

INSPECTION REPORT

BOROUGH ROAD NURSERY SCHOOL

Darlington

LEA area: Darlington

Unique reference number: 113982

Headteacher: Mrs L Millar

Lead inspector: Mr C Smith

Dates of inspection: 11th – 12th October 2004

Inspection number: 266457

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

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Nursery
School category: Maintained
Age range of pupils: 3 to 5
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 111

School address: Borough Road
Darlington
County Durham
Postcode: DL1 1SG

Telephone number: 01325 380785
Fax number: 01325 380785

Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Councillor Isobel Hartley

Date of previous inspection: June 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Borough Road Nursery School is situated close to the town centre of Darlington. Although some children travel in from outside the area, most live within one of Darlington's most deprived wards. Whilst the full range of ability is represented overall, when children start the nursery their skills and knowledge in most areas of learning are below those typical for their age. One hundred and eleven children, aged between three and five years of age, attend the nursery either in the morning or the afternoon. Children join the school in the term that they become three years old. There are three teachers, including the headteacher and two nursery nurses. Eight children (14 per cent) have special educational needs mainly related to learning and behavioural needs or autistic spectrum disorders. One child has a statement of special educational needs. Additional staff are temporarily allocated to the nursery to support some of these children. Two children with English as an additional language have very recently entered the nursery. Children are organised around a key worker who is responsible for their care and for monitoring their progress. A childcare group provide extended day care for children younger than nursery age and for some children already attending the nursery. The school is also involved in 'Surestart' provision working with mothers and toddler groups to prepare children for school. Family learning sessions are provided to enable parents to understand more about the work of the nursery and how they can help. The school has also set up support groups for parents of children with special educational needs. Earlier this year, for the first time, governors were given responsibility for managing their own budget.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2521 1	Colin Smith	Lead inspector	Foundation Stage
			Special educational needs
			English as an additional language
9572	Katherine Anderson	Lay inspector	
2245 2	Mary Farman	Team inspector	Foundation Stage

The inspection contractor was:

Eclipse Education (UK) Limited
14 Enterprise House
Kingsway
Team Valley
Gateshead
Tyne & Wear
NE11 0SR

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	4
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	6
Standards achieved in areas of learning	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	8
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	11
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING	13
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	17

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Borough Road is an effective Nursery School that provides a good standard of education. Good teaching ensures that children achieve well and their attitudes to learning and their behaviour are very good. Effective leadership and management ensure that the nursery provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Most children make very good progress in their personal and physical development and achieve well in the other areas of learning.
- Children who need additional help with their learning overall make better progress than the more able ones.
- Children benefit greatly from the wide range of stimulating and purposeful activities provided.
- The headteacher and staff have created a nursery with a very good ethos for learning.
- A start has been made in measuring school performance but there is still more to do in this area.

Satisfactory improvements have been made since the last inspection. Attendance has improved, teaching has strengthened further and the school continues to benefit from good leadership. Children continue to achieve well and reach, at least, the standards expected for their age in all areas of learning. More time is now devoted to improving children's language and mathematical skills and their progress is assessed and measured more rigorously. However, the information gathered is still not always used to set a sufficiently high level of challenge for the more able children. Systems to check school effectiveness have been introduced but the information gathered is not used as effectively as it could be in improving teaching and learning.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Children achieve well. Many children enter the nursery with skills and knowledge below the levels expected for their age. Effective teaching enables them to catch up and most are on course to reach the learning goals expected for children of nursery age in their communication and language skills, mathematical development and their knowledge and understanding of the world. Staff concentrate their efforts on children's personal social and emotional development. This helps them to achieve very well and reach standards above the levels expected for their age in this area of learning. Teachers make very effective use of the expansive outdoor facilities. Consequently, children achieve very well and reach higher than expected standards in the balancing, climbing and imaginative aspects of their physical development. Good opportunities to draw, paint and model enable children to achieve well and most are on course to exceed the learning goals expected in their creative development. Children with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language respond well to the good levels of support they receive and make good progress. Over half of the more able children achieve well, but their progress is not as consistent as that of other children and a small number of them do not fulfil their potential.

Children's personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral and cultural development, are very good. The very positive atmosphere in the nursery is reflected in children's very good attitudes to learning and very good behaviour. They get on very well with one another and are becoming increasingly independent. Attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the nursery is good. Teaching and learning is good. Nursery staff have a good understanding of how young children learn. Children are provided with

numerous opportunities to extend their learning and they are encouraged to become independent by choosing their own activities. Children are very well managed and their interest is captured successfully by the stimulating range of activities provided. Activities that are provided in the focus teaching sessions are challenging and well matched to children's different learning needs. This enables them all to learn effectively. However, occasionally during other activities, not enough is expected of the more able children and their learning suffers. Children's learning is assessed well and their progress is carefully tracked. Those who struggle with learning, receive good additional support, which enables them to overcome most of their difficulties.

The nursery provides a good curriculum. A very good range of activities, outside the normal sessions, significantly enriches children's learning. Children are well cared for and their personal development benefits from the good links with parents and the community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are good. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are supportive of the school and ensure that all statutory requirements are met. They have recently received responsibility for managing the school budget and have made a good start in financial planning. The headteacher and assistant headteacher have a very clear vision for the school's future. They are successful in securing staff commitment towards improving standards. The nursery is well-organised and day-to-day management and administration are good. Satisfactory procedures for school self-evaluation have been established. Staff are observed and are given feedback on their performance, Governors visit the school to observe how the nursery operates. Children's achievements are measured effectively throughout their time in the nursery. However, the school is right to identify the need to use the information more fully to ensure that staff and governors have the evidence required to make accurate and objective judgements about school effectiveness.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents hold the school in high regard and their views are well founded. A minority would like more information about their children's progress and how they could help at home. However, they are very welcome to visit the nursery and ask for help at any time. They already receive verbal and written reports on their children's learning and information and ideas about how they can prepare them for school and assist them in their learning. Children's impressions of the nursery, collected and passed on by their parents, indicate that they enjoy school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that a good level of challenge is provided for more able children to fulfil their potential in all activities.
- Refine the strategies already in place to ensure that staff and governors are able to make objective assessments of the work of the nursery and use the information fully in the planning of future developments.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning

Children achieve well to reach, at least, the standards expected for their age in all areas of learning. This was largely the picture at the time of the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children achieve very well in their personal, social and physical development.
- Children achieve well in their language, mathematics and creative development and in their knowledge and understanding of the world.
- Children who need additional help in their learning achieve well.
- The achievement of the more able children has improved since the last inspection but there is still more to do.

Commentary

1 Children achieve best in their personal, social and emotional development and in their physical development. Most children are on course to exceed the levels expected in these areas of learning. The importance attached to children's personal development is reflected in their growing self-confidence and enjoyment of school. They are co-operative, sociable and work and play together harmoniously. They soon begin to explore and find out for themselves. Children's eagerness to talk about their experiences extends their concentration and perseverance to levels beyond those expected for their age. The well-organised and expansive outdoor area lies at the centre of children's very good physical development. Children become absorbed in the challenging and imaginative activities provided. They become adept in riding bicycles, climbing on, under and over the various structures and balancing along narrow surfaces. Their imaginative play and social skills advance significantly in response to encouragement from adults to re-enact familiar stories in their play. Children's manipulative skills are typical for their age.

2 Children achieve well in developing their language and communication skills. Many children enter the nursery unable to speak clearly. However, adults constantly encourage children to talk about stories and act out situations such as the pretend post office. As a result, their vocabulary broadens rapidly and their spoken language improves. Children love story time. Their achievement advances well through good teaching of words, letters and how to sequence events in the story correctly. Younger children often copy older ones by experimenting with pencils and crayons to make marks. This raises their achievement in writing simple words. Most children are on course to achieve the levels expected for their age in this area of learning.

3 Children's mathematical development progresses well. Despite their limited understanding of number when they enter the nursery, they catch up quickly and most reach the levels expected for their age. Children's understanding of mathematical language develops very well. This is because nursery staff reinforce their understanding of the words used to compare size, shape, direction and number and take every opportunity to extend their counting and matching skills during their play.

4 Children's knowledge and understanding of the world develops successfully. Although many children enter school with limited background knowledge, they are on course to reach the levels expected by the end of their time in the nursery. By investigating materials and situations, inside and outside school, children's understanding of the world develops at a good rate. Effective teaching of computer skills, with good opportunities for children to practise and apply them, results in particularly good progress and higher than expected proficiency in this area.

5 Following the last inspection, nursery staff have worked hard to introduce systems to assess and measure children's learning. They have analysed the data and found only minor discrepancies between the achievements of boys and girls and children attending either the morning or the afternoon sessions. The analysis of the data shows that children who enter the nursery with very low attainment accelerate rapidly and most of them eventually reach the levels expected for their age. Children with special educational needs make consistently good progress towards the targets set for them. The same is true for the very small number of children with English as an additional language, who benefit from a concentration on their spoken language.

6 The majority of children, whose attainment is typical for their age, also achieve well over time. The progress of the more able children, in both language and numeracy, was an issue requiring improvement following the last inspection. Nursery staff have worked hard to inject more challenge into many of the activities, particularly during the focus teaching sessions. In addition, more able children are sometimes withdrawn for extension activities. Assessments made of children's achievements over successive years indicate that the achievement of the more able children is improving. However, a small number of them are still not fulfilling their potential, particularly in extending their language and mathematical skills. This is largely because nursery staff do not provide additional challenges for them at other times of the day.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance and punctuality are good. Children' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are very good. Children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children enjoy school and attendance has steadily increased over the last four years.
- Children play very well together and learn to share and help others.
- Children's personal development is very well nurtured and reflected in their growing understanding and respect for themselves and the community in which they live.

Commentary

7 Children's attitudes, behaviour and personal development have improved since the last inspection. Attendance rates have steadily increased. Most parents make a good contribution to this by making sure that their children are brought to school on time so that nursery sessions can begin very promptly.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census

No of pupils on roll

White – British
Asian or Asian British – Indian

109
2

8 Most children come to school willingly and there have been no exclusions. They settle very quickly, thoroughly enjoy the activities provided and are keen to learn. Once they have chosen an activity, such as making a book about the things they have seen on the way to school, they concentrate very well for sustained periods before moving on to another activity.

9 Children’s very high standards of behaviour reflect the very high expectations of the nursery staff. As a result, for the most part, children work and play together harmoniously. There are occasional disagreements involving new starters, who are still learning to adjust to the ethos of the school. However, staff are quick to intervene, teaching social skills and always promoting consideration for others. Consequently, children develop a very clear understanding of right and wrong. They fully understand and co-operate with the school’s routines. For example, they know to put on an apron before painting or modelling. They move around the areas sensibly and sit calmly together at snack times. Children enjoy taking responsibilities and learn good manners. For example, when children help to hand out milk and fruit, the others say ‘thank you’ politely. The more confident children even remind those who forget. Tidying up time is very well handled and children all play their part in helping to maintain order.

10 Children’s personal development is very well provided for. Their spiritual development is good. There are many opportunities during the day for children to marvel at their world. For example, having made a set of binoculars one little boy was amazed that everything looked red through the cellophane lenses. Children become part of the school family and develop a very good understanding of the importance of considering others. Through the celebration of festivals, such as Divali, children acquire a very good appreciation of other cultures and traditions. By making frequent visits to places of interest, such as the farm and the theatre, children gain important insights into their own heritage and learn very effectively how people live and work together in the community.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided is good. Children benefit from effective teaching, a well-planned curriculum and good levels of personal support. Strong links between nursery staff and parents enable children to make the best of the opportunities provided.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and it is now at least good in all areas of learning. The way children’s achievements are assessed and the extent to which staff use the information to extend their learning is satisfactory, and improving.

Main strength and weaknesses

- Good planning of purposeful activities with clear goals enables children to learn successfully.
- Children respond well to encouragement to explore and learn for themselves.
- Teachers use support staff very effectively to support children who find learning difficult.
- Good procedures have been devised to assess children’s learning but the information is not always used to extend the learning of the more able children.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 16 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	5	9	2	0	0	0

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

11 The work of the experienced teachers is often very good and nursery assistants provide much good teaching. Staff are always clear about what children are expected to learn and all staff work together to plan a good range of purposeful activities, which stimulate children's curiosity and foster their desire to learn. Within any activity, there are usually several choices of materials available and all activities are thoroughly prepared and children quickly adapt to nursery routines. These factors ensure that sessions get off to a brisk start and no time is wasted. As a result, children's individual interests and talents are nurtured well. Relationships between children and staff are very good. Praise for good achievement and thoughtfulness is always forthcoming and children respond very positively to the high standard of behaviour expected.

12 The strong drive to encourage children's independence is reflected in the provision of many additional experiences, designed to encourage them to explore and learn themselves. For example, interesting arrangements of climbing and balancing equipment are set out to tempt children to test their skills. Good organisation and careful timetabling of individual staff responsibilities means that all activities are safely supervised. The adults responsible stand back and observe initially to give children space to organise their own play and follow their particular interests. However, once the children have made the choices, nursery staff are quick to intervene. They take every opportunity to encourage children to talk about their experiences, which extends their learning successfully. Their use of questions is of a high quality. Many 'What will happen if?' or 'What do you think?' questions are asked that enable staff to measure children's understanding and to improve their skills in thinking and speaking.

13 Teachers and teaching assistants work very closely together to make sure that children who find learning difficult are given the best possible support. Children's special educational needs are regularly discussed. The whole staff plan activities together which contain clear and meaningful targets. This ensures that everyone involved in supporting these children are well acquainted with what has to be done. Staff rightly prioritise children's personal development and readiness to learn as the foundation on which to build literacy, numeracy and other skills. There are many good examples of individual children being supported in their personal development, particularly those with autistic spectrum disorders. Children with language difficulties benefit from well-focused group activities which successfully accelerate their learning. The very small number of children with English as an additional language, new to the nursery, also benefit from good teaching. Much attention is given to their understanding of English and their ability to use language correctly. Nursery staff are quick to involve the children's parents in extending their spoken English in the home.

14 Children's individual learning is assessed effectively. Staff keep good records of children's responses in the main teaching activities. They track individual children as they move around the nursery to gauge how well they are learning and the information gathered is being increasingly used to plan future activities. For example, daily focus activities, which take place during the first hour of each morning and each afternoon, are designed to cater explicitly

for children's different learning needs. On these occasions, different activities are identified to support the learning of the less able children and extend the learning of the more able ones. As a result, a good level of challenge is provided for all children. This is where they learn most successfully. During the group and story sessions, although much productive learning takes place, the needs of the more able children are not specifically planned for and opportunities are sometimes missed to take their learning forward. For example, a group of children set out a model railway track together. The nursery assistant encouraged them to use mathematical language such as under, through, over and above. Although this was well matched to the learning needs of the younger children, the more able members of the group already knew these terms and there was little to extend their learning of language or number.

The curriculum

The school provides a good curriculum. It makes very good provision for children's personal and social development and for curriculum enrichment. Accommodation and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's desire to learn is stimulated by the good range of activities provided.
- Good provision is made for children with special educational needs.
- Children are not able to explore music spontaneously.
- Children's understanding of the wider world and the community in which they live is extended very well through enrichment activities.

Commentary

15 The quality of the curriculum has improved since the previous inspection. Exciting and purposeful indoor and outdoor activities are provided, which increase children's desire to learn. Improvements have also been made to the outdoor area, which is now safe, secure and stimulating.

16 On the whole, the school has developed effective strategies to include all children. Boys and girls are treated equally and their achievements are carefully noted. Staff regularly identify strengths and areas for improvement and plan work to address any identified needs. This is reflected in the clear curriculum plans. Good provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs. They have full access to the Foundation Stage curriculum and all out of school visits. Well-qualified support staff work very hard to ensure that these 'special children' achieve well in all areas of learning. However, the demands made of the more able children are not always sufficient to extend their learning fully.

17 There is a good match of teachers and support staff to meet the needs of the curriculum. Effective deployment of nursery nurses and special educational needs support staff significantly increases children's learning. Children benefit from good accommodation and a wide range of resources. The provision of interesting indoor and outdoor work and play areas makes a positive contribution to the quality of children's behaviour, learning and achievement. However, during the inspection there was no evidence of children being able to experiment and use musical instruments. This limits this aspect of their creative development.

18 The curriculum includes a very good range of enrichment activities. These include visitors, such as police officers, and visits outside school. These visits effectively increase children's knowledge and understanding of the local community and life further away from

Darlington. Visits to places of interest, such as the theatre and Hall Hill Farm, make a positive contribution to children's learning. The nursery makes a special effort to help children to understand different cultures by celebrating festivals such as Christmas, Divali and the Chinese New Year.

Care, guidance and support

This is a caring school with good procedures in place for health and safety and child protection. Nursery staff provide children with good support and guidance. The nursery successfully involves children in its work by seeking their views and opinions.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's welfare and safety are well provided for.
- Relationships between children and staff are very good.
- There are very good arrangements to enable children to settle into the nursery.

Commentary

19 The school continues to look after children well. Governors and staff are very conscious of the importance of health and safety and carry out regular risk assessments to ensure that children are brought into a safe environment. There is a named person responsible for child protection and all staff know the procedures to follow should they have any concerns.

20 Children enjoy very trusting relationships with all adults, especially their key worker. As a result, they feel secure and confident. Many older siblings have attended the nursery, therefore staff know the families very well. They are sensitive to children's differing backgrounds and needs and offer them very high levels of personal support. Parents and staff meet daily therefore there are ample opportunities to share information.

21 Very good induction arrangements enable children to settle quickly. This ensures that their first experiences of school are happy and positive. Many pre nursery age children attend the additional extended day provision (Wrap around care) and build positive relationships with nursery staff and children before they start school. Children and their parents are invited to visit. This gives them the opportunity to meet with teachers and view the school before starting. Key workers are very successful in helping new children to integrate. Parents are always welcome in nursery. Through Surestart, parents and toddlers learn all about school and what to expect. This helps parents to gain a better understanding of how to support their children's learning and prepare them for school.

22 Nursery staff are interested in what children think and they value their views. Unusually for a nursery, parents have been asked to help their children complete a questionnaire to gather their thoughts and feelings.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good relationships with parents and the community. The nursery has forged good links with other schools.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents think highly of the school.
- Good quality information is provided.
- There are good systems to ensure a smooth transition to the feeder schools.

Commentary

23 The nursery continues to maintain good links with parents and the community. The vast majority of parents are supportive. They say that their children are happy and are making good progress. They find staff approachable and helpful. The school uses its own questionnaires to gain a picture of parents' views to ensure that they are satisfied. Several parents help in school and more assist with educational visits. However, a few parents feel they are not kept well enough informed about their child's progress or about how they can help their children at home. There is little evidence to justify this view with the headteacher and other staff making every effort to involve parents in their child's learning. For example, there are plenty of valuable opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress. They are offered three consultation meetings during the time that their children attend the nursery and a written report when they leave. In addition, staff make time for parents every day when children arrive and leave the nursery. Parents receive helpful information on how they can help their children. Leaflets are distributed to explain what children are expected to learn during the forthcoming term and weekly newsletters update parents on future events. The prospectus now contains clear information about the Foundation Stage curriculum and what children are expected to achieve. Staff encourage children to take educational toys and books home, hoping that parents will join in with the activities. Lifelong learning classes such as 'Lets play together' are available for parents to extend their knowledge of the learning process.

24 Links with the community and other schools are good. The school's very good working relationship with the childcare provider who runs the extended day class, enables parents to know that their children are in good hands before, during and after nursery sessions. Good use of visits outside the nursery help to extend children's experiences and learning. Recently a train journey was arranged to enable children to experience different modes of travel. Every effort is made to ensure that children's transfer to the next school goes smoothly. For example, nursery staff take children to visit their new schools and reception teachers also visit the nursery. Children with special educational needs make more frequent visits to reduce any anxieties.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school benefits from good leadership and management as it did at the time of the last inspection. School governance is satisfactory. The headteacher leads the school effectively. The assistant headteacher and other key members of staff also provide effective leadership of aspects of the school's work. The management of the school is good overall, although there is still more to do in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has been successful in developing teamwork amongst the staff.

- Financial planning and the day-to-day management of the nursery are good.
- Effective systems have been introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of the nursery but they require further refinement.

Commentary

25 The headteacher has created a nursery with a very good ethos for learning. She provides a very good role model through her knowledge, care and commitment towards each child and her very good teaching. She is very well supported by the assistant headteacher who takes a key role in leading curriculum developments and devising procedures to assess children's learning. Their conscientious approach has gained the respect and commitment of staff and governors. The effective teamwork that has resulted, is reflected in the way that all staff plan and organise learning activities together and participate in regular discussions about individual children. The headteacher's high aspirations for the nursery are reflected in the drive for improvement, the total involvement of staff, children, parents and governors and the desire to extend the provision for children beyond the school day.

26 Governors welcome the recently delegated budget as an opportunity to manage their own affairs and have acted quickly to set up effective systems to plan, control and monitor spending. This is guided by a sound school development plan, which contains the right priorities and arrangements for managing improvements. Since the budget has been delegated for the first time this year, there are no figures for annual expenditure available for 2003/04. Governors receive good quality information from the headteacher and they play an important part in strategic planning. They ensure that the school fulfils its statutory duties and monitor the school's racial equality satisfactorily. However, they have limited strategies for gathering objective information about the school. They conscientiously attend to the task of setting objectives for the headteacher and monitoring her performance against them. They also make visits to the nursery but they do not have agreed procedures for monitoring outcomes, for example, of the school development plan or specific aspects of the school's work. This makes it harder for them to challenge and support the work of senior staff.

27 The headteacher is a good communicator and is at the centre of all developments. Children, staff and parents seek her advice and share their feelings. This enables her to be well informed and well prepared for all events. This knowledge is used well in ensuring that the nursery runs smoothly from day-to-day. Borough Road Nursery School deserves its good reputation and satisfactory improvements have been made since the last inspection. Following the last inspection, the school was left with the task of measuring the effectiveness of teaching and children's progress, more rigorously. In response, several effective strategies have been introduced. The teaching of nursery staff is observed each term. Clear judgements are made about the quality of teaching and the findings are shared. However, the information recorded does not always identify how teaching can be further improved, particularly with regard to the level of challenge for the more able children, which is still inconsistent.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

28 Effective leadership and management of the nursery ensure that the quality of provision has, at least, been maintained since the last inspection. Many children enter the nursery with attainment that is lower than expected for their age. They achieve well because of good teaching and the many purposeful activities provided.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The calm and welcoming atmosphere helps children to give of their best.
- Nursery staff are very successful in raising children's confidence and helping them gain independence in learning.
- Children benefit greatly from having a key worker to talk to and confide in.

Commentary

29 Teaching and learning are very good in this area of learning. Children achieve very well and many are already meeting the learning goals expected for their age, which represents good improvement since the last inspection. The friendly, caring and stimulating atmosphere helps children to concentrate and try hard. Nursery staff work ceaselessly to raise children's self-esteem and are successful in helping them to respect and care for others. Consequently, most children show patience in taking turns and are co-operative towards adults and other children.

30 Activities are carefully planned and sensitively supervised. Adults ensure that all children join in the full range of activities provided and their efforts and achievements are recognised and quickly praised. This has a dramatic effect on their self-confidence. Nursery staff forge very trusting relationships with the children. This encourages them to 'have a go' and try new and unfamiliar activities, such as balancing along different surfaces for the first time.

31 Parents are very welcome in the nursery and children see them talking to staff. This helps children to leave their parents happily and settle successfully into the daily nursery activities. Children get used to their 'key worker.' Consequently, they have someone to talk to and confide in. This good pastoral care plays a major part in children's happiness and contentment. Nursery staff record children's progress and achievements conscientiously and use their findings to set simple targets for the children to aim for.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff are successful in encouraging children to talk and in improving their listening skills.
- In writing, there are occasions when staff do not expect enough of the more able children.

- Nursery staff effectively promote children's interest in books and develop their early reading skills well.

Commentary

32 Nursery staff provide good opportunities for children to listen to each other and to adults. Children enjoy listening to stories and quickly learn to follow instructions. Adults encourage them to talk about their experiences and they become confident in sharing and explaining their ideas. When children start in the nursery, many have very limited spoken language. Nursery staff teach them effectively to think what they want to say and how they are going to say it. If their expression is unclear or incorrect, children are sensitively encouraged to try again. This helps them to learn to speak clearly and make themselves understood. Children respond well to constant reminders to use their imagination and to take initiative. For example, an older child organised others to re-enact and re-tell the story of the 'Three Bears', which enabled the younger ones to sequence the events in the story correctly.

33 During the main focus activities, children's different learning needs are well catered for. They learn to hold their pencils correctly and copy letters accurately from flash cards. These skills are brought to life by creating a real purpose for children to practise their writing. For example, children pretended to address envelopes in the Post Office. On these occasions, all children learn the skills of reading and writing successfully. However, the assessment of children's achievement shows that about half of the more able ones do not make as much progress as the other children. Nursery staff are aware of this and have introduced extension activities to increase the level of challenge for the more able children. There has been some improvement over the last year, but opportunities are still missed to increase children's reading and writing skills when they choose their own activities.

34 Children achieve well in reading. Story-time has a special place in the nursery and children develop a love of stories and they soon realise that that books also help them to find out things. The well-equipped library areas attract children's attention. They choose books they know and like and then search for adults and other children to share the stories and pictures with. These activities enable children to gain a good awareness of letters and words and they learn to use the pictures to sequence the events in stories correctly. Most of the older children recognise letters, know their sounds and are beginning to guess words by knowing the initial letter. For example, a child with English as an additional language who has only just started in the nursery can already find his registration card by recognising the first letter of his name. Children with special educational needs make good progress in speaking, reading and writing.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision for children's mathematical development is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The stimulating approaches used, foster children's interest in mathematics successfully.
- Although children achieve well overall, not all of the more able children fulfil their potential.
- Children's mathematical understanding is extended well in other areas of learning.

Commentary

35 The good provision identified at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. Interesting and varied approaches, such as stories, games and simple shopping activities, are used to capture children's interest. In one particularly challenging activity, children were asked to estimate a number of beads before threading and counting them involving numbers up to and beyond 20. Teachers pay particular attention to children's different responses and record them. These assessments are discussed by the whole staff team and are subsequently used well in the planning of future activities. Teachers' and nursery assistants make very effective use of questioning, such as, "If you already have two beads, how many more do you need to make three", Such questions probe children's understanding well and make them think.

36 Good teaching enables most children to achieve well. From a low starting point when children enter school, they reach the levels expected for their age before leaving the nursery. Children with special educational needs, make good progress because they receive much additional support and extra sessions to strengthen their areas of difficulty. The pattern of progress made by the more able children has improved over recent years, although a small number of these children are still not making the progress of which they are capable. During the focus sessions, planned to develop children's understanding of number or shape, their different learning needs are catered for well. For example, younger children might be counting coins and shopping items, whilst the more able ones choose which coins they need to buy the goods. However, during other activities different expectations for different ages and stages of children are not made explicit in the planning and opportunities are then missed to take the learning of the more able children forward. For example, when pretending to be three bears in the home corner, children were comparing the size of bowls, chairs and beds, using words such as bigger and largest. This activity reinforced the language of size well for most children but the more able children were already well acquainted with the mathematical terms and opportunities were missed to take them beyond this point.

37 Many additional, interesting and worthwhile activities are provided to enrich and extend children's mathematical understanding. These activities make a significant contribution to their grasp of mathematical language. For example, children's physical play on the outdoor climbing equipment, contributed significantly to their mathematical development as they followed instructions to move forwards, backwards, over and under, and used positional language to describe their movements.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching gives children confidence to explore and investigate situations and achieve well.
- Children's understanding of using computers is good for their age.

Commentary

38 Children have limited knowledge and understanding of the world when they enter the nursery. Good teaching and the provision of a wide range of engaging indoor and outdoor activities enable children to achieve well and reach the levels expected for their age. Nursery staff are well aware of the need to broaden and extend children's experiences. They plan and organise valuable activities designed to encourage them to explore and investigate. As a result, children's knowledge of growing things, such as sunflowers, develops well alongside

their understanding of the need to care for them. Taking them out into the immediate locality and asking them to observe and compare features closely arouses their curiosity. For instance, children visited the French market and took gifts to senior citizens, which greatly increased their understanding of belonging to a community. Rich opportunities to travel on buses and trains increase children's understanding of places outside Darlington.

39 Children develop a keen interest in using computers. They show good skills in using the mouse and keyboard effectively to control movement on the screen. For instance, many children already create pictures and know how to click and drag to move objects around. The school ensures that the religious education element of knowledge and understanding is covered effectively. It gives children opportunities to celebrate a wide range of different festivals such as Christmas, Diwali and the Chinese New Year. This helps children to realise that they live in a culturally diverse society.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The imaginative use of the outdoor area makes a significant contribution to children's physical development.

Commentary

40 Children's control and co-ordination is very good for their age and the standards they reach are higher than expected in this aspect of their physical development. This is attributable to very effective teaching and imaginative use of the outdoor area. Children find tasks such as re-enacting the story of Billy Goats Gruff in the climbing area, very appealing. At the same time, they practise and improve their climbing and balancing skills. For example, a teacher asked a child to 'Feel the bench with your feet and look straight ahead'. This enabled him to complete the balancing task unaided. Most children move confidently, ride wheeled toys skilfully and develop a good understanding of safety.

41 Children benefit from good experiences in handling and managing small equipment and tools. For instance, a group of children learned how to thread tape round a teddy bear shape. This proved difficult, but all of the children persevered and expressed delight when they were successful. However, a few children experience difficulty in using tools such as brushes, pencils and scissors. To some extent this restricts their skills in writing, painting and cutting. Nursery staff are well aware of children's difficulties in fine control and provide specific sessions where they learn how to use various tools and implements. Overall children's attainment is more typical for their age in this aspect of physical development.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Nursery staff are successful in promoting children's curiosity and firing their imagination.
- Children achieve well in most aspects of creativity and their attainment is higher than expected for their age.
- There are not enough opportunities for children to explore music spontaneously.

Commentary

42 Teachers give a great deal of thought to providing activities that encourage children to observe and then experiment with different media, such as paint, glue, water and collage materials. These activities are successful in promoting children's curiosity and stirring their imagination. For example, children's attention was drawn to Monet's 'Waterlilly' paintings. They were shown how to cover their papers with a mixture of water and icing sugar and then guided to investigate what happened when different coloured paints were applied using droppers. Children responded excitedly with exclamations of surprise when the colours merged and began to change. Throughout the activity, children were encouraged to talk about their experience and use new language. Teachers greatly value children's originality and respect their choices. Consequently, a variety of interesting collage materials and painting easels are provided to foster children's free expression. Children have many good opportunities to observe and are then taught how to sketch objects around them. Consequently, their drawings of cars, made during the visit to the garage, are good for their age.

43 Children's good achievement is not limited to exploring media and materials. Imaginative play is a particularly strong feature of the nursery provision. Stories are used effectively to fire children's imagination. Settings and equipment are interestingly arranged to encourage them to act out their ideas. Children are often grouped to enable older ones to influence younger ones. In one activity, for example, children could not resist dressing up in the costumes provided, pretending to eat from the porridge bowls and trying out differently sized beds for each of the three bears. One of the older children impressively organised a group of three others to act out the story. As a result, the children's understanding of the story and their speaking skills significantly improved. Through such activities, children show that they are able to play co-operatively and correctly follow a story line. Most aspects of children's creative development are better than at the time of the last inspection.

44 Musical instruments are kept in a separate room and brought out regularly for group activities. Children often sing rhymes and jingles, although they do not all join in. There is no area where children can spontaneously express their ideas and feelings musically. This limits their creative development in this aspect of learning.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	3
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	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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