

INSPECTION REPORT

PORTMAN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE

Westminster

LEA area: Westminster

Unique reference number: 132151

Headteacher: Joanna White

Lead inspector: Ms Margaret Julia Goodchild

Dates of inspection: 28 June – 2 July 2004

Inspection number: 257216

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Type of centre:	Integrated Early Years Centre, including a nursery with Early Excellence Centre status
Centre category:	Maintained
Age range of children:	1 – 5
Gender of children:	Mixed
Number on roll:	260
Centre address:	12 – 18 Salisbury Street London
Postcode:	NW8 8DE
Telephone number:	0207 641 5436
Fax number:	0207 641 5427
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr Anthony Golding
Date of previous inspection:	N/A

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CENTRE

The Portman Early Childhood Centre is fully integrated centre, incorporating an extensive range of services. In partnership with two neighbouring nurseries, the Portman Centre was established in 2000/1 as an Early Excellence Centre. It provides integrated education and childcare for children in the nursery, providing for Up to Threes and Foundation Stage children, and through a range of community initiatives based at the centre in partnership with Sure Start, KIDS Westminster, Westminster Adult Education Service, social services, Health and Homestart. The centre is awaiting designation as a Children's Centre with its partner organisations locally. It is part of an Education Action Zone. It currently provides for the equivalent of 80 full-time children in the nursery and offers services to a much larger number of children, parents and families through its extensive range of other services. It is registered for childcare provision – currently for 180 children – under the Children Act 1989.

The centre has a high proportion of children with special educational needs, including speech and language difficulties, autism, physical difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. It is within an area that has a high level of social deprivation, with an established white community and a high proportion of children from ethnic minorities, the largest groups being Bangladeshi and Arabic speaking. English is an additional language for the vast majority of children.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15918	Margaret Julia Goodchild	Lead inspector	Communication, language and literacy Physical development Creative development Special educational needs English as an additional language
19798	Jane O'Keefe	Lay inspector	
33010	Judith Venner	Team inspector	Personal, social and emotional development Mathematical development Knowledge and understanding of the world

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Portman Early Childhood Centre is an effective Early Excellence Centre with some outstanding features. It is a 'one-stop shop' that provides very good quality, integrated nursery education and childcare, and offers parents, carers, families and the wider community a broad range of services on one site. Teaching and learning are very good, enabling children to achieve very well. In some areas of learning, children are likely to meet and some should exceed the standard that is expected by the end of their time in a reception class in primary school. In others, a number of children are on course to reach standards that are below average; this reflects their well-below average attainment on entry to the Portman Centre, including the high proportion of children with special educational needs or who are at early stages in acquiring English. The centre is led very well and provides very good value for money.

The centre's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Children receive an education that is backed up by a wide and increasing range of services tailored to their various needs and those of their families.
- Provision is of a particularly high quality for Up to Threes and those who use the drop-in.
- The richness of learning opportunities, regular discussion on the needs of individual children and very good teaching ensure that achievement is very good in the nursery.
- Children with special educational needs or disability, and their parents, are supported very well.
- The centre does not have a brochure that explains its work to users or keeps parents sufficiently informed or consulted.
- Although leadership and management are very good overall, the role of curriculum co-ordinators is undeveloped and some staff with senior management responsibilities are overloaded.
- Monitoring is not rigorous enough in the nursery, toy library and crèche, and staff induction arrangements are unsatisfactory; partly as a result, there are some inconsistencies in practice that affect the overall quality of provision.

This is the first time that the centre has been inspected.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Children's achievement is very good. Three to five year olds in the nursery are likely to meet the Early Learning Goals in some but not all areas of learning by the end of the reception class in primary school. This reflects the well-below average attainment of most children on entry to the nursery and the high proportion with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language. Standards are at least in line with national expectations in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development. The attainment of higher-attaining children is average in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development; opportunities to develop the skills of these children in literacy, mathematical development and thinking are sometimes missed.

Children's personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Children have very positive attitudes and behave very well. There is a good rate of attendance in the nursery, and staff encourage parents and carers to arrive punctually with their children.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The centre provides a very good quality education. Teaching and learning are very good overall, with some particularly good practice in work with children up to three. The ways staff interact with children, observe and evaluate their progress and plan for future activities are strong features, but there is some variation in staff's skills in these areas. Children experience a rich variety of learning experiences. They are cared for very well and much attention is given to the

needs of individual children. Partnership with parents is good overall. Links with other agencies and with the organisations who work in partnership with the centre are excellent. Collaboration with other educational establishments is very effective.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. It is clear that the centre has been very well led in the development and integration of a wide range of education and support services for children and families. The current head of centre, who took up post only a few weeks before the inspection, has made a start in reviewing and fine-tuning aspects of provision. Senior managers provide very good leadership, although curriculum co-ordination in five of the six areas of learning in the nursery is at an early stage of development. Management of educational provision is good, with a need to strengthen some aspects of monitoring in the nursery, toy library and crèche. Management of other services to families and children is very good overall. The governing body is knowledgeable about the work of the centre and provides very good support and challenge to staff.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE CENTRE

Parents are very satisfied with the education and services the centre provides. Children respond with obvious enthusiasm to the activities on offer.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the centre should do to improve are:

- Improve communication with parents of children in the nursery, consult them about provision and provide a comprehensive brochure that explains the centre's work.
- Restructure senior management responsibilities and develop the role of curriculum co-ordinators.
- Ensure that rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluation are in place in all aspects of the centre's work, especially in the nursery, toy library and crèche.
- Provide training for staff to ensure that all practice is in line with the best in interacting with children, recording observations of children's attainment and using this information for planning, and in developing the skills of higher-attaining children in literacy, mathematical development and thinking.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY CHILDREN

Standards achieved in areas of learning and the quality of teaching and learning

Children achieve very well throughout the centre. Three to five year olds in the nursery are likely to meet the Early Learning Goals in some but not all areas of learning by the end of the reception class in primary school. This reflects the well below average attainment of most children on entry to the nursery and the high proportion with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Assessment procedures make a good contribution to children's progress.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Throughout the centre, children make very good progress in response to very good teaching and a rich curriculum, underpinned by the wide range of support that is provided to children and families.
- Children with special educational needs or disability, and their parents, are supported very well.
- Children who are learning English as an additional language make very good progress.
- Opportunities to develop the skills of higher-attaining children in literacy, mathematical development and thinking are sometimes missed.
- Systems for assessing learning are good overall but there is scope for further development in the way children's progress is tracked.

Commentary

1. All children enjoy close relationships with teachers and early years educators, who put the children's interests at the forefront of everything they do. As a result, the children are confident learners who respond with enthusiasm and trust when faced with new experiences. Children who are learning English as an additional language or have special needs receive very good, targeted support for their individual needs.
2. Staff have a good understanding of how young children develop and learn. The centre has made a very good start in applying the guidance from 'Birth to Three Matters' in its provision for the youngest children, in the Up to Threes and the community drop-in. Some, but not all, staff in the nursery have a detailed understanding of the stepping stones that make up each area of learning in the Foundation Stage curriculum.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 15 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	4	3	3	-	-	-

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

3. Across all six areas of learning, the teaching for children aged three to five is at least good, and a significant proportion of teaching seen was very good or excellent. As a result, the children make very good progress. They are likely to meet, and some children should exceed, the Early Learning Goals by the end of the reception year in primary school in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world, and creative development. Although some children are likely to meet the Early Learning Goals in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development, the significant number of children with special educational needs and who are learning English as an additional language means that a number of children may not reach the expected standard in these areas of learning. This represents very good achievement because, when children enter the nursery, the majority are performing well below the level expected for children of their age.

The table below summarises the progress of children aged three to five and the quality of teaching and learning in each area of learning in the Foundation Stage.

Areas of learning	
Personal, social and emotional development	As a result of very good teaching and learning, children make very good progress in this area. By the time they leave the nursery, the attainment of most children is above average. They are likely to meet - and some should exceed - the Early Learning Goals at the end of the reception year.
Communication, language and literacy	Children's overall achievement in communication, language and literacy is very good. By the time they leave the nursery, the attainment of a minority of children is average. That of the majority is below average because of the high proportion of children who are acquiring English as an additional language or who have special educational needs. It is unlikely, therefore, that most children will meet all aspects of the Early Learning Goals at the end of the reception year.
Mathematical development	Children achieve well overall, in response to good teaching. From their well below average attainment on entry to the nursery, the attainment of most children is below average when they leave. A minority of children are on course to meet the Early Learning Goals at the end of the reception year; lower-attaining children and those with special educational needs are unlikely to do so.
Knowledge and understanding of the world	Children make excellent progress in this area of learning. They learn to use their senses to understand the world and develop the skills of investigation and enquiry. By the time children leave the nursery, their attainment is above average. They are likely to meet - and many should exceed - the Early Learning Goals by the end of the reception year.
Physical development	When children enter the nursery, many have below-average attainment in some aspects of this area of learning. They achieve very well and their attainment is average by the time they leave. At the end of the reception year, they are likely to meet the Early Learning Goals.
Creative development	Children's excellent achievement in this area is the result of very good teaching and a range of rich learning experiences that enable them to develop their creativity and find ways of expressing themselves. By the time children leave the nursery, their attainment is above average overall and their skills of imaginative role-play are particularly well developed. They are likely to exceed the Early Learning Goals at the end of the reception year.

4. Staff manage children's behaviour very well. Any inappropriate behaviour is handled skilfully and there are, anyway, few instances of misbehaviour because children are usually entirely absorbed with learning activities. The stimulating and inspiring opportunities in the indoor and outdoor areas mean that when children arrive in the mornings, they are quickly engaged in productive activity. Freedom to move from one activity to another means that their interest is maintained and that positive and constructive, rather than inappropriate or destructive, behaviour is promoted.
5. Staff provide excellent opportunities for children to engage in role-play by providing highly imaginative props and scenarios and readily entering into children's imaginary world. For instance, a range of resources was provided on the theme of 'hospitals'. The area under the stairs was set up as part of the hospital and children had bandages, stethoscopes and other 'instruments' with which to treat the ailing 'baby' on the 'stretcher'. Their role-play was brought alive by wearing face masks and plastic hats like surgeons do in an operating theatre.
6. In activities directed by adults, staff generally provide the right amount of support for children's learning. Where teaching is at its best, teachers skilfully facilitate children's exploration and ensure that activities build on prior attainment. Occasionally, especially in moving children

from mark making towards writing and in developing children's higher order thinking skills, teachers hold back from teaching children the skills vital to the next stage of their development. There are also some missed opportunities for teaching children to recognise numbers and problem solving, although they have plenty of opportunity to practise and extend their counting.

7. The centre makes very good provision for its many children for whom English is an additional language. An emphasis on communication and language acquisition throughout the centre means that these children benefit enormously from linking real, sensory experiences with speaking and listening. The very favourable adult to child ratio in many activities supports children with English as an additional language very effectively. Staff ask a lot of questions to encourage children to communicate and they often provide a commentary of what is happening, to support children in linking unfamiliar vocabulary with actions or objects. Where teaching is at its best, staff ask a lot of simple questions – such as, 'Is the baby breathing?' – within imaginative role-play, which elicit an immediate response from the children. At other times, children sometimes make little verbal response because the adult has not asked them any direct questions about what they are doing. This inconsistency of practice is clearly a reflection of the varying level of skill amongst the large number of adults working in the nursery. A teacher for children with English as an additional language spends two days a week in the centre, working directly with children and developing a range of resources for other staff to use. Additionally, parents are encouraged to help in translating for others and developing resources, such as taping stories in home languages, and come in to lead singing, storytelling or other activities. During the inspection, a parent led a cookery session, where children learnt about the ingredients for a Moroccan meal, and found out some of the Arabic as well as English words for various items. This was typical of the way in which different cultures are valued and used to promote the self-esteem of bilingual children and enrich all children's learning experiences. Such activities are backed-up by a good range of dual-language books and other learning resources.
8. The teaching of children who have special educational needs and disability is very good. Special needs are identified early and external agencies are involved, as appropriate, to supplement the work of the various specialists in the centre itself. Children and their families are given a very high level of support. Staff make children with special educational needs feel valued and ensure that they have access to the full range of activities provided. Parents are involved at every stage in identifying their children's needs when individual education plans are drawn up and in reviewing their targets every half term. The centre does not, however, make use of the P scales¹ in assessing children's progress or setting targets, which is a missed opportunity.
9. There are, otherwise, good arrangements for assessment. Systems for observing and assessing learning are in place, and individual portfolios celebrate experiences and achievement. The main strength in the current system is the way staff meet at the end of each day to evaluate children's achievement and plan future sessions, informed by individual children's development and interests. Targets are set regularly for all children and this, together with the daily evaluation, ensures that children usually have experiences that build directly on their prior attainment. Children are proud of their achievements and enjoy reflecting on their learning through their portfolios.
10. At present, the centre is reconsidering its assessment practice with a view to improving procedures. A new programme is being established for the children to review their progress and to share in the identification of targets for future learning. A system has been introduced recently for checking that all children experience a suitably wide range of learning experiences. The practice of tracking learning is under-developed and this needs to be addressed to ensure that the curriculum is enabling all children to make continuous progress. Staff regularly observe children and record information about their attainment. Some records that result from

¹ 'P scales' have been developed as a way of measuring the small steps by which children with special educational needs make progress; the scales are used in special and mainstream settings throughout the country in assessing attainment, setting targets and tracking children's progress.

such observation are of good quality but at times staff do not focus on genuine new steps in a child's development or know quite how to use the recorded information in setting new targets for children.

11. Children up to three make particularly good progress because they are taught and cared for very well. Learning opportunities in the nursery, the drop-in and the crèche are provided following the guidance of 'From Birth to Three Matters', with the emphasis being placed rightly on sensory experiences, developing communication skills and cognitive and physical development.
12. Staff make sure that children feel secure and the children, in turn, soon develop confidence in relating to known adults and in using the resources available to them. In a music-and-movement session in the drop-in, toddlers were quick to make use of the percussion instruments provided, as well as to move excitedly to the music. Parents, children and staff joined in what was a truly joyous and spontaneous experience that promoted children's social, as well as physical, skills.
13. Equipment is used skilfully and children develop control through exploring a wide range of materials. They have access to high quality resources, which are used very well to give children a wealth of sensory experiences and opportunities to explore and experiment. Babies in the drop-in are provided with 'treasure baskets' that contain a rich variety of shapes and textures – such as a natural sponge, a large fir cone, rattles, a nail brush and various other objects with differing surfaces and details to explore - to stimulate their cognitive development. Children enjoy direct access to many sensory experiences, such as mixing cornflour and adding ingredients to find out about cause and effect, and 'discovering' themselves and their actions reflected in mirrors. Through observing their young children at play, parents increase their understanding of their child's development and staff support them in identifying ways of extending that development at home.
14. Staff in the Up to Threes, drop-in and crèche interact with the children very well. Their sensitivity towards the children and knowledge of their development means that they help each child to make decisions and explore things for themselves. Children's confidence is developed through encouragement and praise and by the adults' skill and spontaneous joy when sharing learning experiences with the children.

Example of outstanding practice

The magic in a new discovery was evident when a drop-in worker interacted with a small group of children in the Up to Threes.

Three children and an adult explored the texture of their own ball of stretchy dough. The adult modelled actions and, at their own level, the children poked their fingers into the ball and pulled and pushed it, investigating. For one child, it was the first time he had had the confidence to handle the material independently. After a while, the adult hid a small white ball in his dough so that the ball could not be seen. The adult involved the children by saying, 'Where is the ball?' and demonstrating finding it. He hid the ball again and gained the attention of all three children. One child left his dough and moved close to the adult. He looked enquiringly. The adult said, 'Where is it?' and the child repeated, 'Where is it?' Again, the adult found it, much to the joy of the children. The action was repeated several times, the child showing delight with squeals of joy each time and repeating phrases spoken by the adult. The third child observed spellbound and suddenly in response to 'Where is it?', stretched forward and exposed some of the ball, his face a picture. The joy of the experience of understanding was apparent. The child did not have spoken language, but demonstrated that he knew the ball was there all the time.

15. Each child's development and progress are noted and discussed each day by staff in the Up to Threes. Children's response and emerging development is used very well to identify and plan for individual children's particular learning needs.

Children's attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Provision for personal, social and emotional development is very good. Children have very positive attitudes and behave very well. There is a good rate of attendance in the nursery, and staff encourage parents and carers to arrive punctually with their children.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children respond very well; they are motivated and eager to learn.
- Management of behaviour is very good.
- Children engage with activities and concentrate very well for long periods.
- Children are independent in accessing materials.
- Children's interpersonal skills are developing well.

Commentary

16. The personal, social and emotional development of children aged three to five is very good. The children are happy to come to the nursery. They part from their parents and carers confidently and quickly become involved in activities. Personal, social and emotional development is well below average on entry but the children quickly make very good progress. As a result of very good teaching and learning, by the time they leave the nursery, the attainment of most children is above average. They are likely to meet - and some should exceed - the Early Learning Goals at the end of the reception year. This is because staff ensure that provision for individual well-being is included in every aspect of the nursery.
17. Very good opportunities are provided to develop social skills and children quickly have the confidence to work alongside their peers and the adults in the nursery. The wide range of stimulating learning opportunities builds on children's interest and supports them in developing positive attitudes to learning. They are motivated and eager to learn and settle eagerly to activities, often for long periods with great concentration. The enthusiasm of the staff makes learning fun and encourages children to persist even when things go wrong.
18. Behaviour is managed very well and there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the centre. Staff are consistent in their expectations and the challenging behaviour of a few does not impact significantly on the quality of provision for the majority. The high standards set for behaviour enhance children's moral development. Most children know right from wrong and respect others. Children respond spontaneously to one another in a caring manner and have a developing awareness of the impact of their actions.
19. The very good organisation of well-presented and labelled resources enables children to follow their own lines of interest and access the materials they require. The organisation of quiet areas and the refreshment stations allow children to take time out to reflect and enjoy a snack. They do this independently, often sharing the time with a friend. This independence is further encouraged when it comes to tidying up and children readily help, knowing the expectations for care of the environment.
20. Opportunities for social interactions are encouraged and supported. Children chat together at the beginning of the session, obviously pleased to see one another. While engaged in activities, they co-operate readily, communicating ideas and responding to one another.
21. The children have a strong sense of community, and cultural development is excellent. Opportunities provide effectively for children to value their own and others' cultures. Staff and parents share their cultures and traditions and provide first-hand experiences for the children that are supported by an excellent range of books and resources. Individual learning experiences are shared and valued through displays, and photographic evidence shows that

children take pride in their achievements, thus further supporting their self-esteem and self-confidence.

22. The development of children's spiritual development is very good. They are fascinated by the natural world and became deeply involved in close observation, for instance, of the giant snail – displaying delight and wonder at the snail's ability to change its body shape. Many examples of spiritual development were seen, such as a child splashing her feet in the pool and marvelling at the droplets of water that rose into the air. Adults provide sensitive support, giving children time to reflect and marvel.
23. The quality of provision and care for children up to three is very good. The children build close relationships with the adults who care for them, and they are comfortable with the routines and expectations of the setting. They are encouraged to be increasingly independent and to have an awareness of their own personal needs. An exciting range of stimulating activities supports children in developing their concentration and promotes interaction with others. Through these rich opportunities, children develop the confidence to explore and begin to make sense of their world.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE CENTRE

The centre provides a very good quality education. Children experience a rich variety of learning experiences. They are cared for very well and much attention is given to the needs of individual children. Partnership with parents is sound overall. Links with other agencies and with the organisations who work in partnership with the centre are excellent. Collaboration with other educational establishments and with the community is very effective.

Teaching and learning

See paragraphs 1 to 15.

The curriculum

The nursery provides a very good quality curriculum that includes a wide range of enrichment opportunities. The centre's accommodation and resources support the range of services it provides very well overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Rich first-hand experiences inside and outside enhance learning in the nursery.
- Provision is of a particularly high quality for Up to Threes and those who use the drop-in.
- The curriculum is developed directly from children's experiences, interests and needs.
- Ethnic and linguistic diversity is reflected very well in planning.
- The learning environment and resources contribute significantly to children's learning.

Commentary

24. Curriculum provision for children aged three to five is very good. It is planned to provide rich learning opportunities in all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum, through the inside and outside environments. There is an appropriate balance of activities that the adults direct and facilitate and those that are initiated by the children for themselves. Policies are in place that set out curricular intentions and the approach to learning in each curriculum area. Staff provide a very good range of stimulating experiences and activities for the children. Planning is based on the interests of the children, building on their achievement, and is therefore constantly evolving. The next steps for learning are reflected upon daily and targeted for action. A very good range of visits and visitors to the centre enhances the curriculum and makes a significant contribution to the development of children's knowledge and understanding.

25. Children come to the centre from many different cultural backgrounds and a wide range of first languages is represented. This diversity is valued and celebrated: it is reflected in all aspects of planning and provision.
26. Children's special educational needs are effectively identified so that these children benefit from focused support and a range of teaching strategies. Individual education plan targets are written and reviewed very regularly, in close collaboration with parents or carers and, where appropriate, with other agencies in the building and external specialists. This planning and careful review of progress, combined with the skills of staff, ensure that children with special educational needs or disabilities access the full curriculum and achieve very well.
27. The centre is well staffed and the accommodation is very well planned. The organisation of the environment, with high quality resources to support work in all areas of learning, is very good. Plans are evolving to improve the accommodation further by providing greater space for wheeled toys and active play. At present, resources are limited for information and communication technology (ICT); this has been identified in the centre's improvement plan as a priority for action.
28. The management of the curriculum is very good. At present, the deputy headteacher with responsibility for the curriculum manages the overview and day-to-day development of the curriculum. The need to delegate aspects of the leadership and management of the curriculum has been identified and will be addressed by developing the role of co-ordinators for each area of learning. Co-ordination of communication, language and literacy is developing well; the role of co-ordinators in other areas of learning is relatively undeveloped.
29. The provision for children up to three is very good. The adults working with these children focus particularly on the children's personal, social and emotional development, working closely with parents to ensure the transition from home to nursery is managed sensitively. Informal opportunities are provided for parents to talk to the staff about their child's learning and care. In addition, there are regular planned discussions with parents about their child's progress and interests and strategies that can be shared in helping the child further. Learning opportunities are provided following the guidance of 'From Birth to Three Matters', with the emphasis being placed rightly on sensory experiences, developing communication skills and cognitive and physical development. Children make very good progress, and continuity is excellent for children as they transfer into the nursery. This is because they are well supported in using the nursery environment, inside and out, and develop confidence and independence. Confidence is developed through encouragement and praise and by the adults' skill and spontaneous joy when sharing learning experiences with the children.

Care, guidance and support

The centre provides a very good level of care and support, and very good procedures are in place to ensure children's welfare. Children are inducted well into the centre and settle quickly. Health and safety arrangements are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff take a very caring and supportive approach towards children and their families.
- General welfare procedures are very effective.
- There are some inconsistencies in the procedures for health and safety.
- Induction into the nursery is very good.

Commentary

30. All the children and their families are valued highly by staff and made to feel secure by the centre's warm and welcoming atmosphere. By being a 'one stop shop' for a range of support

services, the centre is able to meet the personal needs of many young families in the area. Very good levels of care are provided for all children. The reception staff, who are friendly and knowledgeable, quickly put new parents and children at ease. At the drop-ins, which are run by a senior early years educator, a family support worker and a drop-in assistant, and in the toy library and sensory room, very good care is taken of children as they learn to play with others. In the nursery, children are happy and clearly trust the staff; they confidently seek their help and support if they need it.

31. All staff at the centre adhere to local guidelines when dealing with child protection issues. The head of centre is the person designated to deal with any concerns and is always informed if staff are concerned about a child's welfare or safety. The family support workers have particular skills in this area. The provision of a counsellor also provides invaluable personal support to parents undergoing particular difficulties. Furthermore, staff get to know each child in their care and their parents and carers very well, and always consider children's needs in the context of their family situation.
32. An independent audit of the centre's health and safety arrangements has recently been completed and the legal requirements for risk assessments are now in place. A deputy head of centre has been named the appointed person for this area and is currently awaiting further training. Procedures for logging accidents in the nursery are inconsistent, however, and - as a result - parents are not always informed if their child has a minor accident. Staff are now aware of this and steps have been taken to address this situation. In addition, the centre lacks a designated health and safety governor to oversee the implementation of health and safety procedures for the many different users of the centre.
33. Staff visit all children at home before it is time for them to start at the nursery. A series of visits is arranged beforehand so that they and their parents can familiarize themselves with staff and the building. As a result, children settle quickly and are soon able to separate happily from their parents or carers. Staff value children's opinions and constantly seek their views in an informal way. However, there are currently no formal arrangements for recording their views through, for instance, child conferencing; this has been identified by the centre as an area for development.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Parents are very happy with the education, care and support their children receive, and the centre has developed good partnerships with its parents. Its links with the local community and with other schools and educational establishments are very good. There are some excellent partnerships between the centre and other services for children and families.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very satisfied with the work of the centre.
- Limited written information about the work of the centre is currently provided for parents, particularly in the nursery.
- Arrangements for supporting families are excellent.
- Very good links with other schools in the area and with the local community support the centre's work.

Commentary

34. Parents express high levels of satisfaction with the work of the Centre. They particularly value the friendliness of staff and the many opportunities provided for them. One parent said, "It's wonderful, I have no complaints". However, one area that some parents did highlight as a concern was the lack of information provided by the centre. The inspection team agreed with this view and found communication with parents to be more limited than is usually found. There is currently no brochure to give parents and other users a clear overall picture of the

work of the centre, although one is now planned. No home-school contact books are used by the nursery, as is often found in schools. These would enable messages to pass to and from children's homes and would particularly benefit working parents. Although staff try very hard to be accessible to all, it is not always possible for them to speak to parents as they deliver and collect their children. As a result, some misunderstandings with parents have occurred, for instance over the nursery's policy on gun-play – which had not been clearly explained to them. Since the arrival of the new head of centre, some attractively presented newsletters have been issued to parents. These are not yet frequent enough, nor do they reflect fully the high standards or the range of services provided for families. It is intended that newsletters will be issued weekly.

35. Parents have been consulted on their views on many areas of the centre's work, for instance, on the drop-ins, but gathering parents' views is currently under-developed within the nursery. A useful parents' forum has been established recently and this is enabling parents to have a stronger 'voice' in the work and future of the centre.
36. The use of bilingual staff in many areas of the centre helps to break down barriers with parents and build their confidence. In turn, bilingual parents support the centre well by translating information and speaking to other parents. Liaison with these parents when children first attend the centre is good; they contribute to the assessment of their children's language learning needs. Staff in the nursery and Up to Threes are working hard to include parents in their work and increasing numbers now help during sessions and on outings. For instance, a very good example was seen, during the inspection, of a Moroccan mother who came into the nursery to bake bread, in the traditional way, with the children.
37. Parents have a formal opportunity to speak to staff about their children's progress with key workers at termly reviews. They have recently been allowed access to children's portfolios of work so that they can see for themselves how well their children are developing. With their children, they are also able to contribute to the profiles. Regular written reports are provided for parents. These are detailed and informative, giving a clear picture of how well their children are progressing in all areas. Parents in the nursery do not currently receive information on what work their children will be covering. The new head of centre plans to remedy this shortly.
38. The centre has fostered very good partnerships with the local community. A recent arts project – to create a mosaic designed by the nursery children – received valuable support from a local artist. The centre has many very good working links with outside agencies and providers. Through social services and the Primary Infant Mental Health Service, vulnerable children and families are quickly identified and staff liaise closely together to ensure that they get the advice and support they need.
39. Very good links have been established with other schools in the area. The centre is closely linked with other local authority nurseries in the area, through the Early Excellence initiative, and a particularly strong link has been forged with a local primary school. As a result of this, the school's reception class is temporarily housed in the centre.
40. The involvement of **Sure Start** in the centre has provided many very valuable additional services for local families, alongside Sure Start's community outreach work. Many parents take up the services provided – which include a toy library, fathers' group and computer suite. The very well equipped and managed sensory room is made accessible to all, both local groups and individuals; the opportunities this provides are popular with parents, who value sessions such as 'Baby Fun'.
41. The provision of **adult education** is particularly effective in the centre and helps to make a real difference to the lives of many parents. In partnership with Westminster Adult Education Service, a range of accredited and non-accredited courses is provided for parents and the community each week. Using a nearby community centre as well as the centre's own crèche facilities and drop-in, this service now enables parents to undertake an increasing range of

courses. It offers subjects ranging from a number of courses in English as a second language, computer and cookery classes, to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in management. As a result, students - who are often lone parents – are able to progress at their own pace towards their individual goals, frequently resulting in new employment. For instance, one parent began by learning to speak English, completed many other courses and now has a management position in the local adult education centre. Crèche facilities provide a range of stimulating activities for children while their parents or carers are attending these classes.

42. The **family support team** is a particular strength of the centre. Family support workers underpin the centre's work by working very closely with families, often making initial contact with those who are feeling isolated and in need, and quickly ensuring that those needing help get it. Through home visits and the regular drop-ins, staff are able to get to know parents personally. Family support workers are currently launching a new parenting course, aimed at helping parents to enjoy and manage their children and, as part of the family learning programme, community midwives provide classes. Counselling services are based at the centre, providing support to parents and carers, and a health paediatric clinic is run (through the Primary Care Trust), whereby a community paediatrician from St. Mary's Hospital sees patients and families on site.
43. **Drop-in facilities** are provided for childminders and parents, who attend with children in their care and share in a wide variety of stimulating activities. Marylebone Bangladeshi Society uses the centre to provide a Bengali drop-in: this provides opportunities for parents and carers in the locality to share activities with their children, and the toy library provides additional resources for families. For all of these groups, use of the sensory room is an additional stimulating experience that develops children's curiosity and investigative skills. The presence of skilled and well-trained workers at the drop-ins helps to encourage and motivate parents whilst still maintaining a 'friendly face'. During these sessions, staff work very closely alongside parents and children, showing great sensitivity to their needs, as they demonstrate carefully how play and learning can be developed.

Example of outstanding practice

At a drop-in session for parents and under-fives there were excellent relationships between the drop-in staff, parents, carers and children.

A wide range of exciting activities were prepared and available, some of which were specifically planned following the interests of the children at the previous session. The relaxed and welcoming atmosphere encouraged parents and carers to engage with their children and also permitted them to take time for themselves to watch and to enjoy a few minutes of rest. The drop-in was greatly valued as it not only provided stimulating sensory activities for children but also gave very good personal support and advice to parents and carers. The family workers provided excellent examples of play when they were alongside the children, modelling responses and demonstrating ideas of how to interact with children to get them to explore a range of materials. The positive atmosphere of the session was enhanced by the obvious pleasure that was seen in the faces of the adults and the children as they shared interests and investigated together. While the staff had established routines and expectations, they were carried out and respected by everyone. Towards the end of the session, the music played and parents, carers and their children recognised this as the signal for tidying up. They worked together, singing with the music, cleaning, mopping and tidying to restore order to the environment before everyone joined together to participate in a shared story and song session.

44. The outreach work provided by the **KIDS Home Learning** service for children with special educational needs and disabilities supports families very effectively. Through regular visits, the very dedicated and experienced workers devise individual programmes - using small but significant steps for each of these children - which are then carried out in their own homes. Staff provide information for parents and opportunities for them to meet with parents and carers who are in a similar situation, for mutual support.
45. Through the **Homestart** scheme, which provides voluntary support for families in crisis, a programme is being developed to support teenage mothers through monthly events at the centre, to enable them to come together as a support network.

46. **The summer play scheme**, for children up to the age of 11, makes use of resources throughout the centre and is run collaboratively by family support workers and nursery staff.
47. **The dissemination of good practice** is at a fairly early stage of development. It currently takes the form mainly of visits to the centre from local and international teachers, but some direct training is provided for early years educators. In-service training often takes place on Saturdays and is linked to the work of the Early Years and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) in conjunction with Sure Start who provide crèche facilities. Specific projects such as work with the Institute of Education and workshops on the tile project provide a focus for sharing good practice in early years education. Local childminders are offered training as well as their own weekly drop-in facility, where they can share concerns and seek advice from experienced staff. Staff in the nursery welcome students working towards National Vocational Qualifications in Childcare and senior staff have presented workshops at the Institute of Education and local early years forums. The centre intends to become a partner establishment with the Institute of Education, which will involve the regular placement of trainee teachers at the centre and provide wider opportunities for the centre to disseminate good practice.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. It is clear that the centre has been very well led in the development and integration of a wide range of education and support services for children and families. The current head of centre, who took up post only a few weeks before the inspection, has made a start in reviewing and fine-tuning aspects of provision. Senior managers provide very good leadership, although curriculum co-ordination is at an early stage of development. Management of educational provision is good, with a need to strengthen some aspects of monitoring in the nursery, toy library and crèche. Management of other services to families and children is very good overall. Governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The centre has been very well led in reaching its current level of integration between education and childcare.
- There is a strong commitment to expanding provision and to refining aspects of practice where necessary.
- The role of curriculum co-ordinators is undeveloped in five of the six areas of learning, and some staff with senior management responsibilities are overloaded.
- Monitoring is not rigorous enough in the nursery, toy library and crèche, and staff induction arrangements are unsatisfactory; partly as a result, there are some inconsistencies in practice that affect the overall quality of provision.
- The governing body provides very good support and challenge and governors are knowledgeable about the work of the centre.
- Financial management is good despite a significant budgetary carry over.

Commentary

48. The centre has developed rapidly since it was established in 2000/1 on the site of the Portman Family Centre. It is clear that very good leadership has directed the centre's work, effectively integrating a wide range of educational and support services under one roof. The previous head of centre, who did all the initial work, retired in April 2004, when the new head of centre took up post. The current head is developing and refining the initiatives put in place by her predecessor, and co-ordinates the work generated through the designation of Early Excellence. Much has been achieved over the past few years and the new head of centre is working closely with the local education authority to develop further the work for children and families in preparation for becoming a Children's Centre.
49. Staff with leadership responsibilities have a clear vision and sense of purpose. There is a strong commitment to making provision as good as possible and to developing best practice in

all aspects of the centre's work. The latest centre improvement plan identifies a range of appropriate priorities for development. The commitment to including all children and all families is particularly strong amongst all staff with leadership and management responsibilities. Teamwork is good amongst the various workers who support families and provide a range of services in the centre. It is at an earlier stage of development within the nursery. This is partly because there is a 'gap' in the centre's management structure. The two deputy heads of centre have complementary and highly relevant skills but are obliged to get more caught up in day-to-day work than they should, and do not always have time to stand back and reflect on all aspects of practice. The centre has rightly identified the need for an additional deputy head who is to have responsibility for inclusion and who will take on some of the tasks currently completed by each of the deputies. It is also considering appointing a senior teacher in the nursery. Restructuring the senior management team is essential to improving further the overall quality of provision in preparation for taking on the much more challenging management task involved in the shift to Children's Centre status.

50. Curriculum co-ordination is in place for communication, language and literacy, but at an early stage of development in the other areas of learning. Communication, language and literacy is led and managed jointly by a teacher and an early years educator, one from the nursery, the other from the Up to Threes. This arrangement works well and has supported the dissemination of good practice in communication with very young children to staff in the nursery. The co-ordinators of communication, language and literacy liaise appropriately with speech and language therapists and with the English as an additional language teacher in the development of resources and strategies to meet the needs of children who have special educational needs or who are at early stages in acquiring English. The centre is following a similar pattern of teaming up a teacher and an early years educator in the other areas of learning. It is important that these arrangements are put fully into place so that curriculum innovation and development and the overseeing of assessment procedures are secure across the whole curriculum and throughout the centre.
51. Performance management is in place for teaching and non-teaching staff in the nursery and Up to Threes. The head of centre's plan to introduce performance management for the rest of the staff in the building is a potentially positive move in unifying the staff and increasing her control over the quality of all aspects of provision that are under her charge. Other procedures for monitoring and evaluating the centre's work are good. Systems for monitoring most aspects of the support services, including the drop-in, are very thorough. Some regular monitoring is in place in the nursery, the Up to Threes, the toy library and the crèche, but there is scope to check detailed aspects of the work in these areas more closely, especially to overcome some inconsistencies in practice between staff. Staff induction procedures are not properly in place and have been identified as an area for development. Opportunities for staff to engage in continuous professional development are good; this has led to two members of the support staff recently gaining honours degrees in early years education.
52. The governing body is involved in shaping the direction of the centre and has a very good understanding of its work. Governors are appropriately involved in development planning, and they challenge staff as well as providing support. The special educational needs governor, for example, meets with the co-ordinator to oversee provision and find out about the progress of children with special needs. There is, however, no designated health and safety governor at present. The governing body receives termly reports from the head of centre and, additionally, individual governors undertake monitoring visits and produce written reports about the centre's work. Various governors have attended training provided by the local education authority, so that they have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
53. Financial management is good although the centre has had a significant underspend for the last two years. This is largely because it has kept back money for building work and in preparation for a time when Early Excellence Centre funding will be coming to an end. It is negotiating currently to clarify future funding arrangements for those aspects of provision, such as family support, that come under the auspices of social services, and is about to make further appointments to strengthen leadership and management. Money is spent wisely on

planned developments that are of benefit to children, parents and families, giving rise to very good quality provision and some outstanding practice. The centre therefore provides very good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	767,414.37	Balance from previous year	105,087.63
Total expenditure	758,192.00	Balance carried forward to the next	114,310.00
Expenditure per child	-		

Expenditure per child is not relevant to this setting because funding includes provision for a range of support services and community provision as well as that for education.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in personal social and emotional development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children respond very well; they are motivated and eager to learn.
- Management of behaviour is very good.
- Children engage with activities and concentrate very well for long periods.
- Children are independent in accessing materials.
- Children's interpersonal skills are developing well.

Commentary

See paragraphs 16-23.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Provision in communication, language and literacy is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are taught very well in communication and language; the teaching of literacy is good overall.
- Children are given many opportunities to make marks and to enjoy books.
- Staff are not entirely clear about how to move higher-attaining children on from mark making to writing.

Commentary

54. Children's overall achievement in communication, language and literacy is very good. By the time they leave the nursery, the attainment of a minority of children is average; that of the majority is below average because of the high proportion of children for whom English is an additional language and who have special educational needs. It is unlikely, therefore, that most children will meet all aspects of the Early Learning Goals at the end of the reception year.
55. Many children have little or no English when they start at the nursery, but they make very good progress in understanding and beginning to speak English. The acquisition of language is supported very well through use of props to support story telling and especially through a varied and stimulating range of learning experiences, each carrying a range of new vocabulary. Where necessary, staff use Makaton signs to involve children with special educational needs, and children with little or no spoken language are developing a range of gestures and other means to express themselves.

Example of outstanding practice

Language is promoted exceptionally well through its connection with direct, sensory experience, and through role play.

In visiting a farm, then making a coop for the nursery's little batch of eggs to hatch, children came to understand a substantial number of new words as they helped to make the coop, found out how chicks hatch, looked at and held the chicks, and watched them gradually growing bigger each day. The richness of learning resources, including those based on the way children use objects symbolically (such as a box in the sandpit to use as an oven when 'baking' cakes), means that children are continuously having new experiences, or variations on previous experiences, that require and stimulate new language and communication with one another or in language for thinking.

56. Role-play opportunities are excellent and the staff support these play experiences by working alongside the children, modelling the behaviour of the role-play, participating in the activity and extending vocabulary and communication by using language appropriate to the situation. In this way, children are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary that they would not otherwise know. This is valuable for all children and especially helpful to those who are acquiring English as an additional language. Through the sensitive intervention of the staff in role-play situations children are able to take on different roles and responsibilities, developing their skills and understanding.
57. Children make good progress in developing early literacy skills. As part of role-play, they learn that printed information is part of everyday life, such as the printed Edgware Road station name at the role-play 'ticket office', with train timetables and underground maps arranged at child level. Printed labels are provided throughout the nursery, sometimes in other languages as well as English, such as the geometric shapes that have been labelled with several different languages, their meaning made obvious to children because the words appear in the relevant shape. Children quickly come to enjoy books and most children know that print is read from left to right in English. They turn the pages of books carefully and some 'read' the pictures and can retell the main events in familiar stories. The practice of making books, comprising of photographs and comments, about experiences and visits the children have been on is very good. Teaching in daily story times is generally good and children listen absorbedly. These sessions provide some very good opportunities for speaking and listening, and teach children about books, for example, thinking about the illustrator and the author. They include some practice in linking letters and sounds, but this aspect of teaching is not always as clear as it might be.
58. Children are given many opportunities to make marks and to play at writing for a purpose. For instance, materials are provided within role-play situations for children to make marks, and they regularly communicate their ideas by mark making beneath photographs of activities in which they have taken part. In this way, average and lower-attaining children make good progress in developing the skills that form the foundation of writing. Children generally understand that writing communicates meaning and many are able to explain what they intend to communicate in their mark making. Higher-attaining children are able to write their names and a small minority of children have, on occasion, copied some words to describe their activities. A number of children are at the stage where their marks are beginning to resemble letters or where they are striving to form some letters accurately. Opportunities are sometimes missed, however, for building on this emerging skill and for ensuring that assessment records are used to plan the teaching of the next steps in writing. When adults worked with higher-attaining children during the inspection, they did not provide effective guidance that built on children's existing skill in writing or that picked up on their readiness to develop further. This is an area where a number of staff would benefit from training in order to ensure that the minority of individual children who are ready to move on in developing their handwriting skills are given an appropriate and systematic opportunity to do so.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Mathematical language is developed through a range of stimulating play activities.
- Most able children are able to calculate.
- Children learn to count and have a sound understanding of number concepts, but opportunities are not always provided for them to experience numerals.

Commentary

59. Teaching and learning in mathematical development are good overall. Children are given good opportunities to develop their mathematical skills and make good progress. Number rhymes like 'One, two, three, four, five, once I caught a fish alive' are practised regularly and opportunities are provided in all curriculum areas for children to count giving one number to one object. This was particularly effective in a cooking activity and in the telling of the story of 'The Three Bears', when children were encouraged to count to three in the various parts of the story; good use is also made in comparing size. Children achieve well overall, in response to good teaching. From their well below average attainment on entry to the nursery, the attainment of most children is below average when they leave. A minority of children are on course to meet the Early Learning Goals at the end of the reception year; lower-attaining children and those with special educational needs are unlikely to do so.
60. Stimulating activities are provided to engage children in purposeful counting, such as the fishing game in the pond. The children were supported in counting the number of animals caught, and given strategies for doing this, by putting the animals in a line and being guided to point to each one. In the dough making activities, children followed pictorial instructions to count cups of flour, salt and water. All staff encourage mathematical understanding and the children have a developing awareness of more and less. This was demonstrated when one child identified from a graph the most popular name for the snail. He identified that more children liked a particular name and he knew because there were more labels. Similarly, another child, when looking at name cards recognised there were more letters in her friend's name, as he had eight and she had only five.
61. Mathematical language is introduced and applied by staff in the practical activities the children engage with. In the outside sand pit, terms such as taller, shorter, higher, lower are readily used and understanding of the concepts is developing. Children have an awareness of shapes and are beginning to recognise them in the environment. They are supported well in thinking through practical problems when building and constructing, and skilful questioning and support aids the identification of solutions. A minority of higher-attaining children would benefit from more opportunities to solve problems that involve the development of mathematical thinking.
62. Higher-attaining children are able to add two numbers together. One four-year-old, playing in the role-play hospital, was able to say that there were five doctors in the hospital, as there were 'three up there' (in the ward) and 'two here' (in the A & E). Opportunities are provided for children to mark make in a mathematical context, such as recording goals scored during the football activity. Children are shown how to make tally marks for the number of fish they have caught. However, insufficient experiences are provided in linking the number name to the numeral. Modelling of numerals by adults is not sufficiently used to provide effective examples and the skills of numeral name awareness and recognition are under-developed.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality, range and use of resources to explore cultures and beliefs are exceptional.
- A wide range of activities, based on first-hand experiences, encourages children to observe, investigate, think, explore and develop excellent understanding.
- The quality of the support adults give to children enables them to express their ideas and make excellent progress.

Commentary

63. The quality of teaching and learning in knowledge and understanding of the world is outstanding and children make excellent progress. This is due to the rich experiences staff provide and the very effective use of quality resources. Children learn to use their senses to understand the world and develop the skills of investigation and enquiry. By the time children leave the nursery, their attainment is above average. They are likely to meet and many should exceed the Early Learning Goals by the end of the reception year.
64. The opportunities provided for the children to learn about their own and other cultures are excellent and they confidently celebrate diversity. The role-play area linked to a Moroccan home, with opportunities for sharing traditional food and drink, is used effectively to celebrate and explore beliefs and traditions. The provision for dressing in traditional clothes, listening to Moroccan music and exploring non-fiction texts with knowledgeable staff, enhances developing values and respect for different cultures.
65. Through their many trips to farms, involvement in growing plants in the garden and their current study of the chicks and an African land snail, children have ample opportunity to develop an understanding of what living things need in order to grow healthily. Close attention is given to helping children to develop observational skills and for noting similarities and differences in living creatures. This has been supported through the very rich and exciting experiences of hatching chicks. Children are motivated and show high levels of sustained interest in the chicks. On arrival at the nursery after the weekend, a group of children went straight to the cage to see if the chicks had changed. The addition of a giant snail into the nursery involved the children further in noting similarities and differences and in the use of magnifying glasses to look closely at the shell.
66. Cooking activities are used effectively for children to hypothesise and predict and to develop knowledge of a range of different ingredients. In all activities, the children are encouraged to be curious and to use their senses to gain greater understanding of their experiences. Questioning is used very well to engage children in enquiry and to develop understanding.
67. The immediate locality is used regularly for the children to develop understanding of the world around them. They make visits to the park and local museums. Local resources are used to develop children's understanding of past times by visits to the science and fashion museums. Observations of houses nearby and the building work near to the school are used as rich first-hand experiences. Visitors are invited regularly to the school and the arrival of an ambulance linked to the role-play hospital helped further to identify with 'people who help us'.
68. A holistic approach is taken to learning, when the children are encouraged to design and make homes outdoors using a wide range of materials. For instance, during the inspection they constructed three-dimensional homes in the style of those found in Northern Africa. Problem-solving skills were supported very well as the children found the appropriate glue and tape to

hold their structure together. The first-hand experience of being in these structures further developed understanding of life in other parts of the world.

Example of outstanding practice

The breadth of opportunity is excellent and is enhanced by purposeful activity.

Children are able to identify needs and plan ways of meeting them. This was seen in the construction of a cage for the growing chicks. Using real materials, the children worked with the site manager with wood and netting, measuring, sawing and hammering. They displayed enormous pride in their finished construction, which they can see is ideal for the purpose. Opportunities provided, indoors and outdoors, for designing and making are very rich as the children have the opportunity to use a wide range of materials and experiment with a range of tools and different fixing agents.

69. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to record events in the nursery through the use of a camera. The children show high levels of interest when staff use the digital camera and are fascinated to see the pictures on the small screen and to see the printed photographs. Photographs are used effectively to recall events and experiences and for reflecting on previous learning. Children are confident when using the listening centre and manage it independently. Opportunities in ICT are limited at present as the computer is broken and the children do not have the opportunity to work with it or with programmable toys. This has been identified, rightly, as a priority for development.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The breadth of learning experiences provides children with much practice in developing physical control.
- Children have continuous access to the outdoor area and good opportunities to gain in their physical confidence.

Commentary

70. When children enter the nursery, many have below-average attainment in this area of learning. They achieve well and the attainment of most children is average by the time they leave. At the end of the reception year, they are likely to meet the Early Learning Goals.
71. Children have many opportunities to develop skills that involve fine control and hand-to-eye co-ordination. The wide range of learning experiences enables children to use many different types of tools, and so develop a range of precise physical skills. They hammer in nails, use scissors, catch 'make-believe fish', and chop fruit and vegetables when they are cooking. By being trusted to handle tools such as knives and hammers, they learn that equipment needs to be used safely and that they must consider their own and others' physical well-being in all that they do. They regularly collaborate with one another in building various structures, such as a 'flying bus' made out of blocks and planks of wood, negotiating the design and construction as they go along. In imaginative role-play, they have many opportunities to refine their physical control. In play on the theme of hospitals, by concentrating hard, a child was able to bandage the doll's leg and secure the bandage neatly, in readiness to transfer the baby on the stretcher to A & E.
72. Children quickly develop confidence in balancing, jumping and climbing, for example, scrambling up an A-frame, carefully manoeuvring over the top and down the other side, or slowly negotiating the rungs of the ladder to the top of the slide. The fact that adults take photographs and share with them images, for example, of when they first climbed to the top of an initially daunting piece of equipment, helps to confirm to them that they really were able to overcome their fear. Regular opportunities are provided for children to play with balls, dribbling

a football round apparatus or learning throwing techniques. They develop their strength and physical control by activities such as pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with wooden bricks, and learn to move safely in space.

73. Opportunities to play with wheeled toys is limited because there is insufficient room for these to be kept out all the time. The centre intends to develop its rooftop area, which has the potential to become an exciting and secure space for the further promotion of children's physical skills. In the meantime, a part of the outdoor area is used primarily for activities that promote physical development. Staff ensure that children experience a range of equipment, so that the area is sometimes used for playing ball games, sometimes for using the climbing equipment and the trampoline and, at other times, for wheeled toys.
74. During the inspection, children pedalled tricycles and steered scooters confidently between obstacles, which included a set of 'traffic lights' and boxes lined up to suggest roads. These imaginative props brought the learning to life and provided children with ample opportunity to navigate and improve their skills of physical control. The make-believe scene also gave additional meaning when adults encouraged children to be careful not to run into other 'vehicles' or people.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Free expression and the development of individual creativity are very strong.
- Children's learning is promoted through excellent opportunities to visit museums and galleries and to work with artists.
- Opportunities for children to develop their imagination through role-play are outstanding.

Commentary

75. Children's excellent achievement in this area is the result of very good teaching and a range of rich learning experiences that enable them to develop their creativity and find ways of expressing themselves. By the time children leave the nursery, their attainment is above average overall and well above average in imaginative role-play. They are likely to exceed the Early Learning Goals by the end of the reception year.

Example of outstanding practice

Some exciting artwork enlivens the learning environment and bears testimony to the stimulating opportunities children have been given.

A large-scale wall-hanging, displayed over the stairwell, is made up of many pieces of creative collage produced by children, using mixed media to achieve magical and highly varied effects. As part of the local education authority's Education Action Zone initiative the nursery was able to take part in a creative arts project that involved children working with an artist to produce a series of mosaic tiles, which form a frieze in the outside area. A visit to the Fashion Museum resulted in children closely observing the textiles and decorative elements of costumes, then returning to the nursery to create their own designs, dye fabric, make felt and sew. This gave rise to an attractive range of outcomes and an exciting collaborative dress design.

76. There is an art room, where children have free access to a wide range of materials and they are given ample opportunity to paint, to work expressively with mixed media, or to mould play dough. During the inspection, children were making their play dough shapes more interesting by pressing iridescent marbles onto them and sprinkling them with sparkly fragments. Some children have explored techniques such as using watercolour crayons, and they are regularly given opportunities to try to record from observation as part of their overall work on a topic. A number of children have made drawings of the chicks hatching and others have drawn

caterpillars and butterflies. Drawings of frogs by higher-attaining children include a high degree of accuracy in observing and recording details such as the feet and shape of the head.

77. Children work and play in an environment that offers visual and tactile variety to stimulate their senses. The development of their visual perception and sense of touch are promoted, for example, through exploring the differing shapes and textures in the large bowl of shells, enjoying the attractive plants that they helped to set in the garden, and by gently experiencing the soft warmth of a growing chick, as well as through work in art and design. Their visual perception is further promoted by trips to galleries and museums.
78. Children have ready access to a wide range of props and dressing-up clothes to promote their imaginative play. Opportunities for spontaneous, as well as planned, play are excellent, supported by the imagination of the staff in providing a wealth of prompts. For instance, a child playing in the sandpit had access not only to the usual spades and containers, but also had bun trays and saucepans along with boxes to represent an oven. He carefully filled the bun tray, scraping off any surplus sand from each of the sand cakes, before popping the tin into the 'oven' to cook. On the side of the sandpit was a pile of recipe books, linking to the actual cooking children had done earlier in the week.
79. An appropriate range of musical instruments is easily accessible to the children at all times and they have explored the sounds that each instrument makes. They also have the opportunity to listen to music and songs over the headphones. Many children enjoy singing and some join in with the actions to favourite songs. During the inspection, a parent performed a series of folk dances, including Egyptian belly dancing, and this provided an excellent opportunity for children to learn about other cultures as well as to express themselves to the music. Some watched, spellbound; others gradually began to move to the music or played the drums, concentrating hard to match their playing to the beat in the taped music.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the centre	2
How inclusive the centre is	2
How the centre's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	8
Value for money provided by the centre	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Children's achievement	2
Children's attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	3
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well children learn	2
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets children's needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	2
Children's care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for children	2
How well the school seeks and acts on children's views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the centre's links with the community	2
The centre's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the centre	2
The governance of the centre	2
The leadership of the head of centre	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).