how any resulting benefits will be measured and evaluated. Governors need to take a more active and strategic role in planning the future development of the school.

47. At the present time the school only monitors the quality of teaching and learning informally, and there are no formal procedures. The previous inspection identified the need for a system of staff appraisal, but this has not been developed.

48. The staff's expertise and experience are very well matched to the demands of the curriculum for under-fives, and many having received additional training and qualifications. The indoor areas are limited in space, particularly the workshop, but the staff make optimum use of them. Each room has resources and equipment for particular aspects of learning, and staff circulate half-termly between the different areas. They have mounted excellent displays of children's work and stimulus material throughout the school. The plentiful resources are carefully organised so that they are accessible to the children, encouraging their independence and providing many opportunities for choice. Additional computers are soon to be provided. The outdoor garden area provides outstanding facilities for the children, and as part is under cover, can continue to be used in inclement weather. The very cramped reception area for parents has not been improved since the previous inspection. Although plans were drawn up, finance was not available from the local authority. Specific grants, such as for the current Numeracy Project and for the Parents in Partnership work, have been used appropriately and effectively.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

49. The school has many strengths and very few weaknesses. It has a very good, shared ethos that places a strong emphasis on the personal and social development of each child, within a secure and caring environment. It provides a rich and stimulating curriculum, and good teaching, which ensure that the children make good progress in all areas of learning. Within this context, and to improve the standards of work and the pupils' achievements, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- ◆ strengthen the strategic leadership of the school, by:
 - involving staff and governors in planning the future development of the school and formulating a plan for improvement;
 - increasing the focus on evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, so that strengths and weaknesses are identified, and action taken to improve standards;
 - introducing a process of staff appraisal;
 - ensuring that all staff and governors are involved in formulating policies, and that they all have copies of them.

(paragraphs 45-47)

In addition to the key issues, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan. Each weakness is followed by a reference to the paragraph(s) in which it is discussed.

- ◆ review the way in which curriculum time is used, by:
 - providing some more focused teaching for the oldest children, in preparation for starting infant school;
 - improving the arrangements for group times at the end of nursery sessions, so that sufficient time is allowed to enable staff to provide a coherent experience for the children.

(paragraphs 23, 26-27)

- ◆ rationalise procedures for assessing and recording children's achievements and progress, so that they are more focused and manageable, and consistently completed.

(paragraph 38)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	29
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	24	45	31	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	46
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	6

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	19

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

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

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	N/A

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	N/A

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and support staff

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	31

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	99

Number of pupils per FTE adult	8
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	8673.00
Total expenditure	8796.00
Expenditure per pupil	170.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	0.00
Balance carried forward to next year	- 123.00

NB The school does not have fully delegated funding.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	78
Number of questionnaires returned	48

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	92	6	0	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	63	31	4	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	53	40	0	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	43	9	0	14
The teaching is good.	65	31	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	42	42	6	6	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	81	17	0	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	35	49	5	0	12
The school works closely with parents.	58	29	4	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	75	19	2	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	64	32	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	54	33	4	0	9

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

50. The school aims show the priority given to this area of learning. They emphasise the importance of children having opportunities to experiment and express themselves in a happy, caring environment and to gain confidence to share and mix socially. The aims are realised very successfully throughout the school. The children, many of whom arrive with limited experience of co-operating, choosing independently or persevering with an activity, make very good progress. As the previous inspection report indicated, this is a particular strength of the school.

51. Children arrive happily each day and quickly settle in their preferred area, clearly understanding the routines. They know they need an apron if they are painting, a coat if going outside and to wash their hands after certain activities. Most are confident, enthusiastic participants in a wide range of well-planned activities, though some are not so keen to be involved when tidying up is mentioned! Many children persevere with a particular activity for a sustained period of time. For example, several groups spent time using models and toys to act out the well loved story of Goldilocks. Others persevered with their model making in the workshop, showing initiative and independence as they confidently selected materials and used tools appropriately. The very good storage arrangements of all materials and equipment enable the children to select whatever they need, without necessarily asking for adult help.

52. Many children are still quite solitary in their play, though a number are developing social skills and share times with friends. For example, children bought and sold imaginary buns together, some played with the train set, sharing ideas and situations, while others co-operated on the see saw. Some children find sharing and taking turns difficult, but the staff constantly emphasise the importance of this, with good effect. For example, one child did not want to share the toys when acting out a story, but through sensitive intervention by the teacher, the children co-operated well, with each taking a particular role. Children show a caring approach to a child with particular special needs, taking her for a ride in a wheeled vehicle outside, or helping her settle on a cushion to join in with a musical activity. The provision of role-play areas encourages the children to play together, such as when cooking and washing up in the kitchen.

53. The arrangements for those children who stay for lunch contribute very effectively to their social development. Similarly, the sharing of fruit during group times each session is helpful, though at times there is insufficient emphasis on saying 'thank you'. Currently the school is piloting a 'Nurturing Programme' and this is also supporting the children's developing understanding of right and wrong. In a very good session, the children clearly understood the differences between gentle and hurting touches, enjoying hugging each other and then talking about hurtful touches such as 'kicking, scratching and banging your head'.

54. There is a useful policy for personal and social development, which has been revised recently. Some children have challenging behaviour but all staff consistently and calmly reinforce the agreed approach very successfully, showing high expectations. By the time the children reach five, most children will meet or exceed the desired outcomes in this area of learning.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

55. On entry to the nursery, children have a wide range of language skills, with many having language disorders and communication difficulties. Approximately a quarter of the children have been identified as requiring speech therapy. However, they all make good progress at their various levels, particularly with speaking and listening, through the high quality adult intervention and support.

56. There are many carefully planned initiatives to enhance the children's language and literacy development. For example, the school took part in a Family Literacy Project last year, which benefited many children, not just the ten who were specifically involved. From this, increased parental support resulted and the excellent Story Sack library developed. These collections of stories and associated artefacts are enjoyed in school and at home by families, who write enthusiastically about their use. The school encourages further home support by lending story tapes and books and encouraging parents to borrow books for their younger children from the Babies Need Books collection. The school gives parents a very useful booklet called 'Enjoying Books with Your Child'.

57. Children enjoy hearing stories well read, including taped stories. They are beginning to listen to each other, particularly in circle times. They understand the use of a soft toy, to be held by the child who is speaking, while the others in the group all listen. Most children listen well to adults who all find time to interact with individuals most effectively, encouraging them to respond appropriately. For example, in a very good workshop session, the teacher asked a child if he would like to stick one piece of paper to another. He listened carefully as the teacher explained how to use the sticky tape, then used his new found skill repeatedly.

58. The high quality, constant oral interaction by all adults with the children results in very good gains in their spoken language. There is an emphasis on asking the children what they plan to do, what they will need, how they will develop their ideas. This high quality open questioning encourages a response from each child. The role-play areas provide valuable opportunities for the children to speak to each other as they engage in imaginative play. The recent focus on 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' is proving very popular with the children, who enjoy acting out the story, using appropriate voices for the three bears.

59. There is a good supply of books in the school, and children enjoy sitting close to an adult in a small group or individually, listening to favourite stories. Books about the children, with photographs and captions, are enjoyed too. In daily group times, the children often hear a story. However, the wide range of age and ability in each group means at times, while the older, higher-attaining children want to discuss the pictures and story line, the younger children are not able to join in. In addition, some group times are rather short and do not provide sufficient opportunity to discuss the book in any detail. Older children, who are soon

to leave the nursery, do not benefit from some times together, where the focus is at an appropriate level of challenge and interest for them. Most of the children can read their own name, and many read the names of others in their group. During the inspection, some chose to join a very valuable activity where they were supported in reading words associated with the Goldilocks story. An older child made a sentence, using the word cards on a magnetic board. All rooms have many labels on the excellent displays, sometimes showing children's own words.

60. The school provides many opportunities for children to make marks, as the initial stage of learning to write, and staff value all efforts. Some older children write their names, understanding the need for a capital letter to start it. Examples of children's writing are kept in their record folders. Progress can be seen in the samples of the older, higher-attaining pupils as they move from mark making to writing conventional letters. This could be further developed if they had a special group time together, as the previous inspection report indicated.

61. There is a policy for language and literacy, but the school recognises it requires updating. Many children should reach the required learning outcomes for language and literacy by the time they are five, while some will exceed them and others with specific language disorders will not achieve them.

MATHEMATICS

62. Children of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of mathematics because the nursery provides a rich diet of experiences for them to learn through play and discussion. Some activities have a specific mathematical focus, such as when the children play with coloured wood blocks, patterning, matching and counting. In some activities, the mathematical experiences are integrated with other areas of learning. For example, children refined their description of relative sizes during their play with toys retelling the story of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. The staff also exploit the many opportunities for talking about number, shape and size that are part and parcel of the routines of the nursery, as seen when children counted pieces of fruit during group time and discussed whether there were enough for one piece each. The current topic 'All about three' has generated a range of number activities, and the variety of children's work on display shows their understanding of 'threeness' in a range of contexts.

63. Most children develop a good range of mathematical language related to number, size, shape and capacity. As well as talking about objects being bigger or smaller than others, the oldest children understand the idea of one group having more or less items than another, or being the same. In their play with sand and water, they know when containers are full or empty, or which container holds the most. Higher attainers recognise and can name simple plane shapes, and they talk about the number of sides. Although there is a wide range of attainment amongst the children approaching their fifth birthday, most can count to 10 and recognise these numerals, with higher attainers being able to count beyond 20. Higher attainers recognise the number in a small group, say five, without counting, but lower attainers are still developing the ability to count a group of objects accurately and often make mistakes in matching their counting to the objects. In the garden, staff encourage children to use logs

as stepping stones and count as they step. Most of the children step and count accurately, with higher attainers able to write a sequence of numbers on the logs. The oldest, higher-attaining children are beginning to use some simple number operations, for example knowing that six and two more is eight. They know how to write some two-digit numbers. Children are familiar with number rhymes and songs, for instance when singing ‘This old man’ in a music session. They recognise and create patterns, as seen in their work with pegboards. They also use their understanding of number to solve practical problems, such as whether there are enough chairs for a group of children.

64. The staff provide well-judged support and encouragement, posing questions, modelling mathematical language, and guiding investigation, always with the aim of enabling children to take the next step in their understanding. There remains, however, a wide range of attainment amongst the children approaching their fifth birthday, with about half on course to exceed national expectations, and a few children with special educational needs who will not reach this standard.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

65. The nursery provides a particularly strong curriculum to develop children’s scientific and technological skills and understanding, and so they all make good gains in these aspects of their learning. As at the last inspection, progress in developing historical and geographical understanding is sound, but does not receive as much emphasis.

66. In their early scientific learning, children develop good skills in observing living things, handling and exploring materials, and asking questions about how and why things happen. For example, children had planted bulbs and seeds in the garden, and watched as these plants grew and flowered. Older children could explain what they had seen, and knew that the plants need light and water to grow. Children observed a bulb closely using a magnifying container and noticed the roots, the flaking skin and the beginnings of a shoot. As part of their play, children turned over the logs in the garden and were fascinated when they found a variety of small creatures. The teacher encouraged them to observe the slugs, woodlice and ants carefully, noting their features and the way they moved. Children work with a wide range of materials, and learn about the similarities and differences in their properties. For example, children worked with dough coloured black, kneading and shaping it in to cakes, and dry tea, sieving and sifting the leaves. Children mixed porridge and watched the change in its consistency. Staff use these experiences well to develop the language of science. The richness of the curriculum provides many opportunities for children to observe and question scientific events, such as when children rolled car tyres from the top of the mound in the garden, and observed how they travelled. As part of their work about ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’, children discussed temperatures that were too hot, too cold, or just right. A few of the oldest, higher-attaining children are developing a good knowledge of science, as when one child said that there are nine planets in the solar system and went on to name many of them.

67. Children develop their skills in making things, using a variety of materials and tools, and a wide range of construction kits. During the inspection, the workshop area was always busy, and children made Goldilocks’ puppets, in wood, card and fabric, showing good skills in using a range of tools, including saws and hammers. They cut and joined a range of materials, often

being fascinated by the properties of items such as adhesive tape. One of the oldest, higher-attaining children made a realistic mouse, using a card tube, material, netting and tape, which he proudly showed to adults. Children work adeptly with construction kits, often linked to their imaginative play, as when a group of children made a 'bus' out of large wood blocks and took their 'passengers' on a journey. Children work confidently with a range of construction kits, for example when making a marble run, and then watching the marbles roll down.

68. Children show very good skills in working with information technology and, though the nursery has only one computer, it was in use constantly. Most older children use the 'mouse' well to select items on the screen, as was seen when they dressed teddies for varying weather conditions. Number skills were consolidated when children counted and matched items on the screen. Children also showed good skills in using a simple graphics program and were delighted with their finished pictures. Many of the children use a tape recorder confidently to listen to taped stories.

69. During the inspection, there were fewer activities that developed children's geographical understanding, but they do explore the environment around the nursery at various times of the year. Older, higher-attaining children know something about where they live, and can name some special buildings in the town, such as the station and shops. They talk about the places they have been to on holiday, and how they are different from Horsham. Children take the maps out of the store in the garden and use them in imaginative play to find their way about. The older, higher attainers can discuss some of the features on these maps, such as roads, lakes and parks. Children are developing a sense of the past. They talk about events that happened when they were younger, and in one 'group time' children discussed what it must have been like when they were in their mummy's tummy. They recall memorable moments, such as receiving their presents at Christmas. The oldest children know that they will be going to school soon and that this is an important event.

70. A real strength of the nursery is the way in which the activities that develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world are used as opportunities to strengthen all other areas of learning. Of those children approaching their fifth birthday, about half are on course to exceed national expectations in their knowledge and understanding of the world, but a few children with special educational needs will not reach this standard.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

71. Children begin nursery with a wide range of attainment in their physical skills, though this is not as pronounced as in aspects such as language development. All children, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in developing their physical skills because the nursery provides an exceptional variety of equipment and opportunities, which challenges the children and helps them to grow in confidence. As a result, all of the children who are approaching their fifth birthday are meeting or exceeding the desired outcomes in this area of their learning.

72. The spacious garden area is an important strength in encouraging children to extend their physical skills. The children move confidently around this area, taking part in a variety of physical activities, and showing increasing control and awareness of space. For example, all the children play on the many, wheeled toys, and most develop the balance to graduate from

the tricycles and scooters, to the bicycles. One child with special educational needs spent hours mastering the balance needed for a bicycle, and now uses it confidently, at speed, steering adroitly around obstacles. There are also a number of climbing frames and slides, on which most of the children move confidently. Children used ladders to create additional challenges, leaning them against parts of the main climbing frame and climbing to high points. It is a strength that the staff encourage children to be adventurous, whilst keeping a close eye on safety. An illustration of the skills shown by the oldest pupils was when they walked on stilts made of upturned plant pots attached to strings, showing good control. Children also co-operate well in their physical play, rocking a see saw or giving each other rides on the two-person tricycle, which is a particular favourite.

73. Both indoors and outdoors, children show good development in their handling of tools, construction kits and a variety of materials. All children develop their manipulative skills well in a range of contexts, and almost every activity has a physical aspect. For example, children use scissors, saws and hammers in their model making, and staff show them how to use these tools correctly so that they will be safe. One older child cut out the flowers from a piece of self-adhesive wallpaper, with circles that were accurate for her age. Children also use tools effectively to cut and shape dough and clay. Children learn how to use various sizes of brushes to paint, from broad brushes used to 'paint' the outside shed with water, to finer brushes in their easel painting. Children work confidently with construction kits of various types and sizes, as was seen when children made a railway track and then played with the trains. The good development of children's manipulative skills results in many of the older children using pens and pencils well to begin to make marks and eventually to write their own names.

74. The school has a helpful policy for physical development, which emphasises providing a wide range of physical experiences and encouraging children's confidence and independence. These aims are followed through effectively so that all the children make good gains in their physical development.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

75. The children make good progress because they are provided with many opportunities to explore and experiment, developing their creative skills very successfully. Many choose to paint and are confident in their use of colour, making bold shapes and patterns. Some children experiment with colour mixing using fine brushes. Some very good paintings of daffodils are displayed, showing the children have studied the form and colour of the flowers carefully, with high quality results. The focus on the 'Three Little Pigs' before half term and 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' after half term have both led to children's imaginative paintings of the characters in the stories. The children used a range of materials as they made imaginary houses for the three pigs, and beds for the three bears. They enjoy printing too, one pupil hand printing confidently using two colours, while another painted the faces of a box, then printed with both rectangular faces.

76. Children are encouraged to explore a wide range of textures, such as wet and dry sand, tea, clay and dough. Their imaginations led them to make birthday cakes from the black dough, and as they explored and squeezed the clay, they expressed how it felt. In the

workshop, many different materials are available for the children to choose to work with. For example, a child made a purse from fur fabric, another made a puppet from wood with various materials for the clothes and a third made a shaker from a container with small lids inside. These artefacts result from adults discussing the children's ideas with them and encouraging them to extend their ideas, though leaving decisions to the individual child.

77. The role-play areas provide very good opportunities for the children to use their imagination. Similarly, children dress up and act out scenes, such as being bears or police. Two children used the large wooden construction equipment to make a bus and said they were going to the seaside. The Story Sack collection of artefacts had led to many children re-enacting the story of Goldilocks and then creating their own stories using the characters. The children produce their own puppet shows, using the puppets they have made themselves.

78. The provision of a good range of musical instruments enables the children to experiment with different ways to play them and the resulting sounds. They enjoy singing well known songs, such as 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' and 'This Old Man', often adding the appropriate actions. They select tapes to listen to at times. It is a weakness that not all the children can experience the high quality times in the small music area.

79. The previous inspection report indicated that the children's attainment in many creative activities was good, and this is still the case. The school aim for children to experiment and express themselves is realised through the very wide range of activities offered to them, both indoors and outside.