

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **HELEN GIBSON NURSERY SCHOOL**

East Boldon

LEA area: South Tyneside

Unique reference number: 108663

Headteacher: Mrs L Brown

Lead inspector: Mr M Thompson

Dates of inspection: 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2005

Inspection number: 266987

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 to 5 years                               |
| Gender of pupils:            | Mixed                                      |
| Number on roll:              | 77 children (part-time)                    |
| School address:              | North Lane<br>East Boldon<br>Tyne and Wear |
| Postcode:                    | NE36 0DL                                   |
| Telephone number:            | 01915 196846                               |
| Fax number:                  | 01915 193404                               |
| Appropriate authority:       | The governing body                         |
| Name of chair of governors:  | Mrs E Thompson                             |
| Date of previous inspection: | 18 <sup>th</sup> March 1999                |

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Helen Gibson Nursery serves the socially advantaged areas of East Boldon and Cleadon, to the north of Sunderland. Its children come from a variety of home backgrounds, and almost all are of white, and of British heritage. Those from homes in which English is an additional language are thinly represented at the school. The 77 children on roll attend part-time each day, either in the morning or afternoon. They are normally admitted in the September of the year in which their fourth birthday falls, and stay at the school for a year before transferring to the Reception class of the local infant school. Children enter the school with a wide range of abilities; some, for example, are highly articulate while others have limited or immature speech. However, attainment on entry to the school is, overall, above what is expected for children of this age. A small number have special educational needs, such as autism, for which they require individual help. The school was given a delegated budget in April 2004, and its governing body was first constituted in September 2004.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team |               |                       | Subject responsibilities  |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|---|
| 25372                          | Mike Thompson | <i>Lead inspector</i> | Special educational needs;<br>English as an additional language.  |
| 9388                           | Anthony Mundy | <i>Lay inspector</i>  |   |
| 26292                          | Helen Mundy   | <i>Team inspector</i> | Foundation Stage Curriculum:-<br>Personal, social and emotional development;<br>Communication, language and literacy;<br>Mathematical development;<br>Knowledge and understanding of the world;<br>Physical development;<br>Creative development. |

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Helen Gibson Nursery is a **good and effective school** which provides good value for money. Its parents think highly of the staff because their children are happy and achieve well. A particular strength of the school is its success in developing children's independence as learners. Overall, the school is well led and managed, teaching is good, and the range of activities provided for the children is varied and interesting.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Children thrive in the school's caring environment and make at least good progress in all aspects of their learning.
- The headteacher gives very good leadership and is supported wholeheartedly by the staff.
- The children's attitudes towards their learning, their behaviour, and their social and moral development are excellent.
- Children learn well because they are provided with exciting and interesting things to do, and teaching staff are good at developing children's natural curiosity.
- Relationships throughout the school are excellent.
- Opportunities for children to develop skills in mathematics could be improved.
- The school's partnership with parents is very good.
- There are inconsistencies in the day-to-day recording of children's achievements.
- Not all staff have clear and up-to-date job descriptions.

The school has made reasonable progress since its last inspection in 1999. There is now greater emphasis on the teaching of number in 'small group time', although the school's provision for mathematics could be even better. While the first phase of development of the outdoor area has helped children in their physical development, the school recognises that this area needs to be developed further and has clear plans to do this. However, when children use the outdoor area, staff still tend to take a supervisory rather than a teaching role. The introduction of a 'Celebration File' for each child, taken home at the end of the week, and a parents' meeting at the start of each year have helped to keep parents better informed. Children continue to make good progress because the good quality teaching, the broad curriculum and the good leadership have been sustained. However, the assessment of children is not as good as previously reported. The high standards of behaviour, and the children's personal development previously celebrated, have been improved even further.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Overall, **achievement is good**, with boys and girls generally being equally successful. On starting school, most children have levels of skills, knowledge and understanding which are better than those of the average three year old. The very strong focus placed on children's personal, social and emotional development ensures that children quickly become confident and independent learners and make good progress overall during their year in school. By the time they transfer to the Reception classes at the local infant school, most children attain standards that are well above average in personal, social and emotional development and above average in all other areas of learning. The school effectively supports children with specific learning difficulties, and they also make good progress. A particularly noteworthy feature is children's achievement in the aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world relating to the environment.

The children really enjoy school and take an enthusiastic part in activities, showing high levels of interest and commitment. Overall, **children's personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are excellent.** Further outstanding features of the school are children's attitudes to their work, and their behaviour. Attendance is satisfactory.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The school provides a good quality of education for its children, with good teaching and learning.** The best teaching occurs in 'small group time', where members of the teaching staff work with small groups of children through a varied programme of activities. In these activities, teaching staff are good at making sure that all children play a full part. The excellent relationships between all members of the school community contribute strongly to children's enjoyment in learning. In 'work time' sessions, where children choose what they are to do, direct teaching is less in evidence because of the school's very strong commitment to promoting children's independence. However, during these activities, the balance between children's freedom of choice and the staff's direction of what they do needs to be adjusted slightly so that more opportunities can be taken to develop the learning that is taking place. Formal assessment procedures are satisfactory. Although all staff know the children very well, records of day-to-day assessments of children's achievements vary in quality from one teaching group to another.

This very inclusive school provides a rich curriculum, a particularly good feature of which is the 'Forest School' where children use the outdoors as their classroom, with natural materials as their tools for learning. This takes place at the local environmental centre, which all children visit for a block of six morning or afternoon sessions on consecutive weeks. An area for improvement is the provision for children's mathematical development. In 'work time', the mathematics resources set out for children are underused, and planning for mathematics in 'small group time' is under-represented in comparison with other areas of learning. The accommodation and the equipment available for children are satisfactory overall. However, the classroom accommodation is cramped and the school lacks storage space, particularly for the large equipment used for outdoor learning. Staffing levels are good, and children are cared for very well. A noteworthy feature of the care provided is the initiative to introduce the children who stay for a meal at lunchtime to a range of healthy food. The school's good links with the community are evident in many ways; for example, the local childminders visit the school to borrow toys from a 'library' which is kept for shared use. Liaison with the local infant school is very good, and the deputy headteacher of the infant school is one of the governors.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Overall, the **leadership and management of the school are good.** The headteacher has high aspirations for the children and provides very clear leadership. The staff form a very effective team and are fully committed to the school's aims; they contribute much to creating a climate in which children flourish. However, improvements need to be made to ensure that all staff have current and relevant job descriptions, which can then form a basis for the management of their work. Governance is satisfactory. The newly constituted governing body is coming to terms with its responsibilities, but the impact of its work cannot yet be judged. Many of the governors have links with the school, and know a lot about it. Legal requirements relating to the school are properly met.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents hold the school in very high regard. Their views are fully justified. The children are happy and well motivated, and enjoy coming to school.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

**The most important things the school should do to improve are:**

- ensure that children's mathematical development enjoys a higher profile;
- ensure that the on-going records of children's achievements are kept to the same standard throughout the school;
- review and update staff job descriptions.



## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in areas of learning**

Children of all backgrounds and levels of ability achieve well in all aspects of their learning. By the end of the children's year in the Nursery, standards are generally better than those expected for their age. Boys and girls generally achieve equally well.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children attain very good standards in their personal, social and emotional development.
- There is good development of children's early skills in speaking, reading and writing.
- Children's knowledge of the environment is very good.
- Children have good skills in counting, but other aspects of their mathematical development are not practised regularly enough.
- Children with severe learning difficulties achieve well.

#### **Commentary**

1. Standards attained in the areas of learning are at similar levels to those reported at the time of the previous inspection. Most children start school with above average skills overall, and they firmly consolidate and broaden these during their year at the school.

2. When governors were asked to give reasons why they thought that the school is successful, they correctly cited the following reasons:

- \* The school is very good at developing children's independence as learners.
- \* It is an open, welcoming school, in which staff know and care for the children very well. There is a happy 'family' atmosphere in which every individual is important.

3. Children rapidly develop independence as learners because of the staff's strong commitment to provide a curriculum structure that helps to achieve this aim, and part of this structure is the security provided for children through well-established routines. Children know, for instance, that as soon as they arrive for the start of a session it is 'work time' and so they quickly set about choosing from the wide range of activities set out for them. The strengths of this 'work time' session lie in its planning, which ensures that the activities provided cover all areas of learning and give ample opportunities for children to explore and enquire. The success of the session in the way in which it interests and challenge the children is evident in their response, since they stay with their chosen activities for sustained periods. The weakness in the session is that sometimes adults do not seize opportunities to develop children's learning further through direct teaching. Much of this takes place in 'small group time' and 'circle time'. In these sessions other aspects of children's personal development, such as learning to sit quietly and listen, are successfully developed.

4. The children's social development is enhanced by the very good individual care given to them. There is also a good ratio of adults to children, which means that children receive a lot of individual attention. In specific cases, such as children with severe learning difficulties, this individual support is essential in helping them to play a part in all activities. The good quality specialist help that they are given enables them to achieve well. For all children, the family atmosphere, based on excellent relationships, provides a very good climate for learning. The excellent behaviour and relationships between children, evident throughout the school, provide the foundation for the very good standards of personal development achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> At Helen Gibson Nursery, 'circle time' is the name given to a session led by one of the teaching staff for all of the children together.

5. An additional impact of the curriculum, and in particular the Forest School initiative, is seen in children's very good knowledge about many aspects of the environment. Teaching staff are good at making links between lessons at the Forest School and children's day-to-day experiences, and build on children's natural curiosity to help them learn.

6. Overall, the school places a strong emphasis on developing children's skills in communication, language and literacy, since this, alongside children's social development, provides the foundation for progress in all other areas of learning. During discussions, teaching staff build effectively on the good, and sometimes exceptional, vocabulary of some children to develop the skills of those who have immature speech patterns and are reluctant to speak at any length. This approach is also effective in supporting children for whom English is an additional language. At the time of the inspection, the single child who needed this support proved to be confident in communicating with other children and adults, despite being unable to receive extra specialist help from the local authority because of staffing difficulties. In 'work time' sessions, children's use of the 'writing area', in which they play out the roles of doctors or secretaries, helps to develop their skills in making marks on paper and their understanding that text conveys a message. During direct teaching sessions, staff make every effort to involve children in reading activities, such as identifying the name of the day of the week, or 'reading' a 'big book' about the life cycle of a frog. However, less emphasis is placed on giving children ready access to a wide range of books. To some extent, this occurs because space is severely restricted. Library books are stored on a trolley, but this was little used during the period of the inspection.

7. The development of children's skills in mathematics largely takes place within teaching sessions. Mathematics activities provided for 'work time' were largely ignored by the children. Those who chose to work in the area did not use the activity for its intended purpose. For instance, equipment intended to develop children's skills in sorting objects was instead used to hold a 'tea party' – entirely worthwhile learning in itself, but not of a mathematical nature. Nonetheless, children have generally good skills in recognising numbers and in counting.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Children's excellent attitudes and behaviour, together with their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, contribute significantly to their achievements. These aspects maintain or exceed the high standards noted during the previous inspection.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- All children are keen to do their best in lessons and in other activities.
- Children fully meet the school's very high expectations of behaviour and courtesy.
- Relationships at all levels are exceptional.

### **Commentary**

8. Children arrive happily at school each day, eager to begin lessons and all other activities. Their consistently excellent attitudes contribute significantly to the ethos of the school, and to the quality of learning in activities. They always listen attentively to their teachers, and respond enthusiastically to questions. They select and use resources with great care, often working independently for extended periods, without the need for close supervision. During the inspection, no child was seen to be unoccupied.

9. Behaviour is usually excellent. Staff have very high expectations of behaviour, and they consistently praise the children's efforts and personal kindnesses. Occasional small disputes are mediated unobtrusively, and adults' decisions are accepted without resentment. During the inspection, on a visit to a Forest School activity, children meticulously followed safety instructions while engaging in numerous exciting activities. Their exceptionally good vocabulary enables them

to explain the potential hazards in everyday objects. For instance, during a good mathematics session, a child asked the purpose of the small holes in his plastic carrier bag. The teacher then asked the class why an unpunctured plastic bag might be dangerous. To which one child replied: 'You can't breathe (through it)'. While another said 'You'll die!'

10. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent overall, although potential multicultural links are not always fully exploited. Adults in the school are very good role models for courteous and thoughtful behaviour. They are immediately supportive when children seek help or reassurance, and contribute subtly to the children's high levels of self-esteem, self-awareness and awareness of the world around them. Children's very good spiritual development is evident in, for example, their interest in how their tadpoles are eating and growing, and their wonder at the changes seen each week in daffodils growing at the Forest School.

11. All relationships are excellent. Children are friendly and cheerful, and they respond confidently and pleasantly to staff and to visitors. They are very poised and sociable at lunchtimes, gossiping freely while manipulating cutlery and making choices about what they will eat. Although the children have not yet completed the first year of the two-year Foundation Stage, many have already achieved the goals expected nationally in personal, social and emotional development.

12. Children are encouraged to think about the welfare of people, animals and the environment. They know, for instance, that when tadpoles become frogs they must be returned to the wild, and are aware of the importance of protecting the environment of the Forest School. The wider environment benefits from their recycling projects for ink-cartridges and paper. They are very generous of spirit, and they understand the reasons for contributing to local and national charities. They have good understanding of western culture, but limited understanding of eastern cultures. No links are established with children in the developing world.

13. Attendance statistics for Nursery schools are not collated nationally. Attendance at Helen Gibson in the current school year is satisfactory, although seriously reduced by various childhood illnesses. The school and the local education authority (LEA) closely monitor absence patterns, and agree that very few children are ever absent without good reason. The school's actions to promote good attendance are satisfactory but do not clarify for parents why regular attendance, although not statutory, is a key factor in the educational and personal development of young children.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The school provides a good quality of education for its children. Teaching and learning are good, and the children develop skills of enquiry and independence because of the good curriculum. The staff are very caring and there are very good links between the school and parents.

### **Teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Assessment is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Staff have a good knowledge of how young children learn.
- Excellent relationships provide the basis for good learning.
- The records of on-going assessments of children's achievements vary in quality.
- The very good teamwork between staff contributes to the very good and inclusive climate for learning throughout the school.

## Commentary

14. The good quality of teaching reported at the time of the last inspection has been sustained. The staff work hard as an effective team as they help children to learn. Their very strong commitment to ensure that children learn well stems from the very good leadership of the headteacher.

15. Teaching and learning are best in 'small group time'. In these activities, teaching staff make their lessons interesting through their clear explanations and good dialogue with the children. They are very aware of children's responses and ensure that everyone is involved in learning. Teaching in 'work time' and outdoor play activities is satisfactory. In these sessions, a very strong emphasis is placed on developing children's independence in learning by making choices about what they do. As a result, much less direct teaching takes place, and opportunities to develop children's learning even further are sometimes not taken.

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 13 lessons**

| <b>Excellent</b> | <b>Very good</b> | <b>Good</b> | <b>Satisfactory</b> | <b>Unsatisfactory</b> | <b>Poor</b> | <b>Very poor</b> |
|------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1                | 1                | 6           | 5                   | 0                     | 0           | 0                |

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

16. Children with special educational needs (SEN) are fully included in all activities. For those with severe learning difficulties, this is only made possible because of the good quality individual help they are given by skilled support staff provided by the portage and pre-school service<sup>2</sup>, by the LEA 'inclusion' panel, and by school staff. The specific needs of each of these children are very well known by all staff.

17. The very good teaching of personal, social and emotional development benefits children's achievement in all areas of learning, since children co-operate very well with one another and are also confident in working independently. Teaching of knowledge and understanding of the world is also very good. In this area of learning, teaching staff build effectively on the children's natural curiosity about the world around them, and they use questions skilfully to stimulate the children's interest even further. The direct teaching of language and mathematics is good. Teaching staff promote speaking and listening skills well through their good dialogue with the children, and often make good use of opportunities to develop mathematical concepts through activities which encompass other areas of learning. For instance, during a 'small group time' activity about Easter and Easter eggs, the teacher encouraged the children to 'read' the labels on the packaging and count the pieces of chocolate before they were eaten. In indoor activities, good teaching of fine physical control skills, such as cutting or correctly holding magnifying lenses, helps children to learn successfully. Teaching and learning in physical development in the outdoor area are not as good, but they are satisfactory overall. In these sessions, opportunities to develop children's fine motor skills through outdoor play are sometimes missed. This mainly occurs because, as with the 'work time' activities, a very strong emphasis is placed on giving children opportunities to make their own choices rather than being guided by adults.

18. Staff work very closely together to provide learning opportunities of good quality for the children. They have a good knowledge of the development of young children, and good expertise in the nationally recommended Early Learning Goals<sup>3</sup>. Activities are securely based on the sound assessment of each child and, as a result, children are keenly interested in their work and have an appetite for learning.

<sup>2</sup> The grant-funded portage service provides pre-nursery and nursery support for children.

<sup>3</sup> The Early Learning Goals are standards for each of the six areas of learning for children in the Foundation Stage. Most children are expected to have achieved these by the time they start Year 1. In the case of children at Helen Gibson School, this occurs after their transfer to the local infant school.

19. In all lessons, teaching staff manage their children very well and create a very good climate for learning. The good learning that takes place is also due to the excellent behaviour of the children, and the excellent relationships between all members of the school community. This occurs because the staff provide very good role models, command the respect of the children, and know them very well.

20. Assessment is satisfactory overall. On-going records of children's achievements are kept by the teaching staff responsible for each of the three 'colour groups' into which children are placed for certain activities, such as 'small group time'. These records are of variable quality. Some provide very detailed information about specific learning, while others merely note the activities which have been chosen by an individual. During the inspection, there was no evidence that teaching staff used information from their observations of children's choices and achievement during 'work time' to adjust provision. For instance, during the course of the inspection the activities available for children to choose in the area were changed each day, but the fact that the area was rarely used by the children did not appear to have been taken into account when the activities were set out. Overall, however, staff have a very good knowledge of the specific needs of individuals. Systems for formal assessment when children enter and leave the school have yet to be fully updated to link to the Early Learning Goals.

### **The curriculum**

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of all children.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The curriculum is unusually varied, and some aspects are very stimulating for young children.
- Provision is good for children with SEN.
- The designated mathematics room is underused.

### **Commentary**

21. The curriculum is innovative. It provides a rich and balanced basis for learning, meeting individual needs and preparing children fully for the next stage of their education.

22. The curriculum has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Completion of the first phase of development of the outdoor area has greatly extended provision for children's physical development. Small rooms are now used for the teaching of mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). However, resources in the outside area are not yet linked to all areas of learning. Although provision for mathematics has improved in 'small group' time, the mathematics room is rarely a focus for them when they make choices about what to do during 'work time' sessions. Analysis of planning for 'small group time', when much of the direct teaching takes place, indicates that mathematical development features less than any other area of learning.

23. Staff have carefully researched several teaching and learning programmes for very young children, and have successfully incorporated some aspects into the Foundation Stage curriculum. For example, the Forest School initiative provides stimulating outdoor experiences at a local environmental centre. School staff and environmental centre staff liaise closely to ensure coverage of all six areas of learning. Through this initiative, children learn to respect the environment and develop personal and social skills by collaborating in exciting activities.

24. The school's participation in the Healthy Schools scheme significantly benefits all children. They know the importance of exercise and a balanced diet. Dental care has high priority, and all children know how to clean their own and teddy's teeth!

25. All employed staff have had specialist training in working with very young children. The high number of employed staff ensures that all children take part fully in activities. However, teaching staff do not always make the best use of volunteer helpers. Very good use is made of the skilled support of staff from the portage and pre-school service who help children with severe learning difficulties. Their role largely focuses on ensuring that these children have access to all of the activities enjoyed by the other children and are able, for example, to use the outdoor area safely. At the time of the inspection, no specialist help was available for the single child for whom English is not the first language spoken at home. Nonetheless, this child played a full part in all activities because teaching staff are good at ensuring that this is the case.

26. Accommodation is cramped, but satisfactory. The number of children on roll greatly exceeds the building's designed capacity. In addition, the pre-school and after-school activities place demands on the accommodation which were not anticipated when the school was first built. Resources are satisfactory overall. Owing to the lack of floor space, many resources need to be stored at levels which are out of children's reach, and therefore need to be specifically requested. The lack of storage space for large outdoor equipment means that a significant part of one of the available indoor areas is cluttered.

### **Care, guidance and support**

The school provides very good care for all children, and very good guidance to sustain the high standards of their personal development and academic work. Standards in these aspects have been maintained or improved since the previous inspection.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children have excellent, trusting relationships with staff.
- The school values children's opinions on all issues, including their preferences in cooked lunches.
- Staff do not always ensure appropriate coverage of all six areas of learning.

### **Commentary**

27. Children are very secure in a clean, carefully maintained environment, where high standards of welfare are sustained by putting into practice good policies for health and safety, child protection and behaviour management. Children understand the importance of safe practice at school, at the Forest School and at home. For instance, they are particularly aware of the dangers concealed by attractively packaged medicines and cleaning materials. The headteacher is responsible for child protection. She receives regular training, and conscientiously ensures that all adults in the school are alert to possible issues.

28. A very good induction programme includes a home visit by two staff before children visit the Nursery. Teaching staff and other adults have excellent knowledge of the children and their families, and provide very good individual care and support during the induction period and throughout the Nursery Year. Children with SEN are fully integrated in all activities. The school has good procedures for screening prospective staff, and satisfactory procedures for screening volunteer helpers. The governors and staff have not yet fully conformed with the legal requirement of agreeing a policy on adults' use of physical intervention to counter incidents of violent behaviour.

29. Lunchtime supervision is very good. Supervisors serve the children at their tables, cutting food as necessary, and always encouraging them to eat a broad selection of healthy foods, including a sample portion of 'special' vegetables. During the inspection, 'special' rice proved to be very popular, but 'special' cauliflower cheese was not!

30. Adults listen carefully to children, and respond sensitively to their day-to-day comments and suggestions. Staff have very good knowledge of the children's personal and social development. Children's participation in activities is often photographed to provide a record, but monitoring of the six areas of learning in the extended 'work time' sessions is largely retrospective. For example, because staff do not dictate children's choices, it might be possible for a child to spend up to an hour every day - one third of a Nursery session – engaged in a very narrow range of activities.

31. At welcoming breakfast and after-school clubs, Nursery and Infant children play cheerfully with their friends. Adults monitor activities, occasionally intervening to suggest changes or improvements.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Children benefit significantly from the school's very good relationships with parents, and good links with the community and other schools. Standards in each of these aspects have been maintained since the previous inspection.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are very supportive of the school, and are fully informed about their children's education.
- The school has a good relationship with the local community.
- Very good links with the infant school have a positive impact on children's learning and personal development.

### **Commentary**

32. At a pre-inspection meeting for all parents, opinions of the school were overwhelmingly positive. These opinions were endorsed by responses to questionnaires and by discussion with a number of parents during the inspection. The school is rightly valued and respected by parents.

33. Staff and parents form very good relationships in the three terms of Nursery education. Parents are welcome in classes at all times. They are greatly valued as volunteer helpers, and are invited to use their skills and interests to broaden the curriculum. An active parent-teacher association (PTA), a successful joint venture with the local infant and junior schools, organises popular social and fund-raising events and contributes generously to the school's budget each year. Many Nursery parents who are not active members of the PTA support the school by attending events as helpers or participants.

34. The need to keep all parents better informed of their child's progress throughout the year, which was identified as an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection, has been successfully addressed. Staff are very accessible, and parents receive good quality information about their children's progress. Although the school does not provide parents with detailed curriculum information, staff are always pleased to discuss the activities provided for the children, and how children's work in school might be extended at home. Each child's best work is saved in a personal 'Celebration Folder', updated and taken home weekly. Parents are invited to add photographs and other information about their children to the folder. School newsletters are very informative about dates and events, and the prospectus includes much useful advice for parents.

35. The school's integral role in the village, and good links with the community, make a significant contribution to children's learning. The PTA successfully involves local businesses in donation schemes and sponsorships. Local childminders informally share some resources with the school, and children in their care are allowed supervised access to play equipment in the outside area. The school participates fully in local events, including an annual Fun Day, and welcomes many visitors, including musicians, firefighters and a dental health educator. In addition to the six-week block of Forest School sessions for each child, there are regular visits to local places of interest, including a castle, formal gardens and a park.

36. There are good links with other schools, and very good relationships with the village infant school. Nursery and infant staff work closely together to achieve children's smooth transition from one school to the other. Reception teachers visit the Nursery during the summer term, meeting the children as part of the infant school induction programme. The infant school deputy headteacher is a Nursery governor, and the Nursery headteacher is an infant school governor. The Nursery is very good at acting as a mentor for further education students, and for secondary school students on work-experience programmes.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are good overall. The leadership provided by the headteacher is very good, and that of key members of staff is good, as is the management of the school. Governance is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher enjoys the full confidence of parents, and provides clear direction for the work of the school.
- There is very effective teamwork and a shared sense of purpose among staff.
- Not all staff job descriptions are up to date.

### **Commentary**

37. Parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting were greatly appreciative of the commitment and energy of the headteacher and her staff. These views are fully justified.

38. The headteacher is totally committed to the school and the community in which it is set. She has a very clear overview of everything that goes on in the school, and is an excellent role model for other staff. The headteacher knows the children and their families very well, and is always available to parents. She has created an atmosphere in which staff value each other, work very well as a team for the benefit of the children, and make good progress in their professional development. Through her monitoring, much of which is informal, the headteacher has a very good understanding of the strengths to be shared and areas that could be even better. Under her guidance, the school has become good at reflecting on what it is doing and at constantly looking for ways to improve. This is evident, for instance, in the curriculum and premises development which has taken place over the past few years. This has included influences from initiatives in Italy, which are seen in the décor and furnishings, and the Forest School project, which originated in Denmark.

39. Although staff know clearly what their roles are, the full range of these responsibilities is not always set out in job descriptions. Consequently, some of the criteria against which the performance of individuals could be judged are not readily accessible.

40. Governance of the school is satisfactory. At the time of the inspection, the governing body had been constituted for six months, and had met formally as a whole on just two occasions; consequently, the impact of the work of the governing body is yet to be seen. Discussions with representatives of the governing body and the Chair of Governors showed that many of the governors are closely connected with the school through their families, and know the school well through their day-to-day contact and their participation in social and fundraising events.

41. School administration is efficient. It ensures that teaching staff are able to focus on their professional duties and are not diverted from their work by clerical or organisational tasks. The secretary deals competently with day-to-day queries, and contributes strongly to the smooth running of the school.

42. The school was given a delegated budget in April 2004, and the headteacher and governors have used funding wisely. The financial administration is good, and systems for monitoring



expenditure are secure. Governors are at an early stage of monitoring the school's performance using 'best value' principles.

43. Only forecast figures for expenditure relating to the 2004-5 financial year were available at the time of the inspection. From these, the school's unit costs appear to be broadly typical of similar schools. Therefore, in view of its many strengths, the school is judged to give good value for money.

## **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING**

### **AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE**

#### **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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

##### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The excellent relationships at all levels, and children's excellent attitudes and behaviour, contribute strongly to children's progress in this area of learning.
- Children rapidly develop confidence in learning independently.
- Adults sometimes have unrealistic expectations of children's ability to make informed choices about their learning.

##### **Commentary**

44. Very good teaching and learning indicate that almost all children are well on course to exceed the Early Learning Goals. Very good induction procedures settle them quickly into established Nursery routines for morning or afternoon attendance. All staff understand the importance of encouraging children to persevere with tasks. All children, including those with SEN and English as an additional language, confidently attempt numerous educational activities and many everyday practicalities, including fastening zips and buttons.

45. Within a very settled and happy environment, children of all levels of attainment have excellent concentration when working alone, or in groups. They are very relaxed and secure because staff are friendly and courteous and are excellent role models for developing these qualities in the children. All children are very happy, friendly and polite to everyone they meet. Their behaviour is always very good and often exemplary, in classrooms, in the outside area, and on visits. Children know that rules are important in maintaining safety and fairness in a wide variety of circumstances. They are very good at sharing resources, and are very patient when awaiting their turns in activities. During the inspection, on a scheduled visit to a Forest School, they collaborated successfully on a number of projects which are normally thought of as appropriate for much older children. They fulfilled the very high expectations of the adults leading the projects.

46. Nursery policy is to allow children to decide, without adult intervention, their preferred activities in the first hour of each morning and afternoon session. This policy has great potential to develop children's skills as independent learners by giving them wide choice, and uninterrupted time to complete activities. Although the children are very mature for their age, and often make sensible choices, some inaccessible resources are not brought out unless specifically requested. Overall, too much responsibility is placed upon the children, who cannot always remember the full range of available resources, and cannot judge relative educational value. Teachers' assessments of children's learning are sometimes good. However, children's participation in activities is not monitored systematically.

## COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Phonics teaching is good.
- Good homework activities reinforce children's learning.
- The organisation of reading activities could be improved.

### Commentary

47. Teaching and learning are good, and almost all children are likely to achieve or exceed the Early Learning Goals at the end of their Reception Year. Children speak clearly, in full sentences, and converse easily with adults and their friends. Adults' use of diverse vocabulary encourages children to experiment with words in all areas of learning, and in a variety of contexts. For example, when playing in their 'hospital', children understand the roles of a doctor, patient, and nurse. They know, for instance, that a patient does not diagnose, or give medicine!

48. Children's listening skills are very good. They know the importance of 'listening time', and they retain much of what they hear. They always listen politely when others are speaking. They carefully follow adults' instructions, and often respond by asking relevant questions. Children of average attainment remember the sequences of stories, and the words of many songs. Children with speech difficulties respond enthusiastically to sign language.

49. Children know many sounds and letters of the alphabet. They frequently identify letters in captions and name badges. Good homework is closely linked to classroom teaching. Printed pages for each sound are added to the children's Celebration Files. The files, which record achievement in all areas of learning, are greatly valued by parents and children. A 'Storysacks' scheme offers parents a very good range of activities, based upon a single book. Each sack includes, for instance, finger puppets and an audio tape.

50. Many children recognise their names, and a few common words. For example, children of average attainment can select a caption summarising the day's weather. Although children enjoy looking at books, the book trolley is underused. During the inspection, adults were not deployed to stimulate children's reading activities. Additionally, some books are stored at levels out of the reach of children. Although staff identify children who can read a few words, the school does not have a specific programme for developing early reading skills. In a good session seen, linked to the topic of *Growing*, a Nursery nurse read expressively from a 'big book' explaining the life cycle of a frog. She demonstrated how books are a good source of information.

51. Children's early writing skills are good but are not fully developed. For example, many write their first names with correct use of capital and lower case letters but are not encouraged to write their surnames. When role-playing, they enjoy pretending to write official documents, including prescriptions and doctors' appointments.

## MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children use advanced mathematical vocabulary.
- Children do not experience a wide enough variety of mathematical activities.

### Commentary

52. Good teaching and learning indicate that at the end of their Reception Year almost all children will achieve, and a good number will exceed, the Early Learning Goals. However, an issue raised in the previous report, seeking improvement in the achievement of higher-attaining children, remains partly unanswered in mathematics. Planning in this area of learning does not identify any special provision for these more able children.

53. Although teaching of number has been improved during small group sessions, and a separate mathematics room has been established, mathematical development does not feature strongly enough in the first hour of each morning or afternoon session. For example, during the inspection, a child alone in the mathematics room briefly sorted a few objects but then lost interest because no extension activity was available, and no adult was present to guide him.

54. Children of average attainment recite numbers to 30 and, with adult support, count objects accurately to 10. Children have good mathematical vocabulary and understand, for example, terms such as *enough* and *more*. In a good lesson seen, a teacher led children on a tour of the school grounds, identifying shapes encountered in everyday life. They enthusiastically pointed to diamond road markings, rectangular paving slabs and circles on tyres. A very young child identified a circle at the heart of a daisy. All children have good understanding of time, although they are uncertain of the sequence of the days of the week. For example, they may know that today is Thursday, but might not know that tomorrow is Friday. All children have some knowledge of non-standard units of measurement. When collecting twigs at the Forest School, most understood the expression '*as long as your arm*', but few understood the term '*as thick as your thumb*'. Opportunities were not taken for teaching staff involved in the activity to note individual children's achievements

## KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching staff have good questioning skills.
- Children's experiences are limited in some areas of ICT.
- Children have very good subject knowledge in science, particularly in areas relating to the environment.

### Commentary

55. Very good teaching and learning indicate that children are likely to achieve or exceed the Early Learning Goals at the end of the Reception Year. Teaching staff are very adept at developing early scientific skills in young children. They often ask good questions to extend children's thinking. For example, in a good lesson seen, the teacher asked the children why special packaging was necessary for a chocolate Easter egg. The children responded thoughtfully and came up with sensible suggestions. In outdoor play, children experimenting with a length of gutter discovered that the flow of water downhill was slowed progressively by raising the lower end of the gutter. Although the teacher observed the experiment, and asked relevant questions, she did not provide further

challenge for the higher-attainers. Many children describe characteristics of numerous species of birds, plants and flowers at the Forest School. For example, they know that wild garlic is unlike the garlic used in a kitchen. They have very good understanding of the life cycle of the frog and know that frogs can jump but tadpoles cannot.

56. Provision for ICT has improved since the previous inspection. A small room has been converted to provide space for two computers and a printer. Many children have good computer skills. For example, high attaining children easily work with literacy and numeracy programs, and have very good levels of skill in using the mouse to manipulate images on the screen. However, no programmable toys were seen in use during the inspection.

57. Staff frequently use a digital camera to record children's experiences. Prints included in Celebration Files enable parents to discuss school work with their children. Children are not invited to take photographs, although many are clearly capable of doing so.

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in physical development is **good**. However, a main issue identified in the previous inspection report, relating to supervision of the outdoor area, has not been fully addressed. Although children now have a greater choice of physical activities, staff input to their activities is still, intentionally, minimal.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children are very dexterous.
- Teaching staff are good at emphasising the importance of a healthy lifestyle.
- Some of the six areas of learning are neglected in the outdoor area.

### **Commentary**

58. Children's physical development is very good, and they are likely to achieve or exceed the Early Learning Goals at the end of their Reception Year. The teaching is good in sessions which take place indoors and satisfactory in the outdoor area, although planning for the outdoor area does not include all six areas of learning. Children have good gross motor skills, such as climbing, running or jumping. They are very surefooted and are considerate of each other's safety when climbing on large play equipment. They have good awareness of others when riding their bicycles, though the activity itself is more of a play experience than one with specific purpose. During the inspection, children knew that Friday was a 'ball day'. Although several balls were taken into the outdoor area, activities were not planned to develop children's throwing, catching or kicking skills, and the balls were underused. Children have excellent knowledge of the requirements for a healthy lifestyle. At the Forest School they showed good recall of campfire safety rules, learned during the previous week's lesson. The school encourages healthy eating, and responds to the children's opinions about the food prepared for them. Children have excellent fine motor skills. For instance, they cut accurately with scissors and confidently use a wide variety of tools, including glue spreaders, potato peelers and cooking utensils.

## CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children frequently initiate imaginative play.
- Teaching staff are not involved closely enough with children's creative work.

### Commentary

59. Children's prior attainment, and satisfactory teaching and learning, indicate that they will achieve or exceed the Early Learning Goals at the end of their Reception Year. Nursery policy is that children should take home all completed work. As a result, inspection judgements are based upon scrutiny of current planning, undated photographic evidence of completed work, children's work in Celebration Files and their work in progress.

60. In imaginative play, children introduce many original ideas based on their experiences at school and at home. During the inspection, a group of children built a very long, multi-level structure representing the sleeper train seen in a popular film. They sold tickets and invited other children to join them in 'sleeping' on the train. This activity was sustained for an extended period.

61. Children are often engaged in painting and collage activities. They name many colours, including their favourite colours, and confidently select and use paint brushes suited to the scale of their work. They paint enthusiastically and have full control of the process, though most work is little more than covering paper with paint. Although resources are always available, teaching staff rarely discuss with them the processes or the outcomes of their work.

62. Children enjoy using tools to create play-dough models. Their work is good when adults demonstrate the use of cutters and rollers to make figurative shapes, such as snails and snakes. The standard of work deteriorates sharply when not monitored by adults.

63. Children enjoy singing. They have a good repertoire of songs. The staff's enthusiastic participation during singing time encourages all children to join in, including those with SEN and English as an additional language.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

| <i>Inspection judgement</i>   | <i>Grade</i> |
|---|--------------|
| <b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>                        | <b>3</b>     |
| 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            |
| <b>Overall standards achieved</b>                                     | <b>3</b>     |
| Pupils' achievement   | 3            |
| <b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)</b> | <b>1</b>     |
| Attendance  | 4            |
| Attitudes   | 1            |
| Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions                         | 1            |
| Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development             | 1            |
| <b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>                | <b>3</b>     |
| 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   | 4            |
| Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety                              | 2            |
| Support, advice and guidance for pupils                               | 2            |
| How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views                   | 3            |
| The effectiveness of the school's links with parents                  | 2            |
| The quality of the school's links with the community                  | 3            |
| The school's links with other schools and colleges                    | 3            |
| <b>The leadership and management of the school</b>                    | <b>3</b>     |
| The governance of the school  | 4            |
| The leadership of the headteacher                                     | 2            |
| The leadership of other key staff                                     | 3            |
| The effectiveness of management                                       | 3            |

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