

Birchwood Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117069
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290709
Inspection date	21 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Jackie Cousins

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	3-4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Alex Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2001
School address	Birchway Crawford Road Hatfield Hertfordshire AL10 0PN
Telephone number	01707262648
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Age group	3-4
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized nursery school. Most children are from White British backgrounds. A significant proportion are from minority ethnic groups and some are in the early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language. Most children start school with levels of knowledge and understanding that are significantly below those usually seen. The percentage entitled to free school meals is above average. A few children come from travelling communities. The proportion of children with learning difficulties is similar to the proportion expected. The school has been a children's centre since 2003. Childcare is available through the children's centre before and after school and during the holidays.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Birchwood Nursery is an outstanding school and provides excellent value for money. The headteacher's leadership is outstanding and places a great importance on developing extremely strong relationships with parents and other agencies. This means that an exceptionally good partnership is in place to promote children's well-being. Home visits effectively establish links between parents and staff which assist children to settle quickly into school life. Termly consultation sessions allow parents to understand what targets their children are working towards. Every single parent who responded to the questionnaire was totally positive about the school. One parent said, 'My child has been exposed to a broad and fascinating range of learning experiences. I have been extremely impressed with the enthusiasm and imagination of the teaching staff. I would not hesitate in recommending the nursery to others.' Children from all backgrounds and abilities are welcomed and included in all school activities. The school's leadership works exceptionally well to draw the community together. For example, parents and local people are offered guidance on 'positive beginnings' for children through the children's centre activities.

The school's leadership ensures that children's learning and progress are at the heart of everything that is planned. As a consequence, children's achievement is excellent. Many children begin school with levels of knowledge that are significantly lower than expected. As a result of outstanding teaching and learning, children make extremely good progress and achieve expected standards by the time they leave at the age of four. Staff are exceptionally knowledgeable about how young children learn. Particularly effective teaching methods are used and so children develop their basic skills well. Children are effectively prepared for the next stage of education. The curriculum is outstanding. Staff plan adventurous and extremely exciting sessions. Occasionally, the planning for sessions does not set extension activities which allow children to work at a higher level of skill.

Children's personal development is outstanding. This is mostly as a result of the excellent care, guidance and support they receive from all staff. Relationships between staff and children are extremely well-developed. Children are exceptionally happy in school and enjoy all the activities available. Their behaviour is excellent and attendance is good. Children handle equipment particularly safely and move thoughtfully around the classrooms and outside area. They adopt healthy lifestyles extremely well. They learn to try different fruits and grow their own vegetables. The school's use of assessment is good but a few targets for children are rather broad and do not link effectively to areas of development highlighted in the assessment records.

Leadership and management are excellent and have brought about exceptional improvement since the last inspection. For example, children's progress is really well monitored and evaluated. The strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher drive change with particular effectiveness. Extremely good team work unites the staff of the school and children's centre. This means the school is in an excellent position to continue to improve in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the planning of sessions so that extension activities raise the level of skills that some children are using.
- Improve children's targets so that they are more specific and linked consistently to areas of development identified in assessment records.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding so that standards are in line with those expected by the end of the Nursery year. In personal, social and emotional development as well as physical development, standards are slightly above those expected. Evidence from the school's tracking system shows that most children make really good progress. Boys and girls make similar progress. The children who are learning to speak English as an additional language make particularly good progress because of the teachers' expertise in developing communication skills. Children who find learning more difficult are supported effectively and so they achieve particularly well. Higher attaining children make especially good progress and a considerable proportion are working at above expected levels of knowledge and understanding. Children are well prepared for the next stage of education and their future lives because their basic skills and personal development are effectively developed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong. The children happily share toys and clear away materials after activities with effective support from staff. Children's self-esteem is high as a result of the positive ways that staff speak to them and encourage them to have a go at new activities. They respect each others' beliefs and celebrate festivals from other cultures such as the Chinese New Year. Children from different backgrounds play harmoniously together. Behaviour is extremely good and children cooperate really well. They concentrate particularly well and have very positive attitudes to their learning. Children's independence is developed excellently and they are encouraged to choose activities for themselves. They are able to collect resources by themselves because the classroom is effectively organised. Children make an exceptionally good contribution to the community. They work well in groups and offer ideas about how to improve areas and activities. Children raise money for various charities and bring in gifts for those who are less fortunate than themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching sets extremely high expectations of children and this means they make particularly good progress in their educational skills and their personal development. Children learn to use their senses successfully because staff use resources imaginatively. For example, during the inspection, children learnt to explore materials well when they handled a mixture of cornflour and water. This activity developed their language skills because staff used open-ended questioning well. The outside area is used effectively because there is a very wide range of activities which interest children and stimulate their curiosity. Staff use positive feedback with children to give them confidence. Every child is treated as an individual and those who find learning more difficult are very well supported. In one excellent lesson, children's knowledge of the sounds that letters make were extremely imaginatively developed through the use of stories and drawings. Planning for sessions does not always contain extension activities that will effectively challenge children to use skills at a higher level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The rich and exciting variety of learning activities on offer mean children's time in the nursery is exceptionally well planned. Indoor and outdoor activities ensure that children learn to read, write and use number very effectively. For example, they learn to write letters and then walk to the letter box to post them. The school links areas of learning together extremely well so that children are developing several skills at one time. They learn to make up imaginative stories because resources are provided which motivate their creativity. In the outside area children develop their hand and body control in many ways. They learn to climb apparatus using small foot and hand holds which strengthens their grip and arm muscles. This, in turn, improves their hand control when they are writing and drawing. Children who are from minority ethnic groups are especially well provided for and so they make extremely good progress. Information and communication technology is used well to support children's learning in many areas.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care and support for all children's personal development is extremely good. This is because staff are highly committed to children's well-being. The children have learned how to massage each other's shoulders and backs which helps them to release tension at the start of the session. Arrangements to safeguard children are robust. Health and safety is given a high priority and is regularly checked by the school and governors. This means that children work in a safe and secure environment. Any children at risk or who find learning more difficult are quickly identified and are supported well. Individual educational plans are effectively reviewed. Staff are available every day at the start and end of sessions. Children's achievement is closely monitored and evaluated in all areas of learning. Staff are able to identify effectively individual children's strengths and areas for development. The school works extremely well with other agencies such as the educational psychologist. All parents have a termly opportunity to come into the school during the day and discuss their child's progress and targets. A few children's targets are not well linked to assessment records and are not particularly specific. This means that staff and parents can not easily measure children's progress against these targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's leadership is excellent because of the enthusiastic, astute and insightful senior leadership team and staff. The quality of teaching and provision is very effectively monitored. Self-evaluation is well considered and accurate. Recently, all staff from the school and children's centre and some governors worked together very thoughtfully to evaluate provision and suggest areas for improvement. The leadership of the headteacher ensures that the school is always exploring ways to make the quality of learning even better. One parent said, 'The nursery is a wonderful place with fantastic teachers and an even more fantastic headteacher.' Children from all backgrounds are integrated extremely well into the school and racial harmony is strong. Governance is excellent. Governors monitor and challenge the school extremely effectively. The school has an outstanding capacity to improve in the future.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Birchwood Nursery School, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 0PN

Thank you for welcoming me into your school. I enjoyed watching sessions and talking to you. It was interesting to talk to your teachers and the chair of governors. You go to an excellent school. Wonderful things about your school include:

- You really enjoy all the super activities.
- Your behaviour is amazing.
- Your headteacher has very good ideas about how to improve the school.
- Teaching is excellent and staff work hard to make sure you make really good progress.
- Teachers and other staff care for you very well.

I have asked your school to look at how they can make things even better. The most important things are:

- Making sure that staff always plan ways to help you do as well as you can.
- Improving your targets so that you and your teachers know how well you are working towards them.

Keep working hard and enjoying the many things you do at Birchwood Nursery School.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Cousins