

INSPECTION REPORT

BLAGRAVE NURSERY SCHOOL

Tilehurst, Reading

LEA area: Reading

Unique reference number: 109749

Headteacher: Mrs Diane Sandell

Reporting inspector: Mr George Crowther
18814

Dates of inspection: 21st – 23rd May 2001

Inspection number: 198142

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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: | Recreation Road Tilehurst Reading |
| Postcode: | RG30 4UA |
| Telephone number: | 0118 901 5427 |
| E-mail address: | blag4ua2@reading.gov.uk |
| Appropriate authority: | Governing body |
| Name of chair of governors: | Lady Audrey Durant |
| Date of previous inspection: | October 1997 |

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Blagrove is a medium-sized nursery school for boys and girls who are 3-4 years old, most of whom attend for four terms. It has 80 part-time children and is always full. It draws children from a wide range of social circumstances and mostly from the immediate area. Taken together, pupils' attainment when they start nursery is about average. A few children attend the nursery owing to special needs that have been identified by outside agencies. Ten children are on the register of special educational needs, which is about average, and they receive support for a variety of learning and developmental difficulties. One of these children has a statement of need and has additional support. Very few children are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and only one is learning English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Blagrove Nursery is a very effective school. It provides an excellent range and quality of activities for the children, which are planned meticulously. The staff are experienced and skilled, and the children learn in a happy, stimulating and challenging environment. As a result, all the children achieve well, and there are examples of those who make remarkable progress whilst at the nursery. The children's achievements in developing their language skills are particularly good because the staff emphasise the development of speaking, listening, reading and writing as an integral part of many activities. Relationships between all members of the school community are strong, and parents appreciate the high standards of care and education provided for their children. The quality of teaching is of a consistently high standard. Staff know the children very well and respond to their individual needs effectively. The headteacher leads the staff team purposefully and is very well supported by her experienced colleagues. The school provides very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Children achieve well in all areas of their learning, and make particularly good progress in developing their communication, language and literacy skills.
- The quality of teaching is very good and reflects the high expectations staff have of what children can achieve.
- The school provides a rich, well-organised curriculum that stimulates and challenges children's learning.
- The high standard of care provided by the school supports children's personal, social and emotional development very well.
- The school has very good relationships with parents, which encourage very positive support for children's learning.
- The headteacher provides purposeful leadership and makes full use of the many talents of the staff team.

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 October 1997, Blagrove Nursery was found to be a successful school, providing a very good start to the children's education in a well-ordered and stimulating environment. Since then, the school has built on its strengths and made good progress in tackling the action points that were identified. Procedures for informing parents about the progress of their children have been strengthened so that there are regular, formal opportunities for parents to meet teachers. Parents are very happy with the information they receive. Two new computers have extended the opportunities for children to develop their information and communication technology skills. The outbuilding that cramped the school entrance has been demolished. Staff have tried a number of ways to track the children's choice of activities when they are working independently, so that the curriculum meets their needs. This has been a difficult action point to address, but the way the children's learning is organised and the staff's very good knowledge of their abilities ensure that children receive an appropriate range of learning. The school has considerable strengths on which to build, and is in a good position to raise standards still further.

STANDARDS

Children begin nursery with a range of attainment. A few are very capable, a few have special educational needs, but most have the skills expected for their ages. Taken together, children's attainment on entry is about average, as shown in the assessments carried out when they start school. During their time at nursery, their achievements are good in all areas of their learning. Almost all of the children are on course to reach the expected standard in personal and social skills, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative and physical development by the time they start the National Curriculum at primary school. A significant minority will exceed this. Most children should exceed the expected standard in their communication, language and literacy skills. One or two of the current leavers are unlikely to reach the expected standard in some areas of learning, even though they have made good progress.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|---|
| Attitudes to the school | Very good. The children like coming to the nursery. They are very interested in activities and often show a high level of curiosity for learning. |
| Behaviour | Very good. All the children behave well for most of the time because they know the routines and understand the high expectations of the staff. There have been no exclusions. |
| Personal development and relationships | Relationships between children and with teachers are excellent. Children grow rapidly in confidence and independence during their time at nursery. |
| Attendance | Attendance is generally good. The late arrival of a few children can disrupt the learning of others. |

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 the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.</i> |
| Sessions seen overall | Very good | |

The quality of teaching was good or better in all the sessions observed, and it was very good in just over half. Teaching has many strong features and no significant weaknesses. The staff have a very good understanding of how young children learn best, which is evident in the way they plan activities, the range of interesting methods they use, and the purposeful way in which they support learning. As a result, children are eager and confident, and make good gains in skills and understanding. A particular strength is the way in which staff enrich the children's experience of language. Much of this is achieved through skilled questioning and conversation that accompanies activities, but there are also more formal sessions where early literacy skills are encouraged. The teaching in these sessions is very good. As a result, children make particularly good progress in this aspect of their learning. Teaching is good across all areas of learning, including early numeracy. Staff manage children's behaviour very effectively so that they gain the most from activities. Teaching meets the needs of all children and is particularly supportive for those who have special educational needs. It is the high expectations staff have of what children can achieve that makes their teaching so effective.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|--|
| The quality and range of the curriculum | Excellent. The nursery provides a broad, balanced and exceptionally rich curriculum, which enables children to achieve well in all areas of their learning. |
| Provision for children with special educational needs | Very good. The needs of these children are identified early, often through the good contacts staff have with parents and outside agencies. They are well supported so that they can take full advantage of the curriculum. |
| Provision for children with English as an additional language | The one child learning English as an additional language is well catered for. |
| Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | Very good. Provision for children's personal development is an integral part of all activities in the nursery. Staff know the children very well and encourage their growing confidence. Provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and is interwoven within the curriculum. |
| 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 | Very 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 partnership with parents | The school has a very strong partnership with parents, which supports children's 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 is an experienced, purposeful leader who has a clear view of good practice. She leads a strong team, and recognises the need to encourage all their talents in planning the curriculum and teaching. As a result, all the staff, including the efficient secretary, make an effective contribution to managing the nursery. |
| How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities | Satisfactory. The governing body, many of whom are new to the role, provides good support. A few governors visit the nursery regularly, which helps them to understand its work. However, all governors do not yet have a clear enough understanding of why the provision is of very good quality, which would help them to play a fuller part in planning further improvements. They are not sufficiently involved in formulating the school improvement plan. |
| The school's evaluation of its performance | Satisfactory. There are adequate systems in place for the school to monitor its own performance. Children are assessed when they start nursery and their progress is monitored carefully so that achievements can be evaluated. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is increasing, but could be more rigorous. |
| The strategic use of resources | Financial planning and management are good, linked to the school improvement plan, and principles of best value are followed. |
| The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources | The school is well staffed. The accommodation is old, but well cared for, and is enhanced by very attractive displays of the children's work. More space is needed for outdoor play, but the staff make good use of the existing facilities. 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 nursery is good. ▪ Teaching is good and children are given the right sort of activities to do at home. ▪ The nursery provides an interesting range of extra | Parents raised no significant concerns. |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff work closely with parents and are approachable if there are concerns. ▪ The school has high expectations of what children can achieve and the staff keep parents well informed about progress. ▪ The school helps children to become mature and responsible. ▪ The school is well led and managed. | |
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Parents are very pleased with all aspects of the school's work, and inspectors' judgements support parents' positive views.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Children achieve well in all areas of their learning, and make particularly good progress in developing their communication, language and literacy skills

1. The children start nursery with a range of attainment. A few are very capable, a few have special educational needs, but most have the skills expected for their ages. Overall, attainment is about average, as shown in the results of assessments carried out when the children start school. During their time at the nursery, the children's achievements are good in all aspects of their learning, and there are examples of children who make remarkable progress, as seen in their records of achievement. Improvements in language skills are particularly good because the staff emphasise the development of speaking, listening, reading and writing as an integral part of many activities.

2. The excellent range and quality of learning experiences provided, and the very good skills of adults are the main reasons for children's achievements, which have improved since the last inspection. For example, the children were preparing for the 'Ugly Bug Ball', a special event to mark the end of their work on 'Minibeasts'. They made masks to wear, which developed their physical and creative skills, they wrote invitation cards to their friends, which stimulated early reading and writing skills, and they listened to the music that would be played at the ball. These activities captured the children's interest and provided a vehicle for good teaching and learning. Whilst the children were working, adults took every opportunity to discuss, question, count, explore and explain, so that all aspects of the children's knowledge, skills and understanding were being extended.

Personal, social and emotional development

3. The children's achievements are good in this aspect of their learning and they soon become confident and independent so that they can gain most from the activities provided. A few of the youngest children are still quite tentative and may watch others at work before taking part. However, almost all the children approach

activities with a high degree of interest. For example, a popular activity during outdoor play was digging in a soil patch to hunt for worms, and the children showed a high degree of perseverance to collect just a few specimens. A treasure hunt, searching for and recording many letter 'l's that had been placed around the nursery, created a great deal on excitement. Pairs of children scoured the length and breadth of the nursery to find as many as possible. These activities encourage and develop children's personal skills.

4. During all activities, staff emphasise sharing resources and taking turns. This helps the children to work together and to appreciate each other's point of view. For example, a group worked together in the sandpit, talking constantly to each other about their play, and made lines of sand mounds that they decided were 'scarecrows'. When there was some disagreement about the best way to use the sand, an adult intervened and helped them to resolve the problem. The children continued to work collaboratively for over half an hour, eventually deciding that their mounds were 'mountains'. The great majority of the oldest children work well together in all situations and many have formed very strong friendships.

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5. Very good routines develop the children's sense of right and wrong and help them to behave appropriately. For example, tidying up time is when everyone should put away the things they have been playing with, and the children know this is the right thing to do. They know that, if they have been playing in the soil or sand, they need to wash their hands before returning to their room. Misbehaviour is very rare, and it is obvious that children are well aware of the clear expectations that are consistently reinforced by adults.

Communication, language and literacy

6. The children's achievements are very good in this area of learning. Opportunities to talk and listen are part and parcel of each activity provided in the nursery, and the staff constantly encourage the children to communicate. For example, children shaped dough that had been given a lavender scent, which provoked much discussion about smell and touch. Children searched for plastic minibeasts in the bottom of a murky 'pond' created in a water tray, and there was much talk about the sensations and the number found. The children also use and develop their language ability in imaginative play, such as when two children playing with wooden blocks and cars said, "Look! This can be our ramp. You crash your car through that wall and I'll crash mine through this." Play in the home corner is also language rich, and making calls on the telephone was particularly popular.

7. There are more formal times when the children develop their language skills. Story reading is part of each day and the children listen intently, join in with the story, and show a real enjoyment of books. For example, one group listened avidly to 'The Clumsy Click Beetle', which was read very expressively by the teacher. Many of the older children knew about the title and the author, and most could discuss the plot and characters, sometimes predicting what might happen next. There is a letter of the week and children bring in items whose name starts with that letter. Group work focuses on letter sounds, and adults point out letter names and sounds, so that many of the older children already have a good grasp of these. One, higher-attaining child suggested 'lava' as a word beginning with 'l', and knew that

this was something that came out of a volcano. One or two higher-attaining children also recognise some punctuation. Two older girls observed in the library showed good skills in selecting books, turning the pages correctly, and telling their own story from the pictures. By the time they leave the nursery, most of the children have a very good foundation of reading skills and are ready to read independently.

8. Amongst the older children, the early skills of writing are developing well. They are encouraged to write their name on pieces of work, and many can write their first name correctly, starting with a capital letter. They write for a range of real purposes, such as words to accompany displays, invitations to events, or contributions to books made by all the children, for example 'The Scary Book' that lives in the library. Handwriting skills are developing well, though a few children still have weak pencil control so letters are not formed accurately.

Mathematical development

9. Experiences to develop children's mathematical skills are part of a wide range of activities, which ensures that children's achievements are good. Familiarity with numbers and counting are a feature of many tasks, from recognising the numbers on puzzles to counting the spots on ladybirds. A good example was seen in children's outdoor play when they jumped between

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numbered tiles, counting as they went. The staff also build the use of numbers in to rules for games, such as when a child playing basketball said, "I can have three goes, and then it's your go." Children begin to understand patterns in their artwork and through activities such as pegboards. They develop mathematical language measuring things in their play with water, sand and construction kits, as was seen when children built towers from wooden blocks and the teacher discussed which were taller or shorter than the children.

10. There are formal times when the staff teach the children about numeracy. In a very good session observed, a puppet called 'Counting Cow' helped the children to say their number as it passed around a circle. Then the boys counted and there were nine; then the girls counted and there were three, which led to the older children trying to work out how many more boys than girls. The children were also challenged to find the missing number in a sequence from zero to ten. These numeracy sessions are fun and they pull together the knowledge, skills and understanding that children are developing in other activities. Number songs and rhymes are used in many of the group times. As a result of all these experiences, the great majority of the oldest children count confidently well beyond ten, they are beginning to carry out simple calculations, and they have a good grounding in the concepts of shape and measures.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

11. Work focused on the theme of 'Minibeasts' placed a strong emphasis on encouraging the children to explore and investigate. For example, one group went on a snail hunt in the grounds and found a number of specimens, which they were able to examine closely. Another group hunted for ladybirds, one child remarking quite confidently that ladybirds ate aphids, and these children were later observed

examining their catches with a magnifying glass and drawing them. Good quality reference books, and links to a wide selection of fiction, support the children's growing knowledge. During the inspection, the children's investigative work was an excellent feature, and the oldest children were exceeding expectations for their attainment.

12. The children make a variety of things, and this is planned as part of each week's activities. For example, children made their own minibeasts from a variety of found materials, cutting card confidently, using plastic mesh for wings and adding details such as antennae. They showed good skills in selecting materials and joining them.

13. Since the last inspection, resources to introduce children to information and communication technology have improved, though only one computer was in use. There are suitable programs, for example to support the development of early numeracy skills. The oldest children use a mouse confidently and many know the names of some of the keys on the keyboard. Some of the younger children are still developing the skill to control the mouse accurately.

14. The themes followed in the nursery help children to develop their understanding of other people and places. The curriculum includes work on festivals, such as the Chinese New Year and Easter, and this ensures that children have some experience of religions and cultures. Children find out about their own 'history', and visitors to the nursery talk about their memories of life in the past. Study of the area around the school and visits to places such as a working farm enable the children to begin to understand the contrast between localities. The rich range of experience provided by the nursery helps the children to make good progress in finding out about and understanding their world.

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Physical development

15. In the outdoor area, the children play very confidently and show good achievement in physical development. Although space is fairly limited, the staff make excellent use of it. Some of the younger children are still tentative in climbing and balancing on equipment, but most of the oldest children are very agile, balancing along circular tubs and jumping adventurously. All the children enjoy riding on the range of wheeled toys, and the oldest children show speed and control as they negotiate bends and obstacles. When the children were throwing and catching beanbags and balls, the oldest ones, particularly the boys, had skills that were well in excess of those expected for their ages. In their outdoor play, children show a good awareness of space, and it was rare for them to collide.

16. In indoor activities, children are encouraged to use a range tools and equipment, and they do so with growing dexterity. For example, one younger child initially showed little skill in cutting out pictures of minibeasts, but a little teaching enabled him to be much more patient and accurate. Two older girls made necklaces by threading shapes onto a string and they were delighted when they wore them. 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.

Creative development

17. Good achievement in children's creative development stems from the rich variety of activities provided by the nursery. Art is a strong feature, as was seen in the wide variety of children's work in progress and on display. The children's carefully observed drawings of stick insects, dragonflies made from pipe cleaners and a range of fabric, and spiral drawings inspired by observation of snail shells, are all examples of good quality work. The very good range of drawing, painting, printing and modelling all helps children to express themselves. Imaginative play also makes an important contribution to children's creativity. The role-play area became a restaurant, and the chefs and waiters busied themselves to serve the meals. Outdoors, the builders in the sandpit moved large quantities of sand in to their cement mixer so they could build a house. The rich range of language accompanying this play, and the collaborative nature of the activity adds much to other aspects of children's development. Musical activities, both organised and experimental, also help the children to develop their creative skills.

The quality of teaching is very good and reflects the high expectations staff have of what children can achieve

18. The quality of teaching was good or better in all of the 16 sessions observed. It was very good in nine of these sessions, and good in seven. This represents a very good standard of teaching when compared with the national picture.

19. The planning of children's work is excellent. Detailed weekly plans ensure a consistent approach throughout the nursery and coverage of all areas of learning. Staff adapt these plans into activities for their own group, which allows them to be imaginative and to use their strengths. As a result, seemingly mundane activities such as words beginning with the letter 'l' are translated into tasting liquorice and comparing the size of ladles. Meticulous planning results in tasks that provide challenging opportunities for learning. These catch children's interest, help them to concentrate and ensure that they learn new concepts and skills.

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For example, in one group time, the teacher planned a sequence of numeracy activities in which the children counted, ordered and solved problems. As a result of careful planning and very good teaching, the children thoroughly enjoyed the session and improved their skills.

20. The staff 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. They give them lots of praise. When children need some direction, or a 'friend' to work with, adults gently guide them, and give sufficient support to achieve success, without completing tasks for them. For example, children playing on the 'Ugly Bug Bus' were encouraged to balance along the top, and helped when needed, but they were allowed to take their own risks in jumping off or exploring the tunnels created under the climbing blocks. Gentle support in a number of art and craft activities enabled the children to cut more precisely, experiment with paint, or select the best materials.

21. Adults organise and manage children's learning very effectively. Even though some of the rooms and the outdoor area are limited for space, activities are precisely positioned so that the children can circulate freely and gain the most from them. There are well-established routines in the nursery, which adults reinforce consistently, so children know exactly what is expected of them and respond accordingly. Expectations of sharing, taking turns and working with others are constantly modelled and explained. As a result, children channel their efforts into their tasks and work with enthusiasm. The excellent relationships between adults and children support the development of social skills as well as those in other areas of learning.

22. There are high expectations of what children can achieve. For example, the standards achieved in the investigative work seen during the inspection, looking closely at minibeasts and learning about where they live and how their bodies work would be typical of much older children. The staff introduced concepts such as food chains, and details about the changes insects undergo (one child said that a caterpillar 'takes its skin off' to change into a butterfly), enabling many children to develop their understanding well beyond that expected for their ages.

23. Staff are particularly skilled in enriching children's language. They extend speaking and listening skills as part of every activity. 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 listen very carefully so children can speak at length. A good example was when children were examining and drawing the ladybirds they had caught and the teacher said, "What shape is it?" "How many spots does it have?" "What sort of pencil will you need for that?" Through their expressive reading, adults make stories come to life, such as when a group of children listened intently to 'Billy's Beetle' and took turns at spotting it on the page. The basic skills of literacy are taught well, both in group times and through interaction when children are working and playing. Adults assess children's progress through structured observations, noting when new steps in learning are achieved.

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

The school provides a rich, well-organised curriculum that stimulates and challenges children's learning

25. The staff plan an excellent range and content of activities so that the children have very good opportunities to advance their learning. They ensure that the curriculum is interesting, broad and relevant to the children's needs. As a result, children make good progress in all the recommended areas of learning for the foundation stage. Half-termly plans are based on a theme and, during the inspection, much of the children's work focused on 'Minibeasts'. For example,

children painted masks to wear at the 'Ugly Bug Ball', which was an event planned for the end of the week. Another group went on a snail hunt in the school grounds and were fascinated by their catches. Children listened to the story of 'Billy's Beetle', which he lost but kept appearing on each page in the most unlikely places. Within these activities, linked by a common theme, children develop creativity, investigative science skills and their understanding of stories. The curriculum is carefully interwoven so that the children can steadily extend their knowledge, skills and understanding.

26. The nursery has three main rooms, and each has a particular focus, such as creative activities or construction. Staff have detailed weekly plans for their room so that children benefit from a variety of experiences linked to the theme. As the range of activities varies between the three rooms, the groups of children rotate, on a weekly basis, and experience the full range of learning. In this way, the school ensures that the children have equal access to the curriculum.

27. There is a very clear structure to each session, which ensures that the children experience work in a small group, and have opportunities to choose their own activities so that skills of independence and initiative are cultivated. Each session begins with a choice of activities within a room and, where children do not settle easily, adults gently guide them to work. Because the curriculum is so well organised, adults are able to spend most of their time working closely with the children. Next, there is a period when children can move between the rooms and select any activity. This develops personal and social skills because, from the time they start nursery, children have to make choices about where to go and what to do. During the inspection, two older girls went quite naturally to the library, selected books and sat 'reading' for about ten minutes. This independence is encouraged because the staff have given much thought to the structure of each session.

28. A group time follows, which enables the teachers to focus on basic skills in English or mathematics, as was seen when children learnt about their letter of the week. Outdoor activities are imaginatively organised. Climbing, digging and play on wheeled toys provide good opportunities for physical development, but there are also many other activities that might normally be indoors, so the children have a wide range of choices. A group time ends the session, with a story and sometimes songs. It is the good balance of types of activity throughout each session that adds challenge to the curriculum.

29. 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 good resources that enrich children's learning.

10

The high standard of care provided by the school supports children's personal, social and emotional development very well

30. A very strong culture of care is evident in all that happens at the nursery. Adults know that unless the children feel happy and secure they will not learn

successfully. The empathy between adults and children was very much in evidence during the inspection. For example, during Monday morning, a younger child was upset and wanted his mummy. His teacher handled this very sensitively, calming the child and encouraging him to be involved in a cutting and sticking activity, close to her, until the crisis was over. 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 there to comfort them and 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. When necessary, adults are firm and caring, such as in situations where children's safety is involved. They insist that children walked sensibly around the nursery and that they are hygienic in their toileting.

31. At a whole-school level, procedures are well established to promote children's welfare, health and safety. Home visits, before children start nursery, highlight any particular support that may be needed. Individual children's medical needs are monitored carefully, and all staff are trained in first aid. There are very good procedures for child protection and these are well known to all the adults in the school. The headteacher has good links with outside agencies that provide support and advice about children's care. 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.

The school has very good relationships with parents, which encourage very positive support for children's learning

32. Parents think that the nursery is excellent. 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 90 per cent feel that their children are making very good progress. This is a very strong endorsement of the success of the nursery. Parents most often commented on the way in which their children have grown in confidence and independence since being at 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 and the quality of leadership provided by the headteacher. The inspection team agrees strongly with parents very positive views of the school.

33. 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. A number of parents said they had found this visit useful. There are then times for both parents and children to visit the nursery before the child starts. As a result, parents and carers come into the nursery quite naturally at the beginning and end of sessions, chat with members of staff, and exchange information about the children. On the first morning of the inspection, a granddad arrived early and quite happily took his grandson in to the nursery library to read a story. Parents discuss their child's progress informally with nursery staff, and they also have

two formal opportunities to visit nursery to discuss assessments the staff have made of children's progress. This is an improvement since the last inspection when some parents felt there were too few formal opportunities to discuss children's achievements. Parents also appreciate good information about planned activities, sent in regular newsletters and displayed on the whiteboard or notice board in the school entrance.

34. The nursery encourages parents to be as involved in the work of the school as they wish to be. During the inspection, parents visited the nursery to cook cheesy pastry minibeasts with children, to sew, and to help with activities on the computer. Parents attend performances given by the children, such as the Easter bonnet parade. They help on outings and with fund raising. Nursery staff appreciate this support. The school encourages all parents to play a part in their children's education and the great majority of parents are very keen that their children should succeed.

The headteacher provides purposeful leadership and makes full use of the many talents of the staff team

35. The school prospectus says, "Nursery education is about challenging children and encouraging them to develop into motivated learners and thinkers, full of curiosity about the world around them". This clear vision for high-quality nursery education is promoted by the headteacher and shared by her colleagues. Their high expectations for children's achievements, and the way in which they challenge children with stimulating tasks, ensure the vision is translated into practice. The headteacher provides purposeful leadership to reach and sustain the high standards that have been set.

36. 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 ever present around the nursery, teaching groups of children, discussing issues with colleagues, 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. More formal monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning have started recently, but the headteacher recognises that systems are not yet rigorous enough. Although the school improvement plan identifies a number of important initiatives, such as developing the school's approach to literacy and numeracy, its current format is rather unwieldy and would benefit from a sharper focus on the most important issues. However, as in most small schools, the staff team works very closely; evaluation of current practice and identifying issues for improvement are part of regular discussions.

37. The overall organisation and management of the nursery are very effective. The headteacher uses the talents of the staff team to maximum effect. For example, her colleague teacher plays a significant role in many aspects of management, particularly in leading the staff in planning the curriculum. The excellent quality of these plans, and the influence they have on day-to-day practice, is a significant strength. Each of the staff who plans the education for a group of children carries an important responsibility for ensuring that the quality and organisation of activities

meets the high standards expected. Day to day administrative tasks are also well organised, and an efficient secretary supports the headteacher.

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38. The nursery does outstanding work in providing an excellent setting for those training to work with young children. During the inspection, two teachers in training, a nursery nurse and a care student were all placed at the nursery. They commented on the very good support they receive from staff, concerning planning and teaching. It was evident that their skills were developing well and that they were benefiting from the support of experienced professionals.

39. 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. She provides very good leadership for a team of experienced and talented educators.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

40. The inspection team found no significant areas of weakness. There are two minor issues, mentioned below, which the school may wish to add to its plans for development.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

41. The school has many strengths and very few weaknesses. It provides a rich and stimulating curriculum, and very 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:

- adopt a format for the school improvement plan that is less complicated and identifies priorities more clearly;
- increase the involvement of the governing body in understanding the current strengths of the nursery and planning future developments.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of sessions observed | 16 |
| Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and children | 10 |

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| 0 | 56 | 44 | 0 | 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) | 40 |
| Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals | 0 |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

| | Nursery |
|---|---------|
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs | 1 |
| Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register | 10 |

English as an additional language

| | No of pupils |
|---|--------------|
| Number of pupils with English as an additional language | 1 |

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 | 2 |

Attendance

Authorised absence

| | % |
|-------------|------------------|
| School data | No official data |

Unauthorised absence

| | % |
|-------------|------------------|
| School data | No official data |

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

Qualified teachers and support staff

| | |
|--|----|
| Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) | 2 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher | 20 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Total number of education support staff | 4 |
| Total aggregate hours worked per week | 79 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Number of pupils per FTE adult | 7 |
|--------------------------------|---|

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

| | |
|----------------|---------|
| Financial year | 1999/00 |
|----------------|---------|

| | £ |
|--|--------|
| Total income | 133994 |
| Total expenditure | 127337 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 3183 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 2699 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 9356 |

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Number of questionnaires sent out | 80 |
| 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. | 88 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making good progress in school. | 64 | 36 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Behaviour in the school is good. | 72 | 24 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| My child gets the right amount of work to do at home. | 41 | 41 | 6 | 0 | 12 |
| The teaching is good. | 85 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on. | 73 | 15 | 8 | 0 | 4 |
| I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. | 81 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best. | 54 | 46 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school works closely with parents. | 60 | 32 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| The school is well led and managed. | 96 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school is helping my child become mature and responsible. | 72 | 28 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. | 59 | 36 | 5 | 0 | 0 |

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 were making good progress at the nursery, particularly in developing personal and social skills such as self-confidence and independence. They find the nursery a very welcoming environment for both children and adults.