

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **BIRCHWOOD NURSERY SCHOOL**

Hatfield

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117069

Headteacher: Mrs Alex Taylor

Reporting inspector: Mr George Crowther  
18814

Dates of inspection: 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2001

Inspection number: 196554

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 to 5  
Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Birchway  
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Hatfield  
Hertfordshire  
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Appropriate authority: Governing body  
Name of chair of governors: Mrs S Jones  
Date of previous inspection: November 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Birchwood is a large nursery school for boys and girls who are 3-4 years old, most of whom attend for four terms. It has 112 part-time and two full-time children. It is the only nursery school in Hatfield, though a number of primary schools have nursery classes. It draws children from a wide range of social circumstances and from across the town. Since the last inspection, the school has moved to new, purpose-built accommodation, which includes provision for all-day care for some of the children. Taken together, pupils' attainment when they start nursery is below average. A few children attend the nursery owing to special needs that have been identified by outside agencies. Four children are on the register of special educational needs and receive support for a variety of learning and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils needing additional support is about average. About 10 per cent of the children are from ethnic minority backgrounds, but none is learning English as an additional language.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Birchwood Nursery is a good and effective school. It provides a happy, stimulating and well-ordered environment that gives children the confidence to explore a wide range of activities. As a result, they make good progress in all aspects of their learning, and particularly in developing the personal and social skills that support learning. Relationships between all members of the school community are strong. The quality of teaching is consistently good. Staff know the children very well and respond to their individual needs effectively. The curriculum is rich and varied, and children are encouraged to be active and independent in their learning. The headteacher provides strong, purposeful leadership. The staff work well together to sustain the school's many strengths, and plans for future development are well conceived. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Children make good progress in all areas of their learning, and very good progress in developing their personal, social and emotional skills.
- The good quality of teaching provided by all the staff team enables children to become confident learners.
- The school provides a rich and varied curriculum, which stimulates children's learning.
- The school has a very caring approach to all aspects of children's welfare.
- The school has very good links with parents, who have very positive views about what the nursery offers their children.
- The headteacher is a strong, purposeful leader, who unites the staff team and sets high expectations for the quality of education the school provides.

#### **What could be improved**

The inspection team found no significant areas of weakness. There are two minor issues included in the main report, which the school may wish to add to its plans for development.

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When it was inspected last in November 1996, Birchwood Nursery was found to provide a purposeful and successful learning environment that enabled the children to make good progress. Since then, it has sustained its strong commitment to independent learning, the good quality of teaching and a carefully planned curriculum. The action points from the last inspection have been tackled successfully. The school reviewed its plans for improvement and now has in place a clear, well-reasoned set of priorities, linked carefully to available resources. Assessment procedures have been revised and streamlined, and they now provide concise but valuable information showing each child's progress. Assessments of children's skills when they start nursery are now carried out, and the school re-tests children towards the end of their time in nursery to find out how they have progressed. Whole-school planning of the curriculum is now coherent. Overall, the school has made good progress in improving its work. It has many strengths on which to build, and is in a good position to raise standards still further.

## STANDARDS

Children begin nursery with a very wide range of attainment, and a significant minority have special educational needs. Taken together, children's attainment on entry is below average, as shown in the results of assessments carried out soon after they start school. However, during their time at nursery, they make good progress in all areas of their learning. Almost all of the children are on course to reach the expected standard in communication, language and literacy, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative and physical development by the time they start the National Curriculum at primary school, and a few will exceed this. Most children are on course to exceed the expected standard in their personal and social skills. One or two of the current four year olds have special educational needs and are unlikely to reach the expected standard in any area of learning, even though they have made good progress. The children achieve well in relation to their starting points.

## CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children are very happy to come to the nursery. They are interested in activities and show good levels of concentration and perseverance for their ages. Many of the children develop a real curiosity for finding out new knowledge and skills.
Behaviour	Children behave well in school. They know the routines and respond well to the high expectations and gentle reminders provided by the staff. There have been no exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between children and with teachers are very good. Children grow rapidly in confidence and independence during their time at nursery.

Attendance	Typical for a nursery, with periods when there is significant absence from school, owing to illness.
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## TEACHING AND LEARNING

<b>Teaching of pupils:</b>		<i>Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; sound; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Sound' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.</i>
Sessions seen overall	Good	

Teaching was sound or better in all the sessions observed. In 12 per cent of sessions it was very good, and in 76 per cent it was good or better. Teaching has a number of strong features, particularly the very good knowledge the staff have about how young children learn best, the very good management of children's learning, 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 is particularly effective in promoting children's personal, social and emotional 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	Very good. The nursery provides a broad, balanced and rich curriculum, which enables children to develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding. The curriculum lays a solid foundation of good habits for learning. It encourages children to work independently, and this approach results in them making very good gains in their personal and social development.
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. They are confident in their learning.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Provision for children's personal development is at the heart of all the learning that takes place in the nursery. Provision for children's social and moral development is particularly strong. There is good provision for spiritual and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its children	The school provides very good care and support for each child through the good relationships it enjoys with families and a range of effective policies and procedures, including those for child protection.
Assessment	Good systems for monitoring children's achievements and progress enable staff to track children's development, plan appropriate activities, and share information with parents.
How well the school works in	The school has a strong partnership with parents, which supports children's



partnership with parents	learning very well. Parents have very positive views of the work of the school.
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### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and key staff	Very good. The headteacher has a very clear vision for nursery education and for the development of the school. She has led the teaching team through a difficult period of staff changes, sustaining the many strengths of the school. She monitors the planning of the curriculum, the day-to-day quality of education, and the progress of individual children very closely. She is well supported by the whole staff team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body, many of whom are new to the role, provides good support and satisfactorily fulfils its statutory responsibilities. Many governors visit the nursery regularly, which helps them to understand its work. However, some governors do not yet have a clear enough understanding of why the provision is of good quality, which would help them to play a fuller part in planning further improvements. Although governors have played a part in formulating the school development plan, they are not using it to monitor the work of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There are good systems in place for the school to monitor its own performance. Children are assessed when they start nursery and re-assessed towards the end of their time in school, so that achievements can be evaluated. The quality of teaching and learning is evaluated regularly by the headteacher and outside advisers.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning and management are good, linked to the school development plan. The principles of best value are followed.
The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources	The school has sufficient staff, who are well-qualified to teach nursery age children. Despite recent changes, the staff work as a committed and hard working team. The accommodation is very good, though more space is needed for outdoor play when all the children choose this option. 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"> <li>▪ Their children enjoy going to nursery and make good progress.</li> <li>▪ Behaviour in the nursery is good.</li> <li>▪ Teaching is good.</li> <li>▪ Staff work closely with parents and are approachable if there are concerns.</li> <li>▪ The school has high expectations of what children can achieve.</li> <li>▪ The school helps children to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>▪ The school is well led and managed.</li> </ul>	Parents raised no significant concerns.

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**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

#### **Children make good progress in all areas of their learning, and very good progress in developing their personal, social and emotional skills**

1. The children begin nursery with a wide range of attainment. A significant minority have special educational needs, but there are also a few higher-attaining children. Overall, attainment is below that expected for younger three-year-olds, as shown in the results of assessments carried out soon after the children start school. During their time at the nursery, the children make good progress in all aspects of their learning, particularly in their personal and social development.
2. The good range and quality of learning experiences provided, and the good skills of adults are the main reasons for children's achievements. For example, a group activity re-telling the story of 'The Three Little Pigs' was well planned, using good quality fabric models of the houses and figures of the characters, to encourage the children to speak the parts of the pigs and the wolf. The adult kept bringing the children's attention to the dialogue, and modeled expressive use of language. As a result, the children were soon able to contribute, and even the most reticent made good progress in enjoying the use of spoken language and re-telling a familiar story. It is this combination of well-chosen activities and sensitive adult interaction that supports that stimulates children's progress in all areas of their learning.

#### **Personal, social and emotional development**

3. The school places greatest importance on this aspect of children's development. Staff believe that, if children are to make progress in all areas of learning, they must first feel secure and confident. The way that all activities are organised in the nursery is planned to foster the personal skills that will later support children's learning. Group activities place a clear emphasis on independence, sharing resources, and approaching tasks with confidence. For example, a group of older children experimented with paint. Some of the resources had been prepared for them, but they were asked to select their own piece of paper from a variety available, and to choose the ways in which they would apply the paint. These children quite naturally went about their task, mixing the paint, choosing brushes, sharing the colours and commenting on the effects they were creating. Their independence allowed the adult to act as facilitator, making observations, asking questions to prompt the children's use of language, and encouraging them to be adventurous in their use of paint. The children really enjoyed the activity and concentrated for 30 minutes, trying various combinations of colours.
4. For part of each session, children choose the activities they will pursue. The youngest ones may not plan this work but, as soon as they are able, children share their work plans with an adult, which encourages them to think ahead in their learning. During these sessions, children were observed

engrossed in a wide range of activities. For example, three children found a tree stump fascinating, knocked nails in to it, explored the bark, and explained that they were going to make a sculpture like the one in the picture on the wall. Musical instruments, including some shakers made by the children, were a very popular activity. Children played with sand and water for extended periods of time, sharing their ideas and equipment, such as the two children who were hunting for 'buried treasure'. In pursuing these

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activities, the children make good progress in working independently, co-operating with others, and building their concentration. Misbehaviour is very rare, and it is obvious that children are well aware of the routines and expectations that are consistently reinforced by adults.

### **Communication, language and literacy**

5. The development of children's language skills is part of each activity provided in the nursery. It starts with the discussion of personal events and family news raised by children when they arrive, and continues with talk concerning activities, which may be one-to-one or in a group. Adults are very skilful at prompting children to describe or explain. A few of the youngest children are quite reluctant to talk, but the older children are generally articulate and eager to explain what they are doing. The wide range of activities provide a vehicle for talk, which adults exploit, so that all the children make good progress in their spoken language.

6. Amongst the older children, it is also clear that the early skills of reading and writing are developing well. They handle books correctly, know that the print tells the story, and can predict what might come next. They are encouraged to write their name on pieces of work, and some can write their first name correctly, starting with a capital letter. Others are beginning to grasp the idea of writing their name, such as the child who had learnt to write a capital 'H'. One of the older, higher-attaining children had a diary in which she was 'writing' some letters and words in her own invented script. Comparison of the language skills of the youngest children with those shown by the oldest shows the good progress made whilst they are at nursery.

### **Mathematical development**

7. Activities to develop children's mathematical skills are also interwoven within the curriculum. For example, work with jigsaws encourages spatial awareness, and children show a wide range of ability in this skill. Some of the younger, lower-attaining children are just able to place pieces in the correct place in a tray, and one child was very excited that he had been able to master this skill. Most older children are able to complete quite complex jigsaws rapidly, showing a good awareness of shape and space. The wide range of practical activities, such as work with sand and water, provide good opportunities to explore and discuss quantity and measuring, and adults play alongside children, bringing their attention to mathematical ideas. During a work time, one of the older children played with a large tape measure, measuring furniture, arms and legs, showing that she clearly understood the principle of measurement. Most of the children can count, with varying degrees of consistency, but older children are generally accurate to five, and some can match one-to-one, showing that their concept of number is developing well.

## **Knowledge and understanding of the world**

8. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging children to explore and investigate, and this helps them to become scientists in the making. For example, a group of children handled a large block of pink ice, which they described as cold, heavy, and slippery. When asked what would happen to it, the more able said that it would melt and, if warm water were poured on it, that it would melt more. The children watched and talked as it melted, gaining a great deal in their early understanding of scientific concepts.

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9. The children make a variety of things, and this is planned as part of each week's activities. For example, in one of the sessions observed, the children made a magic wand, cutting a star shape, gluing it to a long straw and weaving coloured tissue paper around the stem. These children took great delight in showing their handiwork to adults and other children. The musical shakers are also a good example of products made by the children. These were filled with various materials, and the children gained a great deal from 'playing' them and exploring the different sounds.

10. A computer in each workbase is in use during every session. Some children were using a simple art program to 'paint' pictures, whilst others used a range of early mathematics games to develop concepts such as 'shorter' and 'taller'. Some of the younger children are still developing the skill to control the 'mouse' accurately, but older ones are generally proficient. One child made a real breakthrough during the inspection, developing the confidence to use the mouse independently. A group of children used a tape recorder confidently to play music for their dancing.

11. The topics followed in the nursery help children to develop their understanding of other people and places. For example, a stunning display of work about the Chinese New Year included lanterns, prayer scrolls and coolie hats made by the children and had involved much discussion about the traditions and beliefs of people in a very different part of the world. The rich range of experience provided by the nursery helps the children to make good progress in finding out about and understanding their world.

## **Physical development**

12. In the outdoor area, the children play confidently. They particularly enjoy riding on the range of wheeled toys, and most show the level of agility expected for their ages. Some of the older children were observed climbing a ramp to a platform, and then jumping on to a mat and rolling, with a greater degree of control than would be expected for their ages. In their outdoor play, children show a good awareness of space, and it was rare for them to collide. In indoor activities, children are encouraged to use a range tools and equipment, and they do so with growing dexterity. For example, one child spent an extended period of time at a workbench hammering nails in to a piece of wood. Even though this was quite difficult, he persevered until he was successful, and worked quite safely without close adult supervision. The many art and craft activities help children to use tools such as scissors, a paint brush, and spatulas for glue with increasing confidence and accuracy. It is clear from a comparison between the physical skills shown by the youngest children and those evident in the oldest that good progress has been made.

## **Creative development**

13. Good progress in children's creative development stems from the rich variety of activities provided by the nursery. Art was a particularly strong feature of the work seen during the inspection because the current topic was 'Colour' and a number of art activities were linked to this theme. For example, children dipped a range of small balls in different shades of brown paint and then rolled them around a tray on which a piece of paper had been placed. The physical enjoyment of dipping and rolling, as well as the patterns created, provided a very good creative experience for the children. On display around the walls are many examples of the children's artwork, such as the eye-catching collage hearts, in reds and golds, which the children made to celebrate St Valentine's Day.

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14. Role-play often happened quite spontaneously. A group of children of all ages made a 'ship' out of large wooden blocks and pretended that the carpet surrounding them was the sea. The children avoided the 'sharks' that were prowling the waters, saved each other from certain death, and used a wide range of language, often initiated by the older children, to support their play. Musical activities, both organised and experimental also help the children to develop their creative skills.

### **The good quality of teaching provided by all the staff team enables children to become confident learners**

15. The quality of teaching was sound or better in all of the 17 sessions observed. It was good or better in three-quarters of these sessions, and very good in two. This represents a consistently good standard of teaching when compared with the national picture.

16. The staff plan the content of sessions very carefully, starting with outline plans for the half term, meeting weekly to decide the focus for small group activities, and ensuring that each activity has a clear learning objective. As a result, tasks are well conceived to provide challenging opportunities for learning. These catch children's interest, help them to concentrate and ensure that they learn new concepts and skills. For example, in one small group session, the adult had brought some polished stones for the children to feel. They talked about the colours of the stones, described how they felt, and enjoyed rolling and spinning them to explore how they moved. The adult skillfully asked questions that encouraged the children to experiment and to talk about their observations.

17. The adults have a very good understanding of how young children learn best. They encourage children to be confident, independent and imaginative in their work and play. Individuals who are obviously engrossed in a task are not disturbed. Those who need some direction are gently guided towards a task, or given sufficient support to achieve success, without the adult completing task for them. Adults are very aware of preserving the balance between teaching children and allowing them to find out for themselves. For example, a group of children made birthday cards, largely working independently, but an adult intervened when a discussion arose about the difference between writing and scribbling. She used the opportunity to reinforce the children's early understanding about why there would be writing on a birthday card and what it might say.

18. Adults manage children's learning very effectively. There are well-established routines in the nursery, which adults reinforce consistently, so children know exactly what is expected of them and respond accordingly most of the time. On occasion, the behaviour of an individual is too noisy or boisterous, but adults are very adept at quietly reminding the child of the expected behaviour, or

pointing out a potential safety hazard, which results in the child quickly conforming. The very good relationships between adults and children support the development of social skills as well as those in other areas of learning. Adults consistently praise children's efforts, which spurs the children on to try even harder.

19. Enriching children's language is part and parcel of all the activities that happen in the nursery, and adults are particularly good at extending speaking and listening skills. Sometimes they model spoken language to provide children with a pattern for their own contributions; sometimes they pose questions that make children think and respond; sometimes they just

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listen very carefully so children can speak at length. This was particularly evident when a group of children worked with clay, and the adult led a discussion about how it felt and how the children could mould it. Adults continually assess children's progress, noting the choices they make and when new steps in learning are achieved.

20. In all their work, adults take every opportunity to nurture children's self-esteem, confidence and independence. As a result, the children adopt an assured approach to all their learning, which enables them to make good progress during their time at nursery.

### **The school provides a rich and varied curriculum, which stimulates children's learning**

21. The nursery aims to provide a rich experience for its children, and succeeds. Through careful planning, adults ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced, so that the children can make good progress in all the recommended areas of learning for the foundation stage. Termly plans are based on a topic and, during the inspection, much of the children's work focused on the theme of 'Colour'. Within the theme, planning ensures that children experience a diverse range of learning experiences. For example, work based on the book 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' encouraged language skills, discussion about the life cycle of a butterfly, the exploration of different types of fruit, and large, colourful paintings telling the story. Adults are very adept at exploiting the opportunities for learning within an activity, so that the children gain the most from the experience. Each week, four small-group activities are planned, covering a wide range of learning, and the children experience all of these because the activity for each group changes daily. In this way, adults ensure that the children have equal access to the curriculum.

22. There is a very clear structure to each session, which ensures that the children experience work in a small group, and opportunities to choose their own activities so that skills of independence and initiative are cultivated. Each session usually begins with a task children can tackle alongside the adult who has main responsibility for them, and this is an opportunity to share news, encourage speaking and listening skills, and generally settle the children. In one of these sessions, a child helped the adult to complete the register, taking a keen interest in the names on the sheet and what the adult was writing. Before long, children plan their first self-chosen activity and then have an extended period of time pursuing their interests. For most children, this 'work time' is a very productive period. They engage in a good range of activities, both individually and co-operatively, and adults gently support and extend their play. However, a few children do not yet have the skills

to make best use of this time. They stay at one activity and, unless an adult recognises the need for support, they make too little progress in a wide enough range of learning.

23. The focused group activities that follow ‘work time’ provide opportunities for reviewing what the children have done during the session, involving more, valuable opportunities for speaking and listening. The following adult-led activities, such as exploring musical instruments, painting using marbles rolling on paper, or investigating polished stones, enable the children to develop a whole range of creative, investigative and social skills. These sessions are well organised and have clear learning objectives. For the last part of each session, the great majority of children choose to play outside and, though space is rather limited when all the children select this option, a good range of wheeled toys and climbing equipment ensures that there are good opportunities for physical development.

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24. Although careful planning and good organisation are important elements in providing a rich curriculum, ultimately it is the good skills of the adults that translate these into an effective curriculum for each child. Adults assess and monitor carefully the progress of each child in their group, so that they can respond to children’s needs. The nursery also has very good resources that enrich children’s learning.

### **The school has a very caring approach to all aspects of children’s welfare**

25. The care and well being of the children is the highest priority for adults in the nursery. Some aspects of this were observed during the inspection. For example, on the Monday morning, one child arrived but was upset when it was time for his dad to leave. The teacher handled this very sensitively, soothing the child whilst encouraging dad to stay until the crisis was over. Within a few minutes, the child was happily settled and went off to begin his first activity. This level of care is evident in all the relationships between adults and children. Where children had minor accidents, or were upset by something that had happened during their play, adults were quickly there to provide first aid or to talk through the problem. The staff treat these moments as important opportunities for learning, and as vital aspects of each child’s personal, social and emotional development. Adults are particularly caring and supportive of any children who have special educational needs. Where necessary, adults are firm as well as caring, such as in situations where children misbehave, but this is always done in a very positive manner.

26. At a whole-school level, procedures are well established to promote children’s welfare, health and safety. The headteacher and staff are very supportive of families but, where they believe a child may be at risk, child protection procedures are used decisively. The staff are well informed about and perceptive in matters of child protection. The headteacher has very good links with outside agencies. Health and safety checks around the building are carried out termly, by the headteacher and a governor, and any potential concerns are dealt with quickly. Birches Day-Care Centre, which shares the same building, provides ‘wrap-around care’ in the afternoon and early evening for a number of children who attend the nursery in the morning.

### **The school has very good links with parents, who have very positive views about what the nursery offers their children**

27. Parents have very positive views about the work of the nursery. For example, all the parents who returned the questionnaire or who attended the meeting before the inspection feel that their children are making good progress. Almost 70 per cent feel that their children are making very good progress. This is a very strong endorsement of the success of the nursery. There were no aspects of the work of the nursery about which parents raised a significant concern, and there was strong recognition for the quality of teaching, the fact that staff are very approachable, the close links with parents, and the quality of leadership provided by the headteacher. The inspection team agrees with parents very positive views of the school.

28. The very good relationships that exist between parents and staff begin with the home visits offered by the school, which most parents request before their child starts at nursery. These allow children and parents to get to know a nursery adult so that there is a familiar face when they visit. There are then times for both parents and children to visit the nursery before the child joins, and flexible arrangements for starting nursery so that children make a smooth beginning. It is not surprising then, that parents and carers come into the nursery quite

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naturally at the beginning and end of sessions, chat with members of staff, and exchange information about the children. This informal channel of communication is an important strength in building and sustaining relationships with parents. Each term, parents are invited to visit the nursery to discuss their child's progress with staff, and these events are well attended. Assessments carried out when children start nursery, and the child profile in which staff track progress are both shared with parents. Parents also appreciate information about planned activities, which is displayed outside the work bases.

29. The nursery encourages parents to be as involved in the work of the school as they wish to be. A few parents help in the nursery, a number are active in the Friends of Birchwood, and most of the governors are current or former parents. However, the school is not complacent, and works very hard to involve families who are more reluctant to build contacts with the nursery.

**The headteacher is a strong, purposeful leader, who unites the staff team and sets high expectations for the quality of education the school should provide**

30. The headteacher has a very clear vision of what constitutes high quality education for nursery age children, and this is shared by the staff team. The school's aim, "To create an environment conducive to learning in which individual children can flourish", guides the work of staff and is daily in evidence in the nursery. Children come first. This very strong desire to meet the needs of individual children is the hallmark of the headteacher's leadership of the school.

31. The headteacher knows the children, their families and her staff very well. She has nurtured good relationships, which help the school to run smoothly. During the inspection, she was very visible around the nursery, taking part in teaching and learning in the work bases, discussing issues with colleagues, observing particular children or groups of children, and talking to parents when they brought and collected their children. In this way, she maintains a constant, informal overview of the work of the nursery. In addition, more formal observations, focusing on aspects of the quality of teaching and learning, and providing feedback to colleagues, help to celebrate good practice and identify aspects for improvement. For example, adult interaction with children during 'work time'



has increased in quantity and quality, owing to steps taken following observation. The headteacher also keeps a close watch on the balance of working groups so that their composition best meets the needs of individual children. A monitoring timetable, focusing on different aspects of the school's work in each month of the year, ensures an efficient and thorough approach to school improvement.

32. The organisation and management of the nursery are very effective. A clear set of policies underpins good practice. The school development plan sets out specific priorities for improvement, such as developing the school's approach to literacy and numeracy. Systems for planning the curriculum are well established, and the headteacher leads the weekly meeting to decide particular activities, within the broader, termly plan. At the meeting observed during the inspection, the headteacher was insistent that the staff should be precise about the learning objectives for each activity, and why these were appropriate for the group of children. Day to day administrative tasks are also well organised, and an efficient secretary supports the headteacher.

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33. The headteacher has high expectations of the children's achievements, the talents of her colleagues, and the difference that good nursery education can make to children's future. Her conviction that Birchwood is a good nursery, but can get better, motivates everyone within the school community.

#### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

34. The inspection team found no significant areas of weakness. A few minor issues are included here, which the school may wish to add to its plans for development, as follows:

- during the times when children choose their own activities, some do not experience a wide enough range of learning;
- governors are not sufficiently involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in the nursery, nor in making plans for improvement.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of sessions observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and children	12

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
	12	64	24			

*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*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Nursery
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	58
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	4

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	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** – NB Attendance at nursery school is not compulsory so no national statistics are gathered.

<b>Authorised absence</b>	%
School data	N/A

<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	%
School data	N/A

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

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### **Teachers and classes**

<b>Qualified teachers and support staff</b>	
Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23
Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	188
Number of pupils per FTE adult	5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

### **Financial information**

<b>Financial year</b>	1999/00
	£
Total income	227,773
Total expenditure	223,978
Expenditure per pupil	2,218
Balance brought forward from previous year	20,480
Balance carried forward to next year	24,275



## ***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	116
Number of questionnaires returned	27

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	93	7	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	67	33	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	54	0	0	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	6	31	19	0	44
The teaching is good.	74	26	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	60	28	12	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	74	26	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	44	48	4	0	4
The school works closely with parents.	69	23	4	4	0
The school is well led and managed.	89	7	0	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	73	23	0	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	19	5	0	38

At their meeting, parents were very positive about the work of the school, reflecting the strong support shown on the questionnaires. They felt that their children make good progress at the nursery, particularly in developing personal and social skills such as independence and initiative. They find the nursery a very welcoming environment for both children and adults.

