

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS CENTRE NURSERY

Lee Bank, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103124

Headteacher: Ms Fran Munby

Lead inspector: Mr Michael Hewlett

Dates of inspection: 4th - 6th May 2004

Inspection number: 256344

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Maintained
Age range of pupils:	0 - 5 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	72 in the Foundation Stage maintained nursery
School address:	Bell Barn Road Lee Bank Birmingham
Postcode:	B15 2AF
Telephone number:	0121 464 0003
Fax number:	0121 464 0035
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Maureen Saunders
Date of previous inspection:	May 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Thomas Centre is an Early Excellence Centre offering a wide range of services for young children and their families. The nursery school is an integral part of the centre and contributes to the extensive range of services on offer. It is situated in the Lee Bank area of Birmingham, which is close to the town centre. Whilst the immediate area of the Centre is being redeveloped, a feature of the catchment is the high incidence of social deprivation and high unemployment. There are 72 children on roll in the maintained nursery, aged between 3 and 5 years. The overwhelming majority attend full-time, with only one child presently attending part-time. Eleven children are identified as requiring additional support but none of them have a statement of special educational needs. Of those children with special needs, the majority have social and emotional difficulties, whilst the remainder represent the full range of additional needs, including speech difficulties. A small percentage of children, 3 per cent, are in public care. The children come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with the majority of families coming from African-Caribbean origin. Around 20 per cent of children are of white, British heritage, with a much smaller proportion coming from families who are asylum seekers. Fourteen per cent of the children are learning English as an additional language, with most of them at an early stage of language acquisition. The major community languages are Korean, Toruba and Shona. When children start maintained nursery, their skills and knowledge in most areas of learning are similar to those typical for their age. The nursery has undergone major changes in recent years. It has changed its name, relocated in 2000 to become part of the Excellence Centre initiative and undergone an extensive building programme. St Thomas Centre is open all year round, providing extended care and outreach support for families, as well as working with other early years' settings throughout Birmingham, offering training and advice. It was designated an Early Excellence Centre in 2001 and received a school achievement award in 2002. Early Excellence Centres are part of a government initiative aimed at providing high quality, integrated education and care for young children. Among the additional services available, the centre also incorporates full day care for babies, toddler groups, a 'Centre for Research in Early Childhood',

as well as strong links with health and 'NCH The Children's Charity'. These additional services were not included in the inspection.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Thomas Centre nursery is a very good nursery where children achieve very well. They make very good progress because staff offer them such a rich, exciting curriculum and teaching is good. Leadership and management, links with parents and standards of care are all very good.

The nursery's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Children are well on course to exceed the goals expected of them;
- Teaching is good overall, often very good but, on occasions, some learning opportunities are missed;
- Leadership and management by the headteacher and senior staff are very good;
- There is a very good curriculum with excellent opportunities for enrichment;
- Provision for every group of children is very good and support and guidance are excellent;
- Children behave very well and have very good attitudes to learning because provision for their personal development is so strong.

The nursery has changed in many ways, including its name and location, since the last inspection, which was carried out in 1997. So many changes have occurred in the intervening years that a direct comparison is impossible, but the nursery has responded very well to the many challenges it has faced. These include its designation as part of an Early Excellence Centre, providing full day care for children from as young as six weeks old as well as offering a range of extended services.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Children achieve very well. They are on course to well exceed the goals they are expected to reach at the end of reception year in all the areas of learning. Overall, this represents very good achievement and applies to the many different groups of children within the centre, such as those with additional needs, higher attainers and those who come from different cultural backgrounds, some of whom are new to English.

Children's personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. There is a positive ethos throughout the centre which is apparent in the very good behaviour and enthusiasm that children show. They get on very well with one another and readily take on responsibilities. Attendance levels are satisfactory and the majority of children arrive on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the nursery is very good. Teaching and learning is good overall with many examples of very good teaching. Curriculum provision is very good. An exciting curriculum is carefully planned, with excellent opportunities for enrichment, This grabs children's interest, keeps them actively involved and, as a result, they learn well. Very good use is made of the local area to enrich the nursery's work and staff continually challenge children to do their best. On a few occasions, learning opportunities are not taken. This happens when adults give children too much support and they miss the chance to improve their language skills.

Partnership with parents and other agencies is very effective. The nursery offers a wide range of extended services. This has a direct impact on children's education because parents are provided with a wealth of information and are encouraged to become actively involved in their children's work. Support and guidance is excellent and children feel secure, safe and are happy to come to school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the headteacher and her senior colleagues is very good. They provide excellent vision and direction for the nursery with children's needs at the very heart of what they do. There is a strong commitment to improvement and raising standards in all the nursery's work.

Management is very good. There is a rigour about checking procedures that helps to maintain the high standards of education and care. Data collected on children's progress is carefully analysed and the information is used very effectively to plan future work and make changes to the curriculum. Systems for monitoring teaching and learning are effective and have already identified gaps in the quality in some of the teaching. Governance is satisfactory. The new governor team only started at the beginning of the school year and it is too soon for them to have had a major impact. Nevertheless, they are already actively involved in helping to improve the nursery. They organise their work well and fulfil all their legal responsibilities.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and children are very proud of the nursery and talk readily about its achievements. Parents value the comprehensive range of information and support they receive and are complimentary about the headteacher and staff. These views are fully justified.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

In the context of a very effective nursery, the St Thomas Centre Nursery needs to improve the consistency of teaching by:

- Making sure opportunities for children to learn are not missed.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning

Achievement throughout the nursery is very good. Most children are on course to well exceed the standards expected by the end of the Foundation Stage in each of the areas of learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's achievement is very good;
- Children with additional needs make very good progress.

Commentary

1. When children start maintained nursery provision in the term after their third birthday, their skills are similar to those usually found in children of the same age. During their time in the nursery they progress rapidly along the 'stepping stones' towards the standards they should reach by the end of their reception year, when they complete the Foundation Stage. The majority are on course to well exceed the expected standards in all the areas of learning. This represents very good progress.
2. A high priority is given to raising children's confidence, self-esteem and their ability to work well with others. This results in children making very good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. They achieve very well and manage to establish very good relationships. Most are enthusiastic and stay focused on activities for very long periods, which is unusual in children so young.
3. Because of the very close attention paid to improving children's speaking and listening and early reading and writing, they make very good progress in these areas. As a result, all children in the nursery achieve very well and, by the time they leave, the majority are on course to reach standards that are well above average for their age in all aspects of this vital area of learning.
4. Children achieve very well in their mathematical development. This is because staff provide them with an exciting range of practical activities that grabs their interest and encourages them to practise their mathematical skills. As a result, they also make very good progress in this area. A particular strength is the way in which children are able to apply their skills in other parts of the curriculum, such as when they play outside.
5. Children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them is improving rapidly. They achieve very well in this area and they are particularly good at describing what they see as they carry out simple experiments. Most have a very good understanding of place and time, are eager to talk about where they live and how much they enjoy their visits to places of local interest.
6. In physical development and creative development, children achieve very well. Standards are well above average by the time they leave. Children show very good skills when they paint and draw. The majority move confidently, have a good awareness of space and handle tools confidently.

7. An outstanding feature of the nursery's work and one of the major reasons why the children achieve so well is the way it identifies, early on, just what each child needs to do to succeed. This enables those with additional needs, such as higher attainers, those who find learning difficult, those who are in public care, children just arrived in the country and those who are new to English, to do very well and receive very good support. Strategies include withdrawing groups for specialist input, careful planning that takes account of their individual needs and working with parents so that they can consolidate what has been learnt in school. In addition, children in public care have detailed plans which map out their needs in the widest sense. Evidence from observations, children's profiles and assessments all demonstrate that these procedures are very effective. It makes it possible for the inspection to confirm that there are no significant differences in the rates of progress made by children of different gender or backgrounds.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Children maintain very good attitudes to school and equally impressive standards of behaviour. Provision for children's personal, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Adults engineer spiritual and moral experiences of the highest order for every child;
- There is a consistent approach by staff to all aspects of behaviour;
- Children participate enthusiastically in all the activities;
- The multicultural mix of children and families is welcomed and celebrated by staff.

Commentary

8. The words of one parent at the pre-inspection meeting neatly sum up these children's attitudes towards the nursery - 'She's really mad when she can't come'. The vast majority of children rush in eagerly, looking around immediately for their favourite activities, confident that staff will really make them feel at home. Much of the children's enthusiasm rubs off on their parents and many stay for a few minutes to look at particular areas of the classroom with their children. There is a friendly hubbub that entices the children to settle down with an adult within minutes of arriving. This is due, for the most part, to the professionalism of the staff who do their utmost to spike children's curiosity and make them keen to explore activities in more depth.
9. Teachers are particularly adept at creating spiritually uplifting learning experiences for children of all ages. For example, some staff pursue a relentless quest to fill the outdoor play areas with areas of natural beauty and wonder. They engage the services of environmental specialists to teach children how to make the most of the garden, what to grow and how best to tend these natural habitats so as to nurture the wildlife. Spontaneous opportunities to watch the cycle of life are snapped up by staff as they let children witness what happens to the natural landscape when manmade developments intervene. They watched with awe and dismay as trees were felled but were able to make good use of some of the logs and stumps to make seats for the nursery garden. Adults are relentless in their pursuit of inspirational experiences for children, be these bird watching in total silence or knowing the total exhilaration of playing in a band of African drums.
10. It is no accident that the nursery is an intrinsically orderly, if outwardly bustling, community. Some of the classrooms are large and children spill everywhere as they go about their daily tasks. Everyone, however, is gainfully employed, knows exactly what they are trying to do and is well aware of how they should approach each task. Adults in every area of the nursery

exhibit unending patience, coupled with consistently high expectations for each child. Children with particular behavioural problems are offered very effective support. On rare occasions, the nursery has to exclude a child because all other methods have been tried. Children know the expected standards of behaviour and generally follow these extremely well. They are polite and take turns with equipment and when queuing for lunch.

11. The school offers very good opportunities for children to extend their social and cultural experiences. A multitude of visitors come into classes and children go on a stream of visits around the community. These broaden their understanding of the wider world beyond home and the nursery. The headteacher and staff spend time evaluating how well they and the children understand their own and other cultures. Staff ensure that the cultural backgrounds of all children are celebrated and they try to involve families in these festivities as they bring a much valued additional dimension to activities.
12. Attendance rates and punctuality are satisfactory for children of this age. Both are rising due to the headteacher's increased emphasis on regular attendance and good timekeeping with parents.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good overall and are often very good. Occasionally some learning opportunities are missed;
- Staff plan their lessons very well and make sure that children are interested and stimulated;
- Relationships are very good and staff set children exciting tasks that suit their individual needs;
- Behaviour is very good and this produces an atmosphere that is conducive to learning;
- Very effective assessment procedures are used well to track children's progress.

Commentary

13. The very good relationships between adults and children make a major contribution to the quality of learning, which is good overall. Adults very effectively encourage children to try hard and do their best, and these high expectations encourage children to apply themselves energetically to the chosen tasks. Detailed planning of work, followed by evaluations by all the adults, ensures that challenging yet achievable activities are introduced. Consequently, children regularly experience success and the praise that follows it. Very accurate assessment systems mean that all adults have a very clear understanding of where children have reached and what they have to do next. The assessments made are very detailed and they ensure that work is set at just the right level for the many groups of children represented in the nursery. As a result, staff are able to offer an exciting and stimulating range of activities that support children's learning in all areas of the curriculum. Adults often share their expertise with the children, particularly in clay modelling and art activities, and this results in children achieving very well. Occasionally, activities are missed to extend further children's communication skills, because they are given too much support or not given enough time to practice the new words that have been introduced. Visiting experts make very good contributions to the quality and range of children's experiences, enabling them to extend their knowledge and skills to very high levels. There is very good continuity within the planning of learning experiences, extending from the Toddler Group through to the older children. This ensures that what the adults plan for the children in their care continually builds on their previous learning.

14. A high emphasis is placed on promoting children's personal, social and emotional development. Teaching is very strong, and one of its strengths is the way all adults are consistent about the way they expect the children to behave, providing them with a chance to build their confidence and self-esteem. Adults know the children very well and consequently, no one is left out, for example when they are using construction materials or working directly with adults and engaged in art or clay activities. As a result, children are fully involved and those who find difficulty in sharing, taking turns or articulating their ideas are caringly supported. This makes everyone feel valued and successful.
15. Staff are experienced and knowledgeable in the teaching of language and communication and put their skills to good use. There is a systematic approach that carefully builds on children's previous learning and understanding and then provides them with small steps to accomplish, linked to the assessments staff have made. This means that when any of the adults are working with a group, they have a clear picture of the kind of vocabulary that is appropriate to use. This, in turn, enables children to practise words they know, use them in different situations and build up a bank of new words that have been shared with them by the adult support. Children who have special needs, particularly those with very limited communication skills, benefit tremendously from some very good teaching that builds on this approach, with staff demonstrating great patience and skill as they encourage group members to contribute. Occasionally some opportunities are lost when, for example, opportunities for role play are not immediately taken following very good adult enactments of well known children's stories. Children are regularly introduced to books and by the time they leave the nursery many have developed a love of books. They handle them correctly and carefully and enjoy the illustrations.
16. Mathematical development is taught well and staff are successful at setting up practical opportunities for children to try out their mathematical understanding in other curriculum areas. For example, when children have built a tower using wooden blocks, they are encouraged to count the number of blocks they have used and identify the tallest and shortest. Creative work with clay is used well to introduce mathematical language, with children being asked to find out which is the longest snake. Imaginative play is used successfully to reinforce their understanding of number value. Because the staff understand how young children learn, their organisation and contribution to activities helps to place children's mathematical development in lots of interesting and practical experiences. This speeds up their rate of progress.
17. Teaching across other areas of learning is of a similarly high standard and this helps to explain why children's achievements are so consistent during their time in the nursery. All staff working very effectively together set high standards with good levels of challenge in activities that require children to try hard. Staff work together effectively setting very good examples to children. They make it clear about the standards that are expected, because this is continually explained in a positive and constructive way. Very good behaviour is a feature of all the activities. All staff are skilled in helping some children control aggressive behaviour and the calm, ordered atmosphere has a big impact on children's learning, as it means they can get on with their work unhindered and with confidence.
18. Staff make good use of accommodation and resources to support their teaching and help children learn. The building is continually being refurbished and adapted. The larger room, used by the older children, is difficult to manage with no partitions or screens high enough to break up such a big space. Nevertheless, it is used very effectively by the adults to create contrasting areas of learning and respond to the needs of different groups of children.

19. The outdoor area used by the younger children, although small in area, presents a world of discovery and investigation. The large outdoor area continues to be improved and is used well to support some of the areas of learning

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 29 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	12	10	7	0	0	0

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

The curriculum

The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils very well. Opportunities provided to enrich pupils' learning are excellent. Resources for teaching and learning are good. Accommodation is good because the best use is made of it.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very well planned statutory curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of additional activities;
- The curriculum ensures that children achieve very high standards in personal development;
- Staff are of a very high calibre. They are well qualified and experienced for the age group with whom they work and ensure that the curriculum is well matched to the developmental needs of the children;
- The good quality of adult support and the programmes of work provided for different groups of children ensure they make very good progress and achieve very well;
- The leadership and management of the curriculum are very good and ensure that every activity is evaluated and adjusted if necessary for future lessons.

Commentary

20. The curriculum is very carefully thought out and structured to meet the needs of different groups very well. From the time children start nursery, activities are designed to build upon what has been taught and learned previously. This consistent approach to the curriculum in every room means that children with different needs can be placed in the age group most suited to their developmental stage. Staff take great pains to find out what children know, understand and can do when they start nursery and successfully use this information as a starting point for planning. Lessons planned in each class systematically build upon what has been taught previously and transition from room to room is as seamless as possible, because all staff use similar systems of planning. Some music and dance aspects of creative development are outstanding because they benefit from the technical abilities of visiting professionals who are skilled in working with young children. In these lessons, children learn dances and songs from a wide range of other cultures.
21. In addition to the statutory national curriculum, the nursery also provides an excellent range of exciting additional activities. These include swimming, horse riding and residential visits to a nearby farm. These activities provide an extra dimension to the day-to-day curriculum in the nursery, especially in children's personal development by increasing their range of experiences and learning opportunities. They learn to get along with one another outside the confines of the nursery, to mix with other adults and how to care for animals and the

environment. All this enhances children's spiritual, social, moral and cultural development very well.

22. Staff in the nursery are of a very high calibre. They anticipate situations that are likely to create difficulties for those who find conforming to the very high expectations of behaviour and take steps to avert problems. Staff use a consistent approach and children are managed consistently well by all staff. In addition to the broad, balanced curriculum provided throughout the nursery, additional lessons are designed to meet the individual needs of children such as those who are new to learning English and those with special educational needs. More able pupils are given extra lessons in mathematics and English to ensure they learn at a level appropriate to their ability.
23. The accommodation and resources are good and generally used well across the curriculum. All areas of learning are well provided for. Resources are very well organised and displayed inside the nursery to tempt children to use them. Smaller equipment is clearly labelled and easily accessible for children to get out and put away by themselves. Children's work is attractively displayed to encourage pride in their achievements. The room where the large group of older children are taught is very large and, occasionally, all the children are inside at once. This means that the noise from other groups can be distracting for staff, especially when all key worker groups are having a story at the same time.
24. The large outdoor area is also well resourced and activities planned for outside are often imaginative and exciting. Different activities are provided at different times of the year. For the oldest children, although all areas of the curriculum are addressed in planning for the use of outside, most of the time it is used to promote physical development and knowledge and understanding of the world. The self-evaluative nature of the nursery's practice means senior members of staff are aware of most deficiencies and omissions. As a result, very good plans are afoot to improve outdoor provision. At the end of each teaching session there is a short meeting of the staff in each room to evaluate the quality of lessons provided. This means that subject leaders can make suggestions for improvement and identify and meet training needs. Leadership and management of the curriculum are very good.

Care, guidance and support

The nursery makes very good provision for children's care, welfare, health and safety. There is excellent support, advice and guidance for children. There is good involvement of children in the work and development of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff make the very best use of all the knowledge they amass on each child to help them achieve well;
- Impressive individual profiles are built up of each child's skills;
- Pastoral care systems are firmly embedded and familiar to all staff;
- High quality relationships underpin the core work of the school.

Commentary

25. There is a relentless drive throughout the centre to ensure that the needs of all children are fully met. Comprehensive systems are in place to guarantee that issues of general safety and well being are met. The centre's site supervisor is very well organised and makes sure that drills and other safety procedures are well practised. Lunchtime staff are well briefed and are provided with all the necessary information about children's dietary and medical needs. They pay close attention to children's needs while encouraging them to become increasingly independent. Child protection procedures are very well known to staff. The

- headteacher makes certain that vulnerable children, such as those in public care, are carefully monitored and provided with all the necessary support systems.
26. The nursery has established a most successful induction programme for new children. Parents value this and speak highly of the one to one support offered to their children. When there are particular problems, staff spend a great deal of time trying to resolve issues to the satisfaction of all concerned. However, when necessary, the headteacher does not shirk from delivering a difficult message to parents when it is in the best interests of their children.
 27. The nursery benefits from the services of a conscientious and innovative pre-school worker who runs daily 'Stay and Play' sessions. These were very popular until much of the local housing was demolished and regular families moved away. Undaunted, the leader running these sessions has regrouped, advertised widely and has managed to draw in a new client base who appreciate the service on offer. Pre-school children gain much in terms of their personal and social development at these sessions prior to joining one of the nursery classes.
 28. It is clear from the second the doors open just how well staff know the children in their care. The secret of their success lies in the constant verbal interaction that takes place. Adults are not content to sit back and let children get on with things. They chat, question, tease and, above all, listen to what the children tell them. As a result, they know all about the children's likes and dislikes and alter what happens in nursery to fit in with these interests. For their part, children know that their opinions are valued and listened to. They are eager to talk to adults because they know they will receive a positive response. Staff generate a large amount of useful assessment material over the course of a year and much of this finds its way into the comprehensive profiles compiled for each child. These are detailed and provide the reader with a clear view of a child's interests and achievements. The profiles are characterised by the amount of photographic evidence that reinforces each child's preoccupations during activities.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The nursery establishes very good links with parents, other schools and the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are appreciative of the school's work;
- Programmes to support children and parents when they first join the nursery are very effective;
- The nursery reinforces its position at the heart of the local community and is held in high regard.

Commentary

29. Parents are clear that they like the nursery and its staff. They feel they can come in with any problems and someone will try to help them. They know that their children enjoy coming and they feel that staff try to address the needs of parents as well as those of the children.
30. The headteacher and staff make sure that parents are kept up-to-date with what is happening in classrooms, across the centre as a whole and how well their children are progressing. Reception staff are welcoming and make sure visitors know where to go. There is a relaxed atmosphere in the centre; eye-catchingly informative notice boards provide many useful contacts and ideas for parents as they pass by. The published documentation is interesting and helps parents to understand the aims of the centre and how they, the parents, can contribute to its work.
31. Staff make sure that parents can receive verbal feedback at the start or end of sessions. They are very accessible and build up effective relationships with parents. The detailed profiles of each child are kept in classrooms and these can be seen by parents at any time.

This valuable sheaf of images and evaluations about a child's year help parents to understand what progress their child is making.

32. The local community is a resource used well by staff. Everyone, from babes in arms to the older children, goes out very regularly on different visits; parents are a hugely valuable resource in the time contribution they make to these occasions. All the children are taken swimming; staff and parents accompany them in the water and this is a much treasured activity. The centre is a natural hub for the community and a variety of organisations are either based there or regularly use some of the space.
33. Nursery staff establish very effective liaison with other schools in the area. Above all, this ensures that children move on to full time education with the minimum of disruption as the handover is very well managed by both institutions. The centre ensures that it helps to improve local practice, particularly in the field of early years' education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management is very good. The governance of the nursery is satisfactory. The governing body was established only at the beginning of the school year but is already well organised and efficient. It is a credit to everyone that the major expansion of the nursery's services and its relocation have been managed so successfully.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and senior staff demonstrate excellent vision for the nursery;
- It has identified the right priorities and planned realistic ways to achieve them;
- There is a strong commitment to the professional development of all staff;
- Tracking children's progress is a real strength.

Commentary

34. The governing body was established only at the beginning of the school year but is already beginning to play an active part in nursery life. It is well organised and efficient with committee structures in place and individual governors having specific roles and responsibilities. Governors are well aware of the nursery's strengths and weaknesses and there is a good dialogue with the headteacher when discussions take place. They have had few opportunities yet to set the strategic direction or challenge what goes on but they are aware of what they need to do.
35. The headteacher is a very effective leader who, ably supported by her senior colleagues, has successfully steered the nursery through a period of great change and upheaval. She demonstrates an excellent vision of how she sees the centre developing and has communicated this to all those who work with her. The St Thomas Centre is a very complex organisation, totally different from the nursery school inspected in 1997, offering an extended range of services. Despite the added pressure and potential distraction brought about through building work, change of status and recruiting new staff, the leadership remains highly focused on making sure the provision offered to the children is of the highest quality. All staff are involved in determining what the priorities should be. These are shared through the school development plan which sensibly maps out what is to be achieved over a realistic timescale. The success of these systems in helping to drive up standards can be seen by the rapid progress children make during their time in nursery. A strong feature of the nursery's work is its self evaluation, where it regularly checks up on how effective it has been, making changes where necessary. Improvements in information and communication technology (ICT) followed a review which identified that staff confidence in this area and the equipment children were using was not good enough. As a result, it became the focus of the

centre's priorities, very good progress was made and ongoing evaluations are carefully used to check on the impact of any changes made.

36. Management of the nursery is very good. A particular strength is the way that staff use the comprehensive range of data they collect to make changes to the curriculum and how things are organised. This information starts with a picture of what skills children bring to nursery with them. They analyse individual children's progress in the different areas of learning and observe staff teach. As a result of these well established and rigorous systems, the nursery gathers a clear picture of what is going well, where there are weaknesses and what it needs to do to improve. All the evidence from the data, the children's records and assessments staff make points to an accurate and rigorous review of its performance and a commitment to make things even better. For example, observations of some lessons by some nursery staff showed there were occasions when adults missed chances to improve children's learning by giving them too much support. The inspection confirmed that this was the case and that it should be a priority for improvement.
37. The professional development of all staff is given a very high priority and results in a well qualified and confident group of staff, who are very well equipped to meet the demands that meet them. Performance management systems are very effective in helping to ensure that school priorities are addressed and that the system has benefits for the individual staff as well as the school. A good example of how this has worked in practise can be seen in the way managing children's behaviour has improved throughout the nursery, as a result of this being highlighted earlier as a priority for the whole staff.
38. Parents are very complimentary about the nursery and, in particular, how well it is led. In their meeting with inspectors and in their returned questionnaires they were positive about this aspect. Their views are confirmed by inspectors who judged leadership to be very good.
39. Day-to-day finances are well managed. The nursery has yet to receive a delegated budget and still works closely with the local authority. Funds are used well and finance reports show that systems are well organised. The nursery has worked successfully to identify and overcome potential barriers to learning that are faced by many of the children who attend. For example, it makes sure that different groups of children who arrive in nursery, often at short notice, are given good levels of support. This enables them to settle quickly, experience the full curriculum on offer and begin to make progress.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	86462
Total expenditure	42716
Expenditure per pupil	593 (based on 72 pupils FTE)

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	55753
Balance carried forward to the next	43746

The nursery does not have a delegated budget. All salaries etc. are paid directly by the LEA. The figures above represent funds available for school improvement and the 'carry forward' figures are higher than average because of delays in building work and payment of bills

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is **very good**. The different groups of children who are represented in the nursery are very well catered for. This is because staff identify their individual needs as soon as they arrive, arrange suitable activities for each of them and carefully track the progress they make. As a result, children achieve very well and make rapid progress in the different areas of learning. Routines are carefully designed to help the children feel secure and confident and they experience a curriculum which is rich and exciting.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve very well and standards are high;
- There is a calm, purposeful and welcoming ethos within the nursery;
- Relationships between the staff and children, the staff and parents and between the children themselves are very good;
- Most children settle in very quickly and know the routines well;
- Very good teaching ensures that children are enthusiastic, eager to learn and behave very well;
- Respect for children's own and other cultures and life styles permeate all that takes place in the nursery;
- Leadership and management of this important area of learning are very good.

Commentary

40. Achievement in this area of learning is very good and most children reach well above average standards for their age. They are on course to exceed the goals children are expected to reach at the end of their first year of statutory education. The attractive environment is full of well planned activities that stimulate children's interest and promote very positive attitudes to learning. This, coupled with the calm purposeful ethos created by the friendly approachable staff, ensures that children and parents alike feel welcome. Most children settle in quickly and are keen to take part in the activities provided because they have time to get to know the staff before they start to attend regularly. Staff visit children in their homes and opportunities are provided for parents and carers to bring their children to the 'stay and play' sessions. Once children start nursery, parents are welcome to stay until their children are settled. The nursery also provides courses and talks for parents about early education and behaviour management, so that parents understand the values promoted by the nursery. This has a very positive effect on children's attitudes and their achievement.
41. Teaching in this area of learning is very good and, as a result, children are eager to learn, behave very well and meet the high expectations of the adults who care for them. All adults effectively encourage the development of social skills in a variety of ways. Children are constantly encouraged to take turns and share. Assessment is used very well to plan activities and ways to manage children. This ensures that children with special educational needs, those who have English as an additional language and those who are in public care are well integrated and receive very good support. Children with behaviour difficulties are managed very well because there is a consistent approach. Members of staff are generally very successful at anticipating when problems are likely to occur and take steps to avert

these. As a result, pupils of all abilities achieve very well compared to their level of attainment on entry. Adults provide very good role models and work effectively as a team. They show children how to work together co-operatively on a task and encourage them to join in, try new things and to persevere with a task. They do this by joining in the activity with an individual or with small groups. As a result, all children concentrate well.

42. Children are routinely given the opportunity to select what they want to do from a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities, and there are regular opportunities in lessons to take on little responsibilities such as putting their name in the special place that indicates they are present. They are expected to put on their own coats when going out to play, change into overalls and boots when digging in the garden and shown how to get the sand off their shoes after playing in the sand pit. Children tidy away after themselves and staff are quick to intervene when, for example, they leave books on the floor of the reading area. This consistency of approach is extended to lunchtime, when members of staff take turns to work with midday supervisors to help them to implement a common approach.
43. A notable feature of the nursery is the respect it pays to the differing lifestyles and cultures that prevail within the community. Positive images of the children are constantly promoted by the use of their photographs, both as a teaching resource and as part of the nursery displays. For example, visitors are welcomed into the nursery with a display of photographs of the children who can speak a language other than English at home. Each photo has a 'speech bubble' attached with a greeting in the child's home language. Children are regularly taught songs and dances from the countries represented in the nursery. There is a good supply of books in dual languages and this enable parents to read to their children in either English or their native tongue.
44. The leadership and management of personal, social and emotional development are very good. It is given an appropriately high profile because all members of staff know that success in this area of learning helps to raise standards across the curriculum.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve very well and make very good progress;
- Standards are well above average by the end of nursery;
- The quality of teaching is very good;
- Very good attention is paid to the needs of different groups;
- Occasionally opportunities are missed to extend children's learning;
- Resources are good and used well;
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

45. Attainment on entry to nursery is broadly average in this area of learning. On entry, a few children have immature speech and some of the children in the nursery class are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Very good attention is paid to developing children's speaking and listening and early reading and writing. As a result, all children in the nursery achieve very well, make very good progress and, by the time they leave, the majority reach standards that are well above average for their age in all aspects of this very important area of learning.

46. Teaching in this area of learning is very good. Most children in the nursery are able to explain what they have done by making short statements. The more able children speak clearly in sentences and act as good role models for the others. Children are given frequent opportunities to recognise both their own and each other's names and to write their own name on their work. By the end of their time in nursery they are beginning to recognise initial letter sounds. The children enjoy stories and are usually encouraged to make comments on and answer questions about stories they have heard. In the best lessons, adults ensure that every child has the opportunity to contribute to discussions and to answer questions. In the more ordinary lessons, adults do not exploit the learning chances on offer, as in one story session where an emphasis on 'good sitting' could be perceived by the older children as more important than enjoyment and understanding of the story. On these occasions, children do not show the enthusiastic response seen in the better lessons.
47. Throughout the nursery, members of staff build on the skills the children have acquired at home and/or in the previous class. The very good systems of record keeping and assessment are used very well to plan the next steps in children's learning. Children with special needs, those at the earliest stages of learning to speak English and the more able children all receive specialist support during the week. These lessons ensure that children are given the right level of support and are provided with work that is very well matched to their needs. This ensures that all groups of children make very good progress.
48. Opportunities for speaking, listening, reading and writing permeate the curriculum. During the inspection, children shared 'reading' books together, telling stories from the pictures. Children clearly enjoy reading and are interested in books. This love of reading is promoted very well by the central location of the large attractive book area where the high quality picture books are changed frequently to reinforce the topic being studied. Children are given opportunities to write independently in their play. All children have plenty of opportunities to write freely and to practise letter formation by using sand trays and finger painting. Opportunities to write for a variety of purposes occur daily, such as when making 'shopping lists' in role play and when adding captions to their drawings and recording visits they have made, such as the recent trip to the farm. This activity was presented to the children very well by use of photographs of the visit. This helped the children to recall what they and their friends had seen and helped to engage children's interest in the task. Such successful teaching helps ensure that, by the end of their time in nursery, many children are writing recognisable letters independently and some are able to add simple captions to their work, such as 'This is a pig'.
49. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The co-ordinator is very knowledgeable about the stages children go through when learning to read and write. She provides information and training for both parents and staff. Good quality on-going self evaluation takes place each day as staff come together to discuss the quality of their lessons and the impact of them on the children. The co-ordinator ensures that records of children's progress are kept up-to-date and that these are used systematically to plan work for different groups of children. She also ensures that planning across the nursery is of a high quality and promotes the systematic progression of pupils as they move from class to class through the nursery.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve very well;
- They have a very good understanding of number and calculation;
- Mathematics is very well used to link with the wider curriculum.

Commentary

50. Children achieve very well and make very good progress in their mathematical development. Most are on course to well exceed the goals expected by the time they reach the end of the Foundation Stage. Achievement is better in their understanding of counting and calculating than in their use of mathematical language. This is because some of the children are new to English and, occasionally, chances to extend these language skills are not taken. Nevertheless, they make rapid progress during their time in nursery.
51. Throughout the day children practise and consolidate their counting skills. They reach high standards with many already counting out objects up to ten and often beyond this. At story time, they work out how many of their group are present and when some are missing they are able to work out what the difference in numbers would be. A real strength of the mathematical provision is the way that children can apply what they know in practical situations. There were many good examples of this when children were playing outside. This was well illustrated during a physical activity where children were trying to throw balls at coloured shapes painted on a wall. They were able to accurately count how successful they had been and compare their success rate with their friends. Even more challenge was added to the task for higher attainers when they selected different coloured balls to throw and only counted their success rate when the ball matched the shape they were aiming at. There was great excitement when they succeeded, 'That red ball hit that green circle; I missed the red, now you have a go'.
52. Most children are developing a good understanding of shape, space and measures. For example, they successfully complete some quite complex construction activities which require them to recognise the correct shapes and patterns. Once again, there were good opportunities to practice these skills outside, with large wooden blocks and constructions a feature of the well used resources
53. The quality of teaching is good overall with some being very good. Staff are very successful at matching the tasks to individual children's needs. Detailed assessments and accurate monitoring of how well they are doing ensure that children from the many groups represented within the nursery are all well catered for. Staff develop mathematical skills and set challenges for them at just the right level. This was well illustrated during a sorting activity, where children were collecting stones and twigs in the garden area. The adult working with the group carefully selected the task he asked different members to complete. Higher attainers were asked about the relative size of the branches they were carrying. 'Put the longer ones over there. Are they heavier?' This initiated a discussion where the children were able to compare quantities and weight. Another group found learning more difficult and their tasks focused on improving their counting and matching skills. Finally, two of the group members were new to English and the adult made sure he modelled the words he wanted them to learn, encouraging them to repeat what they had heard, counting out the stones they had collected in their wheelbarrow. Careful planning and regularly checking that each of the groups was purposefully engaged in the activity, contributed to the success of the teaching.

As a result, the children made very good gains in their learning. By the end of the activity their confidence had increased.

54. Some of the teaching of mathematics was less effective but it was still satisfactory. Whilst activities were always well planned, the way they were delivered sometimes varied and there were occasions when learning opportunities were missed. An example of this was seen in the role play area where children were recreating a farm shop. The adult working with them was enthusiastic and asked some really good questions about how many coins they would need to 'pay' for the shopping they had chosen. However, she gave the 'shopkeeper' too much support and answered the questions for her, missing the chance to improve the child's ability to use mathematical terminology.
55. The subject area is very well led. The co-ordinator makes regular evaluations of the progress made, checks on the teaching and organises training sessions for staff when weaknesses are spotted. In addition, she contributes to workshops for parents which help them to support their children at home.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are very confident when using computers and staff support them very well;
- Some very good teaching helps children to achieve very well;
- There are lots of practical activities that encourage children's observational and investigative skills.

Commentary

56. Children's achievement is very good. Children are on course to well exceed the goals expected at the end of the Foundation Stage. This represents very good progress because their skills and understanding are average when they arrive in the nursery. Achievement and progress are especially good in their understanding of place and time and in their ICT skills. They do particularly well in these areas because staff are confident in their own skills and because so much emphasis is placed on developing a curriculum that is relevant and meets children's needs.
57. Teaching of knowledge and understanding of the world is very good overall. Staff are very successful at making activities interesting and challenging. They provide numerous opportunities for children to explore and investigate, describing what they can see and predicting what might happen next. Children talk confidently about simple scientific processes and how things can change. They learn to observe carefully and describe accurately what they can see or smell. Most can explain how the ingredients they mix during a baking activity change in texture when eggs and milk are added. Their understanding is deepened as they point out the differences that occur once the mixture has been taken to the staff room and baked in an oven. 'Look, it's a biscuit. It's not watery any more.' commented one of the group members when she was asked to describe some of the changes she noticed.
58. Children's learning about time, place, cultures and beliefs is successfully promoted through visits and planned themes. Much use is made of the local area and the children visit local shops and parks. Numerous visitors are introduced to the children, including artists and musicians. These visits and visitors have a big impact, children are keen to talk about them and they help to widen their experiences. For example, their residential trip to a local farm

stimulated much discussion and follow up work. The children were fascinated as they printed off pictures they had taken on their visit and talked excitedly about the animals they had seen because the subjects were so relevant and immediate. Their knowledge of their own and other cultures is very good as they celebrate festivals such as Eid and the Chinese New Year. This helps them to learn about the similarities and differences in people's lives and how they prepare for these events. Children also have a very good understanding of events in their own lives. They talk confidently about how they have changed and are 'much bigger' and more 'grown up' than the babies they get to see in the baby units.

59. Occasionally, some of the activities depend too much on the adult input and this limits what children learn, as they watch rather than getting involved. This happened when a group was measuring out different ingredients for a mixture they were creating. The adult handled most of the measuring and the chance for children to reinforce their learning in a practical way was missed.
60. Even the very youngest children demonstrate very good skills when using ICT. Resources are used successfully, both by the children working independently and when adults take group sessions using an interactive whiteboard. A feature of this work is the way in which all areas of learning are cleverly represented using ICT as, for example, when one group used the whiteboard to reinforce their understanding of size and shape and how they compare.
61. This area is very well led by a co-ordinator who has a clear understanding of standards achieved and how things can be improved. As well as regularly monitoring how the subject is taught and making changes where necessary, she organises professional development for colleagues so that any weaknesses they identify in their own knowledge can be addressed.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical education is **very good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is always good and often very good;
- The outdoor play areas are used well to support other areas of learning;
- Children have very good opportunities to develop fine muscle control;
- Children benefit from the presence of musicians, dancers and environmentalists who regularly visit them;
- Additional resources are required to enhance further the provision in the larger outdoor play area.

Commentary

62. Staff are providing a wide range of interesting activities everyday to help children develop both fine and large movements. Fine muscle control is developed well through routine use of chalks, pencils, crayons, scissors, glue, paint, small toys and construction kits. A large room is available for children to dance and experiment with large musical instruments. Children worked with a musician who helped them create contrasting sounds on African drums by using their hands to bang, slap, scrape and finger tap. Children associated the scraping noise created with the wind and finger tapping with the sound of raindrops.
63. Staff also encourage children to run, climb, jump, throw and catch using a variety of equipment and resources. There are well organised areas for children to sit, relax and observe the changing mood of the weather and the seasons. Very good opportunities are provided for children to plant vegetables, regularly tend them and watch them grow. Here, children are encouraged by an adult from the local environmental centre, who helps them

- prepare the ground for planting and tend the pots and beds of tomato plants, potatoes and other vegetables.
64. The large outdoor play area is organised safely and effectively during lunch times. Here, children who are carefully supervised by lunchtime staff use wheeled vehicles and play with and share a good variety of games equipment. Most children show good co-ordination skills and awareness of space.
65. The small outside area is a 'world of discovery and delight' and is used by the younger children in the nursery along with the Toddler Group. This encourages friendship patterns to emerge and the younger children to grow in confidence. There are moments of wonder when children sprinkle bird seed and wait for sparrows, robins and other birds to come and feed. Other children working in the classroom regularly develop their construction and assembly skills as they build towers from wooden blocks and cardboard cylinders.
66. This very good provision is further enriched by the organisation of country walks, horse riding during day, residential visits and regular swimming lessons. The area is effectively led and resources for learning are well organised.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's imagination and creativity are developed well through a variety of interesting and exciting activities that children find irresistible;
- Skills are taught very well when children are working directly with an adult;
- Numerous opportunities are provided for the children to practise the skills that they are taught during their play and, as a result, they achieve very well.

Commentary

67. Children are taught skills in a wide range of art activities and are given sufficient time to revisit them and practise on their own. A wide variety of interesting activities and experiences are readily available to the children, many of which the children find irresistible. Very good opportunities are provided to experiment with making models from recyclable materials (junk), cutting, sticking and experimenting with a good variety of materials and tools.
68. Very good opportunities are provided for the children to develop an interest in music. Children successfully practise their ICT skills, using the mouse to activate a musical 'rap' which they enthusiastically join in. Percussion instruments are provided regularly for children to experiment with at their choosing time. During the inspection, all children enjoyed working with a musician to create different sounds by banging, scraping and finger tapping a range of drums. They showed delight in creating contrasting loud and soft sounds, and practiced techniques to create sounds that represented running water or a storm.
69. Taped music is played to indicate the start of 'tidy up' time. When this commenced, many children were often observed responding to the music, swaying their bodies, twisting and turning and moving their arms. Children sang songs with gusto, often accompanying them with hand movements and gestures.
70. All rooms in the nursery are equipped with role play areas and there are opportunities to make houses and dens in the outside play area. However, following the adults' excellent acting out of 'Farmer Duck', children were not given immediate opportunities to explore the

plot. This prevented them from recalling the language and acting of the adults and then exploring the story further and including their own ideas.

71. Very good opportunities are organised for children to manipulate clay. They are expertly taught to role, cut and join clay to produce animals that live in the jungle. With adult guidance, children collaborate well together to create jungle environments from twigs and branches, hiding their clay creatures amongst the undergrowth.
72. This area of learning is successfully led. There is a clear understanding of how well children are doing and what future priorities need to be.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school (The budget is not delegated)	8
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	4
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	1
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	1
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	2

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

