

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **PRINCESS STREET NURSERY SCHOOL**

Hindley, Wigan

LEA area: Wigan

Unique reference number: 106397

Acting headteacher: Janet McGowan

Reporting inspector: Mrs Pat Kime  
25350

Dates of inspection: 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2002

Inspection number: 230160

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 children:	3 to 4 years
Gender of children:	Mixed
School address:	Gilbert Street Hindley Wigan
Postcode:	WN2 3HJ
Telephone number:	01942 255329
Fax number:	01942 256674
Appropriate authority:	The local education authority
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs E Edwardson (Chair of the management committee)
Date of previous inspection:	1 <sup>st</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup> June 1998

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Area of learning responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
25350	Mrs P Kime	Registered inspector	Personal, social and emotional development Communication, language and literacy Mathematical development Special educational needs Equal opportunities	What sort of school is it? The school's results and children's achievements How well are children taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to children? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
16295	Ms D Shields	Lay inspector		Children's attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its children? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
27777	Mr R Greenall	Team inspector	Knowledge and understanding of the world Physical development Creative development	

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Princess Street Nursery School serves a disadvantaged area a few miles south west of Wigan. The 116 children attend part time, either mornings or afternoons. Six of the children have special educational needs but none has a statement. All the children speak English as their first language and very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most children spend a year in the nursery but when there are spare places younger children are admitted. This means that some children spend four or five terms at the nursery. When children start the nursery, they can do less than most children their age. The school is working closely with the local 'Sure Start' project. It has an 'Investor in People' award.

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

Princess Street Nursery School is a good school where children enjoy their education. The teaching is good. Although the children's starting point is below average, they make good gains in most aspects of their learning. Consequently, they reach an average standard. The children's personal development is fostered very well and they achieve a high standard in this area of learning. The acting headteacher provides good leadership and is managing the school well so that it is improving.

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

- A good curriculum is taught well and, as a result, the children make good progress.
- Standards are above average in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development, and creative development.
- The provision for children's personal development is a key strength. Children respond well to it and to the good pastoral care. They are keen to learn and are well behaved. They have a good degree of independence and they form very good relationships. These strengths help them to learn well.
- The school has a very good partnership with the children's parents and carers. It helps them to help their children.
- The school is led and managed well. The acting headteacher has already made a difference to the school.

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

- Standards in communication, language and literacy, and in mathematical development are not as high as in the other areas of the children's learning.
- The school could make better use of the information it gathers from checking children's progress to judge, more precisely, how effective it is and what it needs to concentrate on.
- The role of the management committee is not clear.

*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 June 1998. Since then it has been through a very unsettled time. However, the staff have maintained standards and the quality of education. Overall, since the last inspection, there has been a good improvement. The acting headteacher came in September 2001. She has built well on what had been done since the last inspection and has speeded up the rate of improvement.

Children are now doing better in their personal, social and emotional development, physical development, and creative development. These higher standards are the result of improvements in important aspects of the school's work. The curriculum has improved. The school is better led and much better managed. The school has a more effective partnership with the children's parents and carers.

Both the key issues for action in the last inspection report have been dealt with effectively. Firstly, the school now follows national guidance on provision for children with special educational needs. It does well for these children. Secondly, the quality of teaching has improved.

## STANDARDS

In personal, social and emotional development, standards are above the level expected for the children's age. The children have a good degree of independence and they concentrate well. They know how to behave in nursery. These standards represent very good achievement because children are quite a long way behind in this area of their learning when they start school.

Standards are also higher than expected for the children's age in knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development. In these areas of learning, the children achieve well from a broadly average starting point.

In communication, language and literacy, standards are broadly average for the children's age and, in view of their starting points, children achieve satisfactorily in this area of learning. Many children start nursery unable to talk in even simple sentences and with a very limited vocabulary. They make progress but this weakness in speaking skills is not overcome and it holds back the development of their early reading and writing skills.

In mathematical development, standards are broadly average. Children achieve well overall in this area of learning but standards are not as high in number as in the other aspects of mathematical development (shape, space and measures).

## CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good; the children love coming to nursery and they are enthusiastic about the things they do. They try hard, they want to learn, and they have the confidence to try new activities.
Behaviour	Good; the children know what is expected of them and they are normally well behaved.
Personal development and relationships	Good; the children develop a good degree of independence. Relationships are very good and children work and play together very harmoniously.
Attendance	Satisfactory; most absence is because of illness but a few children are taken on family holidays in term time.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of children:	Nursery
Quality of teaching	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.*



The teaching of personal, social and emotional development is very good. Provision for this area of learning permeates every aspect of the nursery's work and the staff make the most of every opportunity to promote this area of development. Consequently, the children gain ground at a very good rate. This is why they have such a positive attitude to learning.

There are three main strengths in the teaching.

- The staff provide a wide range of worthwhile, and well-planned activities from which the children may choose. Because the children are keen to learn and they stick at an activity, they make good gains in learning in their knowledge and understanding of the world, their physical development and their creative development. In these areas of learning the teaching is of a good quality.
- The staff are very skilled at organising the children and getting them to behave well. This means that there is an orderly atmosphere that is conducive to good learning.
- The teachers deploy the support staff well so they are able to make a positive contribution to the children's learning.

Sessions of direct teaching are often not as effective in promoting learning as the ongoing provision.

In communication, language and literacy and in mathematical development the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Staff do not make the most of opportunities to extend the children's language skills or to help them to learn more about numbers.

The quality of children's learning reflects that of teaching. For the most part the school meets all the children's learning needs equally well. However, in a few sessions for the faster learners the pace of learning is too slow and the work is inappropriate.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good; the children have a rich diet of interesting experiences that are based around 'topics' that interest them and the staff make sure that all children have a go at everything on offer. The arrangements for teaching early reading, writing and mathematics are satisfactory. More attention could be paid to making it clear how work will become progressively more demanding.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Good; the school quickly identifies children who find it hard to learn and uses outside experts well. The children's work is planned carefully; they are fully included in all activities and they make good progress in the light of their difficulties.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall; the school provides very well for children's moral and social development. The provision for spiritual and cultural development is good. There is scope for further development of multicultural education.
How well the school cares for its children	Good attention is paid to health and safety and welfare matters. The staff have a very high level of concern for the children's well-being. They keep a thorough check on what children have learned. They need to make more effective use of this information.

The school has established a very good partnership with the children's parents and carers. They are enabled to make a very good contribution to the children's learning.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good; the acting headteacher has a clear vision for the school. She has done a lot to improve the school and has laid good plans for further improvement. She gives a good lead to staff.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	There are no governors. Instead the school has a management committee. It carries very little responsibility and has not been given a clear remit. The managers support the school. They have confidence in the acting headteacher but rely heavily on her for information about whether the school is doing well enough for the children. They are not strongly focused on improving the children's achievement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory overall; the effectiveness of teaching is monitored and proper performance management systems are in place. The school is beginning to track children's progress in key areas of learning to see if they are all doing well enough. The acting headteacher has identified appropriate priorities for improvement. It is not fully clear where responsibility for the school's performance lies.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory; the resources for teaching and learning are used well but the effectiveness of spending decisions is not evaluated rigorously. Most of the school's budget is held and managed by the local education authority. The school applies the principles of best value satisfactorily in its work and in spending decisions.

There are sufficient staff. The accommodation is adequate. The resources for teaching and learning are good.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> <li>• The teaching is good and their children are expected to work hard.</li> <li>• Their children are making good progress and becoming mature and responsible.</li> <li>• The school works closely with parents and they find the staff approachable.</li> <li>• Behaviour in the school is good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of parents are not happy with the amount of work their children get to do at home.</li> </ul>

The 51 per cent of parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire think very highly of the school. The inspectors endorse the parents and carers views of the school's strengths but cannot agree with the dissatisfaction of a few over homework. The children get enough work to do at home and it is well suited to their age and learning needs.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and children's achievements**

1. Children do well at Princess Street Nursery. When they start the nursery, they are behind most children of their age. By the time they leave, most children at least meet the expected standard for their age in all areas of their learning. In some, they exceed it. All the children achieve well because they make good progress whatever their starting point or special educational needs. Standards are higher than reported at the last inspection.
2. In personal, social and emotional development all the children, including those whose special educational needs are due to behavioural difficulties, make very good progress. This is because provision for this area of learning is an integral feature of all aspects of the nursery's work and the staff are consistent in their expectations. When they start nursery many of the children are a long way behind most of their age in this aspect of their development. Very good teaching and lots of guided opportunities to develop confidence and independence and to build relationships pay off handsomely. By the end of nursery most children are doing better than average for their age, and they are well set to reach an above average standard in this area of learning by the end of the reception year. Children with behavioural difficulties make progress in learning self-control because staff deal with them consistently and they benefit from good support from specialist staff who visit several times each week. The high standard children reach in this area of learning helps them in their other work because they have established good skills for learning, very positive attitudes and good behaviour.
3. The children make satisfactory overall progress in communication, language and literacy. They start nursery a little behind in early reading and writing skills and, by the end of nursery, their attainment is typical for their age. However, children's speaking skills are generally weak when they start nursery. Many do not speak in sentences and their vocabulary is very limited. They make sufficient progress in their ability to communicate in words but, by the time they leave nursery, they have not reached an average standard for their age. Only the higher attaining children are on course to meet the expected standard by the end of the reception year. In some other aspects of the work, such as their knowledge and understanding of the world, children's learning is inhibited by their speaking skills.
4. In mathematical development the children make good progress from a below average starting point when they enter nursery. The majority are working at a typical level for their age and are set to meet the expected standard by the end of the reception year. However, standards are not as high in number as in shape, space and measures. This is because staff do not make the most of opportunities to promote children's knowledge and understanding of number.
5. In knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development, children start nursery with broadly average levels of attainment for their age. They make good progress because the curriculum gives them lots of opportunities and first-hand experiences. The good range of equipment and daily activity sessions make a good contribution to children's physical development. Standards in physical development and creative development are higher than at the last inspection.

#### **Children's attitudes, values and personal development**

6. The children's attitudes and relationships are very good, their personal development and their behaviour are good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when behaviour was satisfactory and other were aspects mostly good. These outcomes are a result of the very good provision for children's personal, social and emotional development and the high level of day-to-day care and support that they receive. The rate of attendance is satisfactory.
7. Parents and carers recognise these strengths. They state that their children enjoy coming to nursery and like the activities, that children's behaviour is good, and that the nursery is helping their children to become responsible and mature.
8. Children are very enthusiastic when they come in and they are keen to join in all the activities on offer. They become absorbed in their tasks and frequently persist with an activity for a long time. They try hard and clearly enjoy learning. All children, including those with special educational needs, have equally positive attitudes and show the same positive approach to learning.
9. Children pay attention to the staff and try to follow instructions carefully, for instance they listen well during story sessions. Occasionally they call out but this is usually as a result of enthusiasm rather than deliberate disruption. Sometimes concentration lapses; this is mostly amongst the very youngest children who find it hard to maintain their concentration and enthusiasm through to the end of the session. Children are keen to take part in new activities and do so with growing confidence even when they find them hard at first. For example, during a physical education session the children rose to the challenges provided by the teacher. As the session progressed they grew in confidence, trying differing ways of climbing up and down and moving on the climbing frame. They co-operate with staff and work alongside each other well. They are becoming aware of the need to share and take turns. For instance, during a creative activity they waited patiently, and with great anticipation, for their turn to 'dip and dye' their piece of fabric in the pots of colour provided.
10. The vast majority of children are well behaved and all make progress in learning how to behave in nursery. This is because of the very clear expectations, the consistent way in which staff promote this aspect and, for those with behavioural difficulties, the good support from visiting specialist staff. Nevertheless, a few children are sometimes boisterous, have difficulty controlling their behaviour and need a great deal of guidance. Although these incidents are dealt with very quickly and well handled by staff, they sometimes disturb the flow of learning for others. However, overall children move from one activity to another sensibly and behave well as they move between different rooms. Although most children are well trained in behaviour they have not yet developed a real depth of understanding of the consequences of any inappropriate actions. They have yet to develop the skill to 'think things through'.
11. Relationships between children and adults are very good and, in the main, this is also the case amongst children themselves. The children learn to listen carefully during the 'meeting time' at the start of each session. They talk about what they have done at home, discuss their news and share ideas. The children develop high levels of independence and decision making for their age. They are confident to select their chosen activities, such as painting, and take responsibility for putting on aprons to protect their clothes. They tidy up enthusiastically and see what needs doing, for instance picking up small bricks from the floor and putting them in the correct box.

12. The school has maintains attendance registers carefully and accurately but it has no current or previous accumulative statistical records of attendance. However, the registers indicate the level of attendance for most children is satisfactory. Most absences occur because children are ill or because of occasional family holidays. In the main most parents ensure their children arrive on time.

## **HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN TAUGHT?**

13. The quality of teaching, taken overall, is good. This is the main reason why children make better than average progress in most areas of their learning.
14. There are two elements to the teaching. Firstly, the staff plan a good range of worthwhile activities and first-hand experiences, related to 'topics' that interest the children, and they are clear what they want the children to learn from them. This ongoing provision is of a good quality and children learn well from it. For example, at the time of the inspection, the topic was 'Growth'. Children, parents and staff had participated in a very enjoyable and memorable 'Big Dig Day' when they worked to improve the school grounds and the children had very good opportunities to learn more about tiny creatures like ants and ladybirds. In school, two vivariums hold caterpillars and moths and they are surrounded by a very good, captivating display of relevant books and photographs. Each child is growing a plant from seed. The children's learning from these good first-hand experiences was consolidated effectively as they played well together in the 'Garden Centre', a play setting that staff have created in the nursery. Secondly, there are sessions of direct teaching of new work to small groups of children. Teaching in these sessions is of a more variable quality and is generally not as effective as the ongoing provision.
15. There are three key good features in the teaching that underpin its effectiveness.
  - The teaching of personal, social and emotional development is very good and this has a positive effect on many aspects of the children's learning. Opportunities for children to develop in this area of learning are built into all of the nursery's work. All the staff establish very good relationships with the children and they manage them very well. They guide them sensitively into meeting the high expectations for their behaviour and steer them into purposeful activity. Staff make the most of every opportunity to help children develop as individuals, to grow in independence and confidence, and to develop an enthusiasm for learning. Consequently, children are keen to learn and they behave well. They are confident to try new activities and willing to use their own initiative, and they have the persistence and concentration to stick at a task. These qualities and very positive attitudes enable them to learn a lot from the good variety of well-planned activities provided for them in nursery.
  - The teachers deploy the support staff well. They involve them fully in planning the work so they know what children are to learn from all the activities on offer in the nursery and they give them responsibility for teaching groups of children. This means that the support staff's time is used well and they are enabled to make a full contribution to the children's learning.
  - The staff capitalise effectively on parents' and carers' desire to help their children. They tell parents and carers what they might do with their children at home to support their learning in each 'topic'. They set worthwhile homework tasks. For instance, children take books and educational games home.

16. In communication, language and literacy, and in mathematical development, teaching is of a satisfactory quality. Children have sufficient opportunities to undertake work in these areas of learning but, in general, the opportunities are not of such a high quality as in other aspects of their work.
17. There are two main reasons why teaching in these two areas of learning is less effective than most of the other teaching. Firstly much of the work is done in sessions of direct teaching with groups of children. Teaching in these sessions is more often of a satisfactory quality rather than good. Furthermore, in some of the sessions that are planned to bring on the older and more able children, the quality of teaching is not good enough. Secondly, in sessions of direct teaching and in the ongoing provision, staff miss many opportunities to promote communication, language and literacy and mathematical development as in the following examples.
18. Each day staff display the day of the week and they sing a song with the children about the day and the planned activities. However, they could do more to draw children's attention to the letters, to teach the letter names, and to help children learn to recognise these words on sight. The staff read stories to the children every day. The effectiveness of these sessions varies considerably. Sometimes staff use questions very well to lead children to think about the plot and the characters. For the most part, they miss opportunities to help children learn to recognise words that are repeated in a story and they pay too little attention to reinforcing the left to right reading direction. In the play settings created by staff, such as the 'Café' and the 'Garden Centre' there are appropriate materials for writing, such as order pads. However, staff rarely join in the children's play in ways that lead them to use such materials purposefully so the children do not make the progress they could in early reading and writing. One of the activities provided for children is threading beads. The potential of this activity to help children learn about pattern, sequencing and ordering is not properly exploited because, for instance, examples of repeating patterns are provided for them to copy. In a session to promote mathematical development, the children matched baby clothes to different sizes of dolls. They consolidated their understanding about size from this activity but the teacher did little to extend their vocabulary or their mathematical thinking.
19. In two of the sessions seen the quality of teaching and learning was unsatisfactory. On both occasions the children did not learn enough, largely because the teachers did not pitch the work at the right level for the children. For example, the aim of one session, intended to push on the faster learners, was to develop the children's ability to write. However, the teacher lacked the expertise to do this effectively. Consequently, she took too little account of where the children were up to, and the activities the children undertook did little to help them move forward along the road from drawing a few shapes that looked slightly like letters towards writing words independently.
20. The teaching of knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development is good. Some of the most effective teaching seen was in these areas of learning as shown in these two examples.
21. In a session to promote physical development the youngest children used the climbing frame. They made good progress in learning to move in a controlled way. The teacher used this activity skilfully to also move the children on in other areas of learning. She introduced words, such as 'up' and 'down' to describe position and direction. She encouraged the children to be as independent as possible in taking their shoes and socks off before going on the climbing frame and she talked about the numbers on the individual mats on which they placed their shoes. While the children were climbing, the

teacher constantly encouraged them to plan and vary their movements and to talk about the activity.

22. In a session of 'dip and dye' with some of the older children, the nursery nurse brought the children's language skills on well. She encouraged them to talk about what they were doing while they worked. She valued every child's contribution so they were willing to try to express themselves. As a result, they made progress in understanding the sequence of the process of folding fabrics in different ways then dipping them in dye to create a variety of coloured designs, and in using words to describe the patterns they created. The nursery nurse's skilled questioning prompted the children to think things through and successfully drew them into the early stages of scientific enquiry. For instance, she got them observing well, predicting what might happen and hypothesising, and drawing conclusions about how secondary colours are created.
23. Children with special educational needs are taught well. Staff include them in all the activities and support them well. These children benefit from extra help from visiting staff.

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

24. The school provides a good curriculum with a rich range of interesting experiences and activities for the children. The curriculum fully meets the recommendations in the national guidance for the Foundation Stage. The staff make sure that all children, including those with special educational needs, participate in all the activities but they could do more to tailor the work to different children's needs. The curriculum has improved since the last inspection.
25. The staff base work on 'topics', such as 'All about Me' and 'Growth', that appeal to the children and broaden their horizons. These 'topics' are carefully planned so that sufficient attention is paid to all the six areas of learning, the children have a diet of interesting first-hand experiences and they learn through play. However, there is scope for more rigour in the planning of work at the whole-school level. Firstly, the focus is more on the range of activities than on how the work will get harder through the year. Secondly, the 'learning objectives' are often too broad to be measurable and they focus much more on what the children should know and be able to do rather than what they need to understand. Consequently, children's understanding is, at times, somewhat neglected. Thirdly, planning is not matched as closely as it might be to the 'stepping stones' of progress towards the targets for the end of the reception year. This makes it harder than it need be to link curricular planning with the assessment of children's learning and their rate of progress.
26. The work is enriched by a good range of educational visits and visitors. For example, as part of the work on growth, a visitor brought specimens of small creatures to school and talked to the children about them. This helped the children to learn more about the natural world and stimulated creative work. The children visit exhibitions at a local arts centre and while there, try their hands at modelling with clay.
27. The school provides very well for the children's personal, social and health education. Provision to develop personal and social skills is a strong thread running throughout all the school's work. Consequently, children develop well as individuals and, by the time they leave nursery, they have a good degree of independence and confidence and they co-operate well with others. Health education is taught effectively. For example, visitors

talk to the children about road safety and looking after their teeth, and the children learn about healthy eating.

28. The provision for early reading, writing and mathematics is satisfactory but not as good as for other areas of learning. The school has recognised the need to adapt its curricular provision to meet the needs of a wider age range now that younger children are joining the nursery. With regard to the younger children, this works well and they benefit from working as a separate group for some activities, for instance exploring the climbing equipment. In a few sessions the older and higher attaining children are taught separately with the intention of bringing them on in early literacy and numeracy skills. This is not effective because the quality of teaching in these sessions is not good enough.
29. At the time of the last inspection one of the key issues for action related to the provision for children with special educational needs. This is much improved. These children's work is planned carefully and they benefit from good support in day-to-day work and from visiting specialists. As a result, they make good progress towards achieving the targets in their individual education plans (IEPs).
30. The school has established very good links with others who contribute to the children's education. For example, when children start nursery school the staff take a lot of trouble to establish strong links with their families and they work hard to maintain these throughout the children's time at the school. The school makes every effort to liaise with the many infant and primary schools that the children move on to. As a result, the transitions from home and on into primary education are smoothed.

#### The provision for children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

31. The school provides very well for children's personal development. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Provision for personal, social and emotional development area of learning is an integral part of all the school's work. The strengths in this aspect of the school's provision underpin the children's growing confidence and independence that in turn enable them to learn and to benefit from all that the school offers. The children's good response to this high quality provision is seen in their very good attitudes to learning, their relationships and behaviour.
32. The provision for children's **spiritual development** is good. The staff set a good example of respect for each child as an individual and they involve the children in selecting work they are proud of for their 'records of achievement'. This helps the children to feel special and to know that they are valued. Children have opportunities to learn something of religion, for instance they visit the local church. They have some very good opportunities to observe and marvel at the wonders of the natural world. For instance, they are fascinated and excited by the later stages of metamorphosis and by using hand lenses to look at small creatures. Staff plan good opportunities for the children to develop self-esteem and an awareness of themselves and others.
33. The provision for **moral and social development** is very good with much of it being through the very good example set by the staff. All staff set clear and consistent expectations for the children's behaviour and relationships in nursery, they take time to explain matters to them, and they praise good behaviour and consideration. On the few occasions when children misbehave the staff take time to talk to them and help them to see why their behaviour is unacceptable. The children have many opportunities to choose to do the right thing and to think of others. For instance, in the 'Café' there are



props, such as a limited number of hats for the 'cooks' to wear and purses for the 'customers', to help them play together. Even so, the children still have to decide whether there is room for them to join their chosen activity or whether they will have to wait their turn. Good manners and courtesy are promoted very well in 'snack time'. The planned activities provide children with opportunities to work and play in different sized groups and on their own, and through working together they learn to co-operate and to exercise independence when appropriate. The result of all this high quality provision is that the children work and play together harmoniously, they know what is expected of them and meet these expectations, and they have a clear understanding of right and wrong.

34. The provision for developing children's **cultural awareness and understanding** is good. The strengths are mainly in the provision for children to learn about the local culture and to appreciate art and music. Children make educational visits into the community and learn more about the facilities of the local area. For instance, they visit the church and the library. They benefit from the rich experience of visiting 'Drumcroon', the local arts centre and have opportunities to look at works of art in school and they have produced some very good art work recently with the support of an 'artist-in-residence'. Staff play music while the children undertake artistic work. For example, music by Mozart was playing while they painted. They painted contrasting responses to lively music by Vivaldi and calming music played on Pan Pipes. Children learn about and celebrate the Chinese New Year. However, although a good range of positive images are provided in the toys and books in nursery, the range of planned activities to promote awareness of the cultural diversity in British society and racial equality is limited.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS CHILDREN?**

35. Pastoral care is good. The nursery staff provide a high level of day-to-day guidance and concern for the children in their care. Good attention is paid to health and safety and child protection matters. All staff know the children very well and relationships are very good. These strengths help to create the positive climate for learning in which children achieve well.
36. The nursery provides a good standard of care for the children. Most welfare arrangements have been reviewed or introduced since the appointment of the acting headteacher. They are well thought out. The staff provide very good supervision and they are all alert to potential hazards and risks and a qualified first-aider is always available. Health and safety is given a high priority by the acting headteacher and the caretaker. They ensure that regular safety inspections and risk assessments are carried out and monitored. These arrangements are good. However, the management committee takes no active part in ensuring children's health and safety. They rely on reports from the acting headteacher. The arrangements for child protection are good. The responsible staff have up-to-date training and all the staff are aware of the nursery's procedures. The arrangements to help settle children into nursery are good. Children start nursery in small groups over a period of time and this helps them to gain confidence and settle well into new routines in new surroundings.
37. Although attendance is not compulsory for nursery children, the acting headteacher promotes the importance of regular and prompt attendance very strongly with parents. Attendance records are carefully maintained and closely monitored. Parents usually inform the school straight away if their children cannot attend and the staff are rigorous about following up any unexplained absences promptly and effectively. Most absences

are because children are unwell but a few children are taken on family holidays in term time. Parents usually inform the nursery quickly if their children are unable to attend.

38. The school promotes good behaviour very well and is a harmonious community with an atmosphere of respect and tolerance in which children mix and play together well. The staff manage children's behaviour very well and the very good provision for children's personal, social and emotional development also builds their awareness of what is expected of them. Some of the children have great difficulty controlling their behaviour at times. They benefit from a high level of support from the local education authority's behaviour support team. This enables them to be fully included in all activities and to make progress in developing self-control. However, there are no visual prompts to help children with short memories to understand the simple rules for their behaviour. As yet the school has no written policy statement to reflect its practice on anti-bullying or anti-racism. However, sufficient is done in practice to promote positive relationships and race equality.
39. The arrangements to monitor and support children's personal development are good. Staff know the children very well and because of this children are encouraged to make sensible choices and to take account of the needs of others. There are many opportunities for staff to share information about the children on an informal basis and, as a result, specific support for those children who require it is arranged. Records are well maintained so that staff know what progress children make.

#### Assessment

40. The school has good systems for assessing children's attainment and staff keep detailed records of the work the children have covered and what they can do. This information is used satisfactorily to guide the planning of work so that it meets all the children's needs at least adequately. In this way assessment supports the children's progress.
41. Since the last inspection the school has maintained the good features in its assessment of children's learning. It has recently introduced some systems that have the potential to support the drive to improve children's achievement further. There are several strengths in this aspect of the school's work.
42. As each child starts in the nursery, staff make every effort to involve parents and carers in compiling a detailed individual profile. They then add to this and use it to guide their planning of relevant activities to extend each child's learning.
43. Children who find it hard to learn or to behave are identified quickly and staff obtain advice and support from external experts to help them meet these children's needs.
44. Staff keep a careful day-to-day record of the activities children undertake and what they learn and they measure children's progress week by week.
45. The school keeps a very well-presented file, called a 'record of achievement', for every child. This provides a clear cumulative record of the ground covered in each half-term's activities, together with some samples of the child's work. Children help to decide which pieces of work to include.
46. The school has recently introduced a thorough and potentially very useful system for tracking children's progress each term in personal and social development, communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. This is closely

aligned to the 'stepping stones' towards the targets for the end of the reception year (the Early Learning Goals).

47. Despite these good features and developments, the assessment of children's learning and their progress and the use of the information obtained could be made more effective, particularly by strengthening the links between assessment and the planning of the curriculum. Firstly, the assessment systems are unnecessarily complex and time-consuming. This is because they have been added to over time without a rigorous review and some elements are not sufficiently sharply focused on how much progress children make. Secondly, some of the systems are not closely linked to the 'stepping stones' towards the Early Learning Goals. Thirdly, the 'Records of Achievement' do not reflect a balanced range of each child's work and achievement across all the areas of learning. They could do much more to reveal children's rates of progress. Fourthly, the school could make better use of the assessment information it collects. Although staff record learning in great detail, the school does not analyse this data to guide the way it directs its energies and plans for improvement. For example, it does not use the evidence to judge whether different groups of children achieve as well as they can. The school is at a very early stage in using this information to determine which aspects of the school's teaching and curricular provision are most and least effective and to guide the planning of work for particular groups of children, such as the youngest and the higher attainers. Nevertheless, the most recent initiatives are moving in the right direction.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

48. Parents and carers have very positive views about the nursery. A very good partnership with parents and carers has been established and this enables them to make a very good contribution to their children's learning.
49. Just over half of the inspection questionnaires were returned and very, very few parents or carers indicated any dissatisfaction with what the school does for their children. Parents and carers think the nursery is well led and managed and they find the staff approachable. They say that their children enjoy coming to nursery. The inspectors agree with the parents' and carers' views of the school's strengths.
50. The information provided by the school for parents and carers is of a very good overall quality. There is much well-presented and informative written information. For example, the brochure of information about the nursery is very 'user friendly' and contains a lot of helpful practical information. 'Topic webs' are issued each half term. They let parents and carers know what work the children will be doing and how they can help them and support the nursery's work at home. The school listens to parents' views and it takes account of them. Indeed, the practice of sending half-termly 'topic webs' home was introduced in response to a parental suggestion. There are many informal opportunities for dialogue between staff and parents and carers and the very good level of communication ensures that there is effective two-way communication about the children. For instance, staff greet each child and his or her parent or carer as they come into nursery each day. They are very willing to speak to them at such times about any concerns they might have. Parents and carers are fully involved in the induction process when children start nursery. The pre-school booklets that parents and carers complete with their children give the staff useful information and help the children settle in. When the children leave nursery they have satisfactory opportunities to discuss what their children have achieved at an informal meeting with staff. Parents and carers value the 'Records of Achievement' that are built up during the children's time in

nursery and presented to them when the children leave. However, parents and carers do not receive written reports on their children's achievement at the end of their time in nursery or during the year.

51. Several parents help in the nursery with a range of activities. Their help is valued and they make a good contribution to the children's learning. Tremendous support is received when help is required for other activities, such as the 'Big Dig Day' when parents, carers and grandparents readily helped to enhance the outdoor environment by donating plants and tubs and helping the staff and children to plant them. Parents also contribute in other ways to their children's learning. They read stories to them at home from the books that children are regularly encouraged to borrow from the school's library. They support the other small homework tasks, such as completing short worksheets together. The school capitalises very well on their willingness to help and enables them to make a very positive contribution to the children's achievement.

### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

52. An acting headteacher took charge of the school in September 2001. She is providing good leadership and managing the school well and, as a result, it is moving forward. The quality of in-house leadership and particularly management have improved since the last inspection. The other aspects of the school's leadership and management are generally satisfactory.
53. Since the last inspection there has been a lot of upheaval in the school's leadership and management. A term after the last inspection the headteacher moved on and, since then, difficult circumstances have resulted in four distinct periods of leadership and management responsibility, during which three different people have headed up the school. The present acting headteacher is at the school on a temporary basis which is reviewed termly.

#### The contributions of the headteacher, staff, management committee and local education authority

54. The acting headteacher is highly committed to the school and to ensuring that it does the best for all the children. She has established good working relationships with the staff and involved them well in planning for the future. Despite the temporary nature of her employment at the school, she has taken a long-term view. She has quickly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and has laid sound plans to tackle them. She is very active in making improvements within the school and in working to secure suitable new accommodation for the nursery as part of the 'Sure Start' project.
55. The acting headteacher and staff keep a satisfactory check on how effective the school is. Several systems have been introduced recently that are potentially powerful tools in this aspect of the school's work. For example, more rigorous assessment systems are being introduced and staff have begun to track children's rates of progress in some areas of their learning. The arrangements for joint planning of work mean the acting headteacher has a good picture of all the staff's work. She has taken this further by beginning to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and to give staff advice about how to improve.
56. The staff are managed well. For example, every member of staff has an annual interview to establish targets for development that are linked to the whole-school development plan as well as to each individual's needs.

57. The school has a management committee not a governing body. This committee does not have a clearly defined role. There are no written terms of reference for its work. This is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. The acting headteacher keeps the management committee well informed about the school's work. The members of the committee want the best for the children; they support the school and are quick to help if any problems arise, but they are not key players in the drive for continuing school improvement. The responsibilities normally carried by a governing body fall to the local education authority (LEA) which retains control of the bulk of the school's finances. In common with other local schools, the nursery receives regular visits from the LEA's advisory staff to check up on its work and to provide support and advice. There is a lack of clarity about the division of responsibility between management committee and LEA for calling the school to account for its performance. This is not currently affecting the children's education but there is potential for weaknesses that might arise to be missed.
58. The management of provision for children with special educational needs has improved greatly since the last inspection. It is now good. The school quickly identifies children who find it hard to learn and gets them the help they need. The school's procedures now fully meet the national recommendations.

#### The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and resources

59. The school has maintained a satisfactory match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum, despite the upheavals of recent years. The staff have plenty of opportunities to attend training courses and there are efficient systems to ensure that they benefit from each other's learning. The arrangements for induction of students and new staff have recently been improved and are now good. Well-written handbooks give clear guidance. This helps the many students who benefit from work experience in the school to contribute effectively to children's learning.
60. The accommodation is satisfactory. The building provides adequate space for the work of the nursery, and good outdoor areas help children to achieve well in physical development. The quality of the building is poor, but staff work hard and successfully to overcome its basic limitations. The caretaker maintains it to the best possible standard, whilst classroom staff make it attractive with good displays of children's work and they use space creatively for teaching and learning.
61. Taken overall, the resources for teaching and learning are good. This strength has been maintained since the last inspection. Resources are at least satisfactory in all six areas of learning. The range, number and quality of books are very good. Resources for creative and physical development are also very good. In information and communication technology, the school has improved its resources significantly and now has a good range of computers, relevant programs and other technological equipment.

#### The strategic use of resources

62. The school has control over only a small part of its total budget. The bulk of the budget is held and managed by the LEA, which provides the school with financial management support of good quality. The school has very recently established good internal systems for managing the funds under its control and to monitor spending. Funds are spent on appropriate, agreed educational priorities and grants for specific purposes are

properly spent. The accumulated balance consists mainly of specific grants that are due to be spent by the end of August 2002.

63. The available space is utilised well and the resources for teaching and learning are used efficiently. The support staff are deployed well so that they make a full contribution to children's learning. However, the school has yet to establish ways of deciding whether the way it spends its funds is as effective as possible in improving the children's achievement.

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

64. In order to raise standards further and to improve the quality of education, the headteacher and staff, together with the local education authority and the management committee, should:

(1) raise standards in communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development to match those achieved in the other areas of learning by:

- planning and implementing a more systematic and progressive approach to improving children's spoken language skills;
- \* providing more direct teaching of early reading and writing;
- improving the quality of teaching of early reading and writing in the group sessions for the older and higher attaining children;
- placing a greater emphasis on number and providing more direct teaching of this aspect of mathematical development; and
- planning and making the most of opportunities to develop and extend children's skills in communication, language and literacy, and mathematics in all their work;

*(paragraphs: 3,4,16 – 19, 28, 71 – 76, 79, 82, 87, 95)*

(2) \* further develop the use of assessment in the planning of the curriculum by:

- carefully analysing the information gained from assessing children's progress to:
  - a) pinpoint which aspects of the nursery's provision are most and least effective; and
  - b) guide the whole-school planning of work.

*(paragraphs: 25, 47):*

The local education authority and the management committee should:

- clarify their respective roles and responsibilities so that oversight of the work of the school is assured.

*(paragraph: 57)*

In addition to these key issues for action, the following less significant point should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- providing better opportunities for children to learn about the cultural diversity of British society.

*(paragraphs: 34, 85)*

*\* indicates that the school has already identified the need to tackle this issue.*

## **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	13

## Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	0	11	10	2	0	0
Percentage	0	0	48	43	9	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of sessions observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each session represents more than four percentage points.

## 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)	58
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	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	6

### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	N/A*

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0

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

\* This information was not available.

## Teachers and classes

### Qualified teachers and support staff

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.3

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	97.5

Number of pupils per FTE adult	9.7
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*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Financial information

Financial year	2001 -2002
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	£
Total income	18,611
Total expenditure	6,573
Expenditure per pupil	113.33
Balance brought forward from previous year	928
Balance carried forward to next year	12,966

## Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	1

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*



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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	116
Number of questionnaires returned	59

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

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	86	14	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	75	24	0	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	68	29	0	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	25	8	0	42
The teaching is good.	83	15	0	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	59	36	5	0	0
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.	59	27	0	0	14
The school works closely with parents.	68	27	3	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	86	12	0	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	73	22	0	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	14	5	0	25

## **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**

65. Standards are now above average. The provision and teaching in this area of learning are very good and the children make very good progress in their learning. The results are seen in their very good attitudes, their good behaviour and personal development and their very good relationships. When they start nursery their attainment in this area of learning is quite a long way behind what is typical for their age. They need support to make friends and to learn to share and take turns. By the time they leave the nursery most of the children have reached a higher standard than expected for their age and they are on course to exceed the standard expected by the end of the reception year (the Early Learning Goals). The staff give high priority to this area of learning and standards have improved since the last inspection.
66. The children develop very positive attitudes to learning. They come into nursery eagerly. They willingly try the interesting activities on offer and they have the perseverance to stick with the activities they choose for long enough to learn from them. These attitudes and learning skills are the result of teaching which helps the children to grow in confidence and independence. The staff support the children well and create an atmosphere in which they feel secure and are willing to experiment. Children become independent in nursery because staff encourage this. For example, they urge the children to try to put on their coats with as little help as possible. They organise and store equipment efficiently so that children can get things for themselves. Consequently, the children have a good degree of independence in nursery. For example, they 'self-register' by putting their name cards on a display board when they arrive, they get aprons for painting, and they put things away behind themselves.
67. The staff take pains to teach social skills so the children learn to consider others. As a result, the children wait their turn when necessary and they are well mannered at 'snack time'. The children learn to build relationships and to understand and accept how they have to behave so that everyone can get along together happily and safely.
68. A few of the children have special educational needs in this area of learning. Their needs are met well and they make good progress in their personal development.
69. The strength of the teaching lies in three key factors. Firstly, staff plan for the children's personal development in every aspect of school life. Secondly, they make the most of incidental opportunities that arise to promote this area of the children's learning. Thirdly, all the staff are consistent in their expectations of the children and they take the trouble to explain matters and to help children resolve any differences.

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

70. Standards are just average for the children's age and the majority of children are on course to meet the targets for the end of the reception year. These standards are similar to those reported at the last inspection and, overall, they represent satisfactory achievement from a slightly below average starting point. The quality of teaching in this area of learning is satisfactory and the children make gains in their learning at an adequate rate.

71. When children start school there is a clear weakness for many in their spoken language skills and this is by no means overcome by the time they leave. Few talk in sentences; many have a limited vocabulary; and most have difficulty explaining things and using language to help them to think things through. They make adequate progress in developing the ability to communicate in words but, by the time they leave nursery, only the higher attaining children's speaking skills are securely at the level expected for their age. These children talk in sentences, take the initiative in talking to other children when they are playing, and are beginning to explain things in words. For example, one boy said of a photograph frame, 'I've got one of them but a round one'. Most of the children usually use phrases rather than sentences and quite a few rarely contribute orally. Most of the children listen well to the staff. For example, when they used the 'parachute' they followed the teacher's instructions well and all played their part in making this very large and colourful piece of fabric go up and down. They listen to interesting stories and they give brief answers to questions. However, they do not listen well to each other's answers and, when they work and play together, they do not attend so well to each other and they seldom hold conversations. Most of the children find it hard to use the spoken word to consolidate their learning, for instance by talking through what they have done. Equally they have difficulty using talk to describe and explain things that are happening and to predict what might happen next. For example, when the older children folded fabric and dipped it into different coloured dyes, most of them could not suggest, in advance, how the colour of the fabric might change.
72. The school makes very good use of external support to help children who have particular difficulties with their speech and these children come on well. When the quality of provision is high, as in the current work on caterpillars and moths, children learn new words and use them and they talk with greater understanding. For instance, the children use words like 'cocoon' when they talk about the moths and they explain that the remaining cocoons will 'crack open' and moths will 'come out'. In a good 'dip and dye' session, the nursery nurse made the activity exciting for the children and helped them to respond to it in words. As a result, their ability to describe things in words improved and a few higher attainers began to use similes, drawing on other things they had seen. For instance, one described the pattern on her fabric as 'like a sky with a moon'. However, for the most part, the staff could make more use of incidental opportunities to promote speaking skills and there is scope for a much more systematic whole-school approach to extending the children's vocabulary and helping them develop the spoken language skills they need to learn effectively.
73. In early reading, most of the children are working at the level expected for their age. The children enjoy looking at books and they handle them carefully. Several become engrossed in this activity. The older children know where to start reading a book. They hold books the right way up, and they know that adults read the print not the pictures. They do not know the difference between letters and words. They play 'I-Spy' reasonably well for their age but even the higher attaining children have little knowledge of the sounds made by different letters. Very few of the children recognise any words on sight, except their own names. This is largely because the staff do not teach children a basic sight vocabulary.
74. In early writing most of the children are working at the level expected for their age. They make marks on paper that they call 'writing' and some attempt to trace over or copy an adult's writing. However, only the higher attaining children use shapes that resemble letters when they attempt to write independently. Some of the children know how to form some letters correctly and a few write their own names without help.

75. The quality of teaching of early reading and writing skills varies but is satisfactory overall. The ongoing provision is good. For example, in each classroom there is a comfortable corner in which children can look at a good range of suitable books. Staff include relevant books and notices in all the displays in nursery and they read stories to the children every day. In the most effective story sessions, staff question the children skilfully to get them thinking about the characters in the story and about a simple plot line and to check that they understand the story. This is effective in holding the children's attention and keeping them involved and learning. The play settings that staff create for the children include many examples of the written word, such as the 'Yellow Pages' in the 'Garden Centre', and incorporate opportunities for the children to attempt to write. This provision enables children to see many uses of reading and writing but the staff fail to exploit many incidental opportunities to teach children about letters and words. The direct teaching of the skills children will need for reading and writing is less good than the ongoing provision. For example, in a few short sessions each week, the older and higher attaining children are taught together. These sessions are intended to bring them on. However, the teacher's understanding of how best to teach oracy and literacy skills to these young children is not good enough. Consequently, in these sessions they do not make the progress they could because the work they do is not appropriate for their learning needs.

### **Mathematical development**

76. Standards are average for the children's age and the majority of children are on course to meet the targets for the end of the reception year. These standards are similar to those reported at the last inspection and, overall, they represent good achievement from a below average starting point. Teachers give a lot of attention to shape, space and measures and, as a result, standards are higher in this aspect of mathematics than in number. The children make gains in their learning at a slightly faster than average rate.
77. The children are developing an understanding of measurement. They have a satisfactory understanding of the language of measurement, including words such as, 'long', 'taller' and 'short' but only the higher attaining children use this vocabulary spontaneously. The majority tend to describe size simply as 'big' or 'little', unless guided by an adult. Most of the children understand differences in height when two or three items are compared but few can use this understanding independently and most do not understand a simple graph (a bar chart) showing the comparative heights of children. The children have a good knowledge about shapes. They recognise and match basic two-dimensional shapes.
78. In number, most of the children who have been at the nursery all year have reached the level expected for their age and quite a few of the higher attainers are a little further on. Most of the children say numbers in order to at least ten. Some count along with an adult to twenty but get numbers beyond ten mixed up when they count on their own. Many of the children do not count objects accurately. They do not say one number for each object so they get the total wrong. Many of the children recognise numerals up to five. The children have not yet grasped the concept of addition. For example, when one of the teachers showed the children three hats for the cooks and three purses for the customers in the café, none of them could work out that this meant six children could play in the café at one time.
79. The quality of teaching in this area of learning, though satisfactory, varies considerably. In some of the sessions seen, staff paid more attention to getting a task completed than to what the children learned from it. For example, several groups of children

participated in a measurement task aimed at helping them to understand and compare differences in height. Each child in a group was measured and their height noted. However, in some of these sessions the staff simply measured each child and wrote down their height in centimetres, sometimes on a sticker to put on their clothing. In other groups more was done to help children move on in their understanding of measurement. For instance, strips of paper were cut to match the height of each child and these were placed next to each other on the wall so that the children could compare their heights. Another activity on measurement had good potential to promote effective learning but it was not made the most of. Children matched baby clothes to different sizes of dolls. However, the teacher did not take a sufficient lead in the activity to extend the children's mathematical thinking or their vocabulary. As in reading and writing, staff miss many incidental opportunities to promote children's knowledge and understanding of number. The children have good opportunities to use computer programs for number activities.

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

80. Children's work in this area of learning lays the foundation for their later study of science, design and technology, history, geography, religious education, and information and communication technology.
81. As at the time of the last inspection, standards are above average. The children achieve well from a broadly average starting point. Most of the children are on course to exceed the Early Learning Goals by the end of the reception year in all aspects of this area of learning, except their knowledge about different beliefs and cultures.
82. There are two main reasons why the children do well. Firstly, the staff provide a good programme of first-hand experiences with a good range of visits and visitors and a lot of interesting and purposeful activities. Secondly, good teaching helps them to make links between things. Nevertheless, children's learning is still hindered by their limited spoken language skills and because the staff sometimes miss opportunities to make the most of the planned activities to move learning on.
83. Children make good progress in developing their understanding of the world because powerful first-hand experiences excite their interest. This is extended and reinforced through a range of purposeful play and practical investigations, organised coherently around a theme such as 'Growth'. For example, a knowledgeable visitor had introduced the children to various 'mini-beasts'. Following his visit, the children observed the development of caterpillars and chrysalises from day to day. At the same time, children played in their own 'Garden Centre' and planted seeds in damp compost. Later they enjoyed a 'Big Dig Day' when, with parents as well as staff to support them, they explored parts of the school's grounds to find their own mini-beasts. Experiences such as watching the chrysalis crack open gave tremendous impetus and a sense of wonder to their learning about growth. As a result, older children know the life cycle of the butterfly, recognise the diversity of such life forms in their own environment, and link them to what they see in their seedlings and their own lives. They show a growing awareness of change in their own lives and distinguish past and present as they sort photographs of babies and toddlers, or find out how much they have grown.
84. Local walks promote an early understanding of geography. For example, after the children went for a walk they traced where they had been on a street plan. Others push toys around the small road systems that they construct, and talk about bridges, bends and a roundabout. Children know that the different buildings they pass, such as the

clinic, church and shops, all serve the local community. Play in the 'Cafe' uses and extends this knowledge as children serve food and drink to their 'customers'.

85. The children start to learn about religion. For example, they celebrate Harvest Festival, Christmas and Easter in the nursery. They begin to learn about different peoples, cultures and faiths by celebrating Diwali and Chinese New Year. However, this learning is not steadily developed and reinforced by ongoing activities. As a result standards are lower in this aspect of their knowledge and understanding of the world.
86. Children have good daily opportunities to develop their skills at working with computers. They make very good progress in this work and achieve standards that are above those expected for their age. They use a good range of programs that support other aspects of their learning, such as number, shape and painting. The older children show a good degree of independence in controlling the movement of objects on the screen.
87. Children achieve well in this diverse area of learning, mainly because of teachers' skill and care in providing a range of good learning experiences each day. Staff are careful to maintain a balance between activities that children can select for themselves and those that are taught or supported by an adult. Whilst consistently emphasising independent practical activity, staff monitor and guide children's choices to ensure that each child works across a good range. For example, in one typical session a boy extended his awareness of the senses through a series of experiences. He compared the loud and soft sounds produced by the shakers that he and other members of his group had made. He also explored the different textures of wet and dry sand. During 'snack time', he talked about the tastes and smells of different fruits such as bananas, grapes and oranges. Later, in an unplanned activity, he watched the flames of a large fire on the neighbouring building site, and smelled the smoke. In these same activities, he also learned about healthy eating and food hygiene; about how wet sand can be moulded; about how fire changes materials; and about how to choose, fit and join materials together to make a simple musical instrument. However, a common weakness in teaching is that staff often fail to make best use of the good opportunities they plan to move learning on. In particular, they miss opportunities to talk with children and develop their ability to use language to express their growing understanding of the world around them. For example, no one helped the boy to describe or name the shapes he made in the sand or to express his fascination with the fire.

### **Physical development**

88. Children enter the nursery with average attainment. They achieve well and, by the time they leave, their attainment is higher than expected for their age and they are on course to exceed the Early Learning Goals by the end of the reception year. This is much better than at the time of the last inspection, when progress was satisfactory and attainment average.
89. There are two main reasons why the children do well. Firstly, they have daily opportunities for physical activity, both indoors and outdoors, using a very good range of resources. Secondly, the teaching is of good quality and staff set physical challenges for the children. As a result, children extend their confidence and independent control in safety across the range of physical skills.
90. At times the quality of children's learning, though satisfactory, is less good because staff miss opportunities, for example to extend a skill further by teaching it directly; to introduce an extra challenge into the activity, or to help children to acquire the vocabulary of movement.

91. The very different attainments of the youngest and oldest groups reflect the good progress children make during their time in the nursery. For example, very few of the children who started in April could take off or put on their shoes and socks unaided. Those who started in September performed this procedure quickly and efficiently and understood why it was necessary for certain activities. These older children show good control, co-ordination and awareness across a wide range of large and small skills. They control wheeled toys well, steering along a set course accurately and turning to avoid a hazard. A few are advanced enough to perform neat forward rolls unaided; others keep their bodies fully stretched as they roll the length of an agility mat. Most of these children experiment confidently with different ways of moving around obstacle courses or on the climbing frame. They balance and climb skilfully and adjust their movements to travel under, over, along or through different features of the equipment. They show good awareness of space and safety, and also of other children, sometimes working together to support each other. In some of these skills, children approach the standards expected by the end of the reception year. Other skills, such as throwing, catching or striking a ball, are less advanced though still above average. The school vigorously promotes independent skills; all children attempt to put their own coats on and the older children cope well with buttons and other fasteners. Children develop good manual dexterity and they handle tools and small apparatus, like glue spreaders, well. They use scissors carefully, for instance to cut out pictures of toys, which they glue and mount on card. They handle pencils and paintbrushes with a good degree of control, manipulate jigsaw pieces accurately, and fit together the parts of both large and small construction sets.
92. The quality of teaching and learning is good, as are the range and quality of opportunities. There is a balanced programme of teacher-directed and child-selected activities and resources are used selectively and creatively to give children many and varied opportunities, and a new focus for learning each day. A good amount of time is allocated to physical development in each session, but there are clear links with other areas of learning. Most activities occur during or after 'snack time', and children learn to link diet and exercise in their growing awareness of how to keep healthy. The staff know their children well and match specific lessons to the needs of different groups. For example, a good lesson carefully introduced the youngest children to the climbing frame, its features, hazards and opportunities. A very clear procedure developed awareness of the importance of safety and appropriate dress. As the children explored the frame, the teacher helped them to put words to its different parts and their different ways of moving on it. She also took every opportunity to caution children who were over-adventurous, and to challenge others who were ready to explore another way of using the apparatus. This quality of watchful support is typical of all staff in most activities, and is a crucial factor in maintaining good progress. Staff usually make good judgements about when to prompt a child to have a go at a more difficult skill and to move forward with confidence. For example, when a teacher saw that children could control their wheeled toys along a marked route, she introduced a hand signal as an extra challenge to move their learning on. However, there are inconsistencies in this area. Staff do not always engage with children effectively to draw them into an activity, hold their interest, and both set and support successive small challenges to help them to improve their skills.

## Creative development

93. Children make good progress from a broadly average starting point. They have a good range of well-planned opportunities for creative work and the teaching is good. As a result, they do better than is typical for children of their age when they leave the nursery. Standards are higher than they were at the last inspection.
94. The children do well because they respond enthusiastically to the creative activities that staff organise well, and they work with a sense of eager purpose. The staff provide a good range of appropriate resources that children can use independently, and they have high expectations of what the children can achieve. The children's work is enriched by visiting a local arts centre and by working alongside visiting artists.
95. Some aspects of the children's learning are restricted for four reasons. Firstly, many of the children find it hard to put their ideas and experiences into words. Secondly, the staff sometimes fail to exploit good chances to move children's learning on by talking with them about their work. This inconsistency in the use of language to raise the quality of children's learning is a key shortcoming in the school's work. Thirdly, children have fewer opportunities for exploring sounds and creating music than for other aspects of this area of learning. Fourthly, the resources for teaching and learning do not reflect a wide range of cultures so children do not develop an awareness of different ways of seeing things.
96. Children's good progress is reflected in the paintings and drawings seen on display and in their Records of Achievement. For example, their attempts to draw a face advance from a few random marks towards a recognisable image of a face with features and hair, and with legs and arms attached. Children show a growing awareness of colours and their effects. For instance, they select red and yellow paint to create impressions of fireworks on black paper. A visit to the Drumcroon Arts Centre enabled them to work with clay and to paint on a large scale. Visiting artists have stimulated the children to explore a wide range of media and techniques and to produce work that is ambitious, striking and mature for their age. Older children, for example, used collage and printing techniques as well as paint to explore texture, colour, shape and space to create a very large-scale study of an undersea world based on a poem. Some of their painted impressions of the nearby church are also powerful.
97. Children are very creative in their imaginative play. They slip happily in and out of role as they run the 'Café' or the 'Garden Centre' or enact the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk'. Some of the older children showed maturity and imagination in agreeing roles and working together to interpret this story. They used a range of props imaginatively, and the climbing frame became a castle in their play. The agile Jack climbed up and down the beanstalk whilst the Giant strode around in enormous boots shouting for 'the blood of an Englishman'. Different groups acted out the story in different ways but, with support from the nursery nurse, all maintained a clear story line. This is good achievement for children of nursery age. The children's recall of the words of the storybook helped them to enrich the language of their play and work together.
98. Opportunities to make and enjoy music are more limited, and attainment in this aspect is not so high. Nevertheless, almost all children have a good repertoire of nursery rhymes and action songs, which they sing with clear enjoyment. They match their actions to the words, enjoy the music of Mozart as they work, and join in the 'Goodbye' song at the end of each session. Older children show a good sense of rhythm as they clap, jump, sway and dance in time to different pieces of music.



99. The quality of teaching is good. Staff plan in detail for creative development in almost all areas of learning. The careful development of a theme across the curriculum creates a thread of continuity for creativity, and there is a good balance between the direct teaching of art skills, and the free choice of activity. Good adult support helps children develop creatively. For example the standard of the role-play of older children in the giant's castle was strongly promoted by the sensitivity and flair of the nursery nurse. She unobtrusively slipped into minor roles, anticipated problems and prompted ideas, whilst always allowing children initiative and control of their play. This quality of intervention is a mark of good teaching in this area. For example, as children folded pieces of white fabric and dipped them into pots of dye, the nursery nurse shared their amazement at the new colours of green or purple that magically appeared. At the same time, she made very good use of language to challenge them to observe, predict, think and imagine. As a result, children learned much about how colours combine, and how different foldings produce different patterns. "Look, it's a skeleton!" said one child, whilst another saw "A big moon in the sky".