

INSPECTION REPORT

OXHEY NURSERY

Oxhey

Watford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117077

Headteacher: Mrs J Davies

Reporting inspector: Mr P H Cole
2616

Dates of inspection: 29th January – 1st February 2002

Inspection number: 230552

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 – 4 years
Gender of children:	Mixed
School address:	Eastbury Road Oxhey Watford
Postcode:	WD19 4RL
Telephone number:	01923 221790
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Joseph
Date of previous inspection:	20 th January 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2616	P H Cole	Registered inspector	Foundation Stage	What sort of a school is it? The school's results and achievements How well are children taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
14404	A V Rolfe	Lay inspector		Attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its children?
2615	E J Parry	Team inspector	Foundation Stage Special educational needs English as an additional language	How good are the curricular and other learning opportunities?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Oxhey Nursery School is larger than average with 102 children on roll. It is accommodated on two sites that are some distance apart. A similar number of boys and girls attend the school. Although almost all of the children come from white English speaking backgrounds, a slightly higher minority than usual is from other ethnic groups. Seven children speak English as an additional language although only one is at an early stage of learning English. Five children are identified as having special educational needs, one of whom has extra adult help provided by the school and is awaiting a statement to support her particular needs. The attainment of children on entry is wide ranging but is above average overall. It is higher on one site than the other. In the last few years staff have been hard to recruit and retain and this has made it more difficult for the school to maintain continuity in its work.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides a satisfactory education for its children. They make steady progress and, given their starting points, achieve appropriately. Many of the oldest children reach higher levels than expected for their age. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Although much of the teaching is good, a small proportion is unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of the school are not fully effective. Not enough has been done to tackle weaknesses in current provision, largely because of the time and effort put into acquiring a new building. Costs for educating each child are relatively high, mainly because of the dual expenses associated with a split site. When this is taken into account, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The school enjoys exceptionally strong parental support and approval. It keeps parents very well informed about events, about what their children will be learning and the progress they are making.
- Children are encouraged to develop positive attitudes to school, to get on well with each other and to become independent.
- Children with special educational needs are given good support and make good progress.
- Children's spiritual and cultural awareness and their social skills are promoted well.

What could be improved

- The leadership and management of the school, to ensure consistent teaching on both sites.
- The assessment of children's progress and its contribution to improving their learning.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, the school has made insufficient progress since its last inspection in January 1998. Satisfactory progress has been made in tackling the key issues that were identified. The school is close to achieving a new building, which will address the criticism levelled at the accommodation. Teachers now provide children with regular, appropriate opportunities to develop their skills in using computers and in responding to music, for example through

dance. Arrangements for performance management, which have superseded teacher appraisal, are in place and are being implemented satisfactorily. More still needs to be done to monitor and evaluate teaching in order to identify what can be done to make it better. Other aspects of the school's life are not as strong as they were. Children make satisfactory, rather than good, progress. The leadership of the headteacher is not as effective as it was in setting expectations for staff and children and in ensuring that a high quality learning environment is always provided. Overall, teaching is now satisfactory rather than good. The new Foundation Stage curriculum for nursery children has been introduced satisfactorily but is not yet supported by a comprehensive assessment system that ensures that teachers' planning builds on what children already know, understand and can do.

STANDARDS

Overall, the standards achieved by the oldest children are above those usually expected for their age. Through their time in the nursery children mostly make steady progress as they work through the stepping stones of the Foundation Stage curriculum. They achieve appropriately given that many start nursery with attainment that is higher than usual. Most achieve above expectations in language, literacy and communications skills. They are confident speakers who can explain what they are doing and who listen satisfactorily to each other and to adults. Most have made a good start in the acquisition of early reading and writing skills which are better than usual. Most can write their names and some can write common words. Their mathematical development is also above expectations. They have good knowledge and understanding of numbers, with many being able to count to 20. Many can compare numbers and measures, using terms such as *more* and *less than*, *longer* and *shorter*. They know the names of many shapes. Children's knowledge and understanding of the world are good. They can, for example, use computers to produce pictures and print them out. Many are developing an understanding of electricity and how things change in the natural world. Children's personal, social and emotional development is mostly better than expected. They show good personal independence and they usually get on well together. Their creative and physical development is satisfactory with aspects, such as their ability to use small equipment when making things, being better than their skills in handling and controlling larger items, such as balls. Children with special educational needs are given good levels of support and this enables them to make good progress. Those with English as an additional language make expected gains in their learning.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children are positive about school, enjoy their activities and join in them enthusiastically.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The behaviour of the children is satisfactory overall. Whilst most behave well, a few need stronger direction about what is or is not acceptable.
Personal development and relationships	Children make good progress in their personal development and enjoy good relationships with each other and adults in the nursery.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory for a nursery school.

Children often show real pleasure when joining in activities and contribute their ideas enthusiastically when working in groups. Almost all of them are well behaved and can, for example, sustain their involvement, even when they are not directly supervised by adults. A

small number of children show immature or boisterous behaviour that is not always effectively tackled by staff and disrupts others. A particular strength of the children's personal development is their good level of independence. They want to do things for themselves, such as fastening their coats and counting objects with an adult. They almost always get on well with each other, for example when boys and girls are playing together in the home corner, and they work confidently with all the adults in the nursery.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of children in:	Nursery
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory

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.

Within the overall satisfactory picture of teaching and learning, there are strengths and weaknesses. Teaching at the Oaklands Avenue site was often good and sometimes very good, while teaching at the Eastbury Road site was mainly satisfactory and occasionally had weaknesses that resulted in unsatisfactory teaching and learning. In the best teaching seen, the teacher and nursery nurses skilfully developed learning across different areas. During a baking session, for example, the teacher very successfully promoted children's speaking and listening skills, extended their ability to use implements with care and accuracy, and stretched their mathematical understanding well, as they counted spoonfuls, used scales to measure quantities and 'read' large numbers. Staff are deployed well to support identified activities and give intensive help to children with special educational needs that enables them to meet the targets in their individual education plans. Similar care is taken to ensure that children who have English as an additional language are fully involved in activities. All staff at both sites work hard to create warm relationships that help children to feel secure and valued. This encourages them to concentrate for longer periods when they are working individually or in groups. Teachers plan activities with an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy and successfully develop children's understanding of numbers and their early reading and writing skills. In a well-planned group reading session, a teacher skilfully modelled reading. Through careful questioning, she successfully consolidated the children's knowledge and understanding of reading conventions, such as reading from left to right and from the top to the bottom of the page, whilst also increasing the children's knowledge of individual words. Other activities are not always planned with a clear enough focus for learning, for example when children are playing outside with large equipment. As a result, these add little to children's skills. Weaknesses in planning also contribute to unsatisfactory teaching. A floating and sinking activity, for example, was not sufficiently thought through and added little to children's existing knowledge. Sometimes children at the Eastbury Road site do not behave well enough and adults take too long to intervene. When this happens, it can disrupt group work and undermine the effectiveness of question and answer sessions.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides satisfactory breadth and balance between the different areas of learning.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Children with special educational needs are given good levels of additional support that gives them access to all areas of the curriculum and helps them to make good progress in their learning.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	The needs of the small number of children who speak English as an additional language are met well. When their needs are greater than the school can provide for out of its own resources, effective use is made of specialist help.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	This is a strong area of the school's life. Children's spiritual, social and cultural development are promoted well and their moral development is supported satisfactorily.
How well the school cares for its children	This area is satisfactory but does have some aspects that need to be improved, notably in the use made of information gathered about the children's progress.

The school enjoys exceptionally high approval and support from parents. This reflects its warm and caring ethos and the considerable efforts, particularly by the headteacher, that are taken to keep parents informed about events that will be happening, what their children will be learning in the future and the progress that they have made. The provision of lunches for children who want them enhances children's social development and provides valuable additional opportunities for constructive play. The school collects satisfactory information on what children have learned but this information is not very accessible and this limits the extent to which it is used to promote the next steps in learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher has been diverted by the quest to achieve a new school building. This has been successful and staff morale has been maintained during a time of uncertainty. This has been at the cost of sustaining the high quality provision found throughout the nursery in the last inspection which is now satisfactory overall.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities satisfactorily but have not done enough to ensure that the school's strengths are as marked as they were previously.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is unsatisfactory. Too little monitoring and evaluation have been carried out to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning are the same in both sites.
The strategic use of resources	Too much emphasis has been placed on funding the new building. The budget has not been used well enough to support and improve the quality of provision for the children in the current nursery.

The weaknesses in the school's accommodation remain from the last inspection, but are now close to being resolved. The school has sufficient resources to support teaching and learning, but they are not all of good quality. The recruitment of staff has been difficult, and this has made it hard to ensure the consistency of provision. Staff's expectations and the quality of children's learning have slipped, particularly on the Eastbury Road site, where there has been less continuity in staffing. This situation has not been tackled effectively. There has been insufficient monitoring and evaluation of standards and the quality of teaching and learning in order to improve them. The headteacher's skills have not been put to the best use during this difficult time. As a result, some of the qualities found in the last inspection have not been sustained. Insufficient use is being made of the principles of best value when deciding priorities and how the budget should be used to benefit the children currently attending the nursery school.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children really like school and make good progress. • The children are well behaved and develop positive attitudes and values. • Teaching is good. • They are kept well informed and are very comfortable approaching the school with any concerns. • The school is well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no aspects of the school's life that parents had any concerns about.

The inspectors agree with the parents that the children like school, that almost all are well behaved, and that they are positive and enthusiastic about learning. Major strengths of the nursery are the importance and effort made to keep parents informed and involved. The inspectors judge that teaching and progress are satisfactory and that there is currently room for improvement in the leadership and management of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and children's achievements

1 The assessments undertaken when the children start the nursery show that their attainment is close to the local authority average, which is above the national average. There are variations over time from just above to just below average in aspects of their development. While in the nursery, children mostly make satisfactory progress. Many leave for reception classes having achieved higher stepping stones for learning than those expected for their age. During the inspection standards were found to be slightly higher at the Oaklands Avenue site than the Eastbury Road site. This reflects the higher attainment on entry at the former and also the quality of teaching and learning which is currently better at the Oaklands Avenue site, where there has been greater continuity in staffing.

2 Overall, standards in children's personal, social and emotional development, their communication, language and literacy skills and their level of mathematical development are above those usually expected by the time they leave nursery. They are appropriate for these children given their starting points on entry, indicating that they make satisfactory progress. Children's knowledge and understanding of the world are clearly above expectations and reflect the good progress made in this area of work. In all of these areas of learning most of the children are on course to achieve the national early learning goals, and many to exceed them, by the time they leave the Foundation Stage at the end of the reception year. The children's attainment in the physical and creative areas for learning are broadly in line with expectations and represent satisfactory levels of achievement. Children are on course to achieve the early learning goals in these areas by the end of the reception year.

3 Within the children's personal, social and emotional development, the acquisition of independence is particularly strong, both in terms of how they look after themselves and how they approach activities provided in the nursery. They also form positive relationships with each other and adults and most behave well.

4 Children are confident speakers who are keen to contribute when working in groups and who listen satisfactorily most of the time. They develop early reading skills quickly. Older children understand that print carries meaning, that reading is done from left to right and from the top to the bottom of the page. They are beginning to identify initial letter sounds. Most of the older ones can write their names; all can make marks that represent their ideas.

5 A strong aspect of the children's mathematical development is their knowledge and understanding of numbers. Many of those who have been in the nursery the longest can count well past 10 and can recognise numbers to at least nine when they are written down. They can also compare the length and size of objects and identify common shapes.

6 The older children's knowledge and understanding of the natural world are good. They have observed how living things grow and change over time. They also know that magnets can 'pull' and 'push' each other and that electricity travels through wires to make things work. They can use computers to create pictures and some are beginning to understand how to control programmable toys. They are able to construct using kits and assorted materials. The children are also beginning to know out about the beliefs and customs of different cultures, through for example their work on the Chinese New Year.

7 Overall, the children demonstrate satisfactory dexterity and control when moving to music and when using small and large equipment. They are able to represent their ideas and

record what they have seen in pictures and models using a range of media. They use their imaginations effectively when taking on roles during play.

8 The staff are careful to give children who have special educational needs individual support that is well matched to their learning needs and gives them good access to the areas of learning. This enables these children to make good progress and to achieve well. The needs of children who speak English as an additional language are also met effectively and they make the same progress as the majority of children in the nursery.

Children's attitudes, values and personal development

9 Children's attitudes to learning, personal development and relationships are all good and overall their behaviour is satisfactory. All these factors have a positive impact on children's learning.

10 Staff are very successful in settling children quickly into nursery. As a result, they enjoy coming to school and enter into their play and learning activities with obvious enthusiasm. Most listen with satisfactory attention and can concentrate for appropriate periods of time on a variety of activities. The majority of children are able to choose activities in which they wish to participate; most are able to share resources and are learning to take turns when using them, for example when they are working on the computer.

11 Overall the children's behaviour is satisfactory. The majority are well behaved, and relate well to each other and to the adults in the school. Most children are friendly and respectful and happy to talk about what they are doing. The majority are aware of what is and is not acceptable behaviour. However, on occasions the behaviour of a small but significant number of children is unsatisfactory. They demonstrate immature attitudes and engage in boisterous behaviour that, on occasions, disrupts the learning of other children. Staff sometimes do not react quickly enough to this type of behaviour. There is no evidence of any oppressive behaviour, such as bullying.

12 Children make good progress in their personal development. Relationships between the children and staff are good; so too are relationships between children. These relationships make a positive contribution to their learning. For example, during a free choice time, a small group of children using the computer patiently waited their turn, offered help and advice to each other, and readily relinquished control of the computer when asked to do so. Most children are developing good levels of independence. They choose their own activities confidently, dress themselves for outdoor activities and go to the toilet on their own. Almost all parents consider that the school is helping their children to become more mature and responsible.

13 Overall attendance is satisfactory. Most children attend on a regular basis, arrive on time and settle quickly into the school routines.

HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN TAUGHT?

14 Since the last inspection, when the quality of teaching was judged to be good, there has been considerable staff turnover and the overall quality of teaching is now satisfactory. The relatively high turnover has had most effect at the Eastbury Road site, where it has led to a lack of stability and continuity in teaching and learning. The headteacher has put most of her energy into achieving her vision for a new building and an extension to the services to be provided in the nursery. As a result, she has not used her own teaching skills to support new staff as effectively as she could have done or to maintain high expectations at this site. This

is most evident in the quality of displays that sometimes do not value the children's efforts enough, inconsistencies in the way staff manage children's behaviour, and lack of focus in some of the planning. The last two weaknesses lead to unsatisfactory teaching on occasions.

15 Teaching at the Oaklands Avenue site is mostly good and reflects many of the strengths found during the last inspection. The staff work hard together to create a good quality learning environment with interesting displays for children to explore and others that value their efforts and promote their self- esteem. The planning of teaching and learning is well thought out and establishes effective links between different areas of learning, as seen in the baking activity described earlier. There are also good links between the activities in a particular area of learning over a number of days. For example, in the area of creative development, the children started by exploring colour mixing as they produced prints for the background of a pond. They then used paint and other materials to make their own fish and finished the display by constructing ducks out of a range of different materials that they cut, stuck and decorated. These activities were all supported by a nursery nurse who skilfully observed, encouraged, explained, questioned and demonstrated skills to the children. This well-planned and coherent approach enabled the children to refine and improve their creative and physical skills and also contributed well to developing their speaking and listening skills. A weakness that was sometimes evident at both sites was the lack of a clear learning focus for outdoor play and this limited the development of children's skills.

16 At the Eastbury Road site almost all the teaching was satisfactory with similar proportions of good and unsatisfactory teaching. In common with the teaching at the other site, the planning identifies staff responsibilities clearly and ensures that all staff are used effectively to support children's learning. All staff work hard to promote the caring and supportive ethos that characterises the nursery and to ensure that children feel secure and happy in what they do. This has positive benefits for their learning by ensuring relationships are good, and that children are confident to explore and to express themselves, and are encouraged to sustain their involvement in activities. Most of the children who have special educational needs attend the Eastbury Road site and their needs are clearly identified and well supported by the generous staffing provided for them and the sensitive and well- focused activities that staff provide. These are sometimes on an individual basis, alongside the many opportunities that are provided for them to learn in small or large groups and to access all the areas of learning. These children make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. The children who speak English as an additional language do not require any specialist support but staff are clearly aware of their needs and effectively support them when necessary, often making positive use of their backgrounds to promote their self-esteem.

17 Morning and afternoon sessions at the Eastbury Road site are planned satisfactorily, but do not have the same coherence over time or across the areas of learning as those at the other site. Individual activities do not build on each other as well. This is so even when the topics are the same as those taught at the Oaklands Avenue site. Teaching does not make links between the areas of learning as effectively, for example during the baking activity. Individual activities are sometimes well thought through and skilfully taught by teachers and nursery nurses who manage children's behaviour effectively and who use questioning well to check on the children's learning and to extend their knowledge and understanding. This was the case in the reading session described in the summary, when a nursery nurse led a counting session and when a teacher caught the children's interest during a session with a programmable toy.

18 On other occasions the teaching and learning are not planned carefully enough and insufficient use is made of assessment to evaluate the success of the teaching and to plan

for the next steps in children's learning. . This was a weakness that led to unsatisfactory teaching of floating and sinking to a group. The nursery nurse did not take sufficient account of the social and emotional development of the children and did not plan effectively how she would manage the involvement of children in the activity. This allowed the immature behaviour of the boys in the group to dominate. As a result, a more timid child did not take enough part in the activity and the adult's attempts to lead a discussion was ineffective in developing the concepts she wanted to get over to the group. This problem was compounded by not thinking through how best to focus the children on observing which materials might float and which might sink and by providing far too many different objects. Playing with these in the water became the main concern of the children. Whilst individual members of staff at Eastbury Road almost always manage children's behaviour effectively, there is no agreed approach to how this should be achieved when the whole group is together and several adults are available. As a result, these sessions are sometimes not as effective as they should be with children getting up and wandering around, playing with each other and shouting out unnecessarily. Staff are too slow to intervene and no one takes responsibility for ensuring children behave as they should. This undermines the quality of children's learning.

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

19 Overall, the nursery offers its children a broad and balanced education that allows them to make steady progress. However, the provision is not of as good a quality as that noted in the previous inspection. The curriculum is extended by the provision of school meals that give children who attend either morning and afternoon sessions longer time in the nursery. These act as a good preparation for this type of experience in the much larger setting of a primary school.

20 Initial planning and preparation for teaching cover all areas of learning and are done by all teaching staff together, to ensure a comparable framework operates at both sites. Beyond that, groups of staff plan for their own site or session so that there is sufficient flexibility to respond to any different needs that the groups of children may have. A weakness of this system is that there can be too little structure to help staff in their planning. An example of this is that the learning objectives in the weekly and daily planning, such as 'to use tools in the sand', are sometimes too vague. They do not guide provision or ensure that the adult who is leading that activity is absolutely sure about what children are intended to learn. This is particularly so at the Eastbury Road site where there have been many staff changes and where new staff are currently in place. Staff at the Oaklands Avenue site have been together longer and are much more secure in their shared understanding of what planning intends.

21 Both sites have sufficient hard play and grassed areas, although the hard play surfaces are in poor condition. This may have affected the way that the nursery provides outdoor experiences. On some days, provision was good for children's physical development, with a range of climbing equipment and wheeled toys, but limited in other areas. On other days there was a better balance. Given the length of time that children can choose to stay outside, there was not always enough variety or challenge in the activities offered.

22 Children with special educational needs are encouraged to take part in all the activities. They also have individual education plans which clearly identify any special learning needs. All of the very few children who speak English as an additional language have sufficient skills to learn within the normal provision of the nursery. The good ratio of adults to children helps all children to learn.

23 Provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Children's spiritual development is promoted well. There are many good first hand experiences that create a feeling of pleasure in learning and wonder at the world around them. Snowdrops that had just opened at the Oakland site were examined with care, and children gently stroked the flowers. Children at both sites were fascinated by the way blue and yellow playdough could be moulded together to form a green mixture.

24 Children's moral development is satisfactory. Staff are very calm and cheerful in the way they talk to the children and set them good models of courtesy. Most children behave well but there were a number of occasions, particularly at the Eastbury Road site, when small incidents such as running around inside and disagreements were not tackled soon enough. At these times, the rules that govern behaviour were not established clearly enough. Children take part in charity events such as Red Nose Day, or visiting local elderly residents that encourage them to think about other people in society.

25 The organisation and provision in the nursery ensure a good platform for the development of social skills. Children learn to work and play with a variety of adults and children, both of their own choosing and when they are directed to a particular activity or adult. Parents and visitors to the school extend their range of social contacts as does the opportunity to stay for a school lunch.

26 Provision for children's cultural development is good. Different festivals and customs are celebrated throughout the year and cover such events as Diwali, Christmas and Hanukkah. Photographs of the Chinese New Year celebrations show how the children enjoy dancing and eating special foods and how displays were used to add further interest and colour to the topic. The nursery has a good range of books, photographs, toys, games and musical instruments to support their learning about people and society. Photographs of some of the large-scale events show that they are enjoyed by the families as much as by the children. Parties and picnics, dressing up days, visitors and performers all add to the children's experiences.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS CHILDREN?

27 This is a caring school that is successful in providing a warm supportive environment in which children can learn and develop. Staff and children are well known to each other, and staff are responsive to the children's needs, all of which have a positive impact on their learning and development.

28 The school's health and safety policy meets statutory requirements. Most procedures for risk assessment are in place, although fire risk assessments have still to be completed. Some minor concerns relating to health and safety were brought to the attention of the headteacher during the inspection. Overall, arrangements for child protection are good. The Area Child Protection Committee's procedures have been adopted and these are supported by a comprehensive school child protection policy and appropriate links with outside agencies. The headteacher is the designated teacher and has received appropriate training. The headteacher has provided staff with child protection training on an informal basis.

29 Overall, procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance are satisfactory. The headteacher monitors attendance registers, and should any child's level of attendance be a cause for concern, draws this to the attention of the parents concerned.

30 Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are mostly satisfactory. A draft behaviour policy has been prepared that seeks to promote good behaviour by acknowledging good, rather than poor, behaviour. Staff are encouraged to provide good role models and reinforce children's understanding of right and wrong, for example through the use of stories in story time. Should the school have serious concerns about a child's behaviour, the school's policy is to consult with parents. Current weaknesses in managing behaviour at the Eastbury Road site are due to lack of consistent implementation of procedures.

31 Systems for recording assessments of children's progress in each of the areas of learning are being developed, enabling children's progress to be tracked over time. There are currently individual records for aspects of communication, language and literacy and mathematics. These provide useful information that can be used to help plan the next steps in children's learning but the information is not readily accessible and is therefore not easily used on a continuous basis. Information is being collected for the other areas of learning but this is not done very systematically, is quite sparse and is of limited use when staff are planning activities for groups of children. Effective use is made of baseline assessments when children first come into the nursery to identify starting points and targets for their learning, and exit assessments are used to provide receiving schools with useful information to assist their planning.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

32 Parents' views of the school are excellent. In particular, they believe: their children make good progress; behaviour is good; teaching is good; and, they are kept well informed about their children's progress. Parents also indicated that their children enjoyed coming to school; the school is helping their children to become more mature and responsible; the school works closely with them; and, it is well led and managed. Generally, inspectors agree with these positive views of the school, although some elements of management and teaching are not as good as parents indicate.

33 Very good relationships have been established with parents. These begin when children first enter the school, through very good induction procedures. Part of the induction period involves the headteacher meeting with new parents and giving them good quality information about the school. These good relationships are built upon during their children's time in the school. Many parents help in the school and accompany children on visits in the local community. Each term parents are invited to an open session when they can work with their children in small groups. Parents are encouraged to use the school's book lending scheme, so that they can read with their children at home. Friends of the school help in organising successful social and fund-raising events. Overall, parents make a very good contribution to their children's learning both at school and at home.

34 Overall the quality and range of information provided for parents is very good. The school brochure and annual governors' report provides a wide range of information about the school and its activities, and meets statutory requirements. Regular newsletters and letters about specific events ensure parents are kept well informed of current school issues. At the beginning of each term, parents are advised of the curriculum topics to be studied in the term, and detailed weekly lesson plans are available on the school's notice board. Parents are invited to two parents' evenings when they can discuss their children's progress. At the final meeting, parents are given the opportunity to discuss their children's records, which are then transferred to primary school. The school's arrangements to involve parents of children who have special educational needs in the development and review of their individual education plans are good.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

35 The leadership and management of the nursery are not as effective as they were at the time of the last inspection. The headteacher retains her clear educational vision and has maintained staff morale during an extended period of uncertainty over the future of the nursery. However, she has been distracted by her desire and vision for a new building and her plans for extending the nature of provision available in the nursery. This quest is nearing fruition but the time and energy given to it have led to the quality of teaching and learning at the Eastbury Road site slipping. This has been compounded by the considerable staff turnover, which has mainly been at this site. The headteacher, who has not had a regular planned teaching commitment over the last few years, has not used her time effectively enough to monitor and support new staff or to promote sufficiently high expectations. However, where weaknesses have been addressed, improvements have been made; for example she worked with a nursery nurse to improve how an activity can be taught. During a time when continuity has been difficult to sustain, neither the governors nor the headteacher have placed sufficient emphasis on this key element of leadership and management. The quality evident at the last inspection has been maintained at the Oaklands Avenue site where there has been continuity in teaching and day-to-day management.

36 Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities satisfactorily. They have not, however, developed their roles as 'critical friends' to the school or been sufficiently involved in identifying priorities for development, other than those related to the new building, and in monitoring how well these have been implemented. Individual governors do provide positive support to the nursery through their individual expertise in early years education and financial management.

37 The budget is carefully managed to ensure that fluctuations in numbers of children on roll do not place the school's finances at risk. The school has made good provision for children with special educational needs, for example by funding an assistant to work with a child who has very specific needs. Care has been taken to ensure there is funding to cover unforeseen costs associated with the new building. The school's development plan has a satisfactory structure that makes it a useful management tool and has sound links to the budget, but it is not based on a detailed audit of standards and the quality of provision, and this limits its overall effectiveness. The headteacher and governors do not make sufficient use of the principles of best value when they are making decisions designed to bring about improvements and to use the budget to support these. The use of the headteacher's time to support children currently in the nursery would be an example of this.

38 The day-to-day routines of the school are effective and are supported well by a detailed and informative staff handbook and the work of the administrative assistants.

39 The problems found with the school's accommodation during the last inspection remain but plans are now well advanced to resolve them. Currently, storage is poor but could be better organised and the surfaces of the hard play areas on both sites are major weaknesses that adversely affect the quality of outdoor provision. The school has compensated for this to a considerable extent with the provision of good quality climbing frames and soft play areas. Resources for other areas of learning are satisfactory, although much of the furniture is old and adversely affects the quality of the environment.

40 Despite the difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, suitably qualified and experienced teachers, who have the necessary skills to promote children's learning, have been appointed. The recently developed policy for performance management is appropriate

and has started to be implemented although there has not been sufficient time for it to be used to inform staff development. There are sufficient, appropriately qualified, support staff to cover the demands of the Foundation Stage curriculum and the level of support for children with special educational needs is good. Currently, none of the children who speak English as an additional language require extra help but the school makes effective use of the well-established links with support agencies when this is necessary.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

41 In order to further raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- 1 Refocus the work of the headteacher and governors, to ensure that the highest quality provision is consistently made for children, by:
 - Setting clear and consistently high expectations for teaching, children's behaviour and the quality of the learning environment.
 - Building on the start that has been made in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning and use the information gained to further improve the effectiveness of staff through training and development.
 - Reviewing the use of the headteacher's time so that more emphasis is placed on supporting and improving the quality provided for children currently in the nursery.
 - Developing the role of governors so that they become critical friends of the school, make better use of the principles of best value and become more involved in setting the priorities for its development.

- 2 Improve how children's progress is assessed and recorded by:
 - Continuing to develop the assessment and recording of the children's learning across each of the areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum.
 - Reviewing how this information is recorded in order to make it easier for staff to see where children are in their learning and to plan what they need to be taught next.
 - Taking more account of this information when planning activities to be used to develop the children's learning.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	20
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and children	12

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	2	6	10	2	0	0
Percentage	0	10	30	50	10	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 five percentage points.

Information about the school's children

Children on the school's roll

	Nursery
Number of children on the school's roll (FTE for part-time children)	51
Number of full-time children known to be eligible for free school meals	NA

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery
Number of children with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of children on the school's special educational needs register	5

English as an additional language

	No of children
Number of children with English as an additional language	7

Child mobility in the last school year

	No of children
Children who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	0
Children who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Attendance

Authorised absence

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	NA
National comparative data	NA

	%
School data	NA
National comparative data	NA

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: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) 4

Number of children per qualified teacher	18
Total number of education support staff	8

Total aggregate hours worked per week 155

Number of children per FTE adult	7.5
<i>FTE means full-time equivalent.</i>	

Financial information

Financial year	2001
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	£
Total income	221,649
Total expenditure	211,785
Expenditure per child	3,885
Balance brought forward from previous year	14,137
Balance carried forward to next year	24,001

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	2

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	118
Number of questionnaires returned	35

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	77	22	0	0	3
My child is making good progress in school.	60	37	0	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	60	37	0	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	37	3	0	43
The teaching is good.	57	40	0	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	57	37	3	0	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	83	14	0	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	37	51	3	3	6
The school works closely with parents.	60	37	0	0	3
The school is well led and managed.	74	23	0	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	60	37	0	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	31	6	0	29

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Personal, social and emotional development

42 The children attain above the expectations for their ages in this area of learning and this is appropriate given their starting points. They settle quickly into the nursery and soon feel secure and confident to join in tasks with other children. Parents are very happy at how quickly their children feel at home. This reflects the very caring relationships and ethos that the staff work hard to promote.

43 Teaching is satisfactory. Children are given many opportunities to choose activities and they respond well to the challenges and tasks available. They are able to tackle activities independently, such as using listening centres, playing with table-top puzzles, or exploring objects such as magnets that are on display. They show very good personal independence, dressing themselves to play outside, going to the toilet and facing up to challenges when they are learning. A child counting the frogs in a display concentrated really well, for example. When an adult came to help him, he determinedly insisted on counting them by himself and the adult sensitively stood back. The staff encourage children to be aware of each other's needs and to try things together. This successfully promotes the positive relationships that children enjoy, with, for example, boys and girls playing constructively and imaginatively together in the home corner. Almost all children soon start to understand that their behaviour affects others and most quickly learn to be quiet when listening to the teacher. They are beginning to take turns when answering questions and when they are working in groups. A small number of children, mainly in one of the teaching groups, still show immature behaviour for their age. Adults do not tackle their inappropriate behaviour consistently. Occasionally, for example during group time when a book was being shared, their inability to sit still and listen was not dealt with. As a result, all the children in the group gained less from the experience than they should have done. Most of the time teachers and support staff set clear expectations to which the children respond well and this ensures that little time is wasted due to inappropriate behaviour.

44 The staff provide many opportunities for the children to be involved in different social situations including lunchtimes, picnics when visitors and parents join in, and occasions when children engage in exciting activities together, such as making a clay landscape with an artist. Children celebrate the cultural diversity in the school and in the wider community as they engage in activities around festivals such as Chinese New Year, Diwali and Hanukkah. These opportunities undoubtedly help the children develop a sense of belonging and community. Similarly, teachers and other staff plan many opportunities for the children to learn through direct experiences involving growing plants, caring for living things as well as using equipment, and materials, such as magnets and computers. These help the children to develop caring and responsible attitudes.

Communication, language and literacy

45 The baseline assessments made of children when they first come into the nursery show that many have language skills that are above average, although the range of their attainment is wide. Both the nursery's own ongoing assessments and the evidence from the inspection indicate that most children make steady progress. By the end of nursery, many reach higher than average stepping stones in communication, language and literacy. Some achieve aspects of some of the early learning goals intended for reception-aged children. For example, higher attaining children in their third term in nursery write their own names and

hold the pencil correctly. They recognise some initial letter sounds in words, clearly understand that print carries meaning and know that they need to read from left to right and from the top of the page to the bottom.

46 Many children are confident speakers and soon begin to contribute their ideas in group discussions, for example suggesting which words rhyme in a story, reminding the teacher to turn the page when she has reached the bottom or of additional verses of a song they are singing. They can describe how they placed lines of elephants they had made in order of length and how they have made their fishes for the pond display. Most, but not all, listen attentively during stories and group time when they are singing and learning rhymes. Teachers and other adults work hard to make stories interesting using puppets and different voices, for example, to gain and keep the children's attention. Older children can recall and describe some of the main events in a story they have enjoyed. Many find it more difficult to sit and listen to each other, for example, during circle time, because they are eager to have their own say. When they are playing in the home corner, the older ones sustain extended conversations in the roles they have taken, for example speculating where the monster has gone after he has had tea with them.

47 The teaching of communication, language and literacy is satisfactory overall. Individual sessions are sometimes good, particularly when the adult has a clear focus to work on with a group. This was the case when a teacher skilfully used story time to draw the children's attention to common words, to identify rhymes, and to reinforce reading from left to right and top to bottom. On occasion, opportunities to develop literacy skills are not as effectively taken, for example when the teacher did not develop an opportunity to explore the initial sound 'p' when reading a story that included 'pears', 'peaches' and 'plums'. There is also some inconsistency between the practice at the two sites. At the Oaklands Avenue site, adults ask the children to write their names on their pictures and computer printouts, while at Eastbury Road this is not always done. Similarly, greater use is made of labels in displays and around the room to promote reading at the former site. Nearly all the staff promote speaking and listening effectively during activities in other areas, such as when children are working on the computer, making things, such as their ducks for the pond display, and when they are exploring colour mixing with playdough and paint. They encourage the children to explain what they are doing and to describe what they see or feel and through this extend their vocabulary and ability to express their ideas. Care is taken to promote the learning of children with special educational needs, with teachers and other staff, for example, sharing books with them on an individual basis.

Mathematical development

48 Initial assessments show that, although there is a wide range of attainment, many children arrive at the nursery with good counting skills and mathematical knowledge. Subsequent assessments indicate that they make satisfactory progress and that children's attainment overall is likely to be better than indicated by the stepping stones for their age. This is backed up by inspection evidence, which found that many children are on course to exceed the stepping stones for their age and, apart from those who have special educational needs, the rest are likely to be in line with them.

49 The strong focus on counting gives children many opportunities to count in songs, rhymes and number activities. Children join in number rhymes and songs, such as 'Five Little Speckled Frogs', with confidence. Three year olds know the counting sequence to five and some can recognise the numbers on a line. Some can count further than that and have quite sophisticated number awareness as they start the nursery. For example, one was able to count a line of elephants as far as 18 before he lost the sequence but he continued counting with larger numbers. He could also say how many there are in a small group up to

five without touching and counting. Others can count to nine but cannot count a number of objects accurately. Almost all of the four year olds can count numbers to 10 securely, and some can go up to 20. They can recognise numbers to six, for example, as they play a game with one of the adults where they roll a dice and collect the correct number of elephants.

50 Four year olds understand mathematical language, such as *heavier* and *lighter* or *tall* and *short*. A good example of how the teachers develop such concepts in play is when children are encouraged to join construction links to make a line as tall as the teacher or taller than themselves. Such practical tasks keep them happily interested and working enthusiastically. They can combine two small sets of objects by counting but are less secure with *more than* and *less than*. A four year old, for example was asked how many more pencils she would need to make six. She knew that action was needed and reached for more pencils but did not complete the action. Most children identify the common mathematical shapes. They can match, copy and continue simple patterns that are made by their teachers such as alternating coloured bobbins or one horizontal line followed by one vertical and some can operate with more difficult patterns.

51 Teaching in mathematics is satisfactory overall. Counting currently has a high priority and staff at both sites regularly give children opportunities to count through number rhymes and songs. However, many of the songs and rhymes that children enjoy do not offer enough challenge to those who already competent in counting up to five and sometimes above when they start.

52 Some good integration of mathematics into other activities was seen at the Oaklands Avenue site. In baking, for example, some quite challenging work arose naturally from the activity and from children's questions. The children counted spoons of flour and looked at the scales to see whether or not they had enough. The teacher used the recipe to show children larger numbers such as 125g. She also developed the children's responses very well; for example when a child said he could see 500, the group talked about it until they decided it was 50. Children looked at a block of butter to see how it could be divided into four and talked about halving and making sure that both halves were the same. In such activities, children are taught mathematics through practical, everyday activities.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

53 The strong emphasis given to learning through direct experience pays dividends in this area of learning. Children are attaining above expectations and achieving well in developing their knowledge and understanding of the world.

54 Care is taken to provide children with displays that they can explore and observe which enable them to gain insights into how things, such as magnets, work or how living things, such as caterpillars, change into moths and butterflies, and seeds sprout and grow into plants. Practical tasks, such as seeing which objects float and which sink, are enabling them to discover more about materials and improving their skills in observing, sorting and describing what is happening.

55 Regular opportunities for children to use computers are planned and the weaknesses found in this aspect during the last inspection have been tackled successfully. Children use the mouse confidently to make selections on the screen, for example the brushes and colours they want to create pictures or buttons that need to be pressed to operate programs in mathematical and language development. Older children can print out their work by themselves. In a well-focused short session, a teacher at the Eastbury Road site used skilful questioning and practical challenges to develop the children's understanding that instructions

can be given to programmable toys, such as *Pixie*, to make them move forward or backwards and to turn.

56 Good links are made between developing knowledge and understanding of the world and with children's work in creative development; for example, when they were making ducks the children were able to choose materials, use tools such as scissors and join materials together using glue and tape. Their skills in using scissors are mostly good and adults provide sensitive support to help those who need to improve how they use or hold scissors.

57 By producing books about their families and going on walks around the local area, the children are developing a sound understanding of time and place. Through the opportunities taken to celebrate festivals from different religions and, for example, to make pizzas and eat sweets brought in by a Hindu mother, children are beginning to develop their awareness of different cultures and beliefs.

58 Teaching in this area has real strengths as described above, but on occasion insufficient thought is put into how an activity can be best presented to children and this can lead to ineffective learning. For example, too many objects were used when children were investigating floating and sinking with one of the nursery nurses and the purpose of the activity became blurred.

Physical development

59 The children are achieving in line with the expectations for their age in this area of learning and standards are satisfactory. An improved aspect of their physical development is their ability to express themselves in response to music, which was identified as a weakness in the last inspection. These activities are now planned more regularly and have a purposeful focus. In a challenging activity led by the teacher, the older children moved in the ways they thought the characters in a story would move. They skipped, wriggled and fluttered, being children playing, snakes and butterflies, with the more accomplished modifying their movements well as the music changed its dynamics and rhythm.

60 The children's skills in using hand tools, such as scissors and working with malleable materials, such as playdough, are good. They mostly hold brushes and other mark-making implements, scissors and glue spreaders appropriately and control their use well and safely. The staff observe the children carefully when they are using tools and provide sensitive support and encouragement to improve their use, for example providing left-handed scissors when these are needed. The children also handle 'small world', table-top toys and construction toys with appropriate dexterity, for example when completing jigsaws or building garages or strings of trains. Many are also able to put on their own coats and fasten them without adult help.

61 Most of the children really enjoy the extended opportunities they have for outdoor play with the large equipment and apparatus, including the good quality climbing frames available on both sites. They steer and manoeuvre bikes with skill and judge space satisfactorily when manoeuvring them. The more adventurous also show good skills when climbing and swinging on the climbing frame. The children's skills in throwing, catching and kicking balls show less development than their ability to control large toys, and are less consistently supported by adults.

62 Teaching in this area is satisfactory and is most effective when activities are planned with a clear focus for developing skills. This was seen to good effect when a nursery nurse was supporting and encouraging children to improve their use of scissors and glue spreaders when they were constructing ducks for the pond display. Similarly, when staff

supervising the outdoor play added challenges for children riding on the bikes, for example by providing obstacle courses and a pedestrian crossing, their skills were extended. At other times the outdoor play lacked focus and little was added to extend the children's physical abilities. This was most noticeable in encouraging throwing, catching and kicking skills. The staff are careful to ensure that outdoor play is safe and levels of supervision are good.

Creative development

63 Children make satisfactory progress in this area of learning and achieve stepping stones that are mostly appropriate for their ages and sometimes above, particularly at the Oaklands Avenue site. All enjoy joining in singing rhymes and songs that help their learning in mathematical and language development. The older ones have learnt a suitably wide repertoire of songs, which they sing with enthusiasm and they often request additional verses. Even the youngest children attempt to clap in time and the older ones mostly manage this. As described earlier, the older children move well in response to musical rhythms and dynamics.

64 Most of the children can use a range of crayons and pencils to make their own pictures that represent things they see and imagine. Many of the older children provide detail and reasonable proportion in some of their drawings of people they know. The staff provide an appropriate range of opportunities for children to use paint, to construct using different materials, to create collages and to work on small and large scale tasks, including an exciting project using clay with a visiting artist. As with their physical development, the most impressive outcomes result from activities that have clear purpose and challenge. The children were delighted when they 'discovered' what happens when they mixed blue and yellow paint when they were making patterns prior to printing. Others could describe what had happened when they combined yellow and blue playdough. The children making fishes and ducks for the pond display thoughtfully selected materials using their texture and colour for effect.

65 Children play imaginatively in the home corner and the writing areas. They use the resources, such as the 'phones, to support their play and older ones develop stories that they act out together, for example looking for the monster that had come for tea.

66 The teaching of creative development is more effective at the Oaklands Avenue site, where activities are more purposeful and there is greater coherence in what children are asked to do. For example, during the week a nursery nurse worked with groups of children skilfully using observation, encouragement, demonstration and questioning to develop their understanding of colour mixing, use of materials and construction skills as she gradually created an impressive collage of a pond complete with fish and ducks with them. The opportunities at the Eastbury Road site are less well structured and too much of the learning is incidental rather than planned.