



York Road Nursery School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117071
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290711
Inspection dates 28 February –1 March 2007
Reporting inspector Keith Sadler

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

Type of school	Nursery	School address	York Road
School category	Community		Hitchin
Age range of pupils	3–4		Hertfordshire SG5 1XA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462 459127
Number on roll (school)	110	Fax number	01462 459127
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Michael Routh
		Headteacher	Mrs Helen Griffiths
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2002		

Age group 3–4	Inspection dates 28 February –1 March 2007	Inspection number 290711
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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 that also provides daycare for children from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. throughout the year. The nursery is to become a Children's Centre soon. Children come from all areas of Hitchin and nearby villages. The socio-economic background of families is diverse. About two thirds of the children are from White British backgrounds and there are a few from other groups. The percentage of children with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. Children's attainment on entry is at levels expected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

York Road is an excellent school that provides outstanding value for money. There is an overwhelming atmosphere of support and care that enables children to make rapid progress in both their personal and academic development. Achievement is outstanding because the staff provide a high quality education set in a happy, safe and nurturing environment in which the children thrive. They settle rapidly and develop a love of school and learning. One parent said, 'My son is excited about going to school and is equally excited at the end of each day.' This comment reflects parents' unanimous support. Parents agreed that the nursery provides a very positive experience in all areas. Their comments are summed up by a parent who wrote, 'York Road is an excellent environment to develop happy children.' This accurately encapsulates one of the key strengths of the nursery. Children are very confident, their behaviour, sense of responsibility towards each other and their attitudes are excellent. Above all, staff instil a belief in the children that they can achieve and they do! Almost all are on course to achieve the learning goals in all areas of learning and in their personal, social and emotional development. Many of the older children are already close to achieving the expected levels for children who are at the end of the reception year. These strengths occur because the quality of the leadership and management of the headteacher is outstanding. She has a clear vision for the school and its future, has developed a highly skilled team of staff where all inputs are valued. All the staff know the children exceptionally well, they work very closely together to nurture the children and the school runs smoothly. All the staff take their responsibilities seriously and make a good contribution to the school's clear and high quality procedures for checking both the children's progress and the quality of provision in their particular areas. However, there is no leadership structure in place and this limits opportunities for the head to share the myriad of responsibilities that she carries. The school is very forward looking and has been selected to become a children's centre and this, for example, is providing the opportunity to appoint a full time deputy headteacher.

The school puts the children's personal, social and emotional development at the heart of what it does. This means that the children's positive dispositions to learning are developed exceptionally well. Children develop outstanding levels of independence in their learning and take responsibility for planning their work, choosing from the wide range of opportunities available. These opportunities, which match children's learning needs well, come about because the teachers' plans, and the ensuing small group work, result from very careful observational assessments of what the children achieve in their learning. This enables practitioners to target future work to move learning forward at a rapid rate.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a senior leadership team in order to share responsibilities for leadership and management more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children make excellent progress, with the vast majority working within the levels expected and a significant proportion achieving above expectations by the end of their time in the school. Progress is best in their personal, social and emotional development and their skills in communication, language and literacy. The children that are at an early stage of learning English and those with learning difficulties and disabilities also make rapid progress. This is because the provision is excellent. The closely matched enrichment programme enables these children to develop their communication, language and literacy skills well. The school's superb partnership with parents contributes well to progress because children have support at home and parents are helped to understand how children learn and make progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's outstanding personal development includes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour is excellent and children play in harmony together. They have very positive relationships with adults and with each other. For example, during the inspection, a parent came in and played her viola because 'V' was the letter of the week. The children were mesmerised as she played skilfully a wide range of children's songs and nursery rhymes. This high quality provision provided an opportunity for children to develop and show their spiritual understanding as well as to delight in the music and spontaneously dance together. Their enjoyment is reflected in their good attendance.

Children have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. They know about healthy foods and can identify why they are healthy, or not! They also understand the importance of physical exercise. Their physical development results from both the exciting and challenging use of the outdoor area, the good range of small muscle control activities and the daily 'phizzigym' sessions where children exercise to music. Children feel safe and secure and have very well developed ideas about safe practices when cutting with scissors, crossing the road and keeping out of the sun!

The emphasis on developing independent learners enables children to take responsibility for both their learning and all the resources in the school. They are well prepared to thrive in their Reception year.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Relationships are positive, all the practitioners' behaviour management skills are highly developed and they contribute

to the children's positive attitudes to learning. Teachers prepare lessons exceptionally well with a wide range of activities that are pitched to both engage and interest the children, and almost always building on real experiences and artefacts. This provides strong purpose to the activities and helps to engage children's interest and concentration. For example, in one outstanding session, children were learning to cut with scissors when making a plate of food for the teddy bears' picnic. The practitioner set the context and reason for doing the task leading to exceptional concentration and enjoyment. Assessment procedures are a particular strength. Direct and comprehensive learning records are meticulously maintained to show each child's achievements and these are used well to plan future work as well as being regularly shared with parents.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is of exceptional quality and is made highly relevant to the needs of the children. There is an excellent balance between directed activities and those that the children choose for themselves. Plans are detailed and comprehensive and make very effective use of purposeful play. They ensure that activities match both the children's interests and the required coverage of the six areas of learning. These are linked together exceptionally well and help the children to become aware of the connections between different areas of learning. Visits to local places of interest enhance learning as does the wide range of visitors to the school. Children look forward to their recall time sessions in which they review the work that they have carried out. These important sessions are planned well to enable children to represent their activities in writing and drawing as well as in discussion.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The experienced staff team is highly responsive to the needs of children and their families. The school provides good opportunities for parents to understand how children learn. There are high quality and robust procedures in place for child protection and health and safety. All regulations for safeguarding children are met in full. The school's outstanding assessment and recording arrangements enable practitioners to guide children particularly well. Each child has a detailed learning record which is regularly shared with parents. These are then used very well to ease transition into the reception classes of the many primary schools that the children move to.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are excellent. Although the leadership of the headteacher is pivotal to the school's success, that of other practitioners, all of whom have multiple responsibilities, also contributes well to the school's excellent overall effectiveness. Their combined skills ensure that there are good and methodical reviews of provision

and the children's achievements. There is good capacity for further improvement. This results in a nursery that refines its practice in the light of new initiatives and responses from the children exceptionally well.

Governors play an important role. They fulfil their responsibilities well, take a direct part in the school's strategic development and have a clear view of what needs to be done to make the nursery even better. Along with the headteacher, they have been instrumental in the school gaining the opportunity to become a children's centre. However, there are too few opportunities for the headteacher to share responsibilities, which significantly increases the range of responsibilities that she has to take.

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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?	2
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	2
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	1

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.

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

10 March 2007

Dear Children

York Road Nursery School, York Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG51XA

Thank you for your help when I visited your nursery. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit because everyone was so welcoming and friendly. These are the things that I think are best about your school:

- your parents believe that the nursery is good and does some brilliant things for you and I agree with them
- you really enjoy your nursery because you are happy and safe
- your behaviour is excellent
- your school gives you many exciting and fun things to do
- your teachers look after you very well
- you learn very quickly and well
- your headteacher is brilliant!

Your school is excellent and the one thing that I have asked your headteacher to do is to make sure that she has even more help in running the nursery by having a deputy headteacher to help her.

I hope that you will always enjoy your time at the nursery.

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector