

INSPECTION REPORT

VICTORIA PARK NURSERY SCHOOL

Newbury

LEA area: West Berkshire

Unique reference number: 109757

Headteacher: Mrs Fiona Bridger-Wilkinson

Lead inspector: Elisabeth de Lancey

Dates of inspection: 7 – 8 March 2005

Inspection number: 268180

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

© Crown copyright 2005

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Maintained
Age range of pupils:	3-5
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	112
School address:	Victoria Park Parkway Newbury Berkshire
Postcode:	RG14 1EH
Telephone number:	01635 41296
Fax number:	01635 41296
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Karen Swaffield
Date of previous inspection:	April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Victoria Park Nursery School is close to the centre of the market town of Newbury. It is a three class Nursery School which provides education for children between the ages of three to five. Currently, there are 112 children on roll, the majority of whom are part-time, attending either mornings or afternoons. Since the last inspection there have been changes to the local authority's admission procedures. This means that most children leave the nursery to join local Infant or Primary schools in the year in which they become five. Consequently, there is now a higher proportion of three-year-olds in the nursery. Children live in homes across the whole of Newbury and a small proportion come from the surrounding villages. Mobility is low. Nearly all the pupils are of white British origin and speak English as their first language. Seven children speak English as an additional language with two being at an early stage of learning English. One child has a statement of special educational needs, fewer than at the time of the last inspection. Currently, 13 per cent of the children have a variety of learning, speech and language, emotional, behavioural or physical difficulties. Six of these children benefit from funded support. A modular extension to the building houses the nursery class base for children on the roll of Castle Special School, a class for children with a range of special educational needs. These children routinely access all areas of the nursery environment, integrating and working alongside their mainstream peers. This is termed co-location. The association between the nurseries is designed to enrich the educational provision for both of them. Each group of children has the opportunity to grow within a shared setting in which their awareness of other children and their responses are enhanced and developed. It is this emphasis which marks this co-location. Since the last inspection the school has been working towards becoming a 'Children's Centre'. More than half the children take advantage of the nursery's breakfast and lunch clubs. One member of staff has responsibility for family support and learning. She organises classes for parents and carers to develop their skills and offers parents and carers a regular 'drop-in' session and toddler group. The school also provides creche facilities for children from six months to five years old to support parents with their own education. The nursery was awarded a School Achievement Award in 2002, and a Basic Skills Award and West Berkshire Early Years Kite Mark in 2003.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
22272	Elisabeth de Lancey	Lead inspector	Communication, language and literacy Creative development Personal, social and emotional development
9406	Roy Cottington	Lay inspector	
21100	Alan Morgan	Team inspector	Mathematical development Knowledge and understanding of the world Physical development

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates

Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	9
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	14
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	16
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	22

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective nursery with very good features. It is welcoming and caring and has a strong focus on meeting the individual needs of all the children. They consequently flourish and achieve well and most work at levels beyond those expected of children of their age. The headteacher provides good leadership and together with staff she has created an effective team who work well together to improve children's learning opportunities. The nursery offers good value for money.

The nursery's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Children thrive in the nursery's nurturing climate where they feel secure and valued.
- Children of all abilities achieve well in all areas of learning except for personal, social and emotional development in which they achieve very well.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes it is very good.
- Very good use is made of the outside areas to extend learning.
- The partnership with the Castle Nursery is very good and benefits staff and children.
- There is a strong partnership with parents, who think highly of the nursery and support it well.
- The headteacher sets a clear sense of direction for the school.
- The co-ordinators support colleagues but do not monitor provision in the areas of learning for which they are responsible.
- Children do not have sufficient access to computers to support their learning.

The nursery has made good improvement since the last inspection. The issues raised have been tackled systematically. In personal, social and emotional development and physical development high standards have been maintained. In all other areas of learning provision is much improved and standards are better than previously reported. Improved planning and assessment as well as more focused outdoor play have contributed to effective teaching and learning. The organisation of focus groups to encourage the development of specific skills is helping to raise achievement. Health and safety issues have been fully addressed.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Children's achievement is good. They make very good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. In communication, language and literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development progress is good. The staff are very successful in promoting children's personal, social and emotional development and this helps them to work independently and enjoy all aspects of the curriculum. By the time they leave the nursery, most children work at levels which are better than those expected of children of their age. They make good progress in speaking and listening, and their early reading and writing skills are developing well. They enjoy stories and listen attentively. Children recognise their names, learn letter sounds and practise writing in the role-play areas. Progress in mathematical development is good and children have a secure grasp of basic number. They develop a good understanding of space and capacity during water and sand play, and as they pour their drinks at snack time. They identify and match simple shapes successfully. Staff help children observe animals and plants closely and notice the seasonal changes in the garden and the park. Children handle small objects and tools with good co-ordination and steer wheelbarrows with good control and awareness of space. Staff offer good creative learning opportunities to children and are successful in helping them to improve their work; consequently they achieve well. Children who are an early stage of speaking English and those with special educational needs make good progress. Good use of the outdoor areas to stimulate interest and promote learning across all areas ensures that boys and girls do equally well.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Children's spiritual development is sensitively nurtured and they show empathy for others, sensitivity to their environment and living things. They know right from wrong and their very positive attitudes and behaviour contribute much to their effective learning. Staff and visitors to school prepare children

well for life in a culturally diverse society introducing them to a variety of traditions and festivals. Attendance is good and reflects children's enthusiasm for school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. It is underpinned by **good teaching and learning**. Staff foster very good relationships with children. They have a good understanding of how young children learn and are sensitive to their individual needs. Staff create a stimulating environment and well-planned activities which make learning fun and offer the right balance of challenge and support. The children are eager to learn, they frequently become engrossed in their work and they do their best. The teaching of children's personal, social and emotional development and physical development is very good. In all other areas of learning teaching is good. Assessment is good and staff use the outcomes effectively in planning and developing children's learning. Personal accounts of each child's progress in learning are carefully recorded, accompanied by photographs and work samples to give a comprehensive picture of children's achievements.

The curriculum is good. It is carefully planned and soundly based on the national guidance. Visitors to school are used very well to enrich and extend provision. Each area of the curriculum is covered well indoors and out. There is an appropriate balance between the activities that are led by staff and those which the children pursue independently. Accommodation and resources are good. However, computer resources are limited and children's access is restricted.

The quality of care is very high. Relationships in the school are trusting and very supportive. Children are looked after by a team of very caring staff who value them and celebrate their achievements. Children with special educational needs and those who are at an early stage of speaking English benefit from sensitive support.

The school fosters **very good partnerships with parents**. They are given very good information about the school and are kept well-informed about their children's progress. Very good links exist with other schools, especially Castle Nursery. The nursery has developed very effective links with the community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are **good**. The headteacher gives a clear educational direction to the nursery. She monitors performance effectively. The newly constituted governing body fulfils its responsibilities well and all statutory requirements are met. Co-ordinators work well together and have a good understanding of the strengths and development needs in their learning areas. However, their role in monitoring provision is not yet developed. At present, co-ordinators do not have a formal record of the monitoring and evaluation of agreed aspects of teaching and learning in their areas.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents speak very highly of the work of the nursery and speak enthusiastically about the high standard of care. They are delighted with the good progress made by their children. They value the opportunities that they are given to become involved in their children's learning and to improve their own skills. The children love coming to school and enjoy very good relationships with the staff.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- Develop the co-ordinators' role in monitoring provision in the areas of learning for which they are responsible.
- Ensure that children have more opportunities to use computers to support their learning.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning

Standards have improved since the previous inspection and children of all abilities achieve well in all areas of learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children make very good progress in their personal, social and emotional development.
- By the time they leave the nursery most children are working at levels which are above those expected for their age.
- Children with special educational needs make good progress.
- More able children are challenged well.

Commentary

1. When children join the school, soon after their third birthday, their attainment is generally average. They settle quickly into the school's routines and make very good gains in their personal, social and emotional development. Good systems of assessment are in place and used well so that staff can plan the next steps in their learning. They organise activities that ensure children's needs are met and reflect their interests and choices. As a result, they achieve well and by the time they leave they attain standards that are above those expected of children of their age. The oldest children are well prepared for the next stage of their school life.
2. Children of different abilities benefit from the emphasis given to developing independent learning. Staff know the children very well and are particularly good at motivating those with special needs and they respond well. More able children are given good opportunities to explore different ways of learning and many show good initiative in developing their activities. They achieve well because staff intervene sensitively to set new challenges. There is little difference between the performance of boys and girls because staff know that many boys prefer to play outdoors and they ensure that the planned outdoor activities cover all areas of learning.

Children's attitudes, values and other personal qualities

All children have very positive attitudes to work and their behaviour is very good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Attendance is good and punctuality is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children enjoy the nursery; develop good levels of confidence and an enthusiasm for learning.
- Relationships between adults and children are very good and contribute well to the effective ethos in the nursery.
- The development of the children's moral values and respect for others is very good.
- Attendance levels are good but a few children are consistently late.

Commentary

3. Much of the nursery's success stems from the very warm and caring relationships that develop between the children and staff. These very good relationships make a major contribution to a vibrant and secure ethos in which children successfully learn and develop. The children say that they enjoy coming to the nursery and their parents agree. Observations during the inspection confirmed these very positive views. On arrival, children show a sense of purpose and eager anticipation. They hang up their coats, find their name card and join their friends. Having participated in the welcoming activities, each then chooses a key

learning activity. The enthusiasm shown at the start of the session sets the tone for the rest of the session.

4. Children settle quickly into the routines of the nursery, are keen to learn and listen carefully to adults. Staff are quick to praise and build self-esteem and as a result, children develop the self-confidence to participate and experience a wide range of learning activities. This developing confidence is evident in the way that children move from one activity to another, observing the routines of the nursery and sharing resources amicably. When they are at work there is a very positive atmosphere of industry, concentration and enjoyment. The nursery's behaviour management policy is sensitively and consistently implemented by all staff, the children respond well and their behaviour is very good with a very marked absence of any incidents of unkindness, emotional outburst or arguments.
5. Children with special educational needs respond very well. Staff help them to join in activities involving the whole class as well as providing individual support and teaching them specific skills in small groups. There is good support for children who are at an early stage of learning English and they play a full part in the life of the nursery. The staff's commitment to meeting the needs of all children creates a strongly inclusive ethos in which all children thrive.
6. Children develop a very good sense of responsibility. They learn to work together, help one another, and tidy up at the end of sessions. They enjoy the many opportunities to be independent for example, they take responsibility for making their own snacks and choose when they will eat them. When using books and equipment they treat them carefully. They treat living things sensitively and show care and concern for the world around them.
7. Children's personal development is a strong feature of the nursery and they are offered a good range of experiences to learn about themselves. The very good role models provided by staff give children a clear understanding of how to behave and treat others and they begin to understand the impact of their actions on others. They develop a good sense of right and wrong.
8. The achievements of children are celebrated in displays of work and photographs and children are encouraged to reflect on the contributions of others. Spiritual awareness is well nurtured through the exploration and observation of living things. For example, two boys were enthralled and amazed when they studied a minute, newly-hatched stick insect and inspected it closely with their magnifying glasses. There are good opportunities for children to learn about the contributions that people from other cultures make to their school community and their understanding of cultural differences is nurtured through lively celebrations of festivals associated with their own and other faiths.
9. Overall attendance levels are good and reflect the enjoyment most children have in nursery life. Parents work well with the nursery in ensuring that their children attend regularly and most follow the nursery's procedures for notifying the office with reasons for absence. The last report highlighted problems with children's punctuality. This problem is still an issue involving a small number of parents. The planned move to extend the length of the school day may resolve the problem, but in the meantime, the nursery should remain sensitive to the impact on these children.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The nursery provides a good quality of education. Teaching and learning are good. Children follow an interesting curriculum with a very good range of enrichment activities. The nursery offers a high standard of care in which children with special educational needs flourish. The school fosters very good partnership with parents and the community.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good. As a result, children achieve very well in their personal, social and emotional development. Their achievement is good in all other areas of learning. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff sustain very good relationships with all children.
- The individual child is the focus of staff planning; consequently, all children, including those with special educational needs, achieve well and very well in their social, personal and emotional development.
- Staff effectively prepare activities to encourage children to take responsibility and to foster their independence.
- Staff plan focus groups well and deliver challenging activities to develop children's understanding.

Commentary

10. The calm and sensitive manner with which staff care for all the children helps each of them recognise how much they are valued. This is particularly important for the development of the very youngest children, those with special educational needs and those, on admission, who are apprehensive. Within this context, staff use their good understanding of early years provision and how children learn best to create a rich environment for their effective development. Staff enthusiasm succeeds in making learning exciting and fun; something identified earlier by parents. Staff's high expectations of the children are reflected in the stimulating activities they design and the well-planned opportunities they provide for children to learn through play. As the children are required to work independently, make decisions for themselves and sustain their responses to the challenges posed, their confidence grows and their learning is accelerated. Where teaching is very good staff explain clearly what choices are available, build on children's ideas, expect children's responses to reflect the technical terms they have used and ensure no chance is lost to develop or reinforce children's learning.
11. Staff plan effectively together. In addition, they work successfully with staff from Castle Nursery to plan for children from each nursery to work and play together. All the planning has clear learning intentions, appropriate targets and is usefully based on the national early years' curriculum. It takes account of the children's individual needs. Staff are successful in designing activities in which, when appropriate, they can engage directly with children to extend or support their learning. This is of particular benefit to those who are more able or those with special needs. It also ensures that these children are integral members of all groups and successfully share in all pursuits. It is evident, too, when children from Castle Nursery participate, as all gain from joint planning and agreed resources. This is further reflected in the provision of focus groups. They, too, are carefully planned to meet a wide spectrum of specific needs in groups of varying size. They are sensitively managed, well resourced and offer children good quality support to improve their skills in sounding letters, counting and relating one to another. Staff's sensitivity keeps everyone of them alert to each child and when their direct involvement would be of benefit. For example, a member of staff introduced an unsettled child to a story activity. While a parent read a story, this staff member modelled appropriate responses which the child copied and soon engaged successfully with the activity. Staff use information and communication technology satisfactorily to develop children's learning. However, the nursery has few computers for children's learning. The interactive whiteboard has only recently been installed.
12. Assessment is good and staff use the outcomes effectively in their planning and in developing children's learning. At their daily staff reviews and weekly planning meetings, staff draw successfully on the assessments they record from their observations during sessions. They use them well to determine learning intentions and develop or change planned activities. These written observations are retained and built into a personal record of each child's progress in learning and they are accompanied by photographs and work samples of the

children's attainments. Together they track the children's achievement during their time in the nursery. These procedures and records are used effectively to complete the national profile, assess the children's performance against national expectations and provide a summary assessment for each child's transfer. To support them in this, staff have successfully adopted the local authority's 'Pebbles Profile'.¹ This helps staff assess, with more precision, the attainment and progress of those children who are working at the early stages of the national standards. To complement their assessments they compare the outcomes of the national profiles they complete for each child in the first and third terms in the nursery.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 23 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	6	12	5	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.

The curriculum

The nursery provides an interesting curriculum which has improved since the last inspection. It motivates children and effectively meets their needs. There are many very good opportunities to enrich the children's experiences. Staffing levels, accommodation and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The use of the outdoor area is highly effective and a strength of the school.
- There is a strong emphasis on children's personal, social and emotional development.
- The curriculum is planned thoroughly and takes account of children's ideas and interests.
- Provision for children with special educational needs is good and the close collaboration with Castle Nursery benefits all the children.

Commentary

13. The school has improved this aspect of its provision since the previous inspection and this has contributed to improvements in teaching and learning. Issues regarding outdoor play have been dealt with very effectively. There is now a delightful garden area which is tended by parents and children and a well designed play area which includes a good range of resources for imaginative and physical play. The outdoor area is used very well to promote children's physical development and to raise children's awareness of the natural world. It is much enjoyed by children. The most notable feature of the curriculum is the way in which learning is planned so that children access all areas of the curriculum indoors and outdoors and this particularly benefits the achievement of boys.
14. Planning is closely linked to the Foundation Stage curriculum and children have good access to each of the areas of learning. Team planning is effective because all staff contribute their ideas and share their expertise. Activities are amended frequently to ensure that they are matched to meet children's needs and interests. The focus on individual needs is a strength of the provision and promotes inclusion very well.

¹ The Pebbles Profile provides an assessment model for children just entering the Foundation Stage. It mirrors the national Foundation Stage Profile and gives practitioners the opportunity to assess children's learning from an earlier starting point.

15. There is a strong commitment to enriching children's experiences through a programme of visits and visitors who share their knowledge and expertise. Recent visitors include a farmer with his 'mobile farm' and Indian dancers. Displays and photographs show how much children have gained from these experiences; they remember them vividly and talk enthusiastically about the things they have learned. Links with the community provide additional opportunities for enrichment.
16. The nursery is committed to ensuring equality of access for all children. Staff are aware of each child's circumstances and needs. Children with special educational needs receive very good support so that they are able to enjoy all activities. This is underpinned by the very good relationships which the school enjoys with the Castle Nursery. Their individual education plans have precise targets and staff make good use of them when planning work and assessing progress. The nursery welcomes children who speak English as an additional language and values the contribution they make to the school. Those who are at an early stage of speaking English benefit from appropriate support from a variety of agencies and the nursery provides good resources to enhance their learning.
17. Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff are deployed well. The nursery is staffed with a good number of adults who have a good range of expertise and experience. Their work is well co-ordinated and this contributes positively to children's learning. Resources are good and used well. An exception to this relates computer provision. The nursery is aware that further investment in hardware and software is necessary to support learning. Overall accommodation is good. Both indoors and out are used well and benefit children's learning. The provision of new classroom for Castle Nursery and the sensory room are improvements since the last inspection. The central nursery area is used extensively for various purposes but the rooms for whole class and group withdrawal are very small. The sensory room is an effective resource which is used imaginatively to stimulate children's interests in learning.

Care, guidance and support

The provision for the well-being and support of children has improved since the last inspection and is now a key area of the nursery's success. It pays very good attention to the care, welfare, health and safety of the children. The high level of support has a very positive effective on children's self-esteem.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Procedures for helping children to settle into the nursery are excellent.
- The very good range of risk assessments and staff vigilance ensure that the children are safe and secure.
- There is a strong sense of trust between staff and children.

Commentary

18. The health and safety issues mentioned in the last report have now been fully addressed. The nursery takes its responsibility for the well-being of the children very seriously and has set in place a range of very effective procedures to ensure their safety. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and action taken to minimise hazards. The local education authority has recently conducted a comprehensive health and safety audit. All children are treated with care, kindness and sensitivity and children with medical conditions are looked after correctly. Staff response to accidents is quick and effective. Child protection procedures are in place and a member of the governing body monitors its effectiveness.
19. Staff know the children well and work to meet the varying needs of individual children. Relationships are based on high levels of trust and children are comfortable in approaching adults with any worries or concerns. Their personal development and academic achievements are monitored carefully and recorded in their personal profiles. All staff

constantly record significant landmarks achieved throughout the day. Any emerging learning or behaviour concerns are identified at an early stage and in consultation with parents appropriate action is taken.

20. Parents praise the nursery's induction procedures because they help their children to settle in happily. Children and their parents attend the nursery for several sessions prior to admission, staff visit the children's homes and hold meetings with parents to ensure that they are familiar with the nursery's procedures. This enables staff to build a positive relationship with parents before their children start and parents are confident that their children will be well cared for. Children who arrive from other countries are integrated rapidly and soon become successful. Very good systems ensure effective transition to the next stage of education and links with other schools are strong.
21. Children's views are valued and there are many informal opportunities for them to contribute their ideas. In addition, they have helped produce "Golden Rules" which form an important part of the nursery's behaviour management strategy.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The nursery enjoys a very good partnership with parents. There are strong links with the local community and very good links with other schools especially the Castle Nursery. This aspect of the school's work has improved since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The parents have a very high regard for the work of the school.
- The quality of information for parents about the nursery and their children's progress is very good.
- The nursery provides a wide range of opportunities for parents to learn how to help their children at home and to develop their own skills.

Commentary

22. Parents are extremely pleased with all the nursery has to offer. Very good relationships are initiated during home visits before children first enter the nursery. Parents are confident that staff know their children well, treat them fairly and value their achievements. During the inspection, the team observed friendly relationships between parents and staff in their informal contacts at the beginning and end of each session.
23. The prospectus clearly tells parents what they need to know about their children's first step into formal education. Regular newsletters are sent out and information about what their children are learning is displayed around the nursery. Parents are regularly invited to discuss their children's progress and the high quality profile books which contain photographs of their children enjoying a range of activities are well annotated and along with other documentary evidence show parents how well their children are doing. Parents report that they treasure these books which are given to them when their children leave the nursery. Parents of children with special needs are closely involved in discussions about how they can support their children's future development and communications between home and school are strengthened by the home/nursery notebooks.
24. The staff involve parents very effectively in their children's learning and most parents play an important role in helping and encouraging their children. Counting cases, containing mathematical activities, and story sacks are available for parents and these help them to engage their children and support their learning.
25. Family learning sessions are an integral part of the nursery's work and do much to improve parental confidence and involvement in children's learning. The courses and family workshops which are offered by the school, and the creche facilities it provides on these

occasions are highly valued. Parents are clear about the benefits of these facilities which help them to develop their own skills and to take a more active part in their children's learning. One of the most innovative aspects of the school's work with parents is the family learning days when parents and their children work alongside one another in the garden. Parents are also offered 'drop-in' facilities where they receive good advice from agencies such as the health authority.

26. Links with the community are very good. Children visit interesting local places and a number of specialist visitors who work in the community come into the nursery to talk about their work. Children take part in the local flower festival, plant flower beds in Victoria Park and are currently engaged in the mayor's special project which involves working with the community to produce a large glass mosaic depicting the history of Newbury.
27. The very good links with other local schools include the sharing of resources and joint training opportunities for staff. Arrangements to ensure that children make a smooth transfer to their primary schools are very effective and praised by parents. The Castle Nursery is valued by the parents of children attending both nurseries. Parents think that their children benefit from working closely together. This close relationship between the nurseries has a very positive impact on the personal, social and emotional development of all the children. Staff too, benefit from these close relationships and the sharing of expertise contributes to staff confidence and competence in supporting parents and their children.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The nursery is effectively led and managed. The leadership of the headteacher is good. Management systems are well organised and effective. The governors have made a good start in taking on their increased responsibilities and all statutory requirements are met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- At a significant time of change for the nursery, the headteacher has set a clear course for continued improvement.
- Staff and governors work effectively together and in their different teams to sustain high standards.
- The role of the learning area co-ordinators needs to be developed further in the formal monitoring of provision in the areas they lead.

Commentary

28. The school benefits from the good leadership and management of the headteacher. She gives a clear educational direction and positive purpose to the nursery which is founded upon accepting each child 'as an individual with different needs, skills and interests'. This setting of the individual child at the centre of the life of the nursery is shared by staff and governors, and is evident in the nursery's day-to-day practices. Supported by very good relationships between staff, governors and parents, this has done much to help generate the nursery's very positive ethos and improve children's attainments.
29. Under the headteacher's guidance, the effective teamwork of staff and governors has played a significant part in their successful preparations for, and their taking on the full delegation of responsibilities from the local authority. This teamwork also helped direct the nursery's good response to national requirements to change the workload of staff to enable them to continue to raise standards. The headteacher has drawn on her useful monitoring of teaching, learning and standards to develop a new management structure. This includes a senior management team of headteacher and two senior teachers, and shared responsibility between staff for the co-ordination of areas of learning. This has been successful in delegating management responsibility to teachers, including senior teachers in the nursery's effective performance management and promoting the professional development of all staff. For example, senior teachers lead the daily reviews and collation of assessment observations. Co-ordinators have

a good understanding of the strengths and development needs in their learning areas. They work well together offering advice and support and pooling ideas to sustain improvement. For example, together with their colleagues, they fashioned the outdoor areas to support children's development in all areas of learning. They are working towards making a stronger contribution to teaching and learning, building staff expertise and monitoring provision. However, this is not yet established. At present, co-ordinators do not have a formal record of the monitoring and evaluation of agreed aspects of teaching and learning in their areas.

30. The headteacher, as special educational needs co-ordinator, provides good leadership and management to secure the early identification of children with special educational needs and to support their learning effectively. She works closely with staff to develop their skills in monitoring children's achievement and in writing and reviewing their individual education plans. The headteacher and staff engage parents from the outset, readily exchanging information as the children move through the school. They liaise with outside agencies effectively, and draw on the acknowledged expertise of Castle Nursery staff. Each group of staff works successfully together to manage the inclusion of children from this nursery and develop opportunities for children of both nurseries to benefit from playing together and sharing resources.
31. The newly constituted governing body has made a good start in restructuring its practices to meet the increased responsibilities of school and financial management. They have formed appropriate working groups for the major responsibility areas. These groups advise the governing body on available options to guide its deliberations. With the help of the headteacher and the comprehensive information she provides in her termly reports, governors are developing useful procedures for the monitoring of standards and provision. They use the model of their established financial group who monitor effectively the nursery's budgeting. This is undertaken each term with the help of the headteacher and annotated financial statements presented by the nursery's respected bursar. While the local authority has exercised substantial financial responsibility for the nursery, the governors' records indicate that they have managed their minor share well and adhered to the principles of best value. The current financial year is the first for which the governors have full budgetary responsibility. Governors are well informed and clearly understand the nursery's strengths and development areas. This is reflected in the nursery's development plan to which they contribute and whose implementation they regularly monitor. However, this useful annual plan is not set within a strategic context. Although long-term development has been a focus of the nursery's work with the local authority, the strategic planning for the nursery's own initiatives is not apparent in its published documents.
32. The nursery has relevant development priorities. It has effectively engaged local authority advisers as consultants and assessors. The nursery has made significant improvements since the last inspection. This confirms that it has a clear capacity for sustained improvement. In respect of the responsibilities for which it has had control, the nursery has given good value for money.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	292,903
Total expenditure	295,343
Expenditure per pupil	2,524

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	2,440
Balance carried forward to the next	nil

33. This financial information covers a transition period during which the local authority, while continuing with its stewardship of the school's finances, operated its initial, experimental funding formula.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

34. The leadership and management of physical development by the headteacher are good. In all other areas of learning, leadership and management are satisfactory. All co-ordinators work well together to plan thoroughly and look for links across the areas of learning. Good records of progress are kept and this information used to plan the next steps in learning. The headteacher is aware that the role of the co-ordinators needs developing.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff plan very well to meet the needs of each child.
- Children are happy, settled and keen to learn and they achieve very well.
- Children are confident, eager to explore and they become absorbed in worthwhile activities.

Commentary

35. Children achieve very well and by the time they leave the school most children attain beyond the expected level for their age in their personal, social and emotional development. This is similar to the findings of the last inspection. It is due to the strong emphasis on meeting the needs of individual children and the setting of challenging opportunities which engage children and extend their learning. Staff know the children well and have a good understanding of how young children develop and learn. The close and caring relationships between staff and children give children the confidence to try new, different activities. Staff focus well on meeting the needs of children with specific difficulties; they help them feel secure and through their successful interventions enable them to make good progress.
36. Children of all abilities cope well with the routines of the nursery. They happily leave their parents and settle well at the beginning of the school day. Staff encourage them to register themselves, to choose and organise their own activities. The welcome session is used well to set the objectives for the day and to explain to children what is available. Staff build very well upon their interests and their enthusiasm motivates children, makes learning fun and encourages children's good concentration. Children were often observed working for long periods absorbed in their activities. For example, when making a house for the three little pigs, they discussed the properties of different materials and concentrated well as they applied their cutting and pasting skills to build a house.
37. Sessions are planned to achieve a balance between direct teaching and individual learning and the children thrive in this environment. Their decision making skills are developing well. They often plan their own work and are keen to talk about what they are doing. They are encouraged to be independent in choosing and organising their own snack time. They learn to play together, to care for one another and the environment. Staff encourage them to care for animals and many children show interest in the hen and her chickens and the stick insects. Some take responsibility for small tasks around the nursery, such as tidying up and looking after resources. Their behaviour is very good.
38. The teaching of personal, social and emotional development is very good because it is rooted in an understanding of the needs of individuals. The involvement of parents, work with community agencies and the sharing of expertise with staff from the co-located nursery have a significant impact on this area of learning.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children's speaking and listening skills are well developed.
- Children are keen to explain and discuss the activities they enjoy in the nursery.
- Children make good progress in early reading and writing skills.

Commentary

39. Children start school with a wide range of communication, language and literacy skills but they are average overall. The children make good progress because of the effective teaching which ensures that all children achieve well and build upon their previous learning. Children at an early stage of learning English benefit from good support in this area of learning and this enables them to access all the activities on offer. The children with special educational needs also make good gains because the school uses its specialist staff effectively to enhance their own expertise and this makes a good impact on the children's progress. Provision has improved since the last inspection especially in the development of children's knowledge of letter sounds and in the opportunities provided for children to read and write in the outdoor environment. Children are on target to exceed the national expectations by the end of the foundation stage.
40. Great importance is given to developing children's speaking and listening skills. Staff are skilled at encouraging children to speak, they ask questions that encourage the children to talk and extend their vocabulary when they are involved in activities. For example, as they build the pig's brick house children learn that they are using sandpaper and decide that the rough side will be the most effective for their bricks. Staff constantly encourage children to talk about their activities and help them to make their language more precise. The staff teach the children to be attentive. They give them good opportunities to listen and great emphasis is placed on children learning to take turns and listening to one another.
41. The children love to listen to stories and rhymes, and delight in joining in with the parts they know and predicting what will come next. They remember the main events and the characters and creatively recall them in their role-play. Staff share and retell a range of well-chosen stories which are linked effectively to other areas of the curriculum. They capture children's interest well and story telling is often enhanced by the use of puppets and other visual props from the nursery's 'story sacks'. The regular use of the tape recorder is a good way to reinforce children's knowledge of stories and stimulate their interest in reading the accompanying texts. There is a well-resourced library. Books are used well to enhance other areas of learning. For example 'The Hungry Caterpillar' is used imaginatively for mathematical activities. A particularly strong feature is the books that staff make for the children to read. They reflect the activities in the nursery and are illustrated with photographs of the children. These books are very popular and children read them together with obvious pleasure. There are good opportunities for parents to read together with their children at the start of the nursery sessions and through borrowing books during the weekly library sessions. Parents reading with their children at home also help to develop their enjoyment.
42. The staff have improved their teaching and learning of letter sounds. Short teaching sessions which have very clear aims and focus on linking sounds and letters have improved learning particularly of the older and more capable children. They are making good progress in identifying letters sounds and names, they know that their names start with capital letters and hear and identify letter sounds in their own names and simple words.

43. Staff equip children with a variety of materials and opportunities to write for a range of reasons. They develop their early writing skills well and attempt to record their ideas through making marks on paper, and in drawing and painting. Outside they develop their mark-making skills by painting signs and marking boundaries. These activities are beneficial for children, in particular boys who like to play outdoors. Children learn to write their names correctly, hold a pencil accurately and some of the more able children are beginning to form clearly distinguishable letters. There are opportunities for children to practise their writing in the role-play areas for example, when they send messages to the wolf in the house of 'The Three Little Pigs' and price and label the vegetables at the market stall.
44. The staff plan together led by the co-ordinator for the area of learning . Assessment information is used well to build up a comprehensive picture of each child's progress and to identify what they need to do next. Children who need additional help and would benefit from focused sessions are identified and supported. Those who make particularly good progress are challenged in small group activities where their early reading and writing skills are developed. In all aspects of this area of learning children who speak English as an additional language perform at least as well as other children.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff teach number concepts well.
- Staff make good use of their conversations with children to promote mathematical terms.
- Outdoor activities offer children many opportunities to develop their mathematical skills effectively.

Commentary

45. Good teaching ensures that all children make good progress and achieve well. They participate in a rich variety of experiences and establish a solid foundation of mathematical understanding. They are on target to exceed national expectations at the end of the foundation stage. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Children for whom English is an additional language achieve well and they are as successful as other children in attaining at above average levels. This is because staff use every opportunity to consolidate their understanding of number, provide them with a range of activities to explore all aspects of mathematics and record their performance carefully. Staff draw effectively on these records to determine the nature of the support they give and determining the most useful opportunities to engage with the children's activities. Children with special educational needs achieve well and attain standards appropriate to their abilities.
46. Older children count confidently to nine, recognise printed numerals and match these symbols successfully to appropriate groups of toys. Children develop confidence in using their counting skills through regular activities involving singing and rhymes. By counting aloud and systematically grouping items, staff consolidate children's understanding of number and build their mathematical language. For example, placing model animals on a mat, the teaching assistant said, 'Now we have three animals. One more and that is four' Outdoors, a soccer goal has a display of numerals and quantities to ten. Children, counting accurately as they score, compare goals and speak of five goals being more than one. Staff develop such activities to foster children's understanding of addition and subtraction when they work out how many they have when one is gained or one is taken away. Pouring their own drinks at snack time, and during water and sand play, children develop understanding of space and capacity. Outdoors, notions of space and speed are refined as children push wheelbarrows and ride pedal vehicles. Staff help children's awareness of shape during their model making by engaging them in conversations about the boxes they use, the size of the materials they

need to cut to cover them or the lengths of tape needed to hold them together. Children follow shape trails in the nursery grounds to identify and match simple shapes successfully. Garden treasure hunts and climbing equipment provide children with experiences to develop their understanding of location and place effectively. Children build their concepts of direction and space usefully with programmable and response toys. Staff set up market stalls by the vegetable garden to provide children with a clear focus for further counting, weighing and money handling activities to consolidate their mathematical understanding.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff make very good use of the outdoor areas to promote children's learning.
- Children have many valuable opportunities to find out about living things and how to care for them.
- Children have access to a wide range of useful resources to develop their understanding of the world around them.

Commentary

47. Children, including those for whom English is an additional language, achieve well and they are on target to exceed national expectations by the end of the foundation stage. Children's attainment and achievement have improved since the last inspection. Their learning is good because staff consistently teach them well. Staff provide children with a rich variety of activities to stimulate their curiosity and engage their interests. Children with special educational needs are well supported. They achieve well and attain standards appropriate to their capabilities. Outdoors, there is a wide range of exciting activities to develop children's skills, knowledge and understanding. Staff are sensitive to children's needs and readily join their play to extend their enquiries, demonstrate the correct use of tools or explore their thinking. For example, a member of staff noticed a child amused by the sound emitting from a plastic bottle he was squeezing. Through careful questioning and engaging with him she extended his learning so he understood how the noise was being made.
48. Staff help children observe animals and plants closely and handle them with care. They encourage children to think about appropriate words to describe them and introduce children to new terms to extend their vocabulary. Children find out about growth and change by tending plants and seeing the changes the seasons bring to the garden and local park. They watch the incubation of hens' eggs and their moment of hatching. They learn about the life cycles of insects through their observations of caterpillars and ladybird larvae. Staff provide many good opportunities for children to make and build. Children make good use of the wide range of resources because they are readily accessible and they are clearly familiar with their deployment and storage. Exhibits and photographs provide good examples of rockets and cars made from recycled material and trucks from construction kits. During the inspection, children built a pirate ship outdoors from wooden blocks and used a treasure map to dig for jewels in the sand. Invited Asian dancers, celebrations of Christmas and Chinese New Year and visits to the food markets provide stimulating opportunities for children to learn of their own and other cultures. Children learn effectively how to relate past and present and gain a secure understanding of places and features of their own town. They visit museums and examine household items from long ago. They tour local sites and record their visits with photographs, drawings and in discussion with staff. There are many satisfactory opportunities for children to learn about the uses of information and communication technology. Successfully, they play audio-tapes, observe images with the digital camera, control a response toy, switch on the radio and use a telephone to order vegetables. Outdoors on the market stall, a child was observed simulating a 'barcode scanner' when selling potatoes. However, although children use programs effectively and display confidence using a mouse and touch-screen, limited hardware means children's access to computers is restricted.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High quality teaching ensures children achieve well.
- Children's physical skills develop successfully because of the wide variety of challenging activities staff provide in both the inside and outside areas.
- By regular observation and recording, staff monitor carefully gains in children's learning and note where they need further support.

Commentary

49. Staff provide high quality teaching which ensures that children receive the frequent opportunities they need for their physical development, indoors and out. As a result, all children make good progress and achieve well, improving their co-ordination, control, agility and manipulation. The wide range of stimulating activities and the staff's thoughtful assessments of children's performance ensure that they confidently refine their skills successfully and the more hesitant are supported appropriately. Consequently, most children are on target to exceed national expectations by the end of the foundation stage. Children with special educational needs achieve well and attain standards appropriate to their abilities. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.
50. Children move freely and develop a sense of space as they run around and share equipment. Older children confidently climb vertical stepping logs, pull on knotted ropes to walk up slopes, balance on ladders and blocks, descend challenging ridged surfaces and swing on a choice of suspended supports. Their movements are well controlled and they use the apparatus with skill to guide their progress. Alert to safety issues, they take turns without fuss, remind one another to be careful and readily give way when circumstances demand it. Staff present real challenges sensitively to children to guide their development. For example, a teacher's encouragement helped an apprehensive child gain the confidence she needed to climb unaided to the top of the wooden tower. Holding tightly on the rail, the child's eager chatter and sheer excitement on looking down from her vantage point said it all!
51. Staff encourage children to repeat actions and make effective use of large construction equipment to build and balance blocks. They use post-its, pads and clipboards to record their observations of children's performance. After vigorous exercise, children demonstrate awareness of changes in their bodies with their comments: 'I've no breath', 'I'm hot', 'My arms won't work now'. Through the well-structured programme provided and using a variety of tools and plastic construction kits, older children display effective skills cutting, gluing, marking, painting, assembling and controlling a computer mouse. For example, independently, children constructed houses for the three little pigs and demonstrated good skills in bundling sticks and straw, cutting and gluing material, and using tape to hold boxes in shape. Using their assessments to support them, staff provide ample opportunities for children to develop their manipulative skills effectively, and to explore and refine their movements and actions outdoors successfully.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above those normally found by the time children leave the school.
- Children make good progress and achieve well.
- There is good provision for musical development.

Commentary

52. Standards in children's creative development are good and higher than those reported at the last inspection. Their achievement is good. This is because children are presented with a wide range of exciting activities which engage their interest, foster their enjoyment and develop their creativity. They are taught a variety of skills and techniques which enable them to explore and experiment with confidence. All children are included effectively in all activities. Sensitive intervention and careful support encourage the children with special needs to achieve well. Most children are likely to exceed the national expectations by the end of the foundation stage.
53. One of the strengths in the teaching is the many opportunities which children are given to engage in role-play and the way in which staff join in to encourage them to express their ideas. In the three pigs' house, children enthusiastically act out the familiar story and good levels of language were drawn out of this activity through skilful adult intervention. Outside, a group of children digging potatoes and carrots used the market stall to buy and sell their vegetables carrying them forwards and backwards with great gusto in their wheelbarrows and self-constructed trolleys. Role play is effectively linked to the current theme and developed imaginatively in other areas of learning.
54. The school makes very good use of musical activities to promote children's learning. Staff give all children good opportunities to play a range of instruments, to sing, play musical games and to dance. Great enthusiasm is shown by the children as they participate in musical activities and explore the different sounds made by the instruments in the music area. Many show a good sense of rhythm and they know and enjoy singing a range of songs and rhymes. Pupils from the co-located special school who join in these activities particularly enjoy the singing games which contribute well to the social, language and numeracy skills of all the children.
55. The quality of teaching is good and this is evident in the children's response and their high level of interest and involvement. Particular skills and techniques are taught effectively and staff give clear explanations for instance of how to print with rollers or how to mix paints. The children respond to these experiences well. They are aware of colours and shades of colour. They know that when they mix blue and yellow they make green, that red and yellow make orange. They are encouraged to assess their work and to think how they might improve it.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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