

INSPECTION REPORT

WHITEHILLS NURSERY SCHOOL

Northampton

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 121787

Headteacher: Mrs A Williams

Reporting inspector: Mrs Anne Johns
18579

Dates of inspection: 21 - 22 May 2001

Inspection number: 198730

Full 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 4

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Acre Lane
Northampton
NN2 8DF

Postcode:

Telephone number: 01604 842957

Appropriate authority: Local education authority

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Clare Moss

Date of previous inspection: 17 November 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Area of learning responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
18579	Mrs A Johns	Registered inspector	Personal, social and emotional development Communication, language and literacy Knowledge and understanding of the world Physical development English as an additional language Equal opportunities	What sort of school is it? How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
88992	Mr J Vischer	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? Accommodation Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
31819	Mrs S Duggins	Team inspector	Mathematical development Creative development Special educational needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? The work of the speech and language unit

The inspection contractor was:

Full Circle
 The Brow
 38 Trewartha Park
 Weston-Super-Mare
 North Somerset
 BS23 2RT

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 WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

There are 49 boys and 39 girls on roll aged between three and four. They are admitted in the autumn term and attend on a part-time basis. In addition, there are eight places in a unit for children with speech and language disorders.

The school has an above average percentage of children with special educational needs. There are three children with Statements of Special Educational Need. There are very few children from ethnic minority backgrounds. Two children speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry overall is broadly average, although there is a wide range of ability, with several higher attaining children. The school has recently won a national achievement award for improvement and also renewed the Investors in People award.

The school is situated on the outskirts of Northampton and serves a large estate of privately owned houses bordering on open countryside. Most children are local, but there is no specific catchment area and some children attend from a wider area. The school is a one storey open plan building with two main classrooms, the speech and language unit, and an extension accommodating library and play areas. It shares a site with Whitehills Lower School, to which most children transfer after three terms in the nursery school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Whitehills is an effective nursery school, which provides the children with a good start to their education. Staff know the children well and value each child as an individual, fostering high levels of self-esteem. There is a strong staff team, clear leadership, well-informed governors and very supportive parents. The children make good progress overall and most are likely to achieve standards above the Early Learning Goals¹ at the end of the Foundation Stage². Most of the teaching is good. The staff provide positive role models and relationships are very good. Children develop confidence, knowledge and understanding in an environment where purposeful play is very much valued. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards overall are likely to be above average by the end of the Foundation Stage and most children make good progress.
- The quality of teaching is mainly good, with an experienced staff team.
- The school has a positive ethos with very good pastoral care for the children.
- The provision for special educational needs in the speech and language unit is very good.
- The provision for moral and social development is very good, with very good relationships, behaviour and attitudes.
- There is a strong partnership with parents.

¹ The Early Learning Goals set out what most children should achieve by the time they reach the end of the reception year in the primary school.

² The Foundation Stage applies to children from three years of age to the end of the reception year in primary school.

What could be improved

- Written planning does not have sufficient detail to support staff in the delivery of the curriculum and ensure coverage of all aspects of the curriculum.
- There is not always an appropriate balance between planned teaching and the children's self-chosen activities, particularly in mathematical development and outdoor play.
- The monitoring of the teaching and learning is not sufficiently regular or specific.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1997. Since then it has made satisfactory improvement and is well placed for further improvement.

The attainment of the more able children has been raised by the provision of extension activities and tracking the involvement levels and interests of the children. Since the last inspection the school has tried various methods of allocating responsibilities for developing and monitoring the different areas of the curriculum. Currently, the teachers currently share responsibilities with a good level of support from all staff, which works satisfactorily. The informative school development plan identifies clear priorities for development and the necessary actions needed. At the time of the last inspection, leadership and management were sound; these are now good. The school has succeeded in raising awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity. This was evident both during the inspection and also through documentation.

Schemes of work have been introduced, but these are not in sufficient detail to guide the planning and support learning. They do not have enough detail to ensure progression in the children's learning or to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are covered. There are more regular opportunities for mathematical learning, but they do not include enough planned teaching of skills. Good use is made of non-teaching staff to support learning; all staff are well informed and effectively support individual children or groups.

STANDARDS

When the children leave the nursery, they have another year in the Foundation Stage in a primary school. Judgements are based on what the majority of children are currently achieving in relation to the 'stepping stones'³ and therefore, what they are most likely to achieve at the end of the Foundation Stage.

- In personal, social and emotional development, they are likely to achieve above the standards expected. The children are confident and eager to learn. They form very good relationships with each other and with adults, and show a range of appropriate feelings. They are thoughtful and considerate to each other.
- In communication, language and literacy, standards overall are likely to be above average at the end of the Foundation Stage. Most children enjoy listening to language, for example, in a range of stories and poems. They use appropriate language when playing in the shop. They listen well, concentrating and looking intently at the teacher. They enjoy talking about their favourite books. Many children are becoming confident at writing their name correctly.

³ 'Stepping stones' show the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes that children need to learn during the Foundation Stage in order to achieve the Early Learning Goals.

- In mathematical development, standards are likely to be average. Many children can count to ten and a few can count to 20. They are beginning to match numbers by their shape and name and are developing an understanding of mathematical vocabulary.
- In knowledge and understanding of the world most children are likely to achieve beyond the Early Learning Goals. They are interested in the world around them and make good use of their senses, for example, when tasting a range of fruit, or experimenting with floating fruit in the water tray. The children notice similarities and differences, for example, when comparing different fruit or developing tadpoles. They talk about where they live and places which they have visited.
- In physical development, most children are in line to attain the standards expected at the end of the Foundation Stage. They use tools carefully and handle glue sticks in a sensible way. Most children can balance and jump off a bench with reasonable control.
- Standards in creative development are likely to be beyond the Early Learning Goals. The wide range of interesting activities enables children to develop good skills in mixing paints, painting and drawing. Children dance enthusiastically and in time to the music.

Children with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. Those who speak English as an additional language also achieve well because of the support that they receive. Although higher attaining children achieve well, a few children could still achieve more. In mathematical development, for example, insufficient teaching of skills and knowledge to extend the learning hampers the progress.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The children have very good attitudes to school. They are keen to learn and enjoy school.
Behaviour	Behaviour is very good. The children are sensitively managed and they respond well.
Personal development and relationships	There is a strong emphasis on supporting personal development. Relationships between the children and children and staff are very good.
Attendance	Attendance is good.

The children have a clear understanding of the high expectations regarding behaviour. They respond very well to the positive praise and reinforcement.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
Sessions seen overall	Good

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

Teaching in the nursery and in the speech and language unit is good overall. This standard has been maintained since the last inspection. No teaching was less than satisfactory, with about 70 per cent being at least good, including 13 per cent very good

teaching. In about 30 per cent of lessons the teaching was satisfactory. In communication, language and literacy, the teaching is mainly good. All staff are well deployed and interact well with the children to develop their speaking and listening skills. Teaching in personal and social skills is mainly good with some very good teaching; every opportunity is taken to develop these important skills. All the staff encourage the children to be independent and to have high self-esteem. In knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development, the teaching is mainly good. In mathematical development and physical development it is satisfactory overall. All the staff make an effective contribution to the children's learning.

Strengths of the teaching include a thorough understanding of the needs of young children and the Foundation Stage curriculum; high expectations of behaviour; effective management skills; and very good use of praise and encouragement. There is also some skilled questioning, which draws out a positive response from the children. Most children make good progress during their time in the nursery because of the overall good standards of teaching. The lack of enough detail in curriculum planning, including sufficient opportunities for planned teaching, means that in some areas the teaching has less impact on learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and is appropriate for nursery children. Overall, there is a range of exciting activities available for the children. The outdoor area is not used to its full potential to promote learning across the curriculum.
Provision for children with special educational needs	The provision in the speech and language unit is very good. In the main school it is good.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	There is good provision for children who speak English as an additional language.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There is good provision overall. The provision for moral and social development is very good; for spiritual and cultural development it is good.
How well the school cares for its children	The procedures for child protection and health and safety are satisfactory. Pastoral care is very good.

The school has a very strong partnership with parents, which has a positive impact on the attainment and progress of the children.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment

Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides clear and purposeful leadership and management with effective support from all the staff team.
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How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They are very enthusiastic and are well informed through their regular visits to the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has made good use of the Effective Early Learning project and Investors in People award to focus on areas for improvement. The recent audits in information and communication technology and multi-cultural education have had a positive impact on provision.
The strategic use of resources	The financial management of funds under the control of the school is good.

There is some informal monitoring, but this is not sufficiently regular or specific with informative feedback. Overall staffing levels are good. Resources are generally good; the school has increased multi-cultural resources to an appropriate level. The accommodation is used well. Within the remit of the school the principles of best value are applied satisfactorily.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school promotes a calm and caring ethos. • There is very good personal and social development and good behaviour. • The children enjoy school very much. • The staff are very hard working and committed. • There are exciting activities, which promote learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The questionnaire response shows that some parents are unsure about the approach to homework and the provision of extra activities.

The inspection team agrees with the positive comments made by the parents. Suitable homework is encouraged through sharing books from the school library on a weekly basis. The activities outside lessons are similar to those of other nursery schools. About half the parents believed that questions related to homework were inappropriate.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. On entry to the school, children's levels of attainment vary, but overall they are in line with what might be expected for the age. Evidence from the school's records on entry, indicates that there is a significant number of higher attaining children who are confident and have a good range of vocabulary when they start school.
2. Inspection findings present a positive picture. Most children are in line to achieve standards above those expected at the end of the Foundation Stage, except in mathematical and physical development. At the time of the inspection, the children still had another year in the Foundation Stage in a primary school. Most are currently achieving standards above those expected for their age. Judgements were made by observation in lessons, talking to children and looking at samples of their work, documentation and photographs. The good progress and quality of learning observed, including the progress of children with special educational needs and children who speak English as an additional language, are because of the overall good quality teaching.
3. In personal, social and emotional development, the children are in line to achieve above average standards. They are eager to learn and want to find out more, for example after the story of Handa's Surprise, they wanted to know more about life in Africa. They are secure and feel confident in the happy school environment. When they come into school at the start of a session, they are keen to be involved in the exciting range of activities. Many children are already quite independent, for example, choosing when to have their snack or which activity to try. They care for each other and form very good relationships in the friendly and caring environment.
4. In communication, language and literacy, the children are likely to achieve standards above the Early Learning Goals, by the end of the Foundation Stage. They take part in role play, such as in the greengrocer's shop, and dress up to re-enact stories which they have been told. They develop a good use of vocabulary. Many children are becoming confident at writing their name. Older children can form letters correctly when writing their name. They enjoy books and talk about their favourites. There is good use of language and literacy across the curriculum. Staff make good use of opportunities to develop the children's speaking skills, for example, by asking relevant questions in group time.
5. In mathematical development, most children are likely to achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of the Foundation Stage. They recognise some shapes and are developing an appropriate understanding of mathematical vocabulary. In sand and water play, they use the words 'full' and 'empty' correctly. Many children already count to ten. A small minority of children can match numbers by their shape and name.
6. In knowledge and understanding of the world, the children are likely to achieve above average standards. They show a keen interest in the world around them, both in their play and in discussion. Many children have good computer skills, for example, they can use the computer mouse accurately.

7. In physical development, the children show satisfactory skills overall and are in line to achieve the standards expected. They climb and balance on the outdoor equipment with reasonable confidence. They enjoy dancing with the teacher in time to music. They handle tools with increasing control and a significant number of children have good skills when handling tools such as scissors. The outdoor area is not always used to full effect in supporting the children's learning across the curriculum. Opportunities to extend the learning by planned teaching are sometimes missed, and consequently, the children spend some time being unsure of what to do next.
8. In creative development, standards are likely to be above those expected at the end of the Foundation Stage. Children paint and draw showing increasing control and imagination. They sing with a good sense of timing and rhythm.
9. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls. In the afternoons there are more boys than girls. The staff are aware of this and ensure that all have opportunity to be involved in the activities offered. Staff are aware of the need for all children to be included. This includes the children from the speech and language unit who are very well integrated in the main nursery.
10. Children with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their individual targets. Individual targets are well detailed to support teaching and learning effectively. Children who speak English as an additional language are supported well and make good progress.
11. Most children in the nursery school make good progress overall. The previous inspection highlighted the attainment of the most able children as an issue. This has improved as these children are identified at an early stage and given suitable extension activities to take them forward. The lack of clear, written planning for both the short term and longer term hampers the progress that some children make, as some children could be making very good progress. Although staff know the children well, the written planning is not sufficiently detailed to support staff in ensuring that all children make as much progress as possible. Although more able children are identified and given more challenging activities, these do not always build on what they already know, understand and can do.
12. In personal and social development and communication, language and literacy, the good standards have been maintained. In knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development the good standards have also been maintained. Children readily ask questions to gain information. The use of information and communication technology has been developed which has had a positive impact on the children's skills in this area. In mathematical development standards remain the same. In physical development, based on current evidence, standards are about average, whereas they were above average in the previous inspection. In the last inspection standards were judged by the age of five, whereas they are now judged at the end of the Foundation Stage. The school has set challenging targets in relation to creative development and improving the use of the outdoor area, which have an impact on standards. It is on course to meet the targets that have been set.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Children have very positive attitudes to school. They are keen to join in and take a delight in the broad range of activities that are offered to them. For example, when they arrive at school, they move happily from one activity to another, often becoming thoroughly involved in one of the main activities on offer. They take pride in being members of a caring school community that values the whole person. Boys and girls are confident, and feel comfortable with school routines.
14. Children's behaviour in and around the school and in lessons is very good. They show a developing understanding of the impact of their actions on others. For example, after a daily whole-school session, staff called their key groups out one by one; children, who were sitting on different parts of the floor, responded quickly and yet manoeuvred very carefully past their colleagues without rushing or pushing them. In the playground, behaviour is very good. Children play well together and respect each other's space. There were no incidents of bullying noted during the inspection.
15. Relationships are very good between the children and also very positive between staff and children. They are offered good role models by all staff in developing relationships and showing respect for one another's efforts. Again, at a whole-school gathering, staff and children joined in together enthusiastically for a music and movement session, which generated a strong feeling of the school as community. Because of these positive relationships, children feel secure and are self-confident. They are happy to take responsibility for their nametags when they come to school and develop a good sense of independence.
16. Levels of attendance are good. Children come to school on time but not all at once as parents are given a broad time for arrival. This works well.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

17. The overall good quality of teaching has been maintained since the last inspection. No teaching was less than satisfactory, with about 70 per cent of teaching being at least good. About 13 per cent of teaching was very good, and 30 per cent satisfactory. The teaching is shared by the teachers, including the headteacher, and the nursery nurses. All the staff have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the needs of nursery children and they know the children well. As a result of the overall good teaching, most children make good progress in the nursery school.
18. The staff meet regularly to discuss planning and analyse what has worked well or needs improvement. Activities are often linked to a theme, such as 'Handa's Surprise', which stimulates the children's interest and understanding. For example, after this story, children could feel and investigate fruit, investigate floating and sinking with fruit, or dress up and join in role play linked to the story.
19. There is not always an appropriate balance between planned teaching in class or groups, and children's self-chosen activities where learning is consolidated or extended. This has particular impact on mathematical development and physical development. The written planning for both long term and short term does not provide enough guidance to support the teaching of the curriculum and ensure that all aspects of the Foundation Stage curriculum are covered. Short-term planning does not always include clear learning objectives and for some activities there is no planning available. Staff know what they want to do and why, but when there is insufficient planning it is more difficult to ensure continuity in learning, and therefore occasionally opportunities to extend the learning are missed.

20. Some informal monitoring takes place, but this is not regular or focused. This means that sometimes the good practice which exists and its positive impact on the learning, are not shared. No teaching was unsatisfactory overall, but in a few sessions, in particular when the outside area was in use or in mathematical activities, the pace was too slow and some children lost interest. When the focus of an activity is unclear, children are less keen to be involved. For example, in a mathematical activity, the children were provided with toy elephants to sort and measure, but no one wanted to join in this activity and they were unsure about what to do. Although the staff have regular individual professional development sessions with the headteacher, there is not enough regular feedback on the teaching or learning, in order to make further improvements and celebrate good practice.
21. In personal and social skills the teaching is mainly good with some very good teaching. Staff are adept at 'seizing the moment' to develop self-esteem and confidence. They constantly encourage children to take responsibility for themselves and their learning. In communication, language and literacy, teaching is mainly good, particularly in the skills of speaking and listening. In group times, skilful questioning helps to develop the children's vocabulary. In mathematical development and physical development the teaching is satisfactory overall. In the last inspection learning objectives were imprecise in mathematics; the school still needs to address this issue. In knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development the teaching is mainly good.
22. The staff manage the children well, ensuring that children of all abilities are included. They are enthusiastic, which often inspires the children to do their best, for example, when making a batik print. All staff are used effectively and are very well informed about the needs of the different children.

Strengths of the most successful teaching include:

- High expectations of behaviour and standards.
- Good skills in gaining and holding children's attention.
- Effective management skills and organisation.
- Very effective use of resources.
- The provision of a range of exciting activities which capture the children's interest and imagination.
- Very good use of praise and encouragement and skilful questioning, for example, in a group music session when children responded to items linked to a range of songs.

Areas for development

- Improve the balance between planned teaching and children's self-chosen activities, particularly in mathematical development and outdoor play.
 - Develop the planning to include clear expectations of what is to be achieved and how it is to be achieved.
 - Increase the regular monitoring of teaching and learning with informative feedback.
23. There is some effective teaching in literacy skills, mainly through making the most of all opportunities during activity sessions. For example, children interested in maps,

drew their own maps of Africa, accompanied by their independent writing, and this was made into a big book for all to share.

24. All adults know the children who have special educational needs very well and are aware of the targets set for them. Good liaison between the special educational needs co-ordinator and all staff, ensures that children with special educational needs have effective support and challenge. Consequently, the children make good progress and achieve well. Children who speak English as an additional language make good progress and achieve well because of the support which is provided for them. Higher attaining children are challenged appropriately by the extension activities and they make good progress overall.
25. The use of on-going assessment is effective, because the staff know the children so well. The regular staff meetings are useful for informal assessment, which is used in planning further activities. The school is currently developing useful, additional procedures for assessment, which will enable staff to identify clear targets for each child's development and to make accurate assessments of each child's progress.
26. The quality of teaching overall has a positive effect on the children's learning and overall they make good progress. Through the wide range of activities, they extend their knowledge and are stimulated to want to find out more. Usually children sustain their attention for a significant amount of time. When listening to stories they pay careful attention, focusing on what the teacher says.

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

27. The curriculum is broad and appropriate for the age group. It provides effective breadth and relevance for nursery children. They are offered a stimulating and varied range of experiences, with opportunities for individual and group activities. Strong emphasis is placed on exploration activities and learning through play. However, there is a lack of balance in the provision of free choice and planned opportunities to promote the expected outcomes in all six areas of children's learning. Insufficient time and emphasis are given to children's mathematical development. The programme for mathematical development does not provide enough planned opportunities to develop all children's understanding of mathematical processes and concepts, as well as to recognise numbers and begin to match numbers to sign and sound. The school has a suitable outdoor area that is well equipped for climbing, balancing, riding and pushing to promote children's physical development. However, insufficient emphasis is placed on developing children's physical development through a clear programme of learning activities.
28. The key issue from the last inspection report, 'to ensure that children's learning is systematically advanced by introducing schemes of work to support planning in all areas,' has not been fully addressed. The school reviews its curriculum regularly to ensure it matches the interests, aptitudes and special needs of all its children, with an emphasis on interests. Outline schemes are in place for all six areas of learning, supported by photographic evidence of children participating in the various activities. Written planning for progression in the curriculum is limited. The schemes of work do not provide sufficient detail of achievable learning steps to ensure continuity and progression in children's learning. This makes it more difficult to ensure that children gain skills, knowledge and understanding in a progressive way. Short-term planning does not consistently identify the purpose or expected

outcomes of an activity. Staff know the children very well and use this knowledge by making the best use of opportunities on an individual basis.

29. Appropriate importance is given to equality of opportunity. The children with special educational needs have full and equal access to all aspects of the curriculum. Good provision is made for pupils integrated from the speech and language unit and those in the main setting with special educational needs. The school has regard for the Code of Practice when meeting pupils' special educational needs and makes the policy known to parents. The provision determined in Statements of Special Educational Need is met. Individual education plans for these children show short-term, realistic, achievable learning steps to support teaching and learning for more effective progress. The school does not have a ramp for disabled access or toilet facilities for the physically disabled.
30. Provision for personal, social and health education is good. Staff promote good standards, for example, during discussions over snacks or in group time.
31. Links with the community are good; families are a high priority and the ethos of the school welcomes and supports them. Visits in the locality and further afield are used well to give children first hand experiences and make them aware of their immediate community and environment. The nursery school provides valuable placements for high school students, nursery nurses and trainee teachers who make a sound contribution to the quality of children's education. There are regular and effective meetings between the headteacher and reception teacher of the main receiving school.
32. The overall provision for the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with improvement in the provision of cultural development since the last inspection. The provision for moral and social development is very good. Children have a very clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Staff remind the children regularly about the good behaviour which is expected so that children understand and respond very well. The warm family atmosphere supports social development very well. Children mix and play together very well; they take turns without being reminded and share well. The ethos and very good relationships in the school provide children with very good opportunities to develop their moral and social skills. There is not a policy to provide useful guidance in this area and to help ensure that the good standards are maintained.
33. The provision for spiritual development is good, with regular time for reflection and attention drawn to the wonder of the world around us. During the year they grow seeds and beans and enjoy watching them grow. They express delight as the tadpoles develop. In group times stories are used well to foster thought and care for others, and engender such qualities as sharing and consideration. This is very apparent in the daily life of the nursery school. The school celebrates a range of festivals including Easter, Christmas and Diwali, which fosters respect for others.
34. There is good provision for cultural development. The school welcomes visitors to support learning and visits places in the community to promote cultural development. Resources for promoting awareness of the multi-cultural nature of society have been increased, and there is now a good range available. The school realises the importance of this aspect of the curriculum and photographs indicate a range of interesting, appropriate activities throughout the year. The children

experience and enjoy a range of music and art activities during their year at the nursery school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

35. The school takes good care of its pupils. This judgement combines satisfactory levels of physical safety for children with very good pastoral support. The school offers a safe environment for children to learn and play even though parts of the building require attention. For example, the floor in the main room has several potential tripping-up hazards. There are no access or toilet facilities for the disabled. The accommodation does not include a changing area or shower. The kitchen area and staff rooms are used as teaching rooms even though they are not designed as such. However, the school is aware of these issues and staff are very vigilant. Safety procedures are up to date and some aspects, for example, accident reporting, are very thorough. The site supervisor can be contacted at any time via a mobile phone. He is well informed about good health and safety practice and carries out minor repairs where appropriate. First aid procedures are good. There is good provision for sun protection in the summer and a well-devised induction for children into the discipline of fire drills. The site is secure.
36. The school monitors and promotes good behaviour very well. Children are encouraged to behave well by a simple and straight forward policy. This is consistently applied and thoroughly understood by all members of staff. It is shared with parents as soon as their child joins the school and parents are encouraged to play an active part in maintaining high expectations of behaviour throughout the year their child is at the school. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are good. The procedures for child protection are well known by all staff and actively supported by the headteacher. Procedures for monitoring of 'settling in' are well practised and involve the active participation of parents. Home visits are made prior to children joining the school. A positive approach to transfer arrangements ensures children are well supported when moving on to primary school.
37. There are good procedures for monitoring attendance that also involve children. They are expected to lift their own name-tags from their pegs in the cloakroom and place them in the tray in the classroom to indicate that they are present. They are then checked by a member of staff and registered after the time the door is locked. Absences are followed up by phone calls. There are good links with the education welfare officer. Latecomers have to ring the bell to gain access although a wide margin for arrival is allowed.
38. Procedures for assessing children's attainment and progress are satisfactory overall. The school has made an effort to link the statements used in the medium-term plans to those recorded in individual children's files. The key worker, who has responsibility for named children, appropriately collates these individual children's profiles appropriately. However, these are not consistently completed to identify particular strengths and areas for development for individual children.
39. The school caters effectively for children with special educational needs. There is good provision for the early identification of children with special educational needs in the main setting. Individual education plans identify clear half-term aims that are refined into suitable short targets to promote progression. All staff are aware of these targets, and encourage and observe children during their daily activities.

Overall, the personal support and guidance provided by the school are effective in enabling the children to achieve well.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

40. Parents expressed very positive views about the school when responding to the questionnaire and at the parents' meeting. At the latter, parents were appreciative of the fact that they are encouraged to discuss any detail that may affect their child and also that they could look in their child's folder at any time. They also appreciated the calm, caring atmosphere of a school in which they feel valued. These views reflect the positive and open approach the school has towards parents.
41. The school has very effective links with parents and provides very good quality information for them. The school prospectus is comprehensive. It encourages the involvement of parents in the school and emphasises the importance of the parental contribution to learning through its large section on parent partnership. Parents are given clear details about school issues and events in the headteacher's monthly newsletters that are simple and brief. The provision of thrice yearly parents' evenings is very good. In addition, parents are invited to discuss their child's personal or academic progress at any time. The school has provided a large notice board in the cloakroom which parents can see when they deliver their children. The home-school profile offers a valuable Record of Achievement for children and provides good information for parents on their child's progress at the end of the year. This is supplemented by a useful summary report. Parents' views have been canvassed on specific issues related to the Effective Early Learning Project, with their views being taken into account.
42. The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is very good. There is a useful home-school agreement supported by parents. The school encourages first-time parents to get to know other parents by offering opportunities such as accompanying the children on a local walk. The school also provides one of its smaller rooms for parents when not in use for teaching. Parent weeks are alternated with the parents' evenings in every other half term. They offer a very good opportunity for those parents who do not come in to school on a regular basis to come and join in with the activities of the week. There is a number of very committed parents who make a very effective contribution. They come in to school to help with learning activities and to help with the organisation of resources, which make lessons more effective. Many parents are involved with the school trips when large numbers of adults are needed to help with supervising the children. There is no formal parents' association but school events are well supported.
43. The school has a very good partnership with the parents of children with special educational needs. Staff make every effort to encourage parental involvement all aspects of their child's education. The special educational needs co-ordinator communicates well with parents, regularly sharing concerns and celebrating success. Parents are invited to make contributions to reviews to support their children in achieving individual targets.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

44. In the last inspection the leadership and management were sound. Progress has been made in this area and it is now good. The headteacher provides the school with clear and purposeful leadership and is well supported by staff. Good use has

been made of projects such as the Effective Early Learning Project, to identify strengths and weaknesses in the school. There are clear aims and values which are shared by all staff and governors. There is a strong commitment to providing a stimulating curriculum with a clear emphasis on purposeful play. There is a very positive ethos in the school and the very good relationships which exist in the close knit team, make it a good place for young children to learn.

45. The last inspection identified the need to appoint curriculum leaders. The school experimented with this but found it difficult to implement in the setting. The teacher has overall responsibility for the curriculum, but all staff members share this in a more informal way. Although the current system is satisfactory overall, it is now important to develop regular and more focused monitoring in order to make further improvements. Current monitoring is on an informal basis and is not sufficiently regular to have enough impact.
46. The school development plan has improved. In addition to a longer-term plan, the informative one-year school improvement plan contains clear actions, time-scales, cost implications and success criteria. There are targets for improvement with useful evaluations of progress. The procedures for staff development are good and staff have attended relevant training. There is thorough induction and support for any new members of staff. All staff have regular individual performance management sessions with the headteacher.
47. The governing body is very supportive and is well informed through regular visits to the school. Each governor has a curriculum area of responsibility. Visits include monitoring the areas of the curriculum and providing useful feedback at governor meetings. Governors fulfil their role of 'critical friend' and their responsibilities well. They understand the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. They are enthusiastic and meet very regularly. The chair of governors is knowledgeable and makes frequent visits to the school.
48. The local education authority maintains overall financial control. There is no delegated budget so there is limited scope for the school's control over developments in relation to priorities or to seek value for money, for example regarding improvements to the school. The school receives a small capitation allowance to resource particular needs. Financial management within the school's remit is overseen by the headteacher and is satisfactory. Within the limits of the available budget, the principles of best value are applied satisfactorily.
49. The secretarial support for the school is effective and enables the school day to run smoothly. Additional funds raised by the school are well managed and directed to support the priorities in the school development plan. The recent school audit identified some areas for development which have been acted upon. Information technology is used appropriately for administration purposes.
50. The management of the provision for children with special educational needs is good. The headteacher oversees provision and is well supported by all staff. Regular meetings are held at the end of the school day, which provide good support in managing and monitoring pupils with special educational needs. Additionally, the co-ordinator attends all review meetings, leads in the compilation of individual education plans, sets targets and oversees the speech and language unit as part of the setting. The targets set for children with special educational needs are realistic

and achievable. All staff are well informed about the needs of the children, which enables them to fulfil their role effectively.

51. The school makes good use of a range of learning resources to stimulate the children's interests. Resources meet curricular demands and are generally of good quality. Staffing levels are good. All members of the nursery school staff are suitably qualified and have good experience in the education and care of young children.
52. The accommodation is adequate for the delivery of nursery provision. The main classrooms are spacious enough for various different activities to take place simultaneously and the extension provides additional space if necessary. The extension houses the library, allowing the smaller classrooms to be more useful for teaching. The outside area is large and well provided with fixed equipment, which includes the sandpit, playhouse, willow tunnel, and swing bridge. There is suitable storage for outside equipment. Inside, the floor of the main classroom has worn areas, protruding doorsills and sunken doormat wells and requires attention. The small rooms used for teaching key groups are adequate. Storage space is at a premium. The use of the small boiler room to keep school materials, cleaning products and tools is an unfortunate necessity. There is no access or toilet facility for the disabled. The school is clean and bright.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

53. The headteacher, staff and governors should:
 - (1) Develop more detailed written planning, which states what should be taught and when in each area of learning.
(paragraphs 11, 19, 28 and 87)
 - (2) Ensure that there is an appropriate balance between the children's self-chosen activities and the planned teaching of skills and knowledge, particularly in mathematical development and in the use of the outdoor area.
(paragraphs 19, 27 and 78)
 - (3) Develop more regular monitoring of the teaching and learning, with informative feedback to staff.
(paragraphs 20 and 45)

THE WORK OF THE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE UNIT

Information about the unit

54. The unit is sited in the main setting building and caters for eight pupils with speech and language difficulties. It is jointly funded by the local education and health authorities, which provide specialist support and transport between school and home.

How high are standards?

The unit's results and achievements

55. Children in the unit make good progress towards the targets identified in their individual education plans. When working in small groups, pairs or individually, children make good progress due to the good quality support they receive from staff and the flexibility of the centre, which allows pupils to settle and work at their own pace.
56. During the inspection, children made good progress in their communication skills. Through very effective questioning and discussion, good progress was made in the correct pronunciation of commonly used words.
57. When participating in practical play activities in the main setting, children show a growing confidence in making themselves understood.

Children's attitudes, values and personal development

58. Children enjoy coming to the setting. They co-operate well with others but need individual attention. The patience and positive attitudes of all the staff successfully create a happy secure atmosphere where the children love to play. Children respond well to the wide range of activities on offer. They trust the staff and willingly ask for help. Many opportunities are given for children to succeed and the small steps they make are praised. These very young children are confident to come on the school bus and go home, behaving well and listening carefully to instructions. They are well supported en route to and from school, their safety being paramount.

How well are children taught?

59. The quality of teaching in the unit is mainly good, with some very good teaching. The speech therapist, the nursery nurse and the special educational needs co-ordinator work very well as a team, providing consistent support for all children. Joint planning carefully identifies what help and support each child needs. Realistic, achievable short-term targets are identified ensuring staff are well aware of the needs of all children. Consequently each child receives good support and makes good progress.

How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to children?

60. The unit makes very good provision for children's learning through a range of suitable planned learning opportunities that are designed to help each child make progress towards the targets identified in their individual education plans. Children

join the main setting for all activities on offer and withdraw for small group or individual sessions. When in the main setting, their key worker is the nursery nurse employed specifically to support these children in and out of the unit. This arrangement is effective in building children's confidence and self-esteem by having someone so used to their communication difficulties close to hand. The children's targets are shared with all members of staff who successfully make concerted efforts to welcome and support these children in the nursery environment.

How well does the school care for its pupils?

61. The staff monitor the children's speech and language very well, in addition to their personal and social development. Records of children's progress are kept assiduously after each session and used well to plan the next daily session. The speech therapist and the learning support assistant work well together recording all outcomes to ensure continuity and progress in learning by building on what individuals know, understand and can do.

How well does the school work in partnership with parents?

62. There is a very good partnership with parents. The children are brought to the unit by transport provided by the local education authority. A diary for each child is used to communicate with parents who may live a long way from the unit. This successfully overcomes the difficulty of staff and parents being unable to talk together before and after school. A useful booklet has been written setting out many useful details for parents, and ensuring that they and their children are made to feel welcome. Parents of children new to the unit are given sufficient information about it, and kept informed of their children's progress as they settle in. All parents are invited to regular reviews of their children's progress and are aware of the targets set to enable continuation of support at home as well as school.

How well is the unit led and managed?

63. The overall running of the unit falls under the effective guidance of the headteacher of the main setting. As the special educational needs co-ordinator, the headteacher oversees all the administration. The paper work is well managed and follows the Code of Practice for special educational needs. The policy for special educational needs is appropriate and is a joint document with the main setting. Governors are supportive of the unit, but financial control is outside their jurisdiction. Management of resources is mainly the responsibility of the attending speech therapist. The main setting shares all the available resources with the unit whenever needed. The unit room is lively with bright displays that successfully celebrate children's work and teaching resources.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of sessions observed	23
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	14

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0.0	13.0	56.5	30.5	0.0	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)		44
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals		N/A

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs		Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		35

English as an additional language		No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language		2

Pupil mobility in the last school year		No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission		0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving		0

Attendance

Authorised absence		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**Financial information****Qualified teachers and support staff**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22.0:1
Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	124
Number of pupils per FTE adult	5.5 :1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2000/2001
Total income	144,758
Total expenditure	141,742
Expenditure per pupil	3,222
Balance brought forward from previous year	210
Balance carried forward to next year	3,226

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	88
Number of questionnaires returned	39

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	85	15	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	72	28	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	69	31	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	5	10	3	51
The teaching is good.	74	26	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	69	26	5	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	82	18	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	44	41	3	0	13
The school works closely with parents.	74	21	5	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	79	15	5	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	67	26	3	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	13	5	0	26

Other issues raised by parents

Over half the parents who responded to the questionnaire believed that the question related to homework was not relevant in relation to a nursery school.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Personal, social and emotional development

64. Children's achievement by the end of the Foundation Stage, is likely to be above the Early Learning Goals. From related comments throughout the last report, the standards were above average and they have been maintained.
65. The children make at least good progress in this area, because of the effective teaching, which includes some very good teaching. Staff have thorough subject knowledge and plan a wide range of activities to support this area of learning. Purposeful play activities foster very good relationships and help the children to share well. For example, when modelling they take turns with the glue sticks, and in role play they share the dressing up clothes. In group sessions they do not call out, and they listen well to each other and the teacher.
66. They quickly learn the nursery rules and know the difference between right and wrong. The staff are skilled at reinforcing this in a positive way, by 'seizing the moment'. Children begin to understand the impact of their actions on others. They develop positive attitudes and are keen to learn. Staff have high expectations of standards in this area and constantly reinforce these standards so that the children know exactly what is expected of them. During the inspection the children were usually busy, concentrating well in a range of activities.
67. Children quickly learn to be independent, for example putting on their coat when necessary. They know when to stop and listen and most help to tidy away. Resources are well organised and children learn where everything belongs. Independence is also fostered through strategies, such as self-registration, deciding when to have a drink or snack, and using the timer to time their turn on the computer.
68. The children show a range of feelings, for example, when tasting different fruits. Stories and poems are well used to encourage discussion and talk about feelings. Most children develop a good level of self-esteem through the consistent use of praise and encouragement, which brings out the best in them. Staff respect the children and this is returned. There is a strong sense of community and children develop thought and care for each other, through the regular discussions and reinforcement.
69. Children with special educational needs achieve well and make good progress in relation to their targets. This is because of the good support and clear liaison between all staff, who are consistent in their positive approach. Children who speak English as an additional language make good progress through the consistent reinforcement.
70. Regular group sessions often focus on this area of learning, promoting good standards. The range of activities promotes the learning effectively and ensures that this has important prominence.

Communication, language and literacy

71. Children make a good start in the early acquisition of language and literacy skills, and standards are likely to be above average at the end of the Foundation Stage.
72. The children enjoy books and can name some of their favourites. Most children recognise that words carry meaning and several children can recognise some letter names and sounds. They handle books with care. They often choose to share books, for example, when a governor comes into school to help. They make up their own words to re-tell a story. Most families use the home/school library on a regular basis, which has a positive effect on the progress children make.
73. The children listen very carefully, looking closely at the teacher and following instructions well. They listen very well to stories, later re-enacting them in their role play. The very good use of resources, for example, a range of finger puppets and exciting dressing up clothes, enhances the learning. The teachers' own enthusiasm engenders the children's interest and enjoyment. The children listen well to tapes and to each other, taking turns to speak and not calling out. In role play, they take on different roles with increasing confidence. There is a strong emphasis on developing speaking skills and many children already speak clearly and in sentences. They have a good range of vocabulary which is fostered in the regular group times.
74. During the inspection, there were few opportunities to observe children using imaginative play or role play to develop independent writing and number skills. Most children understand the purposes of writing. Importance is given to displays of the children's developing writing skills. Most children are confident at using marks to convey meaning, for example, when writing and drawing about Africa. Many children can write their name correctly, and higher attaining children can form some letters correctly.
75. Computers are used appropriately to develop language skills in language, literacy and communication. Children can explain what they are doing and predict what might happen next.
76. Most children, including those who speak English as an additional language, make good progress because of the effective teaching. The children with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well in relation to their targets, because of the support which they receive. Higher attaining children make good progress through the extension activities, which is an improvement since the last inspection. Some children are capable of making very good progress, but this is limited by insufficient planned teaching sessions to further develop skills.

Mathematical development

77. Standards are in line with those expected for the age group. Children recite a range of number rhymes and use their fingers for counting. Within the expected wide range of ability for children of this age almost all can count to five, with many able to count to ten and a few to 20. A small minority are able to match numbers by their shape and name and are at the early stages of recording numbers in written form. They are developing an understanding of some mathematical vocabulary; this was evident in their sand and water play using the words 'full' and 'empty' correctly. Through suitable involvement of the teacher in the shopping experience, children

are beginning to successfully use their skill of counting when buying 'fruit' from the class shop. They are at the initial stages of associating counting with the use of money. An understanding of measuring is developed through packing, filling and emptying bags for 'fruit' to fit. Children are beginning to learn about properties of shapes, and relationships between shapes, through using building blocks, jigsaws, construction kits and using shapes to print patterns. Many children can describe shapes clearly.

78. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. Most children, including those with special educational needs, or those who speak English as an additional language, make sound progress. In response to the previous inspection report, the setting has provided more widespread opportunities for mathematical learning, and standards have been maintained. However, there is no mathematical focus planned for every day. Activities are play related and give suitable opportunities for the exploration of everyday materials and equipment but sometimes lack structure for learning. The teachers' expectations are sometimes too low. Insufficient consideration is given to planning learning strategies according to the varying abilities of the children. Staff make regular observations but the emphasis is on who has been to an activity, tracking their interest, rather than on specific learning achievement or problems that could be used as a guide to plan appropriate activities to take learning forward. The current scheme of work does not give sufficient guidance for planning clear, achievable learning steps to ensure all children reach their full potential in this area of learning.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

79. By the end of the Foundation Stage most children are likely to be above the standards expected in the Early Learning Goals. The last inspection identified some areas of weakness, although standards were above average. These included the children not asking enough questions, underdeveloped use of large construction toys and that information and communication technology was in the early stages of being introduced. Children readily ask questions. There was little use of large construction toys during the current inspection, but photographic evidence indicates that these are used regularly. Information and communication technology has been developed well. Many children are confident at using the computer mouse and are familiar with a range of programs. The computers are used well, with children taking turns. The school has plans to develop the use of the computer further during the next few months. The use of programmable toys is underdeveloped as the school has only just received appropriate equipment. Most children make good progress because the quality of teaching is mainly good.
80. The children are confident investigators and keen to find out more about the world. The topic of 'Handa's Surprise' increased the children's desire to find out more about Africa. The very good use of resources in this topic enabled the children to learn more about animals, music, food and clothes. They use magnifying glasses sensibly when investigating different fruits and can talk about the similarities and differences. Children look at books to help them find out more, for example 'big books' about Africa. Most children know that they live in Northampton and can talk about local places that they have visited. Visits in the locality and further afield are used well to give the children first hand experiences. In the autumn term, for example, the children explore the attractive grounds of Whitehills Lower School, before making visits further away from school.

81. Most children have good skills in model making. They explain and talk about their models, explaining what they have made. Models are joined together firmly and children can explain why they have used glue or sticky tape.
82. Staff make the most of informal opportunities to promote learning, for example, by talking with children to extend their understanding of different environments. Most children, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, make good progress. In joint planning meetings staff discuss future planning, often taking into account what has worked well. However, the written planning does not have sufficient detail to ensure that all the appropriate aspects of the Foundation Stage curriculum are covered over time, for example, in the use of programmable toys. Teaching is successful and the children make good progress overall because the staff know the children so well.

Physical development

83. By the end of the Foundation Stage most children, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, are likely to achieve standards in line with those expected and they make satisfactory progress.
84. Overall, current standards are in line with what would be expected for the age. There is a significant number of children with good skills in using scissors, pencils and paintbrushes. When playing in the sand and water they pour and fill containers with good control. They have good hand to eye co-ordination when making models.
85. There were no opportunities to observe the children riding wheeled toys during the inspection but photographic evidence indicates that they do this with confidence and enjoyment. Many children can balance on a low bench and jump off with reasonable control. They have an appropriate awareness of space, for example, making sure that they have enough room when dancing.
86. The children are beginning to understand the importance of healthy eating; this is reinforced by the healthy snacks, such as carrots and apple slices.
87. The teaching is satisfactory overall. Teaching is good in group work when specific skills are taught, such as printing or when applying paste for a batik print, it is good and children make more progress, particularly with their fine motor skills. Progress in outdoor physical activities although satisfactory, is not secured by clear planning and learning objectives. Planning for the use of the outdoor area does not include a sufficient range of activities to promote learning across the curriculum, and some opportunities to extend the learning are missed. The school has already identified improving the use of the outdoor area as an area for development.

Creative development

88. Children have a wide range of opportunities to develop their creativity and are well on their way to attain standards above those expected of children by the end of the Foundation Stage. Children experience a suitable range of techniques and media such as paint, pastels and modelling materials. They show a developing confidence in the use of their observation and colour mixing skills when, with support, they show good details of a pineapple. Opportunities are available for exploring colour and creativity. During the inspection a child became very excited when he made

brown and shades of brown by mixing different amounts of colours. He could clearly explain what he had done to arrive at the different results. In the main, paintbrushes are used correctly when children are not under the guidance of an adult but there is a minority of children who still apply paint by a scrubbing action. Children respond well to music. This was apparent in their participation of an African song that calls the cattle home. Good rhythm was maintained and the majority of children know the African words. The children enjoy singing and making music and do so tunefully, using actions enthusiastically in their rhymes and songs. Children use the resources readily to aid their imaginative play in the home and shop corner and show confident social skills when playing with each other.

89. The quality of teaching is mainly good, particularly in observation activities and exploring with paints. All adults support children in their learning and ensure that they gain from the activities through discussion, as they work. There is a good sense of fun encouraged in practical tasks, such as in singing activities. Play activities are organised appropriately in the wet and dry areas and suitably matched to children's interests. The school is working on children's creative development as part of the focus of the current school improvement plan.