



Southway Early Childhood Centre

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109416
LEA BEDFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 278192
Inspection dates 5 July 2006 to 6 July 2006
Reporting inspector Ms. Linda Murgatroyd AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery	School address	Amphill Road
School category	Community		MK42 9HE
Age range of pupils	3 to 5		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01234 266520
Number on roll	72	Fax number	01234 212016
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms.Kaitlin O'Hanrahan
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs. Katrina Foley

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Southway Early Childhood Centre serves an ethnically diverse area close to the town centre of Bedford. It has 72 children on roll, of whom 53 attend full-time and the remaining 19 part-time. Although a few children stay until they are 5, many have only approximately four terms before they go on to primary school. Children are from variable socio-economic backgrounds and enter the nursery with low levels of skill and knowledge across the areas of learning for children of their age. There are 28% of children from White British heritage and 19% from Asian or Asian British backgrounds, with the remainder from a range of other ethnic groups. Just over one third of children are learning English as an additional language and a very small number are identified as having learning difficulties. The school works closely with a range of services to meet the needs of the children, including Sure Start, which funds two part-time posts to support work with families. The school also runs extended services, which include breakfast and after school clubs and drop-in sessions for parents with children aged birth to three years.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Southway Early Childhood Centre is an outstanding school which justifiably enjoys a very high level of parents' confidence. This view is shared by the inspection and the school. Teaching is highly skilled and the curriculum is rich and stimulating, so that children are fully absorbed in their learning. In their relatively short time in nursery, children become confident, independent learners. This leads to excellent achievement in all the areas of learning for children of this age. Children who stay until they are five reach standards well above those found in most schools. The school works closely with parents, who appreciate the outstanding care taken of their children. The leadership and management of the headteacher and assistant headteacher are outstanding and they are well supported by governors. They have built a highly effective staff team, who are constantly striving to improve children's learning. The headteacher, assistant headteacher and governors have a very accurate picture of the school's effectiveness, and areas in which it might develop further. Staff and parents' views are regularly sought as part of this process. New teaching staff have been introduced well to the work of the school, but this good practice has not yet been extended to include administrative and lunchtime staff. The school has been recognised for the excellent start it gives children and has a role in training and sharing its outstanding practice with other schools. The school's capacity to improve further is excellent, as is the value for money it gives.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue the school's work to share their outstanding practice with all staff as well as with other schools and settings, locally and more widely. - Extend the good induction programme to include all new staff, including administrative and support staff.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Most children enter the nursery with skills and knowledge below what might be expected for their age. In their relatively short time here, all children make outstanding progress across the areas of learning. Many leave nursery to go on to Reception class only part way through the Foundation Stage, but most are well on the way to meeting the nationally expected standards for five-year-olds by the time they do so. The few who do stay until they are five reach standards well above average. Over the past three years, the school has seen the standards of its five-year-olds improve, especially in the more complex areas of linking sounds and letters, reading and mathematics. The school sets targets for individual children, based on careful assessment, and has high expectations of what they can achieve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding. Staff make excellent relationships with children, valuing and nurturing each as an individual. Children's behaviour is excellent because they are totally absorbed in what they are doing. When there are minor conflicts between children, they are sensitively helped to find positive solutions. Children play together well, and often cooperate and help one another. The development of independence is a high priority, and children learn quickly to make choices and persevere with them. Parents say that the good habits their children learn are carried through to home, and are delighted with the progress they see in their children. Children are happy and confident, and are proud to show their achievements to others. They are keen to come to school and absences other than for illness are rare. When there is any irregular attendance, this is carefully followed up by the school and creative solutions found. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Building on the exceptionally positive relationships between adults and children, the school is particularly successful in helping children to have respect for others. Through involvement in local visits such as shopping for ingredients, celebrating festivals from a range of cultures and meeting and cooking for visitors, they are helped to understand the wider world in which they live. Because the nursery is run on the principle of making best use of every opportunity to explore and enjoy what is happening, children learn about the magic of nature, for example, while dipping for creatures in the pond or watching birds in the garden. Children are helped to have a very good understanding of the importance of exercise and eating healthily. Staff are particularly effective in teaching children about safety while encouraging them to be bold, such as trying new skills on the climbing frame. Children are very well prepared for later life by being helped to work and play well together, to sustain interest and take initiative.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. The very high expectations and skills of all staff demonstrate their belief that these children deserve the very best that can be offered. Teamwork among staff is excellent. Staff show obvious pleasure in children's achievements, and are encouraging and specific with their praise. All staff have an excellent understanding of the way that young children learn, and use this to plan an exceptional range of activities inside and outside the classrooms. Staff use language extremely well to help children to express their ideas, extend their vocabulary and speak clearly. This is particularly effective in supporting children learning English as an additional language, although all children benefit greatly. One of the excellent ways of encouraging children to become independent is by providing simple instructions in book form, which children can select and follow, to perform complex tasks such as cooking or mixing colours without adult help. Staff seize every opportunity to develop

children's ideas by exploring alongside them, using open-ended questions to extend their thinking. There is excellent provision for children with additional needs, and these children achieve very well. Assessment of children's progress is thorough, and the excellent knowledge staff have of children is highly praised by parents. Children are effectively encouraged to think about the quality of their own work and what they might do to improve or extend it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides a rich, stimulating curriculum, firmly based on an understanding of how young children learn and with a focus on developing children's curiosity and on empowering them as learners. The balance between activities led by adults and those which children can choose for themselves is outstanding, and results in very independent children. Careful monitoring ensures that, over time, all areas of learning are covered by all children. Excellent use is made of the attractive garden as an essential part of learning, for example, children dip for creatures in the pond, watch birds, grow vegetables and flowers as well as use equipment and materials across the areas of learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) is very well used across the curriculum, as well as for the teaching of specific skills. Teaching about health and personal safety is fully integrated into the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff care exceptionally well for the children. They are sensitive and friendly and create an atmosphere in which children feel secure and are keen to learn. Parents appreciate the fact that all staff know their children very well and are confident in handing them over. They are unanimous in their praise for the support the school gives to parents and for the way in which it works with them for the good of their children. Arrangements for admission are very good, and well supported by the extended services that the school provides. Staff encourage parents to look at and contribute to 'blue books' and provide a slideshow of nursery activities showing their children in a range of activities. In this way, parents know what their children are doing in nursery. The nursery is a very safe place for children to play and develop emotionally. Staff are very aware of the procedures for child protection and those to ensure health and safety. The nursery works closely with a wide range of support agencies to provide for children and families. Children are gently guided in their work by skilled staff who encourage them to extend and review their work and play to ensure very good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher is passionate about working with young children and sets very high standards for her staff. She and the assistant headteacher make a very effective management team

whose skills complement each other very well. Despite some changes of staffing in the past two years, they have built a staff team with exceptional skills who work very effectively to provide the best possible start for children's education. Induction procedures for teaching staff are very good, but those for administrative and lunchtime staff, though satisfactory, are less thorough. The headteacher and assistant headteacher provide a clear direction for the school's work, which is very successfully shared with all staff so that there is a willingness to adopt new ideas to improve children's learning. The school has very good systems for checking the quality of children's experiences and ensuring that all are making good progress. All staff and governors are involved in reviewing the school's work and parents' views are sought and acted upon. All points for development from the last inspection have been addressed, and the school has gone on improving year-on-year. For example, the use of ICT has been developed until it is now a strength of the school. The quality of the school's work has been recognised by a number of nationally renowned experts in early childhood education, and the school has an important role in training staff from nurseries locally and more widely including internationally. Its partnerships with parents, local schools and other agencies are excellent. Governance is good. Many members of the governing body know the work of the school at first hand. Governors provide support as well as asking challenging questions, and have good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They review the progress of school planning and ensure that finances are carefully managed, but are less involved in planning developments. The school's good track record and the commitment of staff and governors mean that the capacity for further improvement is excellent.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	NA
Learners are educated about sexual health	NA
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

You might remember that I visited your nursery recently. Thank you for talking to me and showing me what you were doing. I was there to see how well Southway helps you to learn. I had a lovely time, and I think you go to a really great nursery. I could see how much you enjoy being there. I want you to know that these are the things I liked best about Southway Early Childhood Centre: - You have lots of really interesting things to do, and I could see how much fun you have. - You learn to work and play well together and to do lots of things without needing grown-ups to help you. - The staff are always there to help you to learn while you play. Their teaching makes sure that you learn very well. - Everyone at the nursery takes very good care of you, so that you are safe and happy, and your parents are very pleased. - All the staff and the governors know what they want the nursery to be like, and work hard together to make it a good place to learn and play. To make your nursery even better, the staff are going to make sure that everyone who starts working in the nursery knows a lot about how children learn at Southway. Because Southway is a very special nursery, I think that your headteacher and the staff should go on teaching other adults at the school how they do things, so they can help make other nurseries as good as yours. I hope that you go on enjoying all the exciting activities that you do at Southway.