



Office for Standards
in Education

Aughton Early Years Centre Early Excellence Centre

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INSPECTION REPORT

**Aughton Early Years Centre
(Early Excellence Centre)**

Rotherham

Unique reference number: 106828

Head of Centre: Julie Turner

Reporting Inspector: Kathy Gisborne HMI

Dates of Inspection: 27-30 January 2003

This pilot inspection was carried out at the request of the Department for Education and Skills as part of its evaluation of the first Early Excellence Centres. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) elects that the inspection is deemed a Section 10 inspection and that the report shall be published.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Type of Centre:	Early Excellence Centre
Age range of children:	6 weeks to 5 years
Gender of children:	Mixed
Address:	Main Street Aughton Sheffield S26 3XH
Telephone:	0114 287 2530
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Appropriate authority:	Rotherham LEA
Chair of Governing Body:	Mrs Bernadette Bartholomew
Dates of inspection:	27 – 30 January 2003
Date of previous inspection: Section 10:	No previous inspection

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

The purpose of the inspection is to assure the government, parents and the public that the Centre's provision and services meet the criteria for Early Excellence Centres. Inspection also identifies strengths and weaknesses so that the Centre can improve the quality of care and education provision, and help children to achieve the best they can.

THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE INSPECTION REPORT

THE CENTRE AND ITS COMMUNITY

Aughton Early Years Centre, an Early Excellence Centre, was established in December 1999 as a partnership between Aughton Nursery School and Barnardo's Swings and Roundabouts Family Support team. It serves a mixed semi-urban and rural area that has experienced the decline of the coal and steel industries. A wide range of services is offered. These include: day care for children from six weeks to three years (the Young Children's Base); part-time and full-time nursery provision for children aged three to five years; a play group; a parent and toddler group; and extended day-care. The Centre provides curriculum training for early years' staff in settings and in schools. Family support for parents and carers is provided by Barnardo's, in the Centre and in the local community. Adult education, with crèche facilities, is at an early stage of development. The Centre provides places for children with complex special educational needs.

HOW SUCCESSFUL THE CENTRE IS

The Centre is effective and has many strengths. The Head of Centre and the senior staff provide very good leadership and effective management. The consistently good teaching in the nursery helps the children to learn well and achieve high standards. Support for families is well co-ordinated. The staff have a good understanding of what services the community needs, and are finding ways to set them up. They evaluate what they are doing and successfully share their good practice with other early years' practitioners. The Centre provides good value for money.

THE CENTRE'S MAIN STRENGTHS

- The very strong leadership and good management provided by the Head of Centre and key staff have led to very effective teamwork across the Centre's services.
- Teaching is good. Children in the nursery classes achieve well in all areas of learning and reach high standards in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical and creative development.
- Babies and toddlers in the Young Children's Base make very good progress because the staff make sure they feel secure, and care for and teach them well.
- Relationships with families, parents and carers are very good. The staff listen to their concerns and are keen to support them.

THE CENTRE NEEDS TO IMPROVE

Although the teaching is consistently good there are two areas for improvement.

- Teaching children in groups to develop specific skills is not always introduced early enough for a few children to enable them to make the progress they should.
- The children's awareness of cultures and beliefs is not broad enough.

NURSERY EDUCATION FOR 3 TO 5 YEAR OLDS

Standards – the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage for 3 to 5 year olds	Children enter the nursery with standards that are typical for their age. They make good progress, and are likely to achieve the national early learning goals in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development by the end of the reception year in primary school. In their knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development, and creative development they are likely to exceed the expected standards. They make very good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and achieve very high standards.
Teaching and learning	Good. The emphasis is on learning through play and the children respond enthusiastically. The staff work well together as a team. They understand how children of this age develop and give particular emphasis to the children learning as they play. Procedures for assessment are good. A few children though are not introduced to targeted teaching groups early enough.
Personal development	Very good. The promotion of personal development permeates every aspect of the nursery's work. Attendance and punctuality are very good and children are very well behaved. They make very good progress, and most achieve standards that are well above average for their age. The provision for cultural development is sound overall. Children's understanding and respect for their own, and other cultures and beliefs, is not yet broad enough.
Curriculum	Good. The curriculum is planned well and covers all the areas of learning. The staff provide interesting experiences and activities for the children both indoors and out. They ensure that the activities are relevant and appeal to children. A good range of visits and visitors enhances the curriculum.
Extended day care	Good provision is made for nursery children whose parents choose to have them stay for breakfast, lunch or tea. A good balance of planned activities both indoors and out is provided. These complement the children's experiences in the nursery and offer them a quiet and relaxing start and end to their day.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Very good. Children who have special educational needs are identified early and are given very effective support from staff and from specialists such as health, speech and language therapists. The children's learning plans are good because the staff have a very good knowledge of individual needs. This good knowledge of individuals' needs underpins the very good progress these children make.
Guidance, support and care	Very good. The Centre provides a very caring and supportive environment where all staff know the children and their families very well. Induction and transfer procedures are very effective. Children are prepared very well for their new schools. Arrangements for first aid and children's welfare are very good, and child protection procedures are excellent.

OTHER ASPECTS OF PROVISION

Leadership and management	Very good leadership. The head has successfully created a strong team of staff that shares a common vision and a clear direction for the Centre's development. The Centre is well managed. The senior staff have developed effective ways of co-ordinating services and initiatives in order to benefit everyone. The management committee provides sound advice to the Head of Centre and senior staff. The committee is enthusiastic about its forthcoming role as a formally constituted governing body.
Young Children's' Base	Very good. Staff respond sensitively to babies' and toddlers' interests and needs. Because of this the children feel secure and explore with confidence and concentration. They make very good progress in their learning and enjoy the wide range of experiences offered to them.
How well the Centre shares its good practice	Very good. The Centre works closely with two other maintained nursery centres to provide highly successful curriculum training for early years staff in settings and schools. The Centre has recently contributed to national guidance about including children with complex special needs in the Foundation Stage.
Family Services	Very good. The Centre staff are responsive to the needs of the community. The Barnardo's team provides a high level of support for a range of groups, within the Centre, in homes and the local community.
Playgroup	Good. The staff understand young children and successfully encourage them to develop a range of skills using many different activities.
Mum and baby, and mother and toddler groups in the Centre	Good. Staff help children to play with a good range of toys while parents and carers share ideas and concerns with each other and the Centre staff.
Community parent and toddler group toy library	Very good. Staff establish very good relationships with the mothers and their children. They play a major role in reducing their isolation by providing effective support for families and their children. The toy library run by parents is well organised and well used.
Links with parents	Very good. The Centre has become a focus for the local community. Staff make every effort to talk to parents and carers every day. There is excellent consultation with parents about what the Centre offers.

PARENTS' VIEWS ABOUT THE CENTRE

Parents are very supportive of the Centre and very happy with what it provides. They appreciate the high levels of support offered to children with special educational needs. They feel that the Centre is extremely well run and that they are kept well informed about their children's progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY

ABOUT THE CENTRE, ITS CHILDREN AND USERS

1. Aughton Early Years Centre, an Early Excellence Centre, provides a wide range of services for children and their families. It serves a mixed semi-urban and rural area that has experienced the decline of the coal and steel industries. The Centre provides eight places for children with complex special educational needs. These children are enabled to take part in the everyday life of the Centre. At the time of the inspection the children were very young and fairly new to the nursery. A number of the children, though, are familiar with the Centre through attending the Young Children's Base or the playgroup.

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS AND HOW EFFECTIVE ARE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Nursery

2. **The majority of children enter the nursery, at age three, with attainment typical for their age but there are wide variations. A high proportion of the teaching children receive is good, with very good or excellent teaching in one third of the sessions.** As a result children learn well. They are likely to achieve the early learning goals in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development by the end of the reception year in primary school. In the areas of knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development, and creative development their achievement is higher than that expected for their age. The quality of teaching and learning is best in personal, social and emotional development. In this area children make very good progress and achieve well above the level that is expected for children of this age.

Areas of Learning	
Personal, social, and emotional development	Teaching and learning are very good, because the staff incorporate personal development into every aspect of the life and work of the nursery. They are consistent in their approach to helping children behave well. Children enjoy the activities, play happily together, are confident and concentrate very well. Most children achieve standards that are well above those expected for their age.
Communication language and literacy	Teaching and learning are good. Most children will reach the early learning goals by the end of the reception year. They do especially well in developing their speaking and listening skills and exceed the expected standards in these aspects. Children enjoy looking at books. They learn how to write their names, and sound out letters.
Mathematical development	Teaching and learning are good and most children are achieving at a level that is appropriate for their age, with a group of more able children doing better. The children's counting skills and their recognition of numbers are particular strengths, and a small number of children are beginning to find their own solutions to mathematical problems.
Knowledge and understanding of the world	Teaching and learning are good. Most children reach a higher standard than is typical for their age. Children do particularly well in the aspects of this work that lay the foundations for the later study of science and information and communication technology (ICT).

Physical development	Teaching and learning are good. Children make good progress and reach a higher level than expected for their age. The children have a well-developed sense of space and show good body control. Many are developing good skills in handling small articles and can, for example, grip a pencil correctly.
Creative development	Teaching and learning are good, and overall children make good progress. They do best in drawing, painting, craft work, and in moving to music, where they achieve well above what is expected for children of this age.

3. Staff have a good knowledge of the curriculum for the Foundation Stage. They know how young children learn and plan interesting and suitable activities for children to find out by looking, listening and doing. An example of this was when children were introduced to Braille. Children listened to a story read by the teacher, looked at examples of Braille, and pretended that they were blind when they touched three-dimensional pictures and the Braille letters.
4. Most staff know when to intervene in children's activities to help them develop new skills or to improve what they are doing. For example, when a child was trying to play a musical instrument he was allowed to make every effort before a teacher modelled the best way to do it. Children who were learning to swing on a rope were encouraged to watch others and to learn from their actions. Children serving in the fish and chip shop were given encouragement to develop their own ways to successfully scoop up 'chips'. Very occasionally a few staff miss opportunities to intervene in order to ensure that children persevere with a task.
5. The staff make learning for children more interesting by altering the tone of their voice and using physical movements to demonstrate the meanings of words. They ask questions that encourage children to work out their own ideas. They are very aware of children's need to move about, and in individual activities generally a good balance between sitting still to listen and more active learning.
6. All staff work well together and enjoy being with the children. The obvious enthusiasm for their teaching is reflected in the children's attitudes to tasks. The staff are very good role models. They treat each other and the children with great respect and value children's work. For example, a teacher asked the permission of a child to rub her writing off a whiteboard so that another child could use the board. They make each individual child feel important when they greet them personally each morning.
7. Praise is used well. Children are taught the importance of helping each other and appreciating the achievements of others. Every effort is made to promote self-esteem and to give children opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, as when a child who lives on a farm was asked to tell another child the names of a range of farm animals. On a few occasions children do not act in an appropriate way but the staff are quick to respond. They are firm but fair, making sure that the children know that it is their action that is unacceptable and not themselves.
8. The teaching of children who have special educational needs is very good. Children and their families are given a very high level of support. Staff ensure that the children are included in all the activities within the nursery. They make children feel important. Physiotherapy sessions are excellent because the adults make them great fun and this means that children try really hard to complete the exercises.

9. Weekly planning is good and covers all areas of learning. The staff set up activities to meet the needs of the children of average ability but they use their good knowledge of the children, the curriculum and child development, to adapt the level of the activity to the needs of more able and less able children. In the main this works well, except for a few of the children who have attended the Young Children's Base and have too few opportunities to work together in targeted groups and to share their ideas. The balance between individual work and the teaching of groups to do particular things is not always appropriate to ensure that all children make the progress they can.
10. **There are good arrangements for assessment.** Family nursery workers carry out an assessment of what children know, and can do, when they begin in the nursery, and all staff contribute to these records. Parents appreciate the feedback they are given after their child's first month in the nursery. The nursery staff spend much time and effort in observing the children learning. However, they do not always track the extent to which individual children have experienced different areas of learning over a week. There is a tendency to rely on informal observations and the half-termly reviews of children's progress.

Young Children's Base

11. **Children under three in the Young Children's Base make very good progress in their learning.** This is because the staff make sure that they feel secure and are cared for and taught very well. Most children, by the time they leave the toddler room, are confident in relating to known adults and in using the resources available to them. Some are beginning to count to five, recognise their name and are attempting to 'write'. They know how to mix dry paint and use paintbrushes to make careful brush strokes on their paintings. Equipment is used skilfully and children show good control filling and pouring ladles and jugs in the water tray, or rolling and cutting play dough to make cakes.
12. The staff interact with the children particularly well. Their sensitivity to, and knowledge of, the children mean that they are skilled in encouraging and helping each child to make decisions and explore and do things for themselves. For example a little 2-year old girl was encouraged to do more to her painting by the adult asking, "Can you find a brush"? "See if you can find a space". "You've found a space at the top". "Which colour will you use now?" The child responded with great interest and enjoyment.
13. Staff capitalise well on opportunities to talk and listen to the children, asking them questions and confirming their individual responses. Both babies and toddlers go to books as a source of pleasure. They know their favourite books, how to turn the pages and look at the pictures. The staff build on and extend the children's existing knowledge by providing plenty of time to enjoy together rhymes, stories and songs. Children enjoy joining in refrains.
14. Staff are sensitive to children that are less confident and uncertain and quickly give individual attention and reassurance to them. The staff work together in a seamless way, skilfully supporting the children and each other as needed. Any upsets are quickly resolved in a positive way that helps children understand how to behave and relate to others.

15. Each child's achievements and progress are carefully noted, shared with parents and discussed each day by staff. They are also well used to identify and plan individual children's particular learning needs.
16. The rooms and outdoor area are well organised. Resources are of high quality and are used well to give children rich sensory experiences as well as stimulating them to explore and experiment. For example, 'treasure baskets' filled with interesting containers, tubes, strings of beads or feathers provide opportunities for children to concentrate and explore on their own, with staff intervening at the right moment to sustain the interest.

HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN'S PERSONAL QUALITIES DEVELOPED?

Nursery

17. **The personal, social and emotional development of children aged three to five years is very good, because the staff ensure that provision for children's personal development is included in every aspect of the life and work of the nursery.**
18. The staff provide very good opportunities for children to develop their social skills. Children form very good relationships with others and their self-esteem develops particularly well. Most children show social skills that are well beyond those that are expected for their age, and are likely to exceed the early learning goals by the end of the reception year.
19. The staff manage children's behaviour very well and are consistent in their expectations. Opportunities for moral development are very good. As a result, children know what is acceptable and how they should behave. They try hard to live up to the high expectations for their behaviour. They get on well together and take turns sensibly.
20. The children enjoy nursery, because they are so well supported and encouraged by the staff. The activities are interesting so children want to join in. The children concentrate very well, for instance when they persisted with cutting and joining materials even when they found tasks quite hard.
21. Attendance and punctuality are very good. Most parents report that their children, even when they are unwell, do not like to miss sessions. Most absence is attributable to childhood illness. Staff identify the very small number of children who do not attend regularly. They take time to talk with their families and offer support where they can.
22. The children develop very good levels of independence. The nursery is organised and run in a way that enables children to do things for themselves. For example, they can hang up their aprons after painting because they can easily reach the hooks. They move small photographs of themselves from one board to another to indicate when they have had their 'snack'. Staff take trouble to teach the children to tidy up, and even the youngest show pride in doing this.
23. The children's spiritual development is good. They are fascinated by the natural world. They became deeply involved in close observation of blocks of ice, feeling them and observing them beginning to melt. The children are encouraged to think of others, for example by raising funds for 'Help the Aged' and by making gifts for their parents at Easter. The involvement of children with special educational needs in all

aspects of nursery life gives children the opportunity to develop an appreciation of what all children have in common, as well as tolerance of differences.

24. The provision for children's cultural development is satisfactory. They learn about the local community through the good range of visits and visitors. For example, they visit the library, the Post Office and local churches, and road safety workers and fire fighters visit the nursery. The provision for multi-cultural education is satisfactory. The Centre provides opportunities for children to celebrate religious and secular festivals, for instance in nativity role-play and celebrating Hanukkah. However, there is scope to do more to raise the children's awareness of the richness and diversity of cultures in British society

Young Children's Base

25. **Babies and toddlers are settled and secure in their relationships with the staff that look after them.** They are stimulated by the very good support they receive from adults and this sustains their concentration and interest. Children are encouraged to be independent. For example, staff say to them "See if you can do it". They are taught how to look after themselves and help others. An example of this was when a 14-month baby, supported by an adult, was able to help find a clean vest for herself in a big bag of clothes. The involvement and sense of achievement was evident in her joy at accomplishing this.

HOW WELL DOES THE CURRICULUM MEET CHILDREN'S NEEDS?

Nursery

26. **The curriculum is planned well and covers all the areas of learning in the Foundation Stage.** The staff provide a good range of interesting experiences and activities for the children both indoors and out. Staff ensure that work appeals to the children and is relevant to their interests and their experience of the world. A good range of visits and visitors enhances the curriculum.
27. The staff know the children very well and, for the majority of children, they match the curriculum to their individual learning needs so that work becomes progressively more demanding as children acquire greater knowledge and skills. However, the balance of each child's activities, particularly in their first two terms at nursery, is at times too informal and the information about what they achieve is not always well used.
28. The special educational needs of children are effectively identified so that children can benefit from special teaching methods and advice from external support services at the earliest opportunity. The children's learning plans are good. They set precise objectives for each child's learning. These, combined with the staff's very good knowledge that staff have of their needs, underpin the very good progress these children make towards their targets.
29. The Centre is very well staffed, and the accommodation is well planned and organised with high quality resources to support work in all areas of learning. The resources for information and communication technology (ICT) and woodwork are particularly good. Everyone in the Centre makes very good use of the outdoor space and this provides an opportunity for children of all ages to meet together and enjoy learning from each other.

Young Children's Base

30. **The curriculum for children in the Young Children's Base is very good.** Appropriate emphasis is given to children's personal, social and emotional development, communication skills, and their cognitive and physical development. There is very good continuity for children who transfer to the nursery because their learning is ensured through a consistent system of records, visits to familiarise them with the nursery setting and much staff discussion.

HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN CARED FOR, GUIDED AND SUPPORTED?

31. **The Centre provides a very caring and supportive environment where all staff know the children and their families very well.** Most parents are very happy with the care and support provided for their children.
32. The close liaison between the Barnardo's staff and the other Centre staff has resulted in excellent child protection procedures. The Centre's policy is drawn up in line with the procedures laid down by the area child protection committee. All staff who work in the Centre have undertaken training in this area.
33. The staff ensure a very high level of care for children with special educational needs and include them fully in all activities. They research information about children's particular needs through a range of sources that include the Internet and links with national associations. They work closely with support services, such as speech therapy and physiotherapy to provide high quality additional support in the nursery.
34. Induction procedures for all groups of pupils within the Centre are very good. Children who are due to start nursery, and their carers, attend for a session. This gives them time to become familiar with the nursery base and to arrange drop-in visits before the child officially starts. Family nursery workers provide a good level of support to the new children and their families, and the children's records are shared with parents at the end of the first month in nursery. Staff carefully read comments from parents and carers and any concerns are addressed. The Centre shares updated records with parents each term.
35. Transfer arrangements to primary schools are very good. Children are very well prepared for their new schools. A member of staff accompanies the parents and children on their first visit to their chosen school and some school staff visit children in the nursery and exchange information.
36. **Great care is taken to induct both parents and their babies or toddlers into the Young Children's Base.** Staff make it their business to get, and exchange, information about individual children's needs, preferences and the progress they make on a daily basis. Meal times and routines such as changing nappies, are capitalised on by staff to use as social times to interact and talk with children.
37. Staff are particularly sensitive to occasions when children become anxious or unsettled, and quickly give them reassurance. One of the ways they do this is by using the collection of photos of children's' parents and family members to look at and talk about together.

HOW WELL DOES THE CENTRE WORK WITH PARENTS, CARERS AND THE COMMUNITY?

38. **The Centre has established very strong links with its parents and good links with its local community. All staff maintain a very close relationship with parents.** Parents hold the Centre in high regard and, in the one year it has been open, they feel it has become a focus for the local community.
39. Parents are provided with useful information about the Centre, such as booklets containing the necessary information for each age group. These, and letters to parents, are written in a clear and readable style. The Centre has an open door approach and offers parents many opportunities to speak to staff if they have any concerns. Parents are confident that their views are listened to, and that all staff are keen to support them and their children
40. The Centre makes every effort to find out about and respond to the needs of its community. The Centre's response to the views of those who rely on it is particularly good. For example, as a result of a request from parents, there has been a curriculum workshop on mathematics. Parents report that this has enabled them to provide better support for their children's learning at home. Other workshops are planned. Parents help in the Centre, for example with baking and reading stories to children. They also give valued help with visits and fund raising events such as the summer fair and Barnardo's Sponsored Toddle.
41. The Centre is developing good links with the community and has close and productive links with a local further and higher education college. This has enabled them to run courses such as healthy eating and first aid for adults. There are strong links with the local secondary school in order to provide training for ICT and mathematics for members of the community and the school staff.
42. The management committee is supportive and committed to meeting the needs of the community. For instance two members have set up a drop-in facility for grandparents and retired members of the community, which is well used. The committee sees this as a first step in involving members of the wider community in the Centre.

Family Services

43. **The quality of support for families provided by the Barnardo's team is very good. The team is extremely well led by a very enthusiastic and able manager.** The work of Barnardo's includes support for a range of groups and individual families within the Centre, the community, or their homes. The Barnardo's team move to the Early Excellence Centre building in March 2002 provided improved accommodation and enabled the service it offers to become even more flexible and responsive to the needs of the community. Its caseload has expanded rapidly since then. Barnardo's has very good relationships with other agencies that use the Centre and is seen as a part of the very good overall support that the Centre provides for a growing number of families. The way individual services work together, and the very good professional relationships that staff have with each other, is a strength of the Centre. The Centre is developing into a 'one-stop shop' where parents can get support and advice from a range of knowledgeable professionals.
44. Barnardo's workers have very good relationships with the mothers and their children. The parent and toddler group that is sited in a local church hall provides particularly good opportunities for parents to meet together. Individual parents speak of their

isolation at moving to a new area and of difficulties with their children. They appreciate the support that this group has given them.

45. The Centre is flexible and responsive to the needs of the community. For example, when some parents found it hard to get to the Centre a play and learn bus, organised by Barnardo's and Social Services, was arranged for a local venue. Parents particularly like the toddler story times in the community library and a toddler dance group in the local community.
46. A good range of other groups and facilities are provided within the Centre. These include a recently opened playgroup, where staff provide good activities such as acting out number rhymes, opportunities for imaginative play and exciting opportunities to explore outdoors and interact with other children from the Centre. Children are able to play on their own or with others. The staff have a good understanding of children of this age. They encourage them to develop their skills across a wide range of areas.
47. Provision in the mum and baby group and the mother and toddler group is good. The older children are encouraged to play whilst parents and carers take time to talk to each other on an informal basis and share concerns with each other or the staff of the Centre. A well-organised toy library provides a range of high quality books and toys and is used by a large number of families. The toys are effectively catalogued in a book of photographs; children, with their parents, browse through the photographs and talk about what they would like and why.

HOW WELL IS THE CENTRE LED AND MANAGED?

48. **The very strong leadership and good management provided by the head of the Centre and key staff** have led to very effective teamwork across the Centre's services. Many of the staff are new but, nonetheless, everyone shares common principles which are focused on improving and extending the range of services that the Centre provides. They are committed to the integration of high quality services for children, families and other 'users'. Through careful self-evaluation, the head of Centre and staff have accurately identified the right priorities and have put in place successful strategies for developing the Centre. These are reflected in the Development Plan. Targets are designed to help improve current services and create new ones.
49. A clear management structure, underpinned by well-defined roles and responsibilities, unites effectively senior staff from the different services. It has enabled them to find cohesive ways of linking services and initiatives. Their collaborative approach is a real strength of the Centre's work. For instance, distressed or vulnerable parents can bring their children to the nursery and, at the same time, quickly gain access to support systems from both the nursery and Barnardo's staff. This helps parents to tackle their problems and reduces their isolation. As a result parents become more able to care for their children and support their learning.
50. Senior staff have an effective monitoring programme to check on the quality of teaching, the curriculum being delivered, and the impact these have on children's learning. The recent focus, for example, on ways in which the nursery staff ask children questions has led to an improvement in their questioning techniques. Similarly, the targets for improving mathematics have helped the children to develop better skills in recognising numbers and counting. Overall, provision in the areas of learning is securely managed by the subject co-ordinators. Their roles have been

strengthened recently in order that they can carry out regular and systematic observation of the teaching of their areas of learning.

51. There is good collaboration with another Early Excellence Centre and Beacon Nursery School, for example, they are developing a more systematic approach to tracking and evaluating the progress of each entry group of children so that they are better able to review patterns of learning and the strengths and weaknesses in teaching.
52. Performance management for teachers and appraisal systems for other staff, have been brought together well and objectives are linked securely to priorities for improvement for the Centre as a whole. Notes of mid-year reviews are succinct, identify the progress staff are making towards meeting their objectives and record what still needs to be done. A commitment to the professional development of all staff is evident. A strong emphasis is placed on improving the quality of teaching and curriculum provision and on finding educational opportunities for individuals. Consequently, a good number of staff have taken up further study leading to professional qualifications. These include National Vocational Qualifications, degrees and qualified teacher status. Training and further study have opened up opportunities for the career development of staff.
53. The management committee provides sound advice to the head of Centre and senior staff, but does not yet have statutory responsibilities or a delegated budget. The lack of a delegated budget has limited its ability to support senior managers with advice about longer-term planning and financial decisions. However, in the near future it is to become a formally constituted governing body with a fully delegated budget. Members of the management committee are enthusiastic about their new role. They have started to consider the implications of the changes ahead, but have not yet devised a systematic plan that will help them to prepare for formal governance. Individual members of the committee make regular visits to the Centre and this ensures that they are involved well in it. The management committee has a good understanding of the overall strengths of services, especially in relation to family support.
54. The Centre makes efficient use of its finances to maintain very good levels of staffing and to resource developments and improvements. The Centre's day to day finances are managed carefully by the administrator and regularly monitored by the head of the Centre. The head is well placed to support the management committee in its preparations for full delegation. The management committee has a basic understanding of the principles of best value and is evaluating the impact of the use of funding for building extensions. The Centre consults parents and its users regularly and takes very good account of their views. Effective self-evaluation is well established and the staff demonstrate a very good commitment to continuing improvement.
55. **The Centre has found very good ways of sharing its good practice.** It has very effective links with the other two Local Education Authority (LEA) nursery Centres and together they plan, write materials and deliver the training for the Foundation Stage curriculum. This collaborative approach benefits staff and children in each of the nursery Centres as they share their expertise, resources and ideas. For instance, ideas from one of the Centres have been adapted successfully by staff to improve children's language and thinking skills – one of their current development plan priorities. The early years staff in different settings and schools value the training that they receive.

56. This joint work is firmly embedded in the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and the LEA's strategy for improving the quality of education in the Foundation Stage across all settings and schools.
57. The Head of Centre and key staff are identified as mentors by the LEA. They successfully support heads and senior staff of other Centres, schools and pre-school settings to help them develop services and improve the quality of nursery education.
58. The Centre hosts a large number of visitors each year and gives good advice about setting up an Early Excellence Centre. It also provides good quality placements for students engaged in a wide range of training such as national vocational qualifications, teacher training and degree courses in early childhood studies.

WHAT SHOULD THE CENTRE DO TO IMPROVE?

59. In order to further improve the already good standards, the Head of Centre and staff should:
 - review the timing for the introduction of more focused group teaching activities within the nursery;
 - find ways to widen children's awareness of other cultures and beliefs.

The governing body is responsible for drawing up an action plan within 40 working days of receipt of this report showing how the key issues detailed above will be addressed. The action plan must be made available to all parents.

WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN AGED 3 TO 5 YEARS?

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (paragraphs 17-25)

Communication, language and literacy

60. **Teaching is good in this area and overall, the children achieve well.** Most children are on course to meet the early learning goals by the end of the reception year.
61. All the nursery staff promote speaking and listening skills very well. They assess children's language skills at an early stage so that children with particular difficulties receive effective support from the start. For instance, these children receive weekly speech therapy, and the nursery staff supplement this with daily support. As a result of the effective teaching and additional therapy for those that need it, almost all children become confident speakers and attentive listeners. The children that transfer from the Young Children's Base make especially good gains.
62. The staff are skilled at keeping up good levels of conversation, supplying new vocabulary, key words and phrases at the right time. They take every opportunity to encourage the children to talk, giving them time to think things through and respond. This aspect of children's language development is currently a particular focus for further improvement. The consistent emphasis on the development of speaking and listening skills leads to high standards in these aspects. Consequently, the majority of older children speak confidently both to each other and to adults. They can give simple explanations and pose questions.

63. The staff put careful thought into ways of developing children's respect for and enjoyment of books. There is a comfortable reading area, set out with a few well-chosen books, and children have access to a small library of fiction and non-fiction books. The children enjoy reading to each other, adults and the large bear who waits on a comfortable sofa to hear their stories. The majority of children handle books with care, turning the pages the right way. Older and more capable children can use pictures to sequence the main aspects of familiar stories in their own words. The children are starting to use words and phrases that they hear in stories like 'Goldilocks and the three bears' when they play outside.
64. The staff effectively use resources such as soft toys, puppets, story sacks, poetry packs and big books to capture the children's attention and sustain their interest. Some of the best teaching seen took place where staff were confident enough to 'tell' parts of the stories. This meant that they were able to use the props available and could draw attention to particular features of the pictures to enhance the text.
65. Teachers emphasise the skills needed for reading and writing well. For instance, staff teach letter sounds and names, linking them to the symbols that the children use when they write. On many occasions, adults were observed encouraging children to 'sound out' the letters in their names. This consistent approach leads to good progress in children's awareness of letter sounds. Older children can hear the initial letters in familiar words, and some are starting to recognise the sounds at the ends of words.
66. Staff provide children with good opportunities and plenty of encouragement to 'have a go' at writing for a purpose, such as when they 'write' invitations to parties and descriptions of their pictures, or when they copy labels for their models. Children have easy access to writing materials in the role-play and writing areas. A soft toy – 'Sidney bear', is used effectively to help children to understand that words can be a form of communication. They take Sidney home and their parents record Sidney's activities with the family. Staff give parents useful advice about the style of writing used in the nursery, with a reminder about the correct use of upper and lower case letters.
67. Children are routinely encouraged to 'write' their names and good attention is drawn to the use of capital letters at the start of their names. A few of the more capable children copy sentences written for them by adults and with help, can sound out the words needed for short sentences. Very occasionally there are missed opportunities. For instance, those children that are ready are not always shown how to write the letters correctly, or reminded to use their name cards as prompts, and sometimes they are not helped to use the alphabet cards available.
68. Although the staff provide focused early literacy teaching activities towards the end of the children's time in the nursery, a few children are ready for more challenge before this. The staff have not thought through how they might group the children to reinforce and extend their writing skills at an early enough stage.

Mathematical development

69. **The teaching of mathematics is good overall and as a result the children achieve well.** Most are on course to achieve the early learning goals by the end of the reception year, with a number of children likely to exceed them.
70. Number skills are taught well. The children's counting skills are strong and many are recognising numbers to ten. They count as they touch objects, giving one number to each object. A few children are beginning to order numbers correctly. The children

who enter the nursery from the Young Children's Base have received a good grounding in numbers, and the staff in the nursery build well on this.

71. The staff give good attention to the development of the language of mathematics and the teaching of shape. The older children, and many of those who have attended the young Children's Base or the playgroup, have a good knowledge of the names of flat shapes such as circle, square or triangle. They know that a square has four sides and four corners. When they are playing outdoors they run to the triangle shaped house and they are beginning to recognise some of the simple shapes around them. They have a growing understanding of mathematical language such as tallest and shortest, heaviest and lightest.
72. Children are encouraged to learn mathematics through their play. For example, a train set was used effectively to enable children to number and order the carriages. In these activities most staff skilfully develop learning at a level that is in line with the children's ability.
73. Staff make the most of helping children to learn mathematics through everyday activities. For example, when they ask children to count candles on a birthday cake, to count the buns they have baked, or to fetch three large bricks to build a boat for their bear hunt.
74. When they are working with individual children the staff make good use of the opportunities that arise to develop children's mathematics and to encourage them to solve simple mathematical problems. A small number of children are beginning to find their own solutions to problems. For example, when asked to draw six objects and find out how many there would be if one is repeatedly taken away, a child independently drew a ring around the one to be removed and recounted. She continued this strategy, giving an ongoing verbal account of the numbers until she reached zero. However, there are not always enough planned opportunities for children to work in small groups to talk about their ideas of how to solve a problem and to share these ideas with others.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

75. **The quality of teaching and learning are good and children achieve well.** They are on course to exceed the early learning goals by the end of the reception year at primary school. Children do particularly well in the aspects of this work that lay the foundations for later study of science and ICT.
76. The staff give children good, first-hand practical experiences to stimulate their curiosity, to help them make sense of the world, and to develop the skills they need to make things. For example, children visit the bakery in a local supermarket and a butterfly farm, they plant sunflowers and observe their growth, and they use an excellent range of resources for woodwork.
77. The children make good progress in learning about the natural world. For example, staff draw their attention to seasonal changes. The attractive display of pictures, objects and books effectively reinforced children's knowledge and understanding of winter weather and how trees change in winter. By the time they leave nursery, children are able to keep a simple record of day-to-day changes in the weather.
78. Staff pay good attention to helping the children develop the skill of close observation, needed for scientific work. For example, they brought in interesting objects, such as attractive large pebbles for children to look at and investigate. They encouraged

children to compare the feel of the different materials and to talk about their contrasting textures.

79. Children reach well above average standards in their knowledge and understanding of materials and their properties. For example, the more capable children can sort materials according to whether they float or sink and whether they are magnetic or not, and they record their findings on simple charts. Staff question children skilfully to help them learn from practical activities, such as baking. Consequently the children remember what ingredients they have used and they know how cake mixture changes when it is cooked.
80. Children have well above average skills in using ICT because they are taught well. Children in their second term use simple computer programs independently. They control the mouse very well to click on icons. They use a drop down menu and print their work, often unaided.
81. Children's skill at making things is above average. Staff provide a good range of opportunities for them to practise the skills needed to cut, stick and join a variety of materials and to use a wide range of construction kits. The children have a very purposeful and determined approach to designing and making. They concentrate very hard and persist in their efforts. Staff match the level of challenge in these activities well to each child's level of skill.
82. Children make satisfactory progress in developing a sense of time and place. Many who are in their second term find it hard to talk about things they have done in the past, for instance what they did at nursery yesterday. However, evidence kept from last term shows that children have sufficient opportunities to learn about the past. They visit the museum and handle objects from the past, such as old toys. The children are developing an appropriate understanding of the differences between places. For example, the older ones understand that some parts of the world have a much colder climate than Britain.

Physical development

83. **Children's physical development is good. They are well taught and their skills are improving at a good pace.** Most children are likely to exceed the early learning goals by the end of their time in the reception class.
84. The staff are well aware of the children's skills and levels of confidence. They provide them with frequent access to play equipment outdoors. The children have a good sense of space and are confident to demonstrate their skills and to try out new ideas. When playing with wheeled toys such as bikes and prams they move fast, but skilfully avoid collisions with others. They learn how to swing on a rope and are proud of their achievements. The majority of children have a very good sense of balance and are aware of safety issues, such as not using the climbing apparatus when wearing Wellington boots and waiting until the slide is clear before zooming down.
85. The children have good body control. When playing, many can skip, hop, tiptoe and walk backwards, making every effort to look over their shoulders to avoid bumping into others. Their skills of throwing are less well developed but they persevere as they try to throw quoits at containers.
86. The staff are particularly good at developing children's use of small tools. They allowed the children to experiment before demonstrating or suggesting how to improve, as was seen when children were hammering nails. Adults encourage

children to try out different techniques such as using cellotape, or glue and a spreader, to join materials, and give them lots of practice at cutting for a range of purposes. As a result of much practice and skilful teaching the children are able to hold pencils correctly, peel off tiny self-adhesive numbers to stick on a train and use fine paint brushes skilfully to mix colours.

Creative Development

87. **Teaching is good and children achieve well.** The quality of their work in some aspects is particularly good, for example their awareness and skill in mixing different colours of paint, the detail in their drawings, their craft work and the way they move and dance in response to different music. They are likely to well exceed the early learning goals in these areas.
88. Staff carefully introduce children to different types of media and teach particular techniques and skills well. For example, how to use clay tools, or join edges to make a structure. Children use these skills to express their own ideas. They select their materials and make choices about how they will use them. The impact of this good teaching is seen in the children's sustained involvement and concentration.
89. Children listen well to different kinds of music, explore rhythms, sounds and patterns together using percussion instruments. Sometimes this stimulates children to move and dance spontaneously. They are introduced to, and learn, a core of songs that they join in singing enthusiastically.
90. The teaching of dance is excellent and the children's response and achievement are well above expectations. Once a week older children enjoy a structured dance session. They listen intently stopping and moving adeptly to different sounds. They use their own ideas imaginatively to express, for example, gentle light movements.

ANNEX 1: RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF PARENTS AND CARERS

Questionnaire return rate

88%

Number of questionnaires sent out

75

Number of questionnaires returned

66

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes coming to Aughton Early Excellence Centre	95%	5%	0	0	0
I am happy with the way staff handle behaviour	94%	6%	0	0	0
Staff talk to me about my child's progress	77%	18%	3%	2%	0
I would approach staff if I had a problem or a question about what was happening	95%	5%	0	0	0
Staff care about my child and want him/her to do well	91%	9%	0	0	0
I believe that Aughton Early Excellence Centre is well managed and led	91%	9%	0	0	0
Aughton Early Excellence Centre is helping my child become confident and make friends	88%	11%	0	0	1%
I think that Aughton Early Excellence Centre provides good learning experiences for my child	88%	11%	0	0	1%
Aughton Early Excellence Centre provides good support for children with special needs	71%	11%	0	0	18%
I feel involved in my child's learning	71%	21%	0	0	8%
I feel that my child safe and well cared for	97%	3%	0	0	0

ANNEX 2: RESULTS OF THE SURVEY ABOUT OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED

Questionnaire return rate

100%

Number of questionnaires sent out

69

Number of questionnaires returned

69

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The staff are welcoming, approachable and helpful	95%	5%	0	0	0
The courses/workshops/ drop-in sessions are well run and organised	88%	12%	0	0	0
The environment for adults attending courses/work-shops/drop-in sessions is appropriate	83%	15%	0	0	2%
I have benefited from the courses/workshops/ drop-in sessions that I have attended	87%	12%	0	0	2%

Notes

