

Reddish was re-inspected in 2001, as part of OFSTED's evaluation of early excellence centres. This report is below.

REDDISH VALE EARLY YEARS CENTRE

This pilot inspection was carried out at the request of the Department for Education and Employment as part of its evaluation of the first Early Excellence Centres. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) elects that the inspection report shall be published.

**REDDISH VALE
EARLY YEARS CENTRE
REDDISH
STOCKPORT**

Local Authority: Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Head of Centre: Rachel Lord

Reporting inspector: Linda McGill HMI

Dates of inspection: 5–7 March 2001

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Type of Centre:	Early Excellence Centre
Age range of children:	0 – 5 years
Gender of children:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
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Chair of management committee:	Darren Moseby
Dates of inspection:	5–7 March 2001
Date of previous inspection:	28–30 April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Responsibilities	
Linda McGill HMI	Reporting Inspector	Leadership and management Teaching and learning Adult Learning
Jenny Andreae HMI	Team Inspector	Nursery Education Centre Development Links
Ruth Beazley	Team Inspector	Family Support Services Sessional Care

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CONTENTS

	Page No
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	
Information about the Centre	1
How good the Centre is	1
What the Centre does well	1
What could be improved	2
How the Centre has improved since its last inspection	2
Standards	2
Achievement and progress	2
Children's and adults' attitudes and values	2
Teaching and learning	3
Other aspects of the Centre	3-4
How well the Centre is led and managed	4
Parents' and carers' and users' views of the Centre	4
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE CENTRE DOES WELL	5-10
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	10-11
WHAT SHOULD THE CENTRE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	12

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE INSPECTION REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Reddish Vale Early Years Centre was formed from the amalgamation of Reddish Vale Nursery School and Whitehill Family Centre. The Centre began offering integrated services for children aged under five and their families in March 1999. The Centre provides a variety of services for young children and their families, including nursery education, family support services such as parents and child play sessions, adult education, and sessional care every evening. Other activities include “story sacks” workshops, where adults make sacks containing characters and key objects from children’s story books, a toy library, an art and craft materials sale, toddler and baby groups and a “parent talk” group run by the attached health visitor. The Centre also provides for supervised contact visits between children and their parents, and offers support for parents in their own home. These aspects of the Centre’s work were not inspected.

The nursery caters for up to 80 children at any one time; there are currently 112 children on roll, of whom 26 attend for the full day. Of these children, six are on the register for pupils who have special educational needs. This is a much smaller number than in previous years. Of the children who stay for lunch, five are eligible for free school meals. The family support team works with approximately 50 families. The Centre draws children from Reddish and further afield. The surrounding area is socially disadvantaged and unemployment is high, but some children come from outside the immediate area; several families have two working parents. There is little ethnic diversity in the local community and this is reflected in the intake; four children speak a language other than English at home. Some families have had contact with Reddish Vale for a long time; there is little mobility in the area and some of the parents attended the nursery themselves as children.

HOW GOOD THE CENTRE IS

The Centre’s work has a positive impact in many ways. The constructive relationships that underpin its work with adults and children ensure all feel valued and provide a good basis for their learning. Teaching in the nursery is very good and the children make very good progress. Teaching in the other sessions provided for younger children is consistently good. By the time they leave the nursery many children have attained high standards. Adults are given good support in developing parenting expertise and in gaining knowledge, skills and confidence. Outstanding features are the behaviour and attitudes of the children, which are consistently good, and sometimes excellent. Development and liaison workers have made good links with families, schools and agencies in the local community.

What the Centre does well
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching in the nursery is very good; in the family support sessions and after school sessional care it is consistently good.• The children make very good progress in their learning and their attainment overall is above average.• Children’s awareness of books and stories is very well fostered.• The quality of the work with adults is good.• The quality of relationships between the Centre staff, families and other visitors to the Centre is very good.• The way the children relate to each other is very good. Throughout the Centre children behave exceptionally well.• The Centre is well led and managed.

What could be improved

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The management structure to promote integrated working.• The role of the management committee in strategic and long-term planning, which is limited by the lack of delegated powers and funding.• The systems for summarising the children's attainment and the transfer of information between the nursery and primary schools. |
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The areas for improvement will form the basis of the management committee's action plan.

HOW THE CENTRE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Reddish Vale Early Years Centre has not been inspected as a whole Centre before. Two points for development were identified in the previous education inspection report for Reddish Vale Nursery School (April 1997). These concerned provision for music and movement and planning for outdoor play. The Centre has taken steps to ensure that music and movement are regular features in the planning for creative development. There is a policy and scheme of work for outdoor activities, which should ensure that a broad and balanced range of activities is provided. Building works have restricted the scope for developing the use of the outdoors, but improvements in outdoor provision are part of the Centre development plan for 2001/2002. Sound progress has been made in addressing the key issues. The many strengths noted in the inspection report of 1997 have been maintained, in particular the quality of teaching, the broad and stimulating range of activities and in planning and evaluation.

STANDARDS

Achievement and progress

The children in the nursery reach standards which are in line with what is expected for their ages, and many are well on the way to achieving the goals for their learning expected by the end of the foundation stage. Many achieve highly, particularly in: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematics and the scientific element of knowledge and understanding of the world. Standards in physical and creative development are good.

The adults and children who attend the family support sessions increase in confidence and self-esteem. Adults who attend courses in adult learning make gains in knowledge and confidence.

Children's and adults' attitudes and values

Across the Centre, the children have very positive attitudes to learning and these enhance both the quality of their learning and their progress. Children enter the Centre happily and are confident in their use of the space and choice of activities. They respond particularly well to the high expectations the staff have of their attainment and behaviour. Relationships between adults and children are a strength. The provision of interesting and stimulating activities fosters the children's curiosity and motivation, and they participate with enthusiasm. The children concentrate and persevere particularly well.

Adult learners and those who attend groups with their children are well motivated and feel comfortable within the Centre.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching across the Centre is a strength. Wherever children work with adults, the quality of the interaction is usually good or very good and effectively fosters learning. The teaching is underpinned by a sound knowledge of individual children and their needs and interests. Planning in the nursery is thorough, effective and imaginative and builds well on evaluations of what children have already learned and need to learn next. The good quality of relationships between all adults and children promotes effective learning and good behaviour. The sessional care provided after school is well taught and successfully complements the more rigorous demands of the nursery day. Within the parent and child play sessions individual emotional needs are well catered for, this helps children settle. Good use is made of resources to capture children's interests; particularly good use is made of resources in the nursery. The children's efforts are valued and this is evident in the high quality of displays of work throughout the Centre.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE CENTRE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	<p>Good in the nursery. The curriculum for the children is broad and a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities across all the areas of learning is provided. All children have equal access to high quality experiences and the opportunity to pursue their interests in some depth.</p> <p>Adult learners have access to a range of appropriate educational, creative and skills-based activities. Crèche provision makes these activities accessible to parents. Parent and child play sessions are effective in enabling families to play and learn together.</p>
Provision for children with special educational needs	<p>Good. Children who have additional needs are quickly identified and parents involved in deciding the appropriate steps to meet their needs. The support is carefully planned and organised and this enables the children to achieve and make progress.</p>
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	<p>There is very good provision for the children's personal and social and moral development. Spiritual development is effectively promoted and cultural development fostered satisfactorily.</p>
How well the Centre cares for its children	<p>The Centre cares for its children well. The staff provide very good support for the emotional well-being of the children. Progress is closely monitored and those children who require extra support to attain well are identified and planned for in targeted activities.</p>
How well the Centre works in partnership with parents or carers	<p>The Centre works well with parents and carers. There are good informal arrangements for the exchange of information about the children and the warm and supportive relationships between parents and carers and Centre staff foster good communication. Parents are encouraged to contribute to their child's record of achievement, and regular newsletters keep parents informed of how they could support their child's learning at home. The book borrowing scheme also facilitates communication between families and the Centre.</p>
Other aspects of the Centre's provision inspected: sessional care	<p>The recently established after-school club provides a suitable contrast to the nursery day. The emphasis is on relaxed and informal activities, led by a confident and enthusiastic playleader.</p>

Family support services	This aspect of the Centre's work involves home visits as well as Centre-based activities with referred families, managing contact visits and writing contributions to family court reports. The team members possess a wide range of skills and are deployed according to their particular strengths. All of their statutory work is reported to be of high quality and evaluations by participating groups are positive and enthusiastic.
Centre development links	The Centre development and liaison workers have made good links with several local health centres, and with nearby primary and nursery schools, where they support reception age children. Useful home visits are made to follow up individual children and their families and to facilitate help and support.
Adult learning	Adult learning is fostered well. A range of courses and activities supports parenting skills, supplements basic skills and promotes new learning. Some of the participants have progressed from Centre-based courses to further education.

HOW WELL THE CENTRE IS LED AND MANAGED

The day-to-day running of the Centre is smooth and effective. The Head of Centre provides stable, sensitive and strong leadership and gives a positive and clear direction to the Centre's work. Team leaders for the nursery and family support services lead their teams well and foster effective team working. The functions of the senior management team are being developed. However, line management and management structure arrangements are not satisfactory in that there is no clear deputy head of the Centre and the Head of Centre does not have line management responsibility for all the Centre's staff. The management committee is supportive of the Centre's work, but its scope for strategic planning and developing a longer-term vision is constrained by limited delegated powers and the funding arrangements. The management committee's role in evaluating and monitoring the whole of the Centre's work and effectiveness could be stronger. The way the Centre was set up has led to some separation of the services provided. The attempts to establish a whole-Centre philosophy and approach have been constrained by operational difficulties and differences in conditions of service. Although working very well as separate teams, the different roles of the staff are not yet fully understood and there is little exchange of expertise.

PARENTS', CARERS' AND USERS' VIEWS OF THE CENTRE

What pleases parents, carers and users most	What parents, carers and users would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are happy and grow in confidence and make good progress during their time at the Centre. Relationships between staff, children and parents are very good. The good quality of teaching. The effective way the Centre workers work with children and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small number of parents said that they would prefer more frequent opportunities for formal discussions of their child's progress.

The inspection team agrees with the positive views expressed by parents. Formal discussions of children's progress could be improved by the introduction of a summary record of attainment at the end of a child's nursery career, to be discussed with parents and passed on to the reception teacher in the child's next school.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN FINDINGS

WHAT THE CENTRE DOES WELL

Teaching in the nursery is very good and in the crèches and sessional care it is consistently good

1. In the nursery, the staff have a good understanding of children's stages of development and the early learning goals. They use this knowledge to plan carefully, and they use assessment information to target certain children for activities that will take them on in their learning. Activities are planned around a topic for the half term, and this works well because all the staff are skilled at devising tasks and activities which are relevant and which capture the children's interest. Very good and imaginative use is made of resources, both natural materials and man-made. The teachers and nursery nurses interact skilfully with the children, and have a good understanding of the learning they intend to promote. Open-ended questioning is used well to develop children's thinking skills, and the adults involve them in making decisions, for example, what materials to use when decorating a house for the three bears. Children's responses are listened to and acted upon. The staff are sensitive and skilled at developing and extending children's play without taking over. Communication, language and literacy, mathematics and science are particularly well taught. The staff are confident with these areas of learning and have a good knowledge of the "stepping stones" (as set out in the national curriculum guidance for the foundation stage) on the way to the early learning goals. Their high expectations of what children will do encourages them to do their best and to achieve well.

2. The range of activities provided in the sessional care complements the busy nursery day well. The play leader is enthusiastic and works well to make the evening sessions fun for the children who attend. She joins wholeheartedly in the children's activities and they respond with delight and laughter.

3. In the activities provided for younger children in the Centre, the staff have a good understanding of the needs of toddlers and babies and provide for these well. The children's personal, social and emotional development is particularly well supported, and emphasis is given to talking to, and interacting with, the youngest ones to foster their skills in speaking and listening. If children become upset, they are dealt with sensitively and with great respect for their self-esteem.

The children make good progress in their learning and their attainment overall is above average

Children's awareness of books and stories is very well fostered

4. On entry to the Centre, the children's attainment is broadly what would be expected, given the range of backgrounds. They make good progress during their time at the Centre particularly in the development of skills in: communication, language and literacy; mathematics; personal, social and emotional development, and the scientific element of knowledge and understanding of the world. Children attain highly in these areas of learning.

Personal, social and emotional development

5. The high quality of the adults' work with the children helps foster positive attitudes and dispositions towards learning. The provision of interesting and stimulating activities promotes sustained levels of involvement and many children persevere with what they have chosen for long periods. For example, a group using sand, water, shells, twigs and leaves to

create islands for baby bear co-operated well and were absorbed in what they were doing for almost an hour. A two-year-old investigated the properties of cornflour mixed with water and was engrossed in this activity for a long time. Sensitive interventions with the younger children in the crèche and “play at home” group help them settle and grow accustomed to the routines of the morning. Throughout the Centre, the children are helped to form good relationships with adults and other children, and this aspect of their personal, social and emotional development is very strong. The children work together harmoniously, resolve difficulties quickly and show care and concern for one another. The children are interested and enthusiastic learners; their attitudes and motivation contribute to the good progress they make.

Communication, language and literacy

6. Many children achieve highly in this area of learning. They are helped to develop confidence in speaking, both to adults and to one another. When engaged in role play, the children interact well, asking each other questions which help develop the direction of the play. Adults talk with children about what they are doing, and model appropriate use of language and new vocabulary, which the children repeat naturally and learn. Some of the adults use questioning well to encourage the children to express their thoughts and to explore meanings. At story times, the children listen avidly. They comment on the story, making comparisons to their own experience. The children talk about their favourite books, and often choose to look at and read books during the session.

7. Standards in reading and writing are high and a significant number of pupils are well ahead of what is expected for their age. The emphasis the nursery gives to reading stories and looking at books helps children develop a love of books, an awareness of print, and an understanding that there are words, as well as pictures, which tell the story. The children are encouraged to borrow books to read at home with members of their family and they read these books regularly to the deputy headteacher. This has a positive effect on their attainment in reading, and they make very good progress in developing reading skills. For example, some of the older children are beginning to read the words that they know in familiar stories, and others recognise words on everyday items such as boxes and cartons in the home corner. Some of the staff are skilled at using stories to help the children predict what might happen next, or recap and explain what has happened, but not all are equally proficient at this. The emphasis on books and reading has a positive impact on the children’s skills in speaking and their vocabulary develops well. It also has a strong impact on the children’s behaviour and attitudes. For example, one boy sat for quite some time engrossed in the pages of a book, while his mother and other adults discussed a possible adult education course.

8. The “story sacks” workshop is attended by parents, grandparents and other members of the community. They work together to produce resources including puppets, dolls, artefacts and games related to favourite stories. The resources are gathered together in a large, decorated sack and are borrowed by groups within the Centre and by families to use at home. The story sacks are of extremely high quality and further illustrate the importance which is given to books, stories and reading within the Centre.

9. Working in the literacy area, the children write invitations to the teddy bear’s party later in the week. Some of the higher-attaining children have made very good progress in developing their writing skills. They hear and identify the sounds which come at the beginnings of words, and find the corresponding letter on an alphabet chart which they made themselves. They try to write words, using this knowledge. Other children have a clear understanding of different purposes for writing, and write strings of letters on their invitations. Many write recognisable letters, correctly formed. The use of ‘writing frames’, helps children understand that writing can be used in many different contexts, such as letters, prescriptions,

descriptions, and invitations. Many of the children are able to write their name and understand the distinction between upper and lower case letters.

Mathematical development

10. Mathematics is a priority in the Centre's development plan for this year, and the emphasis is on developing a cross-curricular approach to mathematics, rather than treating it as a separate topic. To this end, a separate mathematics area has been abandoned, and the weekly planning adapted to show how mathematics will be addressed through the focused activities in each of the three rooms. This approach is working well, and because the staff have a sound knowledge of this area of learning and provide activities that promote learning effectively, many children are achieving highly. A good example of this was seen when children worked with a nursery nurse to decorate a wooden house for the three bears. The activity involved measuring carpet, wallpaper and curtains, using a piece of string to record the correct length. The children successfully measured the sizes needed and cut out pieces of an appropriate size and shape.

11. Many of the children are developing a good understanding of number. Many have a sound understanding of number to ten, and count objects accurately. More able children have a good grasp of the ideas of "more" and "less", and can work out simple addition and subtraction problems successfully. When programming the "Roamer" (a floor robot), the children recognise the written numbers and press the correct button for the number of steps they wish it to take. The children are encouraged to write numbers in the same way as they write letters and many can form their numbers correctly. Work on the three bears has fostered a sound understanding of comparative size, and of matching. They investigate the concepts of heavier and lighter in practical ways, and some try to apply their knowledge to the use of a balance scale. However, this would be a challenging task for much older children. The children are adept at using simple programs on the computer, which foster different aspects of their mathematical understanding. Many of the children recognise and name simple two-dimensional shapes and some can name three-dimensional shapes. When talking to an adult, they describe some of the properties accurately using everyday language.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

12. This area of learning is effectively promoted, and children achieve good standards, particularly in their scientific knowledge and understanding. The well-planned activities help children to observe, investigate and compare, for example, using magnifying glasses to look closely at soil, and to describe what seeds are like, before planting them. The children have a sound understanding of conditions needed for growth and water their newly planted seeds carefully. They encounter a wide range of carefully planned experiences which develop their knowledge of the natural world, such as observing eggs hatching into chicks and growing plants, and they talk knowledgeably about what they have learned. They have recorded the life cycle of chicks in a large collage. The children observe changes when they cook dough, and when frozen soil melts, and make sensible comments about what they see. The children investigated circuit boards with the support of a parent who had prepared them. They were entranced, and delight was apparent on their faces as they made bulbs light up and buzzers sound. They also learnt how circuits are constructed.

13. The children have good skills at building using a wide range of construction apparatus and natural materials. Following the story of "Bears in the Night", they constructed a scene in order to act out the story with toy bears. They also used equipment skilfully to make chairs and tables for a party for the bears, with some understanding of the need to make items of an appropriate size, and fit for purpose. Many of the children use the computer well and work through simple programs with ease, understanding that moving the

mouse will cause corresponding movement on the screen. Some are confident to open and close programs and to print their work. They understand the ideas of forwards and back when programming the floor robot, and know that the robot responds to the commands they give it. Their understanding of the uses of technology is good.

14. The children are interested in the lives of people in their community and respond well to visits from the fire fighters and lollypop lady. They make visits to shops and other places in the local area. Higher attaining children know what maps are used for, for example, when baby bear became lost one child drew a map of the outdoor area and the route to take to try to find him. The adults capitalised well on this child's contribution, and incorporated the use of the map into the planned activity.

Physical development

15. The children's manipulative skills are particularly well developed. Many hold pencils and other tools correctly and use them appropriately and skilfully. They hold small objects carefully and are gentle when handling seeds, for example. They are confident when cutting out pieces of paper and cloth to decorate the bears' house and when moulding and fashioning clay and dough into the required shape. They fit pieces of construction kits together confidently and make complex structures.

16. Outdoors, the children use bicycles confidently and with some control, and have a good awareness of space and of each other. Accidents are rare. The children use all the space available and with an awareness of the proximity of others. Their skills in throwing and catching are developing well, and some children make good progress with the support of an adult who helps them watch the ball carefully and hold their hands appropriately. The range of activities offered outdoors is suitable, encouraging children to move in a variety of ways and use the space available, but is not so interesting and imaginative as that provided indoors. An good exception to this was the hunt for baby bear, where a group of children followed a map, recited "We're going on a bear hunt" and tapped sticks in rhythm while they searched the playground. This activity fired their imagination and stimulated their language skills.

Creative development

17. The children have a wide range of stimulating experiences which foster their creative development, and many produce pictures, collages and models of a good standard. The Centre as a whole places great value on children's own creative work, which is displayed well. The children are encouraged and given scope to express their thoughts and ideas as they choose and without a prescribed outcome; originality is valued. They produce complex drawings and concentrate well on what they are doing. There are close links between work in creative development and in communication, language and literacy, particularly in role-play and imaginative play. For example, the children are encouraged to talk and describe what they are doing when they create scenarios using sand and shells, they write prescriptions when playing a role in the hospital, and read stories to baby bear in the "bear's cave". The adults often interact effectively with the children in their imaginative play, fostering creativity and the use of expressive language. The children then replicate this on their own, for example, a group of boys acted out the story of the three bears, using appropriate language and expression.

18. The children have a good repertoire of songs, which they sing well and with enjoyment. They play percussion instruments accurately and respond enthusiastically to adults' lead in music sessions, as shown in photographs of when a music student visited to play with them, or when the guitar is used. They move in time to music, for example, when taking part in the Lion dance for Chinese New Year.

The quality of the work with adults is good

19. Much of the work with adults centres on improving and developing parenting skills. During sessions such as “parent and child play” and “play at home”, where adults work with the children and their carers, the staff provide good role models for parents and carers to observe. The parents can also judge the effectiveness of different ways of dealing with young children. Parents reported that their children gained in social skills and were easier to deal with at home, which led to a reduction in stress. The attached health visitor discusses problems and issues faced by parents at a weekly “parent talk” session, where adults feel comfortable to talk about matters which concern them. There is also a “feeding” group, not observed during the inspection, where parents talk about eating problems and failure to thrive. All of these sessions are helpful and foster a better understanding of effective parenting.

20. Adult learning is promoted effectively through the range of courses and opportunities provided. Classes have been organised in basic computing skills, family literacy and numeracy, and craftwork. Participants report gains in confidence as well as learning new skills, for example, women who learned how to renovate and decorate furniture said how their partners were amazed at their skills. They were eager to take part in a further course. This course was accredited and all of the participants submitted a portfolio for assessment. Their pride in what they had achieved was evident. Some of the adults who have undertaken accredited and other courses have gone on to undertake further study and have gained formal qualifications.

The quality of relationships between the Centre staff, families and other users of the Centre is very good

21. When entering the Centre, users, visitors and families are given a warm welcome and the staff take a genuine interest in everyone’s well-being. The staff are willing and ready to spend time with adults and children and play a strong part in developing positive relationships. All members of staff, including administrative staff, treat visitors and users of the Centre with genuine respect. There is an atmosphere of mutual trust and a shared concern for the progress and development of the children.

22. Parents and users of the Centre spoke highly of the professionalism and openness of all the staff. They reported feeling comfortable to approach staff if they had a problem or concern, and appreciated the time given to helping them sort out difficulties. The Centre takes care to respond to the needs and wishes of its clientele and consults widely, for example, on the type of courses people would wish to have available.

The way the children relate to each other is very good. Throughout the Centre children behave exceptionally well

23. The children, from the youngest to the oldest, approach their time in the Centre with enthusiasm. They enter the Centre happily, greeting each other and the adults. They have positive attitudes to learning and have a mature approach to some of their activities, such as reading their book to the deputy headteacher. They respond with interest to the range of activities provided and use equipment with care. The children co-operate with one another very well, and share their toys and equipment readily. For example, a group of six children outdoors put some pushchairs into a line to form a train. They all helped and persevered at pushing it up a slope and took turns at sitting in the chairs, all without the intervention of an adult. Some children volunteer to give what they are working with to others who are left out. During role-play, the children collaborate well, taking turns and developing their thoughts by talking readily to one another about what they are doing. They relate harmoniously to one another and interact well.

24. The children's behaviour is consistently good and at times it is very good or excellent. The adults very rarely have to intervene and any minor disputes are either sorted out very quickly by the children themselves or managed with a little support from an adult. Parents attending the parent and child play sessions spoke of the positive benefits for their children in improving their sociability and awareness of others.

The Centre is well led and managed

25. The Head of Centre is a strong and sensitive leader who provides a positive direction to the Centre's work. She has led and overseen the development of a Centre which has many strengths, both in terms of academic achievement and in the quality of relationships. She has a clear understanding of the difficulties the Centre faces, and has taken successful steps to try to address them. On a day-to-day basis, the Centre runs smoothly and calmly. Leadership of both the family support team and the nursery team is effective and fosters good teamwork within each team.

26. The Centre's development plan sets out priorities for this academic year and an indication of priorities in the following two years. The plan usefully sets out the issues to be tackled and gives some indication of strategies and responsibilities. Very little funding is tied to the implementation of the plan, as there is little scope to do so. This constrains the type of issues which can be included. The development plan could be strengthened by including more pressing issues, such as further improvements in integration and whole Centre working.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The management structure and the integrated working of the Centre

27. When the Centre came into being in 1999, two very distinct groups came together in the same building. It was not an easy time, and much effort was devoted to fostering team working and a whole-Centre philosophy and ethos. These steps were successful to some degree, and overall aims and objectives were agreed, but a number of circumstances conspired to limit their effectiveness. The linear design of the building is such that the two main elements, the nursery and the family support and training rooms, are quite separate from one another. Secondly, the management structure is set up so that the Head of Centre does not have line management responsibility for all of the members of staff, nor oversight of the whole Centre's budget, and there is no clear deputy head of Centre. These factors constrain her scope for managing the Centre as a whole and have an effect on the progress towards integrated working. While the team leaders have established strong and committed teams, their work is still very separate. In the absence of the Head of Centre, each team leader takes decisions based on her particular area of responsibility.

28. The senior management team comprises the Head of Centre, leaders of the nursery and family support services and two senior members of staff. Despite the difficulties caused by the management arrangements, the team is developing effective ways of working together, and meets regularly.

29. Improved communication and understanding are needed to foster harmonious working between the different elements of the Centre. The management structure of the Centre needs review. Although the current system works well on a day-to-day basis, the lack of clarity about line management arrangements and the senior management structure raise difficulties in terms of management of performance of staff and in deputising for the Head of Centre in her absence. The relative status of the members of the senior management team needs to be clarified.

The role of the management committee in strategic and long term planning which is limited by the lack of delegated powers and funding

30. The Centre's management committee comprises representatives from health, education and social services, along with parent and community representatives. Their role is defined in the terms of reference. However, some parts of the terms of reference have not yet been fully implemented. In particular, the management committee does not have control over a devolved budget. The only budget which is fully devolved to the Centre is for learning resources and is a small proportion of overall spending. This has limited the committee's scope for strategic decision making and the allocation of funds to meet agreed priorities. It has also meant that most of the priorities identified within the Centre's development plan are those which can be implemented with limited funds, for example, reviewing the Centre's documentation and improving provision for children with additional needs. The development plans for the outdoor area may not be implemented as the Centre cannot be sure that there will be sufficient funding to pay for them.

31. The terms of reference also state that it is the management committee's role to approve the Centre's development plan, rather than play a key role in determining the strategic direction for the Centre over a period of years. This, together with the lack of delegated funding, limits their power and ability to determine a way forward and to tackle some of the outstanding issues which need to be resolved. External restrictions on the funding and delegated responsibility of the management committee therefore affect the scope of the Head of Centre to manage the Centre as a whole.

Systems for summarising the children's attainment and the transfer of information between the nursery and primary schools

32. The nursery staff monitor children's attainment and progress closely. Each family group leader meets regularly with either the deputy headteacher or nursery teacher, to discuss the observations that have been made on individual children. Significant points are recorded on a record sheet, covering all of the areas of learning. Where there are concerns about a child's progress, this is noted and the child's needs are analysed and recorded in an "action" file. Care is then taken to ensure the child's needs are taken into account in the daily plans. This is an effective system which ensures that the progress and development of all children are tracked, and steps taken quickly to meet individual needs.

33. The family group leaders keep examples of completed work and photographs in individual "record of achievement" books. These books are carefully compiled and are treasured by children and parents alike. Although the records are a celebration of each child's time at the nursery, they do not give a clear indication of attainment and progress, and their usefulness as information for the receiving reception class teachers is therefore limited. Given that many of the children achieve highly, it is essential that both parents and their next school are given an accurate summary of how they have progressed towards the early learning goals in order to ensure progression in learning. This area has already been identified by the nursery as a priority for development.

WHAT SHOULD THE CENTRE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

34. To improve the quality of provision even further, the education and social services departments should work together to:

- review the Centre's management structure and clarify the roles, status and line management responsibilities of senior managers, in order to further integrate the work of the Centre;
- increase the degree of delegation of funding and enhance the strategic role of the management committee in order to improve the Centre's long-term planning and enable funds to be allocated to meet priorities.

The nursery staff should:

- develop and implement a record that summarises each child's attainment and progress towards the early learning goals and is shared and discussed with parents prior to transfer from nursery to reception.