

INSPECTION REPORT

OLIVER THOMAS NURSERY SCHOOL

East Ham, London

LEA area: Newham

Unique reference number: 102706

Headteacher: Ms Dianne Walls

Reporting inspector: Mrs M S Summers
25455

Dates of inspection: 5-6 June 2001

Inspection number: 198026

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Mathews Avenue East Ham London
Postcode:	E6 4BU
Telephone number:	020 8552 1177
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Appropriate authority:	Newham Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Mr B Smith
Date of previous inspection:	14 October 1997

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
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	
Pupils' 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	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	12
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	13
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	14

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Oliver Thomas Nursery School caters for 174 boys and girls aged between three and four, most of whom attend part-time. The children represent the extremely varied cultural diversity of the area, which has changed significantly since the last inspection. Then, there were mainly White UK and Asian children in the school but now all the major ethnic groups are represented. There are also children from many different European backgrounds. There are 23 different languages spoken by children at the school. Over half the children speak English as an additional language. Thirteen children have special educational needs and three of these have help from outside specialists. Achievement on entry is below average overall, although there are children of all different abilities, including some who are very able. There is a high rate of pupil turnover, with many children starting or leaving in the middle of the school year. A new headteacher has been appointed since the last inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Oliver Thomas is a good school. Effective leadership and skilful teaching lead to pupils making good progress and achieving well by the time they move on to their primary schools. Overall, considering the small budget the school controls, it provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The staff works very well together to create a rich and stimulating atmosphere for learning which interests and enthuses the children, who concentrate well on their activities and make good progress.
- The school provides a very warm and caring atmosphere where children feel comfortable, valued and ready to learn.
- The school creates very effective relationships with parents, which enables all adults to work well together to help the children learn.
- The school provides many opportunities for children to work on their own and make decisions for themselves.

What could be improved

- The link between assessment and planning is not always clear enough for the school to be sure that every child makes the best possible progress.
- The part the governing body plays in planning and monitoring the school's work is not as effective as it could be.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made effective progress since its last inspection in October 1997 and continues to provide a good education for its pupils. Leadership and teaching continue to be strong. Comprehensive assessment systems have been developed which enable pupils' progress to be tracked as they move through the school. However, these assessments are not being used well enough to plan for individual children's needs or to identify weaknesses in curriculum planning. Children for whom English is an additional language now receive effective support which helps them to take a full part in all activities and make good progress. The school now plans well for its development although governors still do not have a clear enough knowledge of the school's work to enable them to monitor it successfully and help it plan for the future.

STANDARDS

Children achieve well in all the areas of learning and reach appropriate standards for their age. They do best in personal, social and emotional development where many of them reach the nationally recommended levels for children at the foundation stage even before they leave the nursery. They do well in their physical development because of the good outdoor provision of climbing frames and toys and also because of the many good opportunities for children to learn how to handle small equipment such as pencils and scissors effectively. Their communication, speaking and listening skills are average for their age, which represents good achievement, especially for those who are learning English as an additional language. They are well on their way to reaching the nationally recommended levels in reading and writing, and in their mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world and in their creative development by the time they become five years old.

When children start school, they have a very thoughtful and thorough induction so that they feel secure and are able to explore and learn. This leads to good progress, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. Children who are learning English as an additional language and those with special educational needs make good progress because of the carefully organised additional support from adults.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: children are eager to come to school and quickly become involved in the wide range of activities available.
Behaviour	Very good: they help and care for one another and are anxious to please adults who all encourage good behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: children become independent very quickly and are confident to explore and try out new activities. They play together extremely well and form firm friendships.
Attendance	There is a significant number of children whose attendance is poor and this affects their progress. The school is working hard to try to improve this and is showing some success.

The children quickly become engrossed in activities and work hard for good lengths of time. They move between classrooms and the outside area, working confidently on their own and making decisions for themselves. Children trust and respect all the adults who work in the nursery. Adults spend time with each child, explaining new concepts and skills and encouraging them to become thoughtful and caring towards others and the environment. Childhood illness accounts for a large amount of absence, but there is some that is avoidable. The school is working hard with parents to promote good attendance patterns.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
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Sessions seen overall	Good
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Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

During the inspection, 14 per cent of the teaching was very good and 79 per cent was good; all the teaching seen was satisfactory or better. The emphasis of the teaching lies in developing the children's personal, social and emotional skills and all the adults in the nursery do this skilfully. They ensure that children feel safe and happy and allow them space and time to explore and become independent. Adults take care to ensure that each child is involved in different activities which help them make progress in all areas of their development. They support and explain new ideas and skills carefully and allow them time to practise what they have learned. Adults make careful assessments of children's responses which informs their overall judgements about the levels children reach but this information is not being used well enough to plan the next steps in children's learning.

Adults are conscious of the need to develop the children's spoken language and take every opportunity to teach them new words and ask them questions to encourage them to talk. This helps them to practise their English skills and make them feel confident. Teachers organise group activities to encourage them to practise their writing skills. Children begin to understand how writing can be useful to them in many aspects of their work. Children are encouraged to look at books and listen to stories; the good systems for parents to take home books to share with their children supports this aspect of the children's learning well. Children are always keen to use computer games which help them learn their letter sounds and recognise simple words. They are very interested in the good range of exciting activities provided and work hard, showing high levels of concentration.

No direct teaching of mathematics was seen during the inspection. Distinct areas to encourage the development of mathematical skills are set up in every classroom and structured play activities further support children's understanding of, for example different shapes, sizes and numbers.

High quality team work amongst the staff ensures that all children, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are supported and encouraged in their learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	An exciting and interesting range of experiences are offered to children, particularly for their personal and physical development.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Good; adults know the children very well and are conscious of their needs when working with them at the different activities. Support for children with behavioural problems is particularly good.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	Good; all adults are conscious of the needs of these children and use a wide range of methods to help them develop their English.
Provision for	Very good in all aspects. The wide range of cultural

children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	backgrounds is celebrated extremely well throughout the school and helps children feel valued and confident to learn. Good moral and social values are taught carefully, with great sensitivity. Children are encouraged to reflect about the wonder of the world around them and of their place within it.
How well the school cares for its children	Good; a very safe and caring environment. Careful observations help the staff track the children's progress effectively but this information is not always used well enough to help teachers plan for the next steps in pupils' learning.

All adults work well together to ensure that they provide a consistent approach to supporting children's personal and social development. A consistent approach towards supporting children for whom English is an additional language ensures that they make good progress. Parents value all the school does for their children and the good progress they make. They praise the good provision for pupils with special educational needs and the care taken to help all children settle into the school when they first start.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher ensures that everyone in the school community focuses carefully on how they can best help young children learn. Other key staff give good support to the school's work to ensure that children with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make effective progress.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have become more involved since the last inspection but still do not have a clear enough knowledge of the school's work to enable them to monitor it successfully.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school monitors teaching successfully to ensure it provides a good service for its pupils. It is not yet using the information it gains from assessments to identify areas which may require further development.
The strategic use of resources	The school does not have a delegated budget but plans the use of the funds it does have at its disposal well.

The staff are very experienced and well qualified to work with young children. There is a very good range of learning resources which are used carefully to support children's development. The accommodation is spacious and the school makes very good use of every room and the outdoor areas to give children a full and interesting education.

The lead provided by the headteacher is based upon strong principles and a firm knowledge about how young children learn. She provides the structures which guide teachers and support staff in the school to work as an effective team, committed to providing the best possible opportunities for the children. Governors are supportive but do not have enough information about the school's work to monitor it effectively and help plan for its improvement.

The school spends the available resources carefully, applying the principles of best value appropriately.

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 love school. • Teaching is good and helps their children make good progress. • The school helps children to settle in quickly and feel confident. • The school is well led and managed. • The children's behaviour is good. • The school works closely with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of homework.

parents who feel comfortable approaching staff about any concerns. • The provision for children with special educational needs.	
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Parents are extremely supportive of the school and their positive views are echoed by the inspection team. Some parents think that their children should be receiving more homework but the inspection team finds that the school provides a good range of appropriate activities to do at home, ranging from sharing books to simple worksheets where children practise their number and language skills.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The staff works very well together to create a rich and stimulating atmosphere for learning which interests and enthuses the children, who concentrate well on their activities and make good progress.

1. The headteacher leads a strong team of well-qualified and experienced teachers and support staff. There are secure systems in place to ensure that all adults work effectively as part of a team to provide a consistent approach to education for the young children in their care.

2. The school plans its work well to ensure that each child receives equal access to a wide range of exciting and well organised activities which enable them to make good progress in all areas of their development. Plans are reviewed constantly in the light of ongoing developments to ensure that sessions run smoothly. For example, daily planning meetings between the morning and afternoon sessions, provide good opportunities to consider any necessary modifications. They also ensure that adults are carefully assigned to support particular children or group activities. In this way, the sessions run smoothly and all the adults make effective contributions.

3. Classrooms are colourful and inviting and this is one of the reasons why children are eager to come to school. Most children settle quickly to their chosen activities and say goodbye happily to their parents, confident that they will be safe and looked after by the nursery staff. Activities are prepared very carefully; some include specific teaching and some allow children to choose for themselves and work on their own. Activities are built upon a particular topic, which changes termly. During the inspection the topic was 'Minibeasts' and the focused group activities, led by teachers, looked at aspects of reading and writing, and knowledge and understanding of the world. In one class, for example, groups of children took turns to put pictures of scenes from the book they had been reading, 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' in order, thus learning how stories have beginnings, middles and ends. In another class, the teacher took groups of children on a 'Bug Hunt' in the school grounds. The children set off enthusiastically with specimen jars, magnifying glasses and spoons to collect ants, spiders, woodlice and worms which they observed keenly and handled with care. During both activities, teachers used their own enthusiasm to stimulate and excite the children in their learning and to encourage them to talk about their observations. The children learned all the names of the creatures and observed their different habitats. They listened carefully to one another's ideas and felt confident to offer their own.

4. Children can choose from a wide range of other activities. These include painting and modelling, experimenting with water and sand, constructing models from cardboard, paper and wood or building blocks and kits, as well as many opportunities for imaginative and creative play in a variety of situations. The covered outside area means that children can use it all the year round, whatever the weather and thus there is always plenty of space for them to work and play. All the activities are thoughtfully prepared to develop specific aspects of the children's learning. For example, the climbing equipment and large toys give children opportunities to develop their physical co-ordination and awareness of space, while model making and painting help them practise their skills in handling small tools. Work with sand and water encourages children to learn mathematical vocabulary, such as 'bigger' and 'smaller' and to compare the sizes of various containers and the sand or water that they contain. Adults are always carefully assigned to particular areas to ensure that children are safe, happy and involved. They support individual children if necessary and continually extend the children's learning through skilful questioning.

5. The high ratio of adults to children and their very effective contributions ensure that the children make good progress whilst at nursery.

The school provides a very warm and caring atmosphere where children feel comfortable, valued and ready to learn.

6. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting and those who responded to the questionnaire praised this aspect of the school very highly and the inspection team agrees wholeheartedly with their views. Children are introduced very carefully to the adults in the nursery and all systems are geared towards ensuring that they settle down quickly and happily. To this end, adults spend a great deal of time getting to know the children and their parents or carers and ensuring that any fears or concerns are quickly addressed. Each child is assigned a key worker who takes a special interest and maintains an ongoing dialogue with parents and carers and assesses the child's progress through the school.

7. Children's safety takes a high priority with adults keeping a watchful eye as children play on climbing frames or use equipment such as scissors or hammers. The children are taught how to handle these safely and respond well to the high expectations of adults. After the initial registration session the premises are checked carefully to make sure that they are secure before children are allowed into the outside area.

8. Relationships throughout the school are very good and these lead to high levels of respect between staff and the knowledge that each member of the team will give of their best. These positive relationships also serve as very good examples to children, who see adults being polite to one another and valuing one another's work; thus children develop very warm relationships with one another and adults in the school.

9. The school takes great care to ensure that all the many different cultural backgrounds of the children are celebrated. Throughout the school, signs and captions are written in a range of languages, from Urdu and Gujarati to Spanish and Tamil. Dressing up boxes contain a variety of clothes from different cultures, and focus events on dance or food, for example, involve children learning about Chinese opera and Indian film music and cooking curry and chapatis for one another. In these ways the children learn to respect and value one another's cultural backgrounds.

The school creates very effective relationships with parents, which enables them to work well together to help the children learn.

10. Parents value the school's work very highly. They feel comfortable about approaching the staff with any concerns about their children. This is achieved by the great efforts of all adults in the school to get to know children and parents and by the well-organised procedures at the beginning and end of each session. Many children and their parents arrive before the session starts and adults are always on hand to welcome them. Parents and children enter their assigned classrooms together and while the children collect their name cards to give to an assistant to show they are present, parents can always chat to their key worker or the teacher who is always stationed by the door. Parents are welcome to stay for as long as they wish to support their children if necessary. There are always opportunities when children are collected at the end of sessions for parents and carers to talk to staff.

11. The school provides useful information to parents, which tells them what their children will be learning during the forthcoming term, as well as news about school events. Parents have regular opportunities for formal consultations about their children's progress and receive a comprehensive report when they transfer to their primary schools. The emphasis of the feedback about progress is verbal because of the high number of parents for whom English is an additional language.

12. Parents support their children well at home by borrowing books from the class book boxes to share later in the day. They also encourage the children to complete 'Busy at Home' sheets, simple activities which reinforce skills the children have been learning in school, for example in counting or learning to recognise numbers. These activities are very well suited to the needs of young children.

13. Strong relationships with parents ensure that pupils with special educational needs are well supported during their time at nursery. Regular reviews of children's progress ensure that parents are able to share information from home with school staff and vice-versa. Areas for future improvement are agreed and teachers plan extra support for children to help them meet these targets.

The school provides many opportunities for children to work on their own and make decisions for themselves..

14. Careful planning and organisation by teachers, coupled with high levels of expertise from all adults, ensures that children quickly become independent. They soon feel comfortable within their surroundings and the exciting range of activities entices them to develop new skills. The well-organised and focused taught activities, and the choice of structured play activities means that they have a balanced range of opportunities to develop their learning and their independence. Children move freely between classrooms and the outdoor area, selecting activities which interest them. Adults are always on hand to show them new skills, such as how to hammer in nails or how to balance on a beam but use their good judgement to withdraw at an appropriate time so that children can practise their new skills independently.

15. Activities are always planned to enable children to develop their initiative. For example, a range of different materials are set out for model-making and children are encouraged to select from these as they wish. On one occasion during the inspection, children were noted to leave the table to find additional materials from the drawers of resources. They did this confidently without any prompting from adults, collected what they needed and settled down again quickly to complete their work.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The link between assessment and planning is not always clear enough for the school to be sure that every child makes the best possible progress.

16. The school has developed very comprehensive assessment procedures. Careful observations are carried out, both of children's responses during focused activities and more general observations of their personal and social skills. These observations inform teachers' ongoing records of children's progress towards the nationally recommended early learning goals for young children at the end of the foundation stage. These records transfer to the children's primary schools so that staff there can continue to build upon children's learning.

17. These systems track children's progress very well but there is not enough use being made of them to plan the next steps in children's learning. Each child receives broadly the same experiences and adults are not yet planning well enough to meet the needs of those children who are progressing at different rates.

18. The school has begun to compile data about the attainment of different groups of children when they leave nursery. It intends to use this to identify areas of learning which require further development to improve children's progress.

The part the governing body plays in planning and monitoring the school's work is not as effective as it could be.

19. Governors are supportive of the school although only a few of them make regular visits to see how the school is providing for the children. It is the headteacher who generally plans for school improvement.

20. The school has found it very difficult to recruit governors to serve on the governing body. However, most vacancies have now been filled. Because children only attend the nursery for a maximum of five terms, parent governors are not on the governing body for very long. New governors are not inducted quickly enough into their roles to enable them to play a full part in the school's development. Although many governors have attended courses to improve their knowledge, they have not yet put systems into place to enable them to gather information in a systematic fashion so that they can monitor the school's work successfully. This means that they are unable to take an effective part in planning for improvement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The governors, headteacher and staff should now:

- (1) Use the results of their very comprehensive assessment procedures to plan more effectively to meet the needs of all children and to highlight specific areas of learning which require further development;
(Paragraphs 16-18)
- (2) Develop and implement systems whereby the governing body can monitor the school's work and have an effective impact on planning for school development.
(Paragraphs 19-20)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of sessions observed	14
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	16

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	14	79	7	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)	84
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	11

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	86

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	N/a	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)	4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21

Total number of education support staff	6.8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	221

Number of pupils per FTE adult	7.8
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
Total income	337,286
Total expenditure	337,286
Expenditure per pupil	4,064
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	0

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	84
Number of questionnaires returned	23

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	83	17	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	57	35	4	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	52	48	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	35	30	4	4
The teaching is good.	57	43	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	52	30	4	4	9
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	35	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	39	52	0	0	9
The school works closely with parents.	48	43	4	4	0
The school is well led and managed.	57	35	0	0	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	52	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	57	17	9	0	17

Other issues raised by parents

Parents are very pleased with the way that the school provides for children with special educational needs.

