

INSPECTION REPORT

GRASMERE NURSERY SCHOOL

Luton

LEA area: Luton

Unique reference number: 109420

Headteacher: Mrs Valerie Thompson

Lead inspector: Chris Hemmings

Dates of inspection: 28th - 29th September 2004

Inspection number: 266903

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:	3 - 4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	152
School address:	Icknield Way Luton Bedfordshire
Postcode:	LU3 2BT
Telephone number:	01582 593426
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Hathaway

Date of previous inspection: 1st March 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Grasmere Nursery School is a 78-place nursery school situated on the northern edge of Luton. The school opened as a purpose-built nursery in 1970. It has three main teaching areas, each with its own quiet room. Outside there is a covered verandah, two linked hard play areas and a good variety of physical play equipment. A distinctive and special feature of the outdoor environment is a large orchard. At the lower part of the sloping site there is a Baby and Toddler setting (the 'Tadpoles'*) which has been established for two years. This is also managed by the school. Parents with children in the nursery have the advantage of fully integrated care for their children; there is breakfast, lunch and after-school provision.

The school has recently been re-organised to provide education mainly for children who are three years old. Most of the children will become four during their time in Grasmere. Currently, there are 56 part-time boys and 56 part-time girls in the nursery. A small number of children stay for the whole day. Some of the children have been at the nursery for three terms while the majority have been there for only a few days or weeks. Most children come from the local area but quite a large number travel to the school from further away. The children come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. Most are of white British heritage. A small proportion of the children are from Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds. The school is part of Luton's Nursery School Inclusion project and eight children who have severe and complex needs attend the school. Six children have statements of special educational needs. Currently, the very great majority of children have English as a home language. For a small minority, additional languages are spoken at home. Attainment on entry is average. The school has good links with other nurseries, local schools and education training centres.

**The 'Tadpoles' was not included in this inspection. It was inspected in early September 2004.*

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
14614	Chris Hemmings	Lead inspector	Standards Achieved by Pupils Leadership and Management Special Educational Needs Creative Development Knowledge and Understanding of the World
9590	Roy Kitson	Lay inspector	Partnership with Parents other Schools and the Community
24658	Fiona Musters	Team inspector	Teaching, Learning and Assessment The Curriculum Mathematical Development Physical Development
33063	Janet Warburton	Team inspector	Children's Attitudes, Values and Personal Qualities Care, Guidance and Support Personal, Social and Emotional Development Communication, Language and Literacy English as an Additional Language

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Grasmere Nursery School provides an effective education for its children. The school has a number of important strengths but also several areas that require further improvement. Most children arrive with attainment levels that are broadly similar to those expected nationally for their age group. The strong ethos, stimulating range of learning opportunities and good teaching contribute significantly to children's enjoyment of learning. They make good progress and achieve well. Their personal development is well supported by the very good care provided by all adults and the close links with parents. All children are able to join in all the activities fully and their personal needs are very well met. The new headteacher is providing very good leadership. She has a very clear vision of where and how improvements will be made. She is well supported by the hard-working and dedicated staff and governors. **The nursery gives good value for money.**

THE SCHOOL'S MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES ARE:

- The children enjoy learning and have very positive attitudes to school.
- The headteacher has excellent knowledge of nursery education and has made a strong start to further developing the quality of learning provided.
- The high quality of the arrangements for receiving children when they first come into the school.
- The very good relationships which contribute strongly to the very positive ethos.
- The way the school ensures that all children are fully included in all aspects of school life and are very well cared for.
- Governors are highly committed and actively involved in managing the school's development.
- The large, well-equipped outdoor area provides a rich learning environment.
- Links with other schools, training colleges and the wider community are good.
- Assessments of children's learning are not used sufficiently well to inform teachers' planning.
- Weekly plans are not detailed enough.
- Teachers who are responsible for leading areas of learning are not clear enough about how well the children are learning.

There has been sound improvement since the previous inspection. Curriculum planning has progressed; it is more consistent now but further development is required. There have been substantial changes in the way that teachers assess the children's work. A new approach has been introduced recently but this is not firmly established yet. Subject co-ordinators now have a clearer picture of what aspects of learning are being planned for and they provide regular reports to the governors, as required. However, they do not have a sufficiently precise view of the standards and progress children are achieving.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Children achieve well. The children's attainment when they join the school is average overall. Most older children are on course to reach and exceed the goals that are set for all children nationally for the end of the reception year. There are strengths in the development of speaking skills, the way the children explore and investigate the world around them and how

well they develop confidence and control of the way they move. The children make particularly good progress in handling tools and equipment. Progress in reading and writing, mathematical and creative development is satisfactory. Children with special educational needs achieve well because there is careful planning and skilled support and care which enables them to participate fully. Those children with English as an additional language do as well as other children.

Personal development is good and underpinned by good provision for children's spiritual, moral and social development. Cultural development is satisfactory but the children do not have sufficient opportunities to learn about other cultures. Children have very good attitudes to learning, behave well and display high levels of concentration and perseverance. Their confidence and self-esteem are high. Children settle well and quickly gain confidence. They enjoy very good relationships with each other and with the staff.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching and learning are good. All staff help the children to settle very quickly and to feel safe and secure. Practitioners help the children to make choices from the wide range of activities provided for them. The range of learning opportunities provided for the children is rich and stimulating. The extensive outdoor area is used very well to promote learning. Children with special educational needs are well supported and fully included. Staff build up profiles of the children's learning which parents value highly. The school plans to involve parents more fully in reviewing how well their children are learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are good overall. The new headteacher is providing strong leadership for improving aspects of learning by introducing new approaches to planning, assessment and the organisation and management of learning. For example, she is ensuring that the school is taking better advantage of the outdoor area and site to broaden the range and quality of children's learning experiences and opportunities. The management of the school is good. A thorough evaluation has been made of all aspects of the school's work and plans for improvement are being developed. Day-to-day management is good. All staff work well together to make sure the children learn well. The headteacher has begun to extend the roles of teachers with leadership responsibilities. The governance of the school is good. The chair and vice chair of governors lead the governing body well. They have a high level of involvement in successfully steering the development of the school. They have worked very hard to establish the baby and toddler unit and to ensure that the inclusion initiative has been a success. Governors receive regular reports about what the children are learning as part of their monitoring role. There is scope for further development in this aspect of their role so that they have a more precise knowledge of how well children are learning.

PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents think very highly of the Nursery. They are very positive about all aspects of the nursery's work. They particularly appreciate how warmly they are welcomed into the school and they value the report and profile of their children's learning that they receive at the end of the year. Many parents volunteer to get actively involved in supporting the work of the school and improving the resources through fundraising and practical work, for example, redecorating

the outside play house. The children like coming to the nursery and they enjoy the rich variety of activities provided for them.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THE SCHOOL SHOULD DO TO IMPROVE ARE:

Develop the focus on learning further by:

- consolidating assessment practices and developing the skills and analysis of what children need to learn next;
- increasing the detail in weekly planning so that all staff are clear about how the children will learn; and
- ensuring that subject co-ordinators know what standards children are attaining and how well they are learning so that decisions can be made about how best to improve the education provided.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS

The children's standards of attainment on entry to the school are similar to those expected nationally for three-year-old children. At the time of the inspection the great majority of children had very recently started attending the school. The evaluation of how well children achieve is based mainly on evidence gathered by focusing on children who have been at school for more than one term and from the detailed review of individual profiles of pupils who attended the school during the previous academic year. By the time the children leave the nursery, the majority exceed what is expected for their age. There are no significant differences between the achievements of boys and girls.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and they have very positive attitudes and dispositions to learning.
- The children's achievement in knowledge and understanding of the world is good.
- Children make very good progress in developing confidence and control of movement and the way they use tools and equipment.
- Children with special educational needs and those who speak another language, other than English, at home achieve well throughout the nursery.
- Achievement in most aspects of communication, language and literacy, mathematical development, and creative development is satisfactory, but it is not of the same standard as other areas of learning.

COMMENTARY

1. Older children, who have been at the school for more than one term, are on course to exceed the goals they are expected to reach in most aspects of learning, by the end of their time in the nursery.
2. A distinct strength of the school is the very positive attitudes and dispositions that children develop towards learning. Children achieve well in personal, social and emotional education throughout the school, where staff are particularly successful in developing children's confidence and self-esteem. Significantly, even the youngest children show deep interest and they concentrate and persevere often for lengthy periods. All adults have high expectations of good behaviour and children meet them. This is giving the children a very positive start to their education.
3. There are particular strengths too in speaking for communication and thinking, exploration and investigation of the world around them and developing control of movement, equipment, tools and materials. The activities for developing the children's knowledge and understanding of the world are carefully planned to provide a rich range of first-hand, practical opportunities and experiences, both inside and outdoors. Consequently, children show high levels of curiosity and they are making good progress in learning to explore and investigate by looking closely at similarities, differences, patterns and change. They achieve well when they are manipulating objects, assembling and constructing using a variety of materials. The children make good progress in developing their capabilities in information and communication technology equipment. Older children demonstrate a secure grasp of basic skills; they know how to complete simple programs and to print out their work independently. Children make very good progress in learning to move with control, balance and skill. They demonstrate confidence when climbing and boldly riding wheeled vehicles. They handle tools and objects and manipulate materials with very good levels of control.
4. The good achievement by the relatively high proportion of children with special educational needs is helped by their careful integration into the full range of activities and the high expectations of their achievement by all staff. Specialist support, for example, with the local education communication co-ordinator, is well focused and effective in enabling children to make good progress. Children from all ethnic groups and those children whose home language is not English make good progress.
5. Children make steady progress in communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and creative development overall. They make better progress in exploring media and materials because they are provided with many opportunities to handle and work with a range of substances and equipment in two and three-dimensions. Imaginative play is well developed through role-play in some classrooms. However, this is not consistently the case throughout the school. Progress in music is sound. There is insufficient focus on developing understanding of other cultural traditions and roles.

Children's attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The children's spiritual, moral and social development is **good**. Cultural development is **satisfactory**. Children's behaviour is **good** and they have very positive attitudes to school and to learning. Attendance is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children very much enjoy coming to school and show strong interest and persistence in the activities they experience.
- The school successfully promotes very good relationships amongst all adults, including parents, and between children.
- The majority of the children behave very well.
- Children operate very independently within the secure and positive ethos offered by the school.
- Children have a good understanding of right and wrong and their social skills are developing well.
- Children's understanding of a wide range of cultures other than their own is a weakness.

COMMENTARY

6. Children's attitudes to learning are very good and they very much enjoy coming to school. The school has clearly-established routines and this ensures that even very new children settle quickly and become swiftly absorbed into an activity. Children are fascinated by the quality and range of experiences offered to them, especially in the extensive outdoor area. They are eager to discuss and plan together what they intend to do in a later session. Because of this good provision, most children show very good levels of perseverance, with exceptional concentration on the part of some older children. They show enthusiasm when they make discoveries, such as when a child shouts out "purple!" on seeing red and blue mix to become a new colour, and they also recognise their own successes. Because the school is developing their self-esteem well, they are happy to share these feelings with other children and adults as well as to seek help when necessary.
7. The children work well with one another, readily forming good relationships. They show consideration to each other, and older children in particular have learnt to negotiate effectively. Good examples of this were seen when a group of boys who were running trains on two tracks agreed which way each needed to go to avoid a crash. Another older girl willingly agreed to help a group of very new children in their first music session. They showed growing confidence and enthusiasm as they followed her lead in familiar activities and responded to her evident pride in their joint success. Children generally behave well in response to the clear expectations of adults and racial harmony among the children is excellent, as it is in the whole school community.
8. Children are able to operate with a high level of independence because the good teaching in the school helps children to develop their confidence well. They make suitable choices from the broad range of activities and make more imaginative decisions in the wider outdoor environment. The majority of children take responsibility for their personal hygiene and meet the school's expectation that they will manage both dressing-up clothes and coats independently.
9. The children's spiritual development is good and they appreciate the quality of their environment, treating it with respect. When studying the visiting tortoises, children show high levels of sensitivity to the needs of the animals as well as expressing amazement at their appearance and movement. They look after the tortoises carefully when they are loose in the orchard and eagerly take responsibility for tracking them. Children are also fascinated by the falling conkers and make a connection between those and the falling apples which they can eat. The children's moral awareness is good. They understand issues of right and wrong within their community and know what that means for the way

they should behave towards others. Children are learning cultural awareness through the celebration of world festivals, where they meet visitors and sample different food. However, this area of work is not sufficiently well developed.

- Levels of attendance are satisfactory for children of this age. The school works very well with parents to ensure that they understand the need to bring their children regularly to school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good overall. There are many good features but also several important areas for development. **Teaching and learning are good.** There are a number of important strengths. Staff are especially effective at helping the children to settle very quickly and to feel safe and secure. The school successfully fosters children’s personal, social and emotional development, speaking skills, physical confidence and interest and understanding about the world. The good range of activities and events that children experience contributes significantly to the children’s positive attitudes to learning. The very good outdoor area is used very well to stimulate curiosity and promote learning in a good range of areas. There is the potential to extend this further to support learning, particularly in communication, language and literacy, mathematical and creative development. Children with special educational needs are well supported and fully included. The school plans to involve parents more fully in the partnership in learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching is **good**. Assessment is **satisfactory**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Staff provide a wide range of attractively presented resources and activities to stimulate children’s curiosity and interest.
- Teaching encourages children to be independent and to concentrate and persevere in their chosen activities.
- Staff help children settle very quickly into school so that they feel safe and secure.
- Children with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make good progress because the whole staff are alert to their needs and meet them well.
- Teamwork amongst staff is good and all make a significant contribution to children’s learning.
- Planning for adult-led activities is not sufficiently well developed.
- Whole-class activities are often not well managed to maximise learning.
- Assessments do not sufficiently inform the next planned steps in learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 24 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (62%)	9 (38%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

11. Teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. Staff skilfully present a wide range of engaging materials and activities to stimulate interest and curiosity. Playing imaginatively with dinosaurs and shaving foam, making jam sandwiches, and exploring patterns in colour and shape with dried beans and lentils are some of the rich ways in which children are enticed into using all their senses through exploratory play. New children are sensitively introduced to materials which may not be familiar to them and are deftly drawn into taking part.
12. Children choose their activities and are often immersed in their play for long periods of time. Practitioners encourage this deep involvement and make well-timed and skilful interventions to extend the learning. They watch the children carefully and offer well-considered assistance when they encounter small problems. As a result, children develop good powers of concentration and perseverance and feel successful. They are encouraged to think for themselves and to become self-reliant.
13. Staff quickly get to know the children very well. Parents are welcomed into the nursery at the start and end of each session, even though the classes are small and cramped. This enables parents and staff to keep in close touch about events at home and in the nursery. The genuine warmth and care that staff show to families helps the children to settle into nursery and to feel happy and confident in developing trusting relationships with one another.
14. Teachers work very effectively with the well-qualified nursery nurses, support staff and students. They manage a rich menu of activities over two twice-daily sessions. The first half of each session is held indoors, with children being free to move between rooms. In the second half, the vast majority of children elect to be outside in the extensive and well-resourced grounds. Staff foster spirited, adventurous physical play and as a result the children become skilled drivers of wheeled vehicles, keen climbers and able investigators in the orchard. The progress they make in their understanding of the natural world and their physical development is good.
15. Teaching of children with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language is good. Staff know and care for the children very well. They show a good awareness of the range and type of needs within the school. They are adept at providing appropriate support and guidance and this enables all children to participate fully and to make good progress relative to their abilities. As a result, the children thrive and become successful learners.
16. A less effective aspect of the teaching is the management of whole-class sessions when children gather together for snack time and some story sessions. Not all staff are equally skilled in leading large groups. Insufficient thought is given to the contrasting emotional and social needs of the very new children and those who have been at nursery longer. These sessions are often rushed; the children are frequently restless and, as a consequence, good learning opportunities sometimes are missed for reviewing learning through discussion.
17. Since the last inspection teachers have become more familiar with the nursery curriculum and more confident in their planning. The adult-led activities have identified learning intentions for children of differing abilities. However, the detail in the planning is not sufficient for all staff reliably to transmit the plan into action and to achieve the intended outcomes. For example, the planning for an activity designed to support the children's

growing use of language did not identify the possible vocabulary to be learnt, or the questions and comments which might encourage children to talk. As a result, many learning opportunities were missed. Within the weekly planning, children use a wide range of resources but there are limited opportunities for children to revisit, revise and consolidate their skills and experiences from one day to the next. Similarly, staff do not always give enough attention to matching their adult-led activities well enough to the children who have been at the nursery for some time. Consequently, there are a small number of occasions when these children are not making enough gains in their learning.

18. The recently developed system of recording short, insightful observations of children at play makes a useful contribution to individual photographic portfolios of learning which are made available for children and parents. The observations and the photographs are dated, enabling children's progress to be monitored. At the moment, the observations are not used well enough in staff planning sessions to identify and plan the next steps in learning for individuals. The new assessment records for each child appropriately cover all six areas of learning. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum is **satisfactory**. The resources and accommodation are **satisfactory** overall. Classrooms are small and confined but the use of the extensive outdoor area is **good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Good opportunities for children to make choices from a broad range of planned activities.
- The extensive outdoor area is used well.
- The provision for children with special educational needs is good.
- The development of early written communication skills is not given sufficient prominence.
- The indoor areas are cramped and this inhibits the range of activities the school is able to provide.
- There are too few resources to fully develop the children's awareness of a wide range of cultures.

COMMENTARY

19. Since the last inspection, sound progress has been made with developing curriculum planning. Staff now use a consistent planning format and devise a balanced range of activities which are cross referenced to the six areas of learning for children of nursery age. Many of the activities are linked by a common theme; for example, pets, colour and shape. The planned experiences and resources engage children's interests and stimulate their curiosity because they are attractively presented. There are good opportunities for children to make choices between planned activities, some of which are led by adults and some in which they can work alone.
20. The 'outdoor classroom' is a very good learning resource. It is used throughout the year on a daily basis for the second half of each session. The orchard is a popular area and an inspiring resource for children's burgeoning interest in the natural world. It encompasses many different fruiting native trees and plants and associated insect life. The permanent climbing apparatus and trim trail are well used for the development of physical skills, strength and stamina. Under the shelter of the verandah, children build

and construct in sand and wood, draw with chunky chinks on the playground and learn about the properties of water.

21. The school makes good provision for children with special educational needs and takes a pride in successfully integrating children from all ethnic groups, including those children whose home language is not English. There are good levels of additional support given to those children with special educational needs, and the progress of these children towards their individual targets is closely monitored. For example, the local education authority communication co-ordinator regularly visits the school to provide specialist support for the children and guidance for the staff.
22. The development of children's speaking skills is well established across many aspects of the nursery's curriculum but the provision of opportunities for written communication is under-developed. A good start has been made by ensuring that writing areas are an established feature of each class, but there is scope for nurturing children's emerging skills more fully.
23. The indoor accommodation is cramped, presenting staff with many challenges in planning the best use of the space in which to provide a rich and varied curriculum. Often less-than-ideal compromises have to be made. For example, children constructing with large, hollow building blocks share the room with the quiet reading area and the space used for snack time. Over the week staff plan frequent changes of materials and activities but this restricts the opportunities for children to revisit and revise their learning from the previous day. The school plans to broaden the ongoing curriculum and release the pressure on indoor accommodation by increasing the learning space by enclosing some of the generous outdoor area with additional fencing.
24. As yet there are few opportunities for children to develop higher levels of independence by following their strong personal interests, setting up their own activities and gathering their resources. In spite of the constraints on space, staff work well to create a visually attractive learning environment.
25. The curriculum is enriched by occasional visits to local shops, including the hairdresser's and Mead Open Farm. Parents and family friends who have a particular skill or an interest to share contribute well in broadening children's experiences. During the week of the inspection, four tortoises became a focus of fascination and interest, while the week before, kittens were the centre of attraction.
26. Display and resources are not used well enough to reflect the rich diversity of culture and heritage of children currently attending the nursery.

CARE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The school provides **very good** levels of care for children and **good** levels of support and guidance.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Very good relationships contribute strongly to the very positive ethos of the school.
- The school has very good systems to ensure the welfare, health and safety of all children.
- Induction procedures for children entering the school are very good.

- Children do not always have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

COMMENTARY

27. Relationships are very good at all levels. Adults are successful in developing children's independence and identifying an appropriate need for support and guidance. The staff operate very well together as a team, which enables children to easily access support when they need it from any adult.
28. The school provides a good balance between careful assessment of risk and allowing children to be sufficiently free to explore their environment and to make decisions of their own. In particular, the school successfully encourages children to make adventurous use of the large outdoor area. Children feel a real excitement in exploring the orchard and in riding their tricycles at speed downhill. They rapidly learn to be considerate of each other, for example, when negotiating a passing place for the cycles. All children make good progress in developing their confidence and self-assurance.
29. Induction arrangements for new children are carefully and effectively designed to meet the needs of each family. The time which parents or carers spend in school is also used very well to promote links between families. The school is very alert and sensitive to parental needs. A good example was seen when the school went to some trouble to give exact details of a child's activities to an anxious parent on the telephone. The nursery's care arrangements are securely established, well staffed and they work very well.
30. A weakness is the small amount of time in the school routine allocated for children to meet together and to reflect on what they have learned. As a result, some learning opportunities are lost. Individual and group achievements are often discussed and celebrated with an adult but the stimulus of sharing each other's experiences and feelings is missing. Opportunities to plan future developments with the children are not sufficiently well developed.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS, OTHER SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

The school has developed **very good** links with other schools and the community. The partnership with parents is **good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Parents like the school and most consider that the children make good progress.
- Parents are comfortable about approaching the school with complaints or concerns.
- Links with the community and other schools.
- Currently there is no formal system for parents to contribute to their children's learning.

COMMENTARY

31. There are high levels of parental satisfaction. They are very happy with the school and feel that their children make good progress. In meetings with parents at school, informally and at the parents meeting, they were very positive about the school and the only concern they have expressed is that some parents are uncertain about how well their children are progressing. Although staff meet parents on a daily basis which allows them to talk informally about their children's learning and progress no formal progress meetings take

place. The school is aware of this shortcoming and is at an early stage of developing a more formal approach.

32. The school provides parents with a very comprehensive school brochure, termly newsletters and, before the children arrive at the nursery, information about the procedure for settling them into school. The governors' annual report to parents is very well presented and sets out in a very easy format details of the life and work of the school.
33. The school maintains a useful profile folder for each child, comprising of information gathered about that child while they are in school. It contains factual information collected from parents or carers before the child starts in the nursery. Also in the folder is a brief history of the child's life before entering the nursery, prepared by the parent. All this information is well used to help settle the child into the life of the school. An insightful report is prepared six weeks after the child starts nursery, describing how well they have settled in. As the child progresses through the school, assessment sheets are added together with photographs showing them busy at the activities. Staff write observations on these which are referenced to the Stepping Stones and Early Learning Goals. Finally, a Leaver's Report is completed, which is a comprehensive summary of the child's experience and abilities. The profile folder is kept in the child's classroom and is readily accessible to them, their parents and staff. Parents are permitted to take the folders home to review and they can be retained by them when the child leaves the school.
34. Parents give valuable support to the school by fund-raising and with such activities as redecorating the play house, running a fun sports day with pupils from the local high school and similar events.
35. The school has developed very good links with other nursery and play schools in the area and meets termly to share experiences and good practice. The Tadpoles Unit for babies and very young children is on the same site and is managed by the nursery school headteacher and the governing body. This results in a smooth transition for children when they enter the nursery. Arrangements for children to transfer to infant schools are very well managed, with teachers coming from those schools to get to know the children and vice versa. Children have short trial visits to the infant schools and those schools also get a copy of the final report to parents, with their permission.
36. Grasmere Nursery School has very good links with local colleges and provides placements for students on early years and childcare courses. The school also works closely with the local university's teacher training students and the local education authority.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are good. The new headteacher is a very effective leader who has swiftly introduced significant improvements to the existing practice. Governors are proactive and provide a high level of support for developing the nursery. The leadership and management of key staff are **satisfactory**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Very good leadership by the headteacher is resulting in important improvements in practice throughout the school.

- Governors make a strong contribution to the leadership of nursery; they are well led by the highly committed chair of governors.
- The good day-to-day management of the provision for special educational needs and those children with English as an additional language ensures that children get the support they need to be fully included in all activities.
- The roles of teachers with senior management responsibilities are satisfactory, but further development of their role is needed to ensure a full involvement in school improvement.
- Subject co-ordinators are satisfactory but they do not yet have a sufficiently sharp grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the areas of learning they lead.

COMMENTARY

37. The new headteacher is providing strong leadership and management for the school. She has a very clear vision for the next phase of the school's development which is based upon an expert understanding of how young children learn best. While maintaining and further developing the welcoming, family atmosphere, the headteacher is committed to further improving the school's performance and the quality and range of children's learning experiences and opportunities. She has swiftly introduced innovations in assessment practice, curriculum planning and the use of role-play, and enhanced the use of outdoor areas as a learning environment. The headteacher has secured the full confidence of teachers, staff and parents in the short period of time she has been in post. There is a shared sense of purpose within the school to provide high quality education for all the children, with a strong commitment to inclusion and full equality of opportunity.
38. The effectiveness of teachers with delegated leadership responsibilities is satisfactory overall but it is a recognised area for further development. Senior teachers are very supportive of the headteacher. Their roles are being re-defined currently to ensure that they are more fully active in leading school developments. Leadership and management of special educational needs are good and ensure that support is targeted to where the need is greatest, enabling those children to take a full and inclusive role in all the school has to offer.
39. Procedures for monitoring the curriculum provision and the quality of learning and teaching are not well enough established. Since the last inspection, subject co-ordinators have increased their influence over what is taught in their areas and they have successfully improved resources and led projects to improve staff subject knowledge, in information and communication technology, for example. However, co-ordinators do not have a clear enough picture of what impact the changes made are having upon standards and the children's achievements. They do not formally observe learning in each other's classes so they are unable to evaluate the quality of learning and, thereby, contribute insightfully to the process of planning for further improvement.
40. Management is good. Day-to-day management runs smoothly and the school is a well ordered and secure place for all children. The office team plays an important part in establishing a sense of warm welcome. In a short time the headteacher has made a rigorous evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of all aspects of the school's work and improvement planning is thorough and suitably focused upon addressing the identified weaknesses. All staff work well together and there is a very positive ethos which is evident in the way all staff respond and treat the children and parents. Performance management is in the process of being used more robustly by the new

headteacher so that each member of staff is absolutely clear about what is expected of them. Procedures for monitoring staff performance are, similarly, beginning to be used effectively to identify areas of professional development. Staff training has sensibly focused on developing common systems of planning, assessment and recording children's achievements. Visits have been made to other schools to enable teachers to observe good practice in role-play. This has resulted in role-play being well developed in some classes in the school.

41. The governance of the school is good. Governors are hard working, extremely supportive of the school and they fulfil their statutory duties conscientiously and well. The chair of governors, ably supported by the vice chair, leads the governors energetically and effectively. He regularly spends time in the school informing himself about how the school is operating by talking with children and staff. A good partnership with the headteacher is established and the chair of governors plays an active part in key strategic decisions. Governors' meetings are very well attended and conducted purposefully. There are well-established structures for working efficiently through committees and this provides the governors with a rounded picture of the life and work of the school. The governing body is committed to ensuring that all children get the support they need to achieve well. It challenges when necessary to make sure that it is getting best value from the resources the nursery buys. Governors are rightly proud of their work in ensuring the successful introduction of new initiatives such as the 'Tadpoles' unit. While the governors do monitor the range and quality of the curriculum, they do not have a sufficiently precise view of whether all children are learning as well as they might in all areas of learning and throughout the school.
42. Financial planning is good. This is significant since the school has taken on increased responsibilities for managing its own delegated budget recently. The school has successfully managed to set a balanced budget this year. Financial management and control are secure. Good procedures are in place to ensure that the school gets best value for money from agreements and the purchase of goods. The school provides good value for money.
43. The following table indicates the overall balances from the last financial year for which there are completed accounts.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	389,311
Total expenditure	385,613
Expenditure per FTE pupil	4,943

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	4,049
Balance carried forward to the next year	-15,285

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING AND SUBJECTS

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision for personal, social and emotional development is **good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Children make good progress towards the Early Learning Goals for personal, social and emotional development at the end of their reception year.
- Children demonstrate high levels of concentration and perseverance.
- Children of most ages and abilities show that they are willing to take responsibility for their own learning and actions.

COMMENTARY

44. The majority of children show good levels of concentration and perseverance and often spend a considerable time on one activity before moving on. This is particularly the case in the well-equipped role-play areas where particularly skilful intervention from some adults helps children to extend both their thinking and their language. Children also make very good use of the opportunities offered by the outdoor environment to pursue imaginative play at some length. For example, two boys enjoyed climbing the stile through the “secret” gate and were engaged in a complex adventure role-play which absorbed them for most of the session.
45. Independent learning skills are fostered as children are given the confidence and freedom to choose their activity and to make decisions about how to use what is available. Because children are given a high degree of flexibility in choosing what interests them, they are successfully beginning to understand that they can have control over their own learning. As a consequence, they are also developing the confidence to play alone or in a variety of different groupings. Because adults exploit every opportunity to build up the children’s confidence and self-esteem, children know that their efforts and ideas are respected and valued.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The provision for communication, language and literacy is **satisfactory**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Children of all abilities achieve very well in spoken language.
- Adults enthusiastically seek out opportunities to encourage children to develop their ideas through talk.
- Children are supported well in aspects of their development of early writing.
- Children enjoy books and understand that the print carries meaning.
- Adult-led focused activities are not always planned in enough detail to help children improve.

- The written environment does not support progress in reading and writing sufficiently.
- Children are not able to access a sufficient variety of books.

COMMENTARY

46. Children use spoken language very well for both communication and thinking. In the well-developed role-play areas in two of the classrooms, children are able to express their ideas clearly. An older boy is able to use language persuasively to sell buns in the baker's shop: "Is this enough for you? Would you like just two more?" and goes on to ask, "Would you like your cup of tea now?" Other younger children use language well to enhance their imaginative play. Creeping through the latch gate and stile, one says "...this is the secret way – nobody can follow..." An older girl is able to explain what is happening in the photographs in her profile, recalling events which are important to her and speaking fluently in complete, sometimes complex sentences.
47. Adults take every opportunity to develop and explore vocabulary with children, discussing the texture of the cake being mixed and of the conkers in the orchard. They offer good models of language to children and have high expectations of children's ability to speak clearly and for a purpose, for example, delivering carefully planned messages to the school office. They use questions well to encourage speculation and extend thinking and some staff are particularly skilled in making high quality interventions in both role-play and discussion.
48. Children enjoy listening to stories and are able to join in with repeated refrains. They understand how books are organised and handle them appropriately. One older boy recognises and reads the title 'How do you put it on?' spontaneously while another turns to recipe books for information in a role-play area. An older girl is able to re-read the adult-scribed captions in her book of photographs. She is supported well by an adult to link some sounds and symbols. Children benefit from the self-registration in some of the classes so that they quickly come to recognise their names. This is adapted well for older children to include both names. Children are making good progress in developing a sense of rhythm. Good teaching in a music session helped children to recognise the syllables in their names and to recognise and copy different rhythms. Children enjoy a comfortable bench in the outdoor area which has a supply of books appropriate to the environment. However, because there are few big books, teachers use small texts with large groups of children who are therefore not fully involved and lose their concentration. The supply of books in each classroom contains very little non-fiction and the school stock of classified non-fiction is not accessible to children. As a result, children are not able to develop the habit of looking to books for ideas and information, and adults are not able to model this for them. A valuable opportunity to develop a good learning routine is lost.
49. The school provides a sound range of opportunities both in the classrooms and the outside area for children to practise mark-making. Children using large brushes and rollers show precision in 'painting' specific areas with water and spend extended time experimenting with making different shapes in shaving foam, dried beans and coloured rice particles. When adults are present they are encouraged to associate the marks with known letters. Children readily use material from the writing areas in each room to 'write' for communication. One girl concentrates hard on writing a list of the "things fairies need from the fairy shop" and with good support from an adult, develops her ideas well. They write confidently in the role-play areas, for example, labelling the buns for sale and

making appointments at the vet's surgery. Sometimes, however, the writing is not developed fully because there is nowhere in the school where it can be pinned up or posted or otherwise made use of.

50. Because assessment and planning of adult-led group activities are not sufficiently detailed, all children do not have enough opportunity to address regularly the individually identified next steps in their learning, particularly in the key skills of linking letters and sounds, and higher-order writing for communication.
51. The classroom and outdoor environments are not fully used to enhance children's understanding of the purposes of literacy. There are too few displays at children's eye level to attract the children's interest and to enable them to interact with them. A few pictures have very simple captions or labels written by adults but there are very few other examples of writing of any kind. Because not enough emergent writing or other independent mark-making by children is clearly on display, children are not given the very important message that their 'writing' is real and valued by adults, and so important opportunities to emphasise the reasons for learning to read and write are lost. The wider environment is not used well enough to immerse children in examples of the uses of literacy; for example, there are few signs and symbols such as arrows, outdoors as well as inside, and children are not stimulated by continually recognising the benefits of reading and writing.
52. The co-ordinator provides sound support for staff and parents and undertakes some limited monitoring of planning, which represents some improvement since the last inspection. However, she is still not able to maintain an overview of consistency between classes and between the aspects of this area of learning.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision for mathematical development is **satisfactory**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Many varied activities which promote mathematical understanding and language.
- Good resources for role-play and computers.
- Focused group teaching is not used consistently well across the nursery.

COMMENTARY

53. Children start school with expected levels of mathematical understanding and are on course to achieve the right levels when they leave the nursery. Progress is satisfactory, although a few of the older children make better-than-expected progress. Throughout the week, the children have access to a wide variety of activities that promote their understanding in all aspects of mathematics. The materials and equipment are thoughtfully selected to give the children a broad range of experiences. Making patterns with beans and lentils, counting collected conkers from the orchard and making triangular sandwiches are a number of free-choice activities in which children explore and develop their understanding. Staff also make good use of incidental opportunities to support mathematical development. Children painting with water and long-handled rollers are challenged to see how high they can reach and to cover the empty spaces. Those

watching the tortoises are urged to count the shapes on their backs and observe the triangular bite shape left in the eaten cucumber.

54. Children naturally turn to using mathematical language in the well-resourced role-play areas. The baker's shop has real money in the till, there is dough to roll and shape and divide and the bun tray has space for 12 currant buns. The pet shop has large and small dogs to be matched to varying-sized pet carriers and leads of differing lengths. When constructing helicopters with large hollow blocks, children make careful decisions about the ones they choose for their size and position. They use phrases such as 'biggest bits', 'too big', 'heavy' and 'this side'.
55. The children are enthusiastic users of maths computer programs. The programs are well selected by the staff to support the children's mathematical development and to link well with the class topics.
56. The teaching of mathematics through small group games and adult-led activities is very successful but not consistently so in all classes. In the one session seen, children made good progress because the adult knew the children well and led the learning firmly and skilfully to achieve the learning intentions. As a result, children recited numbers in order, counted objects, and matched numerals to groups of animals. Some older children recognised random numerals up to seven and selected the correct number of objects to match.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Children enjoy a rich curriculum which provides a wide range of activities.
- Most children are well on the way to achieve the standards expected of them by the end of the nursery year, and some will exceed them.
- Good use is made of the outdoor area to develop knowledge and understanding of the natural world.
- Visits to places of interest and a variety of visitors are well used to support learning.
- Children have access to a good range of tools and resources.
- Imaginative role-play is not used consistently well throughout the school.

COMMENTARY

57. The children achieve well and most are likely to exceed the expected levels for their age when they leave the nursery. The curriculum is carefully planned to provide a wide and varied range of experiences. All the children show a positive attitude to this area of learning and frequently sustain and maintain interest and concentration for long periods as they become absorbed in imaginative role-play. Two boys explored the characteristics of a soap flake mixture for almost an hour, for example. The children were fascinated by the appearance and behaviour of four tortoises. They show great curiosity by asking questions about what they can see and touch. During these interactions, the nursery nurse adeptly introduced new information and vocabulary such as 'tortoises do not have teeth' and 'hibernation'. Digital cameras are used frequently and effectively by staff to capture these events and are then annotated with children's comments. Photographic evidence confirms that the children experience a good range of activities and experiences both inside and outdoors. An image of a child with a giant sunflower grown at home following germination at school indicates how this area of learning is extended beyond the school with parental support.
58. The children understand how to use telephones, tape recorders and cameras. They know how to use the mouse to control events on the computer screen. The youngest children are sensitively supported as they explore how to operate simple equipment. An older child confidently selected different activities from a program, constructed a picture of a caterpillar by clicking and dragging different parts of the body before proudly printing out his work. The teacher intervened effectively to support the child over a technical problem and used the opportunity to celebrate his achievement and to consolidate technical vocabulary.
59. The children select materials independently from the resources provided when making models and collages. They are taught simple skills well, for example, how to hammer a nail into a piece of wood safely to fix a plastic wheel to the wooden body of the car. They collaborate well when building with construction kits and using brushes and rollers to paint parts of the building and environment with water. The children are developing an appropriate understanding of different roles in society through visits by paramedics with an ambulance and fire fighters to the school. Visits to the local shops and to Mead Open Farm successfully extend the children's knowledge of their locality. Understanding of

different beliefs and religions is well developed through stories and festivals. Their understanding of different cultures is less well provided for, however.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision for physical development is **very good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- The outdoor space is used very well.
- There is a comprehensive range of apparatus for physical development.
- The good teaching encourages and promotes vigorous and adventurous play.
- Many activities are provided for the development of fine motor skills.

COMMENTARY

60. Children do very well in this area of learning and are likely to exceed the level expected when they leave the nursery because of the good provision and good teaching. They make very good progress in developing confidence and control of the way they move and handle tools and equipment.
61. A significant strength of the nursery is the large, well-equipped outdoor area. This is where the children love to be. The equipment has been thoughtfully selected and located to ensure that children can develop a broad range of physical skills. The challenging, permanent climbing apparatus meets the needs of older and more confident children. Climbers reach a good height with a spirit of adventure. The wooden trim trail provides easier climbing opportunities. The wheeled toys are sturdy and of good quality. Many have the option of carrying two children at the same time, thus increasing the load and helping the development of strong leg muscles. Children develop good stamina and co-ordination as they boldly steer the vehicles down the gently sloping site, avoiding obstacles in their paths. They soon learn that running uphill can make them hot and tired. The layout and use of the outdoors allows children plenty of space in which to run safely from one area to another. The orchard offers shelter, shade and yet more opportunities for imaginative adventure. Staff encourage robust physical development but never at the expense of the children's health and safety.
62. Indoors and under the verandah are many vibrant free-choice activities for children to develop dexterity and fine hand control. Children use tools including paintbrushes large and small, hand-drills, hammer and nails at the carpentry bench, spades and shovels in the large sand pit and cookery equipment. The materials too are many and varied. Children develop the co-ordination of thumb and forefinger in moulding and pinching dough, picking up beans to make patterns, and hanging out the freshly washed dolls clothes. Older children learn to write their names successfully.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **satisfactory**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- A good range of opportunities is provided for children to explore a diverse range of media and materials.
- The children show very good levels of concentration and perseverance.

- There is a limited range of multi-cultural resources for music and to stimulate imaginative activity.
- The teaching does not support child-initiated learning sufficiently.

COMMENTARY

63. Children of all abilities enjoy getting involved in creative activities and most are attaining at the levels expected for their age. They make good progress exploring media and materials. The teaching of creative development is satisfactory overall. Teachers and staff are careful to provide a good variety of activities to support creative development but they are predominantly activities which the teacher has decided upon and there are too few opportunities for the children to initiate their own creative activities.
64. The children are adept at using a wide range of resources. They often sustain their concentration for long periods of time, for example, when exploring the process of blending paint by building up layers of colours and finding out what effects using two brushes at once can have. A girl shouted with excitement when discovering that pink and blue make purple when mixed together. Displays throughout the school reflect the good variety of two-dimensional painting, printing, collage and mark-making activities undertaken. Children's work on show indicates that they are learning to express their individual interpretation of the tasks given; images vary from those which are careful and quite precise to those which are splashy and gestural, created with gusto and confidence. However, children are not sufficiently encouraged to make choices for themselves and there is an over-emphasis upon creating an end product. Opportunities to extend their learning are sometimes missed.
65. Planning ensures that the children experience a satisfactory range of opportunities to develop their imaginations. There are differences in the quality of furniture and props for role-play areas in the different classes. Children play and act out stories together well in the role-play areas in one classroom in particular. They became fully absorbed in acting out scenes in the baker's shop. Much of the children's role-play work is spontaneous, and in the best practice seen, practitioners are skilful in the way they support and extend children's imaginative thinking. However, the use of role-play to stimulate the children's imaginations is inconsistent throughout the school.
66. The children are making steady progress in learning how to listen to and make music. They use percussion instruments successfully and demonstrate early rhythmic awareness and sense of the repeating pattern of sound. Children sing enthusiastically, even those who are very new entrants to the school. With skilled support from teaching assistants, they learn to clap in time to their name.
67. Creative development is a recognised area for further improvement. The subject co-ordinator has a good understanding of where improvements need to be made. The steps recently taken to improve teachers' understanding of how to maximise the learning opportunities in role-play are having a positive impact. There are well-considered plans to increase the use of the outdoor areas to enhance the provision for creative development.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	2
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	4
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	4
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
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	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	4
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).