

INSPECTION REPORT

LYDALLS NURSERY SCHOOL

Didcot

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 122972

Headteacher: Claire White

Reporting inspector: Shirley Billington
4343

Dates of inspection: 7th – 9th May 2002

Inspection number: 230872

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 5 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Lydalls Road Didcot Oxfordshire
Postcode:	OX11 7HX
Telephone number:	01235 813137
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Appropriate authority:	The Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Nicola Williams
Date of previous inspection:	18 th May 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
4343	Shirley Billington	Registered inspector	The Foundation Stage Equal opportunities English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? <i>The school's results and achievements</i> How well are pupils taught?
11096	Margaret Davie	Lay inspector		How high are standards? <i>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</i> How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? How well is the school led and managed?
30266	Hilma Rask	Team inspector	Special educational needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This school has the equivalent of 60 full time nursery places. There are currently 30 four year olds attending full-time and 58 three and four year olds attending either morning or afternoon sessions. There are twice as many boys as girls on roll. The majority of children spend at least three terms in the nursery, including one term when they attend full-time, before moving on to primary schools. When children start at the nursery, their levels of attainment are generally low; many have very limited skills in speaking.

The proportion of children that is eligible for free school meals is around seventeen per cent; this is broadly average.

The school has ten places that are reserved for children with special educational needs. Eight of these places are currently taken up by children with a range of special educational needs, including speech and language delay, physical impairment, specific learning difficulties and behavioural difficulties. There are currently no children with a statement of special educational needs.

Four children speak English as an additional language; one is on the early stages of learning English. Bengali and Cantonese are the main other languages spoken. There is no specific additional support for children who are learning English as an additional language.

Full day care is provided on the same site as the school. This facility is available from 8am to 5pm throughout the year; places are taken up mostly by children from the nursery but are also available to other local children. The nursery also offers a support group twice a week for parents of younger children who may have special educational needs.

Since the last inspection there have been several changes of staff. The head was appointed in April 2001, the other full-time teacher in September 2001. Most of the nursery nurses and learning support assistants (LSAs) are also recent appointments.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. Children generally make good, and at times very good, progress in all areas of learning. Teaching is good and some aspects are very good. There is very good provision for children's personal development and they develop very positive attitudes to learning. Provision for children with special educational needs is very good and they are fully included in all that the school has to offer. The school is very well led and managed.

What the school does well

- Children make very good progress in their speaking skills, their physical development and their knowledge and understanding of the world
- Children develop very good attitudes to learning and behave very well
- Partnership with parents is strong and they are given good information to help them to support their children's learning
- Provision for children's personal development is excellent
- The head provides strong leadership and staff work well as a team
- There is excellent provision for children's care and welfare
- There is very good provision for children with special educational needs and they make very good progress
- The learning environment is of high quality and offers children an exciting range of purposeful experiences

What could be improved

- The range of planned opportunities to extend the skills of older and higher attaining children in

literacy and numeracy

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in May 1998. Since then there has been good improvement overall, particularly in the last year. Children now make good progress overall in every area of learning; their progress is very good in aspects such as their speaking skills and their knowledge and understanding of the world.

The weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been successfully addressed. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is now good and many children attain a good level of skills. There is a more consistent approach to the teaching of children in small group sessions.

Curriculum planning has improved; there is now guidance in place for teaching all areas of learning. The role of the co-ordinator has been clarified and subject leaders are making a good impact on work in their areas. Provision for the teaching of older children has been improved, but there is still scope to introduce more structure to their experiences in literacy and numeracy.

STANDARDS

The vast majority of children achieve very well in relation to their levels of skills and understanding when they start school. All make good, and at times very good, progress in all areas of learning and the vast majority are on course to reach the targets set for children at the start of Year 1 in primary schools. Children make particularly good progress in their personal and social skills, learning to work independently and collaboratively, to make decisions for themselves and to take responsibility for planning their activities. Progress in knowledge and understanding of the world is also very good and this lays a secure foundation for children's later learning in subjects such as science and design and technology (DT). Progress in physical development is very good because the children have such good experiences to extend their skills in this area.

All children make good progress in the early stages of literacy and numeracy and have a good foundation of skills in these areas. However, for a minority of older and higher attaining children, there is scope to introduce more challenge to the range of activities that they encounter.

Children with special educational needs make very good progress as a result of skilled and well-targeted provision.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Children are generally enthusiastic about all that the school offers. They have very positive attitudes to learning.
Behaviour	Very good. Children respond well to the consistent expectations of staff and the well-established routines.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. The older children learn to work independently and to make decisions about their activities. Relationships are very good at all levels.
Attendance	Good; the children are keen to come to school.

Children's positive attitudes and very good levels of behaviour are important factors in ensuring that they make good progress in their learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of children:	Aged 3 to 4
Quality of teaching	Good

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

The overall quality of teaching is good and some aspects are very good. Strong features of teaching include the very good relationships that staff form with the children and the very good strategies to manage behaviour. In addition, talk is used well to support and extend children's learning; all staff pay careful attention to the language that they use and children's own communication skills develop well in response to this.

Resources are used well to support teaching and learning. The environment is very well organised to ensure that children can make choices about how they will organise activities and begin to take responsibility for aspects of their learning.

Early literacy and numeracy skills are taught well so that children learn, for example, how to handle books, how to represent their ideas through mark making and are secure in counting and identifying groups of objects from one to ten. More use could be made of the teaching approaches outlined in the national strategies for literacy and numeracy to extend learning from this good base.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Children are offered a well-planned range of rich experiences in an exciting environment.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Very good. Children's individual needs are well known and support is very carefully planned to help them to make maximum progress.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	Good. Staff provide sensitive support to enable the children to access all aspects of the curriculum. Children's progress in all areas of learning is in line with that of their peers
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Experiences in a range of areas such as art and music extend children's appreciation of the wider world. There is very good provision to prepare children for life in a culturally diverse society.
How well the school cares for its children	Excellent. Children are very well cared for and each is known well by all members of staff. Their progress is carefully tracked.

The school works very well in partnership with parents. They are given very good information to encourage them to support their children's learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The head provides strong leadership and has a clear vision of how the school might be further improved. Staff work well as a team and have a very high level of commitment to the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Many governors are fairly new to the role but they are well-organised to fulfil their responsibilities and very supportive of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school is making good use of information on children's achievements to identify aspects of the curriculum that could be improved.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Resources are carefully targeted to support children's learning.

The school has a very good ratio of staff to children; this is generally used very effectively to support learning. Accommodation and resources are of very high quality; the principles of best value are used well in making decisions about purchases and improvements in provision.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>All parents (100 per cent) feel that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school • Teaching is good • Behaviour is good • The school works closely with parents and they are well informed about how their children are getting on • The school is well led and managed • They would feel comfortable approaching the school 	<p>There were no areas of concern</p>

The above views are based on the comments of 5 parents who attended a meeting prior to the inspection and 26 (30 per cent) parents who returned questionnaires. The inspection team is happy to confirm that parents' confidence in the school is fully justified.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and children's achievements

1. Children make good, and often very good, progress in all areas of their learning. Many start school with a very limited base of skills and understanding. This low base is quickly built upon and children move on very rapidly in the early stages of their learning. As a result, the majority is on course to attain the early learning goals¹ by the end of their reception year. Since the last inspection, there has been an overall improvement in the rate of progress and in children's levels of achievement.
2. Progress in personal, social and emotional development is very good as a result of the strong focus that the school places on promoting children's skills in this area. Progress in speaking and listening is also very good, because of the emphasis that all staff place on using talk to enhance children's understanding and extend their vocabulary. Children's knowledge and understanding of the world and their physical skills are effectively extended by the very good provision planned to support learning in these areas, children achieve well and many demonstrate a very good level of skills. Progress is good in creative development.
3. In literacy and numeracy, children make good progress. The vast majority has a secure base of skills in language and literacy and in mathematics. However, very few children attain levels beyond the early learning goals¹; there is scope to extend further the skills of older, higher attaining children to take them into the first levels of work in the National Curriculum.
4. Children with special educational needs benefit from a very good level of support. This is carefully targeted and very well managed. All staff are aware of the targets in children's individual education plans (IEPs) and there is a consistent and sustained approach to support children in making progress towards these.
5. Children who speak English as an additional language are well supported so that they are able to readily access all aspects of the curriculum. They make good, and at times very good, progress in line with that of their peers.

Children's attitudes, values and personal development

6. The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of the children are very good and make a very significant contribution to how well they learn. This is a strength of the school and represents an improvement since the time of the last inspection. Personal and social development is particularly good ensuring that children are well prepared to move on to primary schools.
7. Children are happy when they come to school. They confidently leave their parents and carers, knowing they will get a friendly greeting from the staff. They respond positively to the warm, caring atmosphere. Even those who have just started show a clear sense of belonging and are aware of routines and expectations. They settle quickly at the start of sessions and are soon engrossed in some of the many activities that are on offer, sometimes even resuming an activity that they were involved in the day before.

¹ The early learning goals refer to the targets set for children's attainment at the end of the reception year. For children in the nursery, this stage is reached after they have transferred to primary schools.

8. Children often show good levels of concentration, sticking at an activity for a good length of time. In the large outdoor sandpit for example, a small group of boys worked diligently for the whole of an hour. They were digging and building a tunnel system to carry water from the edge of the pit to a big hole they had dug in the middle. Their first attempt to move the water failed because the pipe joins were leaking, but undeterred, they were soon hard at it again, stopping the leaking areas with sand. Their perseverance paid off in the end as the tunnel worked.
9. Children are however, sometimes less able to sustain these levels of concentration when working in their group activities. This is most noticeable if the pace of teaching has slowed or they are not actively involved. During a mathematics game children became fidgety and distracted while waiting their turn and then lost their concentration entirely when one left to go to the bathroom. This shortened the length of time they were productively using to practice counting skills.
10. Behaviour is very good and makes a significant contribution to the harmonious learning environment. Children respond positively to the calm, purposeful atmosphere and the high and consistent expectations of all the staff, which quickly help them to learn what is acceptable. Adults rarely find it necessary to raise their voices. Children generally share resources well and, with adult support, are developing a sense of what is fair and what impact their actions have on others. This was clearly demonstrated when there was a misunderstanding about the length of time a child had been using a bicycle. The teacher made sure that all the facts about the dispute were explained and that a polite request had been made by the child who was waiting to 'have a go'. In these sorts of situations, children are learning negotiating skills and how to determine right from wrong and to find amicable solutions to problems. They are able to take turns, responding positively to the many systems that are put in place to encourage this. At lunchtime they wait patiently to be served because they know this is expected of them. They enjoy eating with one another and with the staff and lunchtime is a very pleasant social occasion for all. As with most activities, children respond positively to the opportunity to develop their independence by getting their own drinks. There is no evidence of harassment or bullying of any kind.
11. As in the last inspection, relationships remain warm and constructive and continue to make a positive contribution to children's personal development. They obviously like their carers² and have developed a real sense of trust in them. They readily come to them with any problems and seek their help to sort things out. They are developing positive feelings about themselves and their work, because the staff always show respect for their contributions. The children are proud to show any of their work that is on display and wait eagerly to share their creations with their parents. Children are learning to appreciate that people have different needs and are sensitive to others who have specific learning difficulties because of the very good role models provided by the staff.
12. Personal development is very good, and this represents a significant improvement since the time of the last inspection. Children respond very positively to the way the environment has been rearranged recently to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. They treat equipment with respect and know they can move around freely, not having to interrupt their activities to ask to use resources. Children get their own aprons to play in the water, or enlist the help of others, and find the paper on which to paint. They are keen to work on the computer; they know how to manage the programs and some know how to print their own work and are encouraged to do so.

² 'Carers' is the term used for the teachers and nursery nurses, each of whom takes specific responsibility for a small group of children

Role-play on the model train becomes engrossing because the resources needed to broaden the experience, for example, from a simple train journey to a day out with a picnic, are so readily to hand. This makes a strong contribution to children's developing independence. Older children carry out jobs responsibly, for example helping to show new children where equipment is kept, and they diligently tidy up, having thoughtfully been supplied with child size cleaning implements.

HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN TAUGHT?

13. The overall quality of teaching is good and some elements are very good. The quality of teaching is a key factor in ensuring that children make good progress and achieve well. There is no significant variation in the quality of teaching in different areas of learning; however, there are some particular strengths in the provision for children's personal and social development and in promoting their knowledge and understanding of the world. Teaching of children with special educational needs is very good. There has been an improvement overall in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. Teaching was also found to be good then but there is now a higher proportion of very good teaching.
14. The very good relationships that staff form with individual children underpin good teaching and learning. Children are known very well and staff demonstrate an outstanding understanding of their particular needs and stage of personal development. This is evident in the high quality interactions between staff and children, particularly at small group time when a carer's detailed knowledge of a child's background often enables sensitive handling of discussions. All attempts to answer questions or express ideas are treated with respect; where children have difficulties with communication, staff praise and sensitively extend their responses, thus giving status to the children's responses and providing a good model to extend their language skills. Very good strategies are used for behaviour management, particularly where children have social or emotional difficulties. Potential conflict is often diffused very quickly. Staff promote respect for and consideration of others through gentle questioning and suggestions – 'how did that make you feel?' 'can we ask for that in a different way?'
15. Very good use is made of resources in small group teaching sessions to engage children's interest and to support their learning. In discussion of a recent visit to the railway station, for example, photographs of features such as traffic lights and an enlarged section of a street map were well used to encourage children to talk about the route that they had taken and what they had seen on the way. Resources are readily available to the children so that independence is effectively promoted; the organisation of the teaching areas ensures that children become skilled in making decisions and planning or extending their activities. This is apparent, for example, as children use the woodwork bench; they choose their materials, think about ways of joining these, select appropriate tools for their activities and confidently ask an adult for help where necessary – often to hold a nail straight while it is hammered into a piece of wood! In activities such as these, and in others that enable exploration and investigation, children often demonstrate very high levels of concentration and application.
16. The early stages of literacy and numeracy are generally taught well so that all children have a good base of skills in these areas. Where staff read stories, for example, they draw attention to the print to demonstrate what they are reading and encourage the children to comment on the pictures or join in with repetitive parts of the text. Children are given good opportunities to write for a variety of purposes, for example, in making tickets for the train station and books about their visit there. Children are encouraged to write their own captions by making marks or, where appropriate, writing recognisable words. Older children are encouraged to use their growing knowledge of sounds to write

independently; at times, however, there is over-dependence on this approach and not enough attention is paid to promoting recognition and use of commonly used words. When staff write for children, there is variation in the style used; this means that children do not get a consistent model of script. Staff take every opportunity to reinforce children's early counting skills and to promote their recognition of the value of groups of numbers to ten and sometimes beyond. In both literacy and numeracy, however, some activities provided for some older and higher attaining children lack challenge and their good base of early skills is not systematically built upon and extended.

17. Support staff make a very valuable contribution to teaching and learning. Nursery nurses are skilled in making a well-judged intervention to extend learning in activities chosen by the children. As three children poured water into a variety of narrow containers, a nursery nurse joined the group; through comments and sensitive questioning she helped them to explain what was happening to the water and to the corks that they were attempting to keep at the bottom of the containers. Learning support assistants (LSAs) are well deployed to work with small groups and individual children; they play a significant role in supporting children with special needs through the provision of specific programmes in short withdrawal sessions or through guiding them in the course of practical activities. Support staff also play an important role in the on-going assessment of children. This is very well organised to ensure that all children are regularly observed in the course of a range of activities. The information is used to track children's progress and to plan targeted activities to meet their learning needs; however, these are not always systematically followed through to ensure focused use of teaching time.

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

18. Overall, the school makes very good provision for all areas of learning in the Foundation Stage³. There has been good improvement since the time of the last inspection.
19. Subject policies have been put in place and the continuing development of curriculum guidance is identified as a focus by the school. Long-term planning for all areas of learning is clearly written; this has the potential to provide for good continuity of learning over time but some is in the early stages of implementation and the full impact is not yet apparent. Staff refine their medium- and short-term planning in the light of their ongoing assessment and identified individual needs. Imaginative use of the accommodation is made with particularly good use of the well resourced outdoor area to provide for extended role play, investigative work and a wide range of physical play activities. The indoor areas are well organised to provide for a very good range of practical and knowledge based activities. Staff work very hard as a team to ensure that all children have opportunities to cover all areas of the curriculum appropriately. However, they are not yet making full use of the approaches outlined in the national literacy and numeracy strategies to extend learning for older and higher achieving children.

³ Foundation Stage refers to the period of learning experienced by children aged 3 to 5 years. The Foundation Stage ends at the start of Year 1 in primary schools.

20. Provision for children with special educational needs is very good. The school has made a good start to implementing the requirements of the new code of practice and this is reflected both in the policy and in action. All staff provide very good quality support for children with special educational needs and short one-to-one withdrawal sessions for individuals with the LSAs are of a consistently high quality. These sessions contribute most effectively to children's very good progress towards their individual targets. IEPs are clearly written and regularly reviewed and designed to maximise children's participation in the full curriculum.
21. The school places a strong emphasis on inclusion and this is a very good feature of the curriculum provided for all children, including those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language. One example of this is that some staff are trained in Makaton signing⁴ and the use of this, alongside spoken language, draws in children with speech and communication difficulties as active participants during group activities.
22. The curriculum is enhanced by the very good use of local visits and visitors which the school organises. For example, very good use was made of a visit to Didcot railway station to extend children's knowledge and understanding of travel. Provision for personal, social and health education is very good and parents are pleased with the wide range of curriculum experiences provided for their children.
23. The school has good links with training institutions. The school regularly provides nursery nurse (NNEB) student placements and also hosts visits from groups of initial teacher training students from time to time. Good relationships have been developed with local primary schools and staff take particular care in supporting the transition of children with special educational needs to the next phase of their education. Close links have been established between the on site day care facility and the nursery school.
24. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. This makes a positive contribution to children's personal development. Activities are planned well to provide opportunities to raise spiritual awareness. Children were almost overwhelmed, for example, when they put their whole hands into a tray of paint during a creative activity, barely able to vocalise how they feel; one gasped in wonder, "It feels like.... pink!" They are encouraged to reflect on feelings in order to gain an understanding not only of themselves, but also of others. Acting out "I'm going on a bear hunt", or role play on the model train, provide opportunities for them to think how something makes them feel or what effect their actions might have on others. The playing of music in group time, such as "Carnival of the Animals" encourages them to sit and contemplate. Their own observational drawings and paintings of flowers are used well to encourage them to think about the good feelings they get when looking at something that is beautiful. Children regularly observe wildlife, for example visiting the baby cygnets in the spring and then going to see them again later on in the term to appreciate how they have grown. They enjoy planting seeds, delighting in how they grow, and are keen about planting and tending the flowers in the garden.
25. Children's moral development is strongly supported. A new behaviour policy has been formulated with input from all of the staff and provides a clear framework for children to be treated fairly and consistently. They are always made aware when they have done something that is unacceptable. Driving into others on a trike or accidentally bumping another child is never ignored; staff ensure that an apology is made and that children

⁴ Makaton is a form of communication used where people have speech or hearing difficulties

understand why this is required.

26. Social development is particularly well supported. Children are allowed free access to resources to encourage decision-making and social interaction. Staff are very vigilant about ensuring that children are mixing well, often encouraging a quiet child to work with one who is more confident. Stories are used well to deal with social issues in a sensitive way, for example a carer may read *The Rainbow Fish* or *Be Brave Billy* when children are finding it hard to share and mix with others. The whole group celebrates birthdays in order to make a child feel really special. They are expected to take turns and wait for one another patiently, for example, when washing their hands or waiting to be served at lunch. Children are also encouraged to wait patiently until everyone has finished eating to have seconds. A dilemma about which of four children were going to get the last half slice of bread was very well managed by the adult eating with them. She asked the children how they could resolve this and encouraged them to come up with suggestions; one of them eventually solved the problem, "I think we could all share it, and each have one bite!" This type of experience is helping children to learn to share and to have consideration for the needs of others.
27. Provision for cultural development is very good and this represents a significant improvement since the time of the last inspection. There is a good awareness of the importance of introducing the children to the diverse cultures that make up our society. Major religious festivals, such as Diwali, Eid, Christmas and Passover are always celebrated and incorporated into activities, through, for example the making of divas (Diwali lights). Chinese New Year was celebrated this year by cooking and eating a Chinese meal, listening to Chinese stories and making Chinese decorations such as dragon masks. Books and puzzles reflect a range of ethnic backgrounds and a variety of dual language books and musical instruments such as rainsticks and maraccas is available. Video material, such as extracts from *Stomp*, introduce music and dance from other countries. The locality is used very well to teach children about their own local heritage. They visit the Railway Centre, which is an integral part of life in Didcot, the local market, post office and library and this makes a positive contribution to their cultural development as well as starting to give them an understanding of how people live and work together in a community.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS CHILDREN?

28. The standard of care and welfare provided is excellent. All children are extremely well known, as are their families, and this allows staff to give a very high level of support. The children are clearly happy and respond to the friendly and stimulating environment. They are particularly well known by their carers, who are responsible for a high level of pastoral care, but they also spend time with all of the other staff and this ensures that their individual needs are carefully addressed. Children's progress is regularly monitored to ensure they are getting the support they need. A good understanding of special educational needs and close liaison with outside agencies, such as the educational psychologist and local health visitor, also ensures that those who need specific help receive it as soon as possible.
29. The school has drawn up an excellent health and safety policy with particular emphasis on the care and safety of young children. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and there is a very good awareness of fire safety, drills being carried out at different times during the day to ensure all of the children are aware of procedures. Children are shown how to use equipment such as the wood working tools correctly and staff are very vigilant about their safety both inside and outside. Staff are very well trained in the administration of first aid, and parents are advised of all but the most minor of mishaps.

The headteacher is designated responsible for dealing with matters of child protection and there has been a good level of training for all other staff.

30. Behaviour is promoted and monitored very effectively. Situations are unobtrusively diffused before they escalate so that the flow of learning is not interrupted. Children who find behaving appropriately particularly difficult are particularly well managed and there is little obvious difference in their general behaviour. Few squabbles or misunderstandings amongst the children were observed. The staff intervene appropriately to ensure that no oppressive behaviour or bullying occurs. Attendance is not mandatory at this stage, nonetheless every effort is made to encourage parents to bring their children to school regularly, helping to set precedents for when their children start formal education.
31. Children's personal development is very well supported by the many strategies put in place to teach them the importance of applying themselves to their activities, good behaviour and the developing of good relationships. Carers are able to guide each child appropriately because they know their small group so well. Children with specific needs are fully integrated into these groups and are very well supported in their personal development. When sharing group news, for example, a child who has difficulty with speech was sensitively helped to sign by the teacher; her few words were unobtrusively interpreted for the rest of the children who might have difficulty understanding them. This helps to make her feel fully included in the group. At lunchtime the tables are beautifully laid and routines observed in order to make children aware that meals are friendly, social occasions; they are given very good support in learning to manage a knife and fork.
32. Procedures for assessing children's attainment and progress are very good. Since the last inspection, a clear policy has been put in place that provides helpful guidance for the staff to follow. All are involved in regularly observing children, have a clear understanding of their needs and generally use this information very well to move them forward in their learning. On occasions, however, the work that is planned for children following assessments is not targeted as closely to their needs as it might be. This has an impact on the rate of learning of some older, higher attaining children.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

33. Parents have very positive views about the school and are right to have a high degree of confidence in its work. This is a strength of the school. They feel that they have good access to all the staff, including the headteacher to discuss any worries or concerns. They appreciate the opportunities they are given to become involved in their children's learning at the beginning of each session. Many attended the recent curriculum evening and say that it was very helpful in explaining the way that their children are helped to learn. The openness with which most parents talk to staff shows how much they trust them; staff in turn make every effort to give parents any help and support that they can.
34. Staff work very hard to ensure that links with parents are of the highest calibre. They value them as partners in the children's learning. Home visits are available to all families whose child has been offered a place and most parents take these up. This gives them the opportunity to meet their child's carer in their own environment and also to share what they know about what their child can already do and any concerns they may have. The confidence with which even the newest children arrive and get involved in activities is testament to how well this system works. The information that parents provide is built upon during the child's time at school. It also forms the basis of the record book which is shared with parents at regular intervals so they are fully informed about how well their child is doing. Recently, staff have asked parents to add their own perceptions about how they feel their child is doing to compare with school assessments in order to

highlight and address any differences. Parents are free to visit as often as they like once their child has been offered a place and are invited for regular consultations once their child has started school. Staff work in close partnership with parents of children with special educational needs. Targets in IEPs are drawn up in consultation with parents during regular review meetings. Very good guidance is given on how parents can support their child's learning at home.

35. Parents are given a very good range of information. The main entrance is used as a central area for parent information, with pictures of staff and governors and school documentation. It also now contains the lending library from which many parents borrow books to share with their children at home, making a positive contribution to their reading skills. A notice board contains both school and community information and there is a good range of information given to parents about how they can help their child's learning at home.
36. The headteacher has worked very hard to establish the day care centre which shares the same site. This provides 'wrap around care' for children of working parents and helps to establish early links between the school and local families. The opportunity group, which meets twice weekly in the community room, gives a small number of families invaluable access to staff and resources to help prepare their children for school.
37. Many parents are generous in their support of activities organised by PASTA (the school's parent teacher association). There is now a very strong and enthusiastic committee, which organises events such as the Christmas Bazaar and Easter Treasure Hunt. The main aim of these events is to provide social occasions where families can meet, but they also raise additional funds for the school. PASTA has bought a water activity centre and two-wheeled bike, both of which are extremely popular with the children. Recent fundraising is directed at developing a wildlife garden and pond for the benefit of the children. PASTA also organises the very successful 'new children's tea parties', which provide a social occasion for new children and their parents to get to know each other.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

38. The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are very good. The headteacher and most members of the governing body are relatively new; this has enabled a very useful period of reflection and audit with a view to further development and the improving of standards.
39. The headteacher ensures that the school has a clear educational direction and has a strong vision for the further development and ongoing improvement of the school. In this, she has a high level of commitment from other teachers and support staff. The aims and values of the school are clearly reflected in its work, providing a safe and happy place where children are well known and encouraged to be independent, self-disciplined and start to develop a sense of responsibility. These aims are clearly fulfilled by how well the children are supported and success is evident in the good degree of independence that they gain. Co-ordinators successfully fulfil their roles and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They are fully involved in strategic planning and are taking a lead in developing, monitoring and auditing their learning areas, as well as analysing children's attainment and progress in order to target areas for improvement. The management of provision for children with special educational needs is particularly good and successful in ensuring that these children get the specific support they require. The newly appointed co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) has worked hard to promote a whole school approach towards supporting

children with special needs.

40. Governors are well organised and supportive. They meet regularly and receive a good amount of information to keep them fully informed, including all reports of any external monitoring that has been carried out, for example by the local education authority (LEA). The chair of governors also meets with the headteacher on a weekly basis in order to discuss ongoing developments. Governors are well informed through the headteacher's reports, copies of newsletters and updates on the progress of the school development plan. They are actively involved in the life of the school and make regular monitoring visits, for example to discuss health and safety and provision for special educational needs. This is followed up by a report to the full governing body to ensure all are fully informed. Curriculum liaison is developing, incorporating close links with the teacher responsible for a particular area of learning. Both literacy and mathematics sessions have been visited by governors and observations shared. Governors make good use of advice from the LEA when necessary and have used these services for an audit of their work. They found this very useful and are in the process of drawing up their own development plan. They have a clear view of the strengths of the school and are supportive of plans for its development.
41. The headteacher works very closely with all the staff to provide a strong lead in teaching and promoting improvement. She sets a very positive, professional ethos for the development of teaching and monitoring as strategies to move forward. She is well informed about strengths and areas for development. Arrangements for the induction of new staff are typically thorough and well thought out. A positive, friendly and helpful attitude toward new members of staff ensures that they are able to settle into their role quickly. School routines function smoothly and day-to-day administration is effective.
42. The LEA is responsible for managing most of the budget. Effective use is made of the funds that the school does control to address priorities for development. Funds have, for example, been used to refurbish the community room and help establish the day care centre. This shows the school's strong commitment to developing the partnership with parents. Both areas are pleasant environments and are successfully addressing community needs. The school development plan is an ambitious document with very appropriate priorities, on which a good deal of progress has been made. The capacity for further development of the school is very good. Good use is generally made of time. Children involve themselves in an activity as soon as they arrive and spend their time productively. Teaching time is not always targeted as effectively as it might be in directed activities with small groups.
43. The accommodation provides an excellent learning environment for the teaching of young children. It has also been thoughtfully adapted to meet the needs of children with special needs. A conscious decision has been made to buy very high quality, hard-wearing resources and these contribute positively to the excellent learning environment and to children's good level of achievement. All resources are labelled and easily accessible and a good deal of attention is paid to safety. There is a very good range of resources, for example, for reading, for outdoor activities and for woodworking and scientific discovery. The building and grounds are extremely inviting and beautifully maintained. Principles of best value are appropriately applied. A programme of consultation with parents has been instigated, for example to ascertain if they are happy with and making use of the holiday play scheme offered. Close working relationships with similar schools is helping to establish a basis on which children's progress and achievements can be compared and improved.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

44. In order to build on the very good base for children's early learning, the governors, headteacher and staff should now:

- Provide more planned opportunities for the extension of children's skills in literacy and numeracy by:
 - ensuring that the activities that are provided are sufficiently challenging;
 - making full use of the guidance in the national strategies.

(Paragraphs 3, 16, 19, 48, 49, 51)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of sessions observed	24
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	13

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	6	13	3	0	0	0
Percentage	0	27	59	14	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	58
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	15

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	16
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and support staff

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.8

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	235

Number of pupils per FTE adult	5.4
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	230,492
Total expenditure	212,421
Expenditure per pupil	3,541
Balance brought forward from previous year	unavailable
Balance carried forward to next year	18,071

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	3.5

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	95
Number of questionnaires returned	25

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	88	12	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	80	16	0	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	68	32	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	4	4	0	72
The teaching is good.	80	20	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	76	24	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	92	8	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	36	36	4	4	20
The school works closely with parents.	64	36	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	76	24	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	80	16	0	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	8	4	0	32

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Personal, social and emotional development

45. Children make very good progress in this area. Many start nursery with very limited skills in terms of catering for their own needs and being aware of those of others; very good teaching, consistent routines and the emphasis on praise for all achievements ensures that personal and social skills improve rapidly. By the time that children leave the nursery, the majority is confident and has a good sense of self-esteem. A minority is able to work successfully as part of a group and many co-operate readily in pairs, particularly in practical activities and role play. The majority of children have positive attitudes to learning and are confident in initiating ideas and making decisions about how they will organise their activities. They are generally independent in choosing what they will do and often show initiative in solving practical problems. Many children show sustained concentration and application in working at the activities that they choose; one four year old, for example, spent a lengthy period working in the sandpit digging holes to 'bury treasure'. He made good use of a simple plan, devised with the help of a teacher, to identify where the holes should be. Friends were invited to contribute to the activity by adding to the plan, writing the first letter of their names to show where they would dig and then setting to work. The level of collaboration and commitment to the project was very high and interest was sustained for a lengthy period without any adult involvement.
46. Teaching is very good. All staff have consistent expectations of how children will behave and place a strong emphasis on praise and recognition of, for example, showing kindness to others and considering their feelings. The environment is very well organised to encourage independence; resources are readily accessible so that children can select the tools and materials that they are going to use. They are also encouraged to take responsibility for collecting their own drinks during the teaching sessions and for helping to tidy up at the end – there are even child-sized brooms so that they can sweep the floor! Stories are used well to raise children's awareness of the needs of others, for example, of what it might mean to be lonely. There is strong emphasis on raising children's awareness of the needs of others and of the rich diversity of cultures, beliefs and lifestyles in modern British society.

Communication, language and literacy

47. Children make good progress in this area and the majority is on course to achieve the expected early learning goals. Teaching is good overall, with very good promotion of speaking and listening skills to support all children's learning, including those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language. Staff encourage the children to express their ideas whilst they engage in self-chosen or structured group activities. Very good use of open-ended questions encourages children to put forward their own ideas and discoveries. For example, children in the role play area of the station explain that a ticket is needed before getting on the train, and children digging in the large outdoor sand pit put forward their own ideas about what treasure they might find buried in the sand. Staff make good use of photographs to encourage children to recall shared events and to sequence events in order, and new vocabulary is carefully introduced to extend the range of children's spoken language. Very good use is made of Makaton signing to include children with speech and language difficulties in activities. All children are eager to talk about the many first hand experiences provided within the nursery. For example, they are fascinated by the growth of their bean and

sunflower seeds and talk animatedly about this with their teacher.

48. Early writing skills are well promoted through regular opportunities to write in play activities and in book making tasks; teaching in this area is good. A few children showed remarkable concentration and sustained interest in writing when they made train books related to their visit to the station. Printed labels in resources and displays around the nursery are well presented and magnetic boards are effectively used to support early literacy. Staff encourage the children to recognise and to write their own names and they act as scribes for children to model the process of writing. However, there is sometimes inconsistency in the letter formation, size and script used when adults write for children in their books. There are also some inconsistencies in the approaches taken to teaching early writing skills. For example, some staff encourage children to use a word bank to find the words that they need for captions for their pictures while others 'sound out' each word individually.
49. The school has invested in a high quality range of books and resources for reading, including group reading materials and story tapes. Accessible book boxes are placed throughout the school, as well as in the large and attractive book area, to encourage reading. The children respond with enthusiasm when sharing stories with adults or in self-chosen activities with a friend, showing good awareness of how to handle books; older children have a good understanding that print carries meaning but rarely make a start on reading independently. Teachers provide valuable activities to develop the children's early awareness of letter sounds and the children make good use of an alphabet chart to locate familiar words they want to use in their own writing. Overall, however, there are not enough opportunities to promote children's recognition of frequently used words.

Mathematical development

50. The majority of children make good progress in this area; a significant proportion makes very good progress from a low base on entry to the school. The majority of children are on course to meet the early learning goals; a few of the older higher attaining children have the potential to reach higher levels but are rarely given sufficiently challenging activities to take their learning further.
51. All children learn to use number names in everyday situations, for example, when counting the number present in their group or through singing number rhymes. Many quickly learn to recognise, count and order up to 5 objects and to find the numeral that matches the group. They move on to successfully work with numbers to 10 and to compare groups of objects, gaining an understanding of 'more' and 'less'. On occasions, children encounter larger numbers and enjoy, for example, counting between 10 and 20 groups of objects; however, this type of activity is not systematically planned and for some children there is too much consolidation of 1 to 10. Older children begin to explore the ideas of addition and subtraction through number games and often enjoy using the language involved, explaining, for example, that the addition sign means that 'they put more people on the bus'.
52. Very good attention is paid to developing the language of mathematics and the majority of children learn to accurately use terms such as 'larger', 'smaller', 'longer' and 'shorter'. Staff take every opportunity to promote mathematical vocabulary through a range of activities, for example, as children work with sand or water or are making models in the construction area. Stories and role play are used well to teach children how to describe position, for example in acting out 'We're going on a bear hunt'. Many children become adept at using comparative and positional language, learning, for instance, to

immediately recognise and name the larger set of objects when two are compared. Children learn to recognise a variety of shapes and to describe their properties. Older children can order items by length and height.

53. Teaching is generally good. Resources are used well to engage children's interest and to teach mathematical ideas. A set of colourful boxes containing a varied number of objects was used well to encourage children to estimate and check how many each contained; the teacher encouraged accurate counting and, where appropriate, moved a child on to finding the numeral that matched the number in the box. Attractive number lines were used to check the order and to promote recognition of numerals. Several children showed a high degree of concentration in working at this activity and increasing skill in counting accurately. Very good questioning encouraged the children to use what they already knew about number and to think for themselves, for example, in deciding whether a box held 'more' or 'less' than a given number. Planning for focused number sessions is detailed and particularly good attention is paid to identifying the mathematical language that will be promoted through each activity. However, planning is sometimes over-ambitious and the extension activities that would begin to meet the needs of higher attaining children do not always take place.
54. Mathematics is currently a focus for development. A new scheme of work has been introduced and this has the potential to provide for continuity and progression in planning for higher level activities in numeracy. A useful evaluation of children's skills in mathematics highlighted the need to focus more on their understanding of pattern; this was used as the basis of planning for a series of activities to improve skills in this area.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

55. Children make very good progress in this area. The majority is on course to attain the early learning goals by the end of the reception year. There is very good provision for learning in this area and a good foundation is laid for children's later experiences in science, design and technology (DT), history and geography. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the provision for ICT, which has ensured that children are developing good skills in this aspect.
56. Children show good awareness of features of the environment and different types of transport. Through making and using simple maps, they show how they get to school or to track the route that they take to get to the nearby station. They are beginning to understand the significance of the different colours of traffic lights and of the roles of staff at the railway or fire station. They are developing a sense of the passage of time through thinking about how they have changed since they were babies and what they would like to do when they grow up.
57. Very good provision for early experiences in science encourages children to explore, investigate and observe in a variety of situations. They plant seeds and observe the growth of plants, learning the names of the main parts and their functions. They have opportunities to work with materials such as batteries and bulbs and make circuits. There is also very good provision for DT, with opportunities for children to make models using construction equipment, recyclable materials and different types of wood. Many show a good level of engagement in model-making; there is a high degree of interest in using the woodwork benches where children learn to use a variety of tools, including hammers and a drill, with a good degree of accuracy. Some make vehicles and they often have a clear view of the finished product, using paint and labels or materials such as feathers or sequins to create an impact.

58. Children learn to use ICT to support their learning in a variety of areas. Their skills in art are improved by using a paint program; many show good control in using the mouse to colour, fill and change abstract images on the computer screen. They make very good use of a digital camera to record activities, such as a visit to the station. Through work with a programmable toy, they learn to recognise that devices respond to commands; some are skilled in understanding that changing the commands produces different outcomes.
59. A limited amount of direct teaching was seen in this area, but planning, displays and the skills that many children demonstrate indicate that teaching is good and that some elements are very good. Changes to the organisation of teaching sessions mean that children have more time for the development of ideas and to improve their skills through a range of practical activities. The co-ordinator has carried out a useful audit of children's attainment in this area that has led to some adjustments to the curriculum to ensure, for example, better provision for promoting a sense of place and awareness of the environment. There is a very good range of resources to support learning and these are accessible and well used.

Physical development

60. Children, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress in this area and the majority is on course to reach the expected early learning goals. Teaching is good; staff provide a wide range of exciting and challenging activities to develop the children's physical and fine motor skills. The large outdoor area is well planned and the very good range of large apparatus and sturdy wheeled tricycles and trolleys provides the children with challenging physical activities. Very good questioning by an adult enabled one child to solve the problem of attaching a large trolley of bricks to his wheeled tricycle; this led to sustained co-operative play with his friend. Children use the outdoor equipment with increasing awareness of space and gradually learn to respect the needs of other children around them. The large fixed climbing apparatus provides children with good opportunities to climb, swing, crawl and slide. An attractive area of living willow provides the children with tunnels to explore and negotiate.
61. The large sandpit areas in the outdoor area are well equipped with strong spades for digging and large sections of pipe to lay out. This encourages the children to work together to negotiate the use of tools and space and aids their physical development. Independent access to an outdoor water tap provides the children with a chance to fill buckets and other containers with water; a group of children were very excited when they successfully carried these to the large sand pit to create a waterfall.
62. Good planning ensures that the children have many opportunities to gain good control of small tools. Through well focused adult support, they learn how to handle tools at the well equipped work bench and they use scissors to cut a range of different types of materials, showing increasing dexterity. The children are taught how to hold pencils and other writing equipment appropriately. They learn to select and use materials such as sellotape, glue and scissors which also supports the development of finer physical skills and hand-eye co-ordination. Children enjoy the wide range of outdoor and indoor activities, which develop their physical skills. Work undertaken in this area provides a valuable and effective contribution to their personal and social development as they learn self-reliance and how to share resources and co-operate together.

Creative development

63. Children make good progress in their creative development and the majority is on course to achieve the early learning goals. Teaching in this area is good; the staff provide well planned and motivating learning activities which encourage creative thinking and imaginative play. For example, outdoor play involving a train and the ticket office linked to children's experiences of visits to Didcot Station; the children took on the roles of passengers, ticket collectors and office staff with total enthusiasm, as they busied themselves with checking timetables, selling tickets and organising luggage. Staff promoted valuable talk and discussion through their own involvement in the activity and their interest encouraged children to sustain lengthy involvement in their self chosen roles. At the same time, play on a smaller scale with a toy train, toy buildings and small figures provided for the needs of less confident children.
64. Children have good opportunities to use a range of paints, collage and printing as well as malleable materials. The children make their own choices of how to represent their ideas and observations from a range of accessible resources and this fosters their creativity. Items made by the children are attractively displayed and this gives them pride in their achievements. They enjoy using recycled materials to make constructions and sustain interest after attaching boxes together by painting their models, because they are encouraged by the support and interest of their adult helpers. Older children enjoy making observational drawings of their growing bean plants.
65. An attractive home play area provides further role play experience for the children, and when there is adult support during this activity, children engage in more elaborate and purposeful play. Good use is made of small puppets and toys to encourage imaginative play. One child with special educational needs, with enthusiastic adult encouragement, became very animated when performing to a small group using a small set of finger puppets. Musical instruments are appropriately used, for example to recreate the sound effects of the story of *The Bear Hunt* with marracas, drums and shakers. Photographs of the children acting out the story were well used to recall the sequence of events during a small group session. Apart from group singing sessions where children enjoyed building up their repertoire of rhymes and action songs, little music making, dance or movement sessions took place during the inspection. However, these types of experiences are planned on a regular basis.