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INSPECTION REPORT

WOODCROFT NURSERY SCHOOL

Chelmsford

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 114699

Headteacher: Mrs Annie Tann

Reporting inspector: Mr John Tyler

20506

Dates of inspection: 4th and 5th February 2002

Inspection number: 230297

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Nursery
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 3 to 5
Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Dorset Avenue
Great Baddow
Chelmsford
Essex
Postcode: CM2 9UB
Telephone/Fax number: 01245 473222
E-mail address admin@woodcroft-nur.essex.sch.uk

Appropriate authority: Managing body
Name of chair of governors: Mrs Jenny Fleming
Date of previous inspection: June 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Woodcroft is a large nursery school for boys and girls aged between three and five years. The 120 children attend part time, with most joining at the age of three and attending for three or four terms. It is one of only two nursery schools in Chelmsford, and draws children from a broad range of social circumstances and a wide area. A few children attend the nursery owing to special needs that have been identified by outside agencies, and eight receive some level of support from outside the school. Their needs include behavioural and emotional support and physical, speech or communication difficulties. A similar number of children enter the nursery with strong social and language skills for their age. A small number of children are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and two of them are learning English as an additional language. Taken together, pupils' attainment when they start nursery is average. The school is over-subscribed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school. Children are happy and feel confident to explore the wide range of activities on offer in a well-ordered environment. Their personal, social and emotional development is fostered particularly successfully and they achieve well in all the areas of learning for this age group. The very good quality of teaching and the caring ethos help children to learn rapidly. An excellent partnership with parents is reflected in the very positive views expressed by them in the pre-inspection survey. The school's many strengths are maintained and continue to develop because of the effective leadership of the headteacher and the strong teamwork of the whole staff. The cost per pupil is high, but with so many strengths the school offers good value for money.

What the school does well

- Children are happy and confident, make especially good progress in their personal, social and emotional development, and reach standards overall that are above expectations for their ages.
- Successful teamwork contributes strongly to the very good quality of teaching and care, positive use of assessment procedures and the effective management of the school.
- Children experience a broad curriculum, with particularly well planned opportunities for learning outdoors.
- Excellent relationships with and support for families make a very significant contribution to children's learning.

What could be improved

The inspection found no significant weaknesses. A few minor aspects for improvement were identified, and the school may wish to include these in its development planning.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since its last inspection in June 1998 the school has maintained the strengths that were identified and has made good improvements. Standards remain above expectations for the ages of the children and have risen in mathematical development, especially in number, and in physical development. One reason for this is the effective use of improved outdoor facilities, part of the continuing development of the accommodation. Provision for children's spiritual and cultural development has improved well. The school's partnership with parents was previously judged to be good and is now excellent. Such improvements are the result of effective leadership and management and strong teamwork. The school is well placed to continue making improvements.

STANDARDS

Children with widely different experiences and attainment on entry make rapid progress during their short time at the school and achieve well in relation to their starting points. By the time they leave the nursery many children are attaining standards that are above expectations for their ages in personal, social and emotional development,

mathematical development, physical development and creative development. Standards in communication, language and literacy are above expectations in listening and in spoken language, and average in early reading and writing skills. Children's knowledge and understanding of the world is in line with expectations for their ages.

Although some children with special educational needs are unlikely to reach the nationally expected standards by the end of their reception year in the infant school, they are learning at challenging levels. Some more able children are already working in the early stages of the National Curriculum in those aspects for which they are ready to do so. Children learning English as an additional language achieve well because of the very strong emphasis on developing language and on social interaction.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Children are keen to come to nursery and happy to work, play and explore new ideas and experiences. They concentrate well for their ages, sometimes for a long time, and persevere when activities are difficult. Their inquisitiveness helps them to learn effectively through play.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Children behave very well and respond positively to adults' consistent expectations. They know and follow routines. There have been no exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Children have very good relationships with each other and adults. Their confidence and independence grows rapidly and many have good social skills by the time they leave the nursery.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Typically for children of this age, many absences occur because of illness.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of children:		<i>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.</i>
Sessions seen overall	Very good	

The quality of teaching was very good in half the sessions observed and at least good in every one. This consistently strong teaching ensures that children learn very effectively, make rapid progress during the short time that they attend the nursery, and achieve well. The school is successfully meeting the varying needs of its children.

Adults work together extremely well. Staff, students and helpers are all aware of what children are meant to be learning through the different activities and so they focus on the most important issues. They ensure that routines and expectations are consistent, which helps children to feel confident and to behave well. Adults are very encouraging and their relationships with each other and children make a significant contribution to the positive atmosphere within the school. These positive factors result in children concentrating for relatively long periods, being attentive when required, and enjoying learning. Questioning is used very effectively to guide children and to check and extend their understanding. It is generally well focused on the learning intentions that have been identified in teachers' planning. Occasionally, adults answer their own questions before children have had time to think of their own answers.

When adults focus attention on a specific activity the pace of learning is rapid. For activities without adult intervention, children occasionally lack sufficient guidance and in these instances their play lacks purpose.

Literacy and numeracy are taught at a suitable level for the ages of the children, with a good focus on oral skills and first-hand experience. Those who are ready for early reading skills and learning to record their ideas, both in writing and mathematically, are encouraged and challenged appropriately.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The broad curriculum provides many opportunities for extending and reinforcing children's learning. Planning ensures that knowledge and skills are developed systematically, but with enough flexibility to allow for children's different rates of learning. Planning for the use of the outdoor facilities is particularly good. The curriculum has a good balance between adult-directed and child-chosen activities.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Needs are identified as early as possible and careful planning ensures that they are dealt with very effectively. All children are given very good adult support and are equally valued members of the school. Co-operation with external agencies provides the school with valuable support and advice.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	Children are helped to develop language through play and more formal learning sessions. Strong encouragement to play with others is especially effective. The breadth of the curriculum ensures that language development includes a wide and relevant vocabulary.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school is very successful in fostering children's emotional, social and moral development. Emotional support and consistent routines and expectations are very carefully planned. Spiritual and cultural development is fostered well through the wide range of activities and well-chosen resources.
How well the school cares for its children	Children receive very good care. Policies and procedures to ensure their welfare are consistently applied by all staff. As well as taking good care of daily concerns, the school has very good procedures for assessing needs over the longer term. These enable staff to track children's development, plan suitable activities and keep parents well informed.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Excellent. The accessibility of staff and support given to families make a very significant contribution to children's learning. Parents have easy, daily access to information about their children's progress. Many parents help in school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and deputy work effectively to foster a team approach in all aspects of the school. The school's aims and values are evident in all its work and the staff share a commitment to continued improvement.
How well the managers fulfil their responsibilities	The managing body provides good support for the work and development of the nursery. Managers know the school well and play an appropriate part in formulating plans for improvement. Some of them use their considerable expertise in specialist fields to offer good advice.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Assessments at the beginning and end of children's time in the nursery enable the school to evaluate the success of its educational provision. The quality of teaching is monitored by the headteacher, and the open nature of staff discussions and planning ensure that strengths are shared and improvements made.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its available resources well and seeks best value in financial and educational matters. Rules for financial control do not allow this school to carry forward money from one year to the next. Although this has not been detrimental so far, it has the potential to reduce the effectiveness of longer-term planning.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>Their children like school.</p> <p>They feel comfortable about asking questions and raising concerns.</p> <p>The school works closely with them and keeps them well informed about their children's progress.</p> <p>Children make good progress because of the strengths in teaching.</p> <p>The school is successful in fostering children's personal development, and behaviour is good.</p> <p>The school is well led and managed.</p>	<p>No matters were raised by a significant number of parents.</p>

The inspection findings agreed with the parent's very positive views of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY**WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL****Children are happy and confident, make especially good progress in their personal, social and emotional development, and reach standards overall that are above expectations for their ages.**

1. In recent years, the changing pattern of entry to local primary schools has affected the age profile of the nursery. A reduction in the number of children who stay until they are nearly five years old has enabled the nursery to take children at a younger age. Most children now enter the nursery aged three, and consequently, many have limited social skills and strong emotional needs. At the same time, there are relatively few older children to act as role models. The school has very successfully adapted its approach to children's personal, social and emotional development to take account of these factors. Children with widely different experiences and attainment on entry make rapid progress during their short time at the school and achieve well in relation to their starting points. By the time they leave the nursery, many children are attaining standards that are above expectations for their ages in personal, social and emotional development.

2. Adults are very welcoming and create an atmosphere in which children are keen to come to nursery and happy to work, play and explore new ideas and experiences. New children are helped to settle into routines quickly and to gain in confidence and independence. At the start of sessions, children arrive happily. When being collected, they are often reluctant to leave. Children concentrate well for their ages, sometimes for a long time, and persevere when activities are difficult. For example, three children collaborated to construct shapes out of clay. Their first creation was a snail, but this transformed into ice cream and then a pile of rocks as they added lumps and shared imaginative ideas. When their creation began to collapse, they persevered well, replacing pieces and experimenting how to make it retain its shape.

3. Children behave very well and respond positively to adults' consistent expectations. They have very good relationships with each other and adults. When occasional disagreements arise, for example over sharing toys or play-space, they are usually settled quickly and amicably. Adults are especially good at listening to children's points of view and explaining to them why they should behave positively towards each other.

4. One benefit of the successful concentration on children's personal, social and emotional development is that it helps them to make good progress in other areas of learning. As they play happily together, for example, children talk with each other and so improve their use of spoken language. Those who are learning English as an additional language make rapid progress because of the high level of interaction between children. Children are inquisitive and this helps them to learn effectively through play. Adults encourage them to ask questions and to find things out for themselves, but are also good at giving clear guidance and explanations.

Successful teamwork contributes strongly to the very good quality of teaching and care, positive use of assessment procedures and the effective management of the school

5. Teamwork is a significant strength in the work of the nursery. Those who work directly with the children plan together and have very good systems to ensure that sessions run smoothly. Staff, students and helpers are all aware of what children are meant to be learning through the different activities and so they focus on the most important issues. Questioning often focuses on similar ideas in activities that are being led by different adults. Routines and expectations are consistent, which makes good use of time and helps children in their personal development. For instance, adults very efficiently prepare each base so that children can sit comfortably to eat their snacks. The children know the routine for this, and respond very positively to the expectations that they eat with good manners and talk quietly in discussions that are often well led by the adult on each table. Although at certain times children are able to move freely between different areas, the expectations that adults set for behaviour are consistent, and this helps children to behave very well. Consistency also helps children to feel confident. They are happy to explore because they know what the limitations are, whatever the activity and whichever adult is teaching them.

6. It is not only those teaching children who are part of the strong teamwork. Caretaking and maintenance staff, for example, play an important role in setting out and storing large play equipment as well as the usual duties of such jobs. Office staff know children and parents well, and play an important part in setting the welcoming and supportive tone of the school. Managers visit regularly and take an active role in many aspects of the school.

7. Children receive very good care. The systems for receiving children at the start of sessions and for supervising their collection are very good and, during sessions, children are well supervised. Staff collaborate exceptionally well to ensure that these systems operate smoothly. For example, they communicate very well to ensure that the supervision of the outside area is synchronised with other activities ending, so that children are never unattended. As the number of children increases or decreases in a particular area, so the number of adults changes to match the situation. All adults are well aware of specific requirements for children with special educational needs and those with medical needs. Staff are very good at ensuring that issues that have arisen during the day are shared with parents and carers so that children's needs are met effectively.

8. The school has very good procedures for assessing children's needs and progress. These enable staff to track children's development, plan suitable activities and keep parents well informed. All staff make notes about a few target children each day. These notes are then compiled at daily meetings so that a detailed record is kept of how children are developing in all the areas of learning. Further notes are kept about any children for whom there are specific concerns. This system relies on all staff being equally responsible for observing and recording children's achievements and difficulties. They carry out this valuable work very successfully.

9. The headteacher and deputy work effectively to foster a team approach in all aspects of the school. The school's aims and values are evident in all its work and the staff share a commitment to continued improvement. The open nature of staff discussions and planning ensure that strengths are shared and improvements made. Staff are happy to learn from each other, to ask for advice or support, and to suggest new ways forward. This not only helps the school to run successfully, but also benefits the significant number of early years practitioners and students who have visited the school for training.

Children experience a broad curriculum, with particularly well planned opportunities for learning outdoors.

10. The broad curriculum provides many opportunities for extending and reinforcing children's learning. Within each of the six areas of learning for this age group there is a good range of experiences, and the curriculum has a good balance between adult-directed and child-chosen activities. Children are encouraged to try things from across the curriculum, and to make links between areas of learning. For example, some children were invited to make biscuits and, while doing so, learned about mathematical ideas such as measuring and counting. In another session, children used their imaginations to act out part of a story, sang and played music, danced and thought about the similarities and differences between animals. Through a single very successful activity, they extended their learning in communication, language and literacy, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development.

11. Careful planning ensures that knowledge and skills are developed systematically, but with enough flexibility to allow for children's different rates of learning and needs. Although some children with special educational needs are attaining at levels below those expected for their ages, they are learning at challenging levels relative to their starting points. Some more able children are already working in the early stages of the National Curriculum in those aspects for which they are ready to do so. Those who are ready for early reading skills and learning to record their ideas, both in writing and mathematically, are encouraged and challenged appropriately. One group, for example, were looking at a different letter of the alphabet each day so that, over time, they would become familiar with all of them. The teaching enabled the least experienced children simply to begin to recognise the relationships between the letters and associated sounds. Meanwhile, the higher-attaining children suggested names that started with the day's letter, thought of rhymes, pointed to the letter in words, and tried to read some of the simpler words.

12. Planning for the use of the outdoor facilities is particularly good. The range of resources is very good and enables children to experience activities in all six areas of learning. Staff plan the use of the outside facilities with as much detail and as clear learning objectives as the inside activities. The result is that children play with purpose and learn a lot at the same time as getting fresh air and, on occasions, burning off excess energy. During the inspection, children explored a 'bug house', followed a trail of 'bugs' that led them through the large apparatus and used chalk to draw bugs on the hard play surface. Naturally, they were not aware of the language, mathematics and other areas of learning that they were experiencing at the same time! When riding wheeled vehicles, children are encouraged to develop personal skills. For example, they stop and start at the traffic lights and co-operate imaginatively in 'filling up with petrol' and parking vehicles in numbered bays. The outside area contributes strongly to children's very good achievement in physical development.

Excellent relationships with and support for families make a very significant contribution to children's learning.

13. Parents are strongly supportive of the school. A very high proportion strongly agreed with many of the statements in the pre-inspection survey and there were no statements with which a significant proportion disagreed. Many parents help in school and make a valuable contribution to the standards achieved. They are given good guidance and work well with other adults to provide a high level of consistency.

14. Staff are always willing to talk with parents about concerns and to share news of significant achievements. Many parents take advantage of this openness and say that it has been an important factor in their children settling into the nursery quickly and making rapid progress. Parents are welcome to stay in the school while their children settle, and appreciate the way that children are encouraged in this way to gain confidence. Some say that this has also helped them to overcome their own initial nervousness at leaving their children in the care of others. A few parents have asked the school for advice about practical or emotional aspects of bringing up their children and have been given helpful guidance. The school actively seeks ways to help parents and to encourage them to play a leading role in their education. A recent initiative is the development of a parent and toddler facility, due to open shortly. The support given to families makes a very significant contribution to children's learning.

15. Parents have easy, daily access to information, and feel very well informed about their children's progress. They are welcome to look at the record folders kept in each base and to discuss anything they wish about their child's progress. The school provides useful information about the curriculum so that parents can support their children at home. A very small number of parents were concerned that their children did not get an appropriate amount of work to do at home. Inspectors found that the school's expectations were good, and entirely suitable for children of this age.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS***Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection***

Number of lessons observed

8

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

5

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	4	4	0	0	0	0
Percentage	0	50	50	0	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one 12 percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils**Pupils on the school's roll**

Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	60
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	N/A

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	30

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	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance**Authorised absence**

	%
School data	

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	

National comparative data (Primary schools)	5.6	National comparative data (Primary schools)	0.4
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and support staff:**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	14.5

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	198

Number of pupils per FTE adult	4.5
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	00/01
	£
Total income	284,479
Total expenditure	281,801
Expenditure per pupil	4,697
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	0

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	0
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	0

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
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	66

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	89	9	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	70	30	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	65	33	0	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	62	9	9	5	15
The teaching is good.	85	15	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	73	25	2	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	89	11	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	43	5	0	12
The school works closely with parents.	74	24	2	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	89	9	0	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	74	24	0	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	52	29	2	0	17