

Woodcroft Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114699
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	290003
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Alison Pangbourne

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Fiona Tittensor (Vice Chair)
Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002
School address	Dorset Avenue Great Baddow Chelmsford Essex CM2 9UB
Telephone number	01245 473222
Fax number	01245 475528

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized nursery school. It is one of two local authority nursery schools in Essex. Most of the children come from White British families and the others come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small minority speak English as an additional language. Over a third of the children have learning difficulties and disabilities. When children enter the nursery the variation in their attainment is wide but for most of the children it is below what is typical for their age, particularly in social and language development. The nursery school offers a family toddler group and a pre-nursery group for children aged between two and three years. At the time of the inspection, the nursery was undergoing extensive building works.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good nursery school. Parents are extremely positive about it. One wrote, 'My child could not possibly have had a better start to his school career.' The children love it too, rushing to come in at the beginning of sessions. One said, 'Let's see what we're doing this morning!' The book of children's views contains many examples of how much the children love their nursery.

Children's achievement is good. From a starting point that is below average for their age, they are on course to reach what is expected on entry to primary school, with higher attaining children exceeding this. They make good and sometimes very good progress because the quality of teaching is good and the imaginative curriculum with its exciting opportunities for outdoor play gives them a good start. Staff know the children very well, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, and match activities closely to their needs. Extremely thorough monitoring of how well each child is doing means that areas for development are swiftly identified and activities are put in place to support them.

Children's personal development is outstanding. They become independent and enthusiastic learners who enjoy nursery enormously. They receive excellent care, support and guidance and this helps them do well. Their behaviour is exemplary. The outstanding emphasis on contributing to the community, such as singing to the residents of the local sheltered housing and raising funds for an unusually wide range of charities, gives them an excellent understanding that is unusual in such young children. Extremely effective partnerships with parents and with the many students who train or undertake research in the nursery, greatly benefit children's learning.

The good leadership and management of the headteacher and the senior teacher are fundamental to the nursery's success. They maintain thorough and useful information about each individual child that clearly shows their progress through the school. The nursery is currently piloting several different ways of recording a whole school overview to demonstrate attainment on entry, attainment on exit and the value added by the nursery in between. At the moment it is difficult for the nursery to show exactly how much progress each year group has made, to compare it with other year groups or to monitor the achievement of different groups of children.

The headteacher is strongly committed to developing her staff. They have recently taken responsibility for areas of learning and their roles are currently being developed. They are gaining an improved understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their areas and a deeper knowledge of them to enhance provision for the children. Governance is good. The headteacher and governors have an accurate view of how well the nursery is doing and work together well to bring about improvement. Their main priority is the completion of the building works as the school moves towards extending its provision, whilst ensuring that the impact is in keeping with the ethos of the nursery. Value for money is good. The quest for further improvement and the improvements that have taken place since the previous inspection show that the nursery has a good capacity to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine and improve the information kept about attainment and progress to give a clear whole-school overview of children's attainment on entry to nursery, where they have reached when they leave for primary school and how much progress they have made.

- Develop the roles of staff with curricular management responsibilities so that they can identify strengths and areas for development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good and sometimes very good progress because the quality of teaching is good and the interesting curriculum encourages them to learn. Comprehensive individual records show that all children, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well. By the time children leave nursery most of them are on course to meet the early learning goals at the end of their first year in primary school, with higher attaining children exceeding them. They do particularly well in social and language development because the nursery places great emphasis on developing these skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children thoroughly enjoy nursery and their behaviour is excellent. Attendance is only satisfactory, mainly because not all parents wish their child to attend every day. The nursery does all it can to encourage regular attendance. A real strength is the excellent contribution that the children make to the community. They regularly visit the residents of the local sheltered housing to sing to them. In return a resident visits the nursery to play the piano for them. The children have also worked with members of the community to develop their 'story garden'. Healthy eating is encouraged and children develop their social skills effectively at 'snack time', passing fruit to each other and tidying away drinks. The children develop an excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness through the stimulating activities, such as learning about their own and other cultures. The good focus on developing early literacy, numeracy and computer skills, together with the emphasis on good manners, means that children have a good basis for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

All adults work very closely as a team and the children respond very positively to the staff's high expectations. Adults use questions well to include all children and develop their learning. They make learning enjoyable and the children try to do their best. Where teaching is exceptionally strong, staff use very imaginative methods to captivate the children, such as wearing a wide array of hats and using dramatic effects to encourage them to sing. Good organisation means that children know the routines well and move confidently from room to room. However, during one observation children had to wait rather too long for their turn at an activity. Adults know each child extremely well. Several children are identified each week and all staff observe them closely. They formally discuss each child's progress and set targets for development. Consequently, tasks are very well matched to the needs of each child and this contributes positively to their good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has some outstanding features. The outdoor areas are used very effectively to enrich learning. They provide excellent opportunities for adventurous and physical play. The 'story garden' and 'sculpture garden' provide outstanding opportunities to wonder at nature and to make discoveries. A parent wrote, 'The team work hard to make sure each session is fun and enjoyable for the children.' Visits add interest, and visitors such as a museum worker and a vocalist from a band fascinate the children. Provision for those with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language is strong and contributes to the good progress these children make. The nursery has identified children who have special talents and is currently developing ways to further improve provision for them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The nursery's very caring ethos means that children and their parents feel valued. Again, a parent wrote, 'My child has been given such wonderful care and support. Each child is important to the staff.' Procedures for safeguarding children are robust and staff are well trained in child protection. Children's progress is tracked extremely thoroughly and the nursery maintains a wealth of information about each child. This includes full and detailed profiles of each child, including examples of work and detailed observations across all areas of learning, and comprehensive record books showing progress towards targets for children with learning difficulties. Staff set challenging targets from their observations of how well children are doing. Links with other schools, colleges and agencies are excellent, with many students undertaking training or research at the nursery.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and the senior teacher show a strong commitment to the development of each child. This is shown in the information kept about individuals. They are currently trying different ways of recording children's attainment and progress to give a whole school overview. They know that this will help them to demonstrate how much progress children make during their time at nursery. It also helps them to easily compare different groups of children, for example, the progress of boys and girls, in order to identify areas for development. Staff have recently taken on responsibility for areas of learning and they are beginning to develop their management roles to give them a better understanding of strengths and areas for development. Governance is good. Governors are well informed and act effectively as 'critical friends', ensuring that the soon to be completed building works meet the nursery's needs. The headteacher and the governors have effective and accurate systems for checking how well they are doing and what needs to be done next. The nursery is working towards extending its provision to improve facilities for the community still further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 March 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Woodcroft Nursery School, Dorset Avenue, Great Baddow, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 9UB

I have asked Mrs Sullivan to read this to you. I expect you saw me in your lovely nursery recently. I really enjoyed visiting you. Thank you for talking to me and showing me what you were doing. I would like to tell you what I found out.

I thought that you were all very good children and that you played very nicely with your friends. I thought that those of you who went to Purbeck Court behaved beautifully, holding a grown up's hand all the way there and back again. I loved hearing you sing at Purbeck Court and all the people who came to listen looked very happy to see you! You have lovely gardens to play in and lots of interesting things to do there. You were very interested in what the builders were doing and you were very sensible. Nobody tried to go where they were busy! All the grown ups look after you extremely well and help you to learn new things. Mrs Sullivan and Mrs Lloyd make sure that your nursery gets better and better. Your families know that you go to a good nursery school.

I have asked Mrs Sullivan to keep some extra records to show how everyone gets on during their time at nursery. I have also asked some of the adults to find out what is working well in their areas and what they can make even better for you.

I hope you carry on enjoying your time at Woodcroft Nursery School and do well in your next school.

Best wishes

Alison Pangbourne

Lead Inspector