

Orchard School and Nursery

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	820/6018
Unique Reference Number	133596
Inspection number	296855
Inspection dates	21-22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew McDowall HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

This Inspection of the funded nursery education was provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Orchard is an independent school and nursery between Luton and Bedford. Pupils attending the school come from surrounding towns and villages. The school is housed on two sites. The under three-year olds attend the Sharpenhoe Road site and the remainder attend the Higham Road site which was originally built as an infant school. The school promotes a holistic approach to care and education and aims to develop a passion for learning in the pupils and for them 'to be the best that they can be'. The school was last inspected in April 2002. Provision for three-year olds was not inspected at this time.

Evaluation of the school

The Orchard School and Nursery is a good school with outstanding features in important areas. The quality of education it provides is good, as is the quality of teaching. As a result the pupils make good progress. The school meets all the regulations relating to independent schools. The way in which the school attends to the welfare, health and safety of the pupils, as well as their social and moral development, is outstanding.

Quality of education

The school provides a good quality of education. The quality of the curriculum is good. It is broad and well balanced and offers the pupils a good range of academic and practical activities that enables them to make good progress and reach standards that are well above average. The school offers the subjects of the National Curriculum and much more. A high priority is given to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The curriculum is further enhanced through weekly lessons in dance and philosophy, and specialist teaching supports the work in physical education, French and music. Good use is made of visits to the locality and visitors to school to enrich the curriculum. The school does much good work out of doors. The locality is used well to develop understanding of the seasons and environmental issues. Visits to such places as the nature reserve, and a local garden to see chickens, provide opportunities for the pupils to develop a good understanding of the natural world. The school provides a satisfactory range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. Appropriate schemes of work are in place for all subjects and lesson planning usually indicates how the work set by the teachers will meet the needs of all abilities in the class.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Because the staff know the pupils extremely well relationships in the school are very good. Consequently, lessons are happy occasions that are enjoyed by everyone. This positive school ethos raises the self-esteem of the pupils, who are all keen to have a go at their work. Staff use individual social targets effectively and this enables the pupils to make outstanding progress in their social development. The teachers have a good understanding of the subjects they teach. The headteacher and deputy headteacher check on the quality of teaching in the school and ensure that help and guidance is provided where it is needed. The teaching assistants are an important part of the staff team and they are particularly effective in supporting pupils with learning difficulties. Resources are generally good and staff use these well. A strength of the teaching is the way books are used to foster a love of literature. Pupils were observed listening attentively and thoroughly enjoying the stories that were read to them. In the best lessons the pupils are offered practical activities that are well matched to their individual needs. For example, in an outstanding lesson where pupils were learning to add and subtract, the teacher used grapes to reinforce the concept of one less. She cleverly targeted her questions to ensure the more able pupils were extended, and the thought of having a grape to eat, when their turn came, motivated all the pupils to listen very well.

There is a well established framework and procedures to check and track the progress pupils make. This is carried out on a regular basis and indicates what the pupils do well and what they need to improve to move to the next level. However, this information is not used consistently to plan learning that will stretch all pupils. The sample of pupils' recent work shows that sometimes the same or very similar work is set for pupils of different abilities. This particularly impacts on pupils of higher ability who are not always challenged as well as they might be. The pupils all have a set of targets that cover both social and academic development. The pupils know their targets and are reminded to consider them when working in class. Some of the targets are not sufficiently specific to individual pupils to clearly identify what they need to do to improve. Whilst verbal feedback to pupils is good, the marking of their work is generally very brief and does not always tell the pupils how well they have done, and what they need to do to improve.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils have very positive attitudes to school and attendance is good. Their social development is excellent; the pupils are relaxed with each other and adults. There is a strong family feel to the school and pupils are quick to offer help if anyone is feeling unhappy. Smiling faces are a feature of Orchard School. The mixed-age grouping at meal times makes a very good contribution to pupils' social development as the older pupils are expected to help the younger ones, and they do this very well. Pupils have a very clear sense of right and wrong, and the way in which the school manages behaviour promotes pupils' self-discipline. When they occasionally

forget, the pupils are quietly helped to consider the impact of their actions on others. Because these strategies are so effective, and consistently applied, behaviour is outstanding.

The school makes a very good contribution to the community. Pupils are actively involved in a wide range of fund raising and charity events. This helps them to gain a good insight into the wider world and develop positive attitudes to people less fortunate than themselves. There are good links with the village. Pupils have the opportunity to develop financial skills when devising and running stalls at the Summer Fete and in planning the annual visit to the pantomime. Information and communication technology is well integrated into the curriculum. This, and the good progress they make in English and mathematics, prepares the pupils well for the next stage in their education and later life.

Pupils' cultural and spiritual development is fostered through work on other faiths. In addition, the work in philosophy offers opportunities for the pupils to reflect on some of the difficult questions in life. The strong focus on the natural world helps the pupils to appreciate their surroundings. This is exemplified by the way they take great pleasure in watching and appreciating the beauty of the pheasants on the school field.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The way in which the school attends to the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is outstanding. All policies relating to health and safety are comprehensive, regularly reviewed and relate very well to the particular needs of the school. The headteacher's background in the health service serves the school very well in dealing with medical matters. There is a strong commitment from all staff to do all they can to keep the pupils safe. When incidents happen they are carefully reported and are dealt with quickly and sensitively.

Arrangements for risk assessments are very thorough and cover every eventuality. Safeguarding procedures are very good. Pupils are supervised well at all times. The school has several staff who are trained in first aid, and procedures relating to fire safety are good. The pupils say that they feel very safe in school and that they have confidence that the staff will help resolve any difficulties they may have.

The school is very successful in promoting a healthy lifestyle. School meals are nutritious; they are cooked on site and much enjoyed by the pupils. Healthy snacks are provided at break times and water is freely available.

The small play equipment is very good and encourages exercise; balls and bikes are well used at playtimes, as are hoops and hopscotch. The pupils have a good understanding about how to be healthy and participate very enthusiastically in dance lessons. The school has good plans to improve accessibility relating to disabilities. It has had a report from an external consultant and is acting on this advice.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is vigilant in the way it carries out the necessary checks to ensure that there is no reason why all staff who work at the school should not work with children.

School's premises and accommodation

The quality of the accommodation and premises is very good. The classrooms, furniture and fittings in the school are very suitable for the number and age of the pupils attending the school. Resources are generally good and the number and quality of the books in the school is very good. Care is taken in keeping the school neat, tidy and safe for the pupils. The quality of decoration is good. The school has extensive grounds and the amount of available play space is good. Plans are in place to provide a wider variety of play environments in order to better support the curriculum and provide the pupils with a more interesting range of activities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has recently reviewed the information it provides for prospective parents or carers, and now fully meets requirements. All school policies are readily available to parents. Regular newsletters, emails and information about the curriculum keep parents well informed about the workings of the school. The school provides a comprehensive annual report to parents that tells them much about how their children are doing at school.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's complaints policy meets requirements in all respects. It sets out clearly the appropriate procedures, responsibilities and time-scales for dealing with complaints.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Ensure all teachers consistently use the assessment information the school has to plan learning that stretches all pupils, particularly the high achievers.

- Develop the school target system to make the targets more specific to individual pupils.

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Practitioners have a good knowledge of the Foundation Stage and promote all aspects of children's learning and development. They are well informed about the children's individual starting points and have high expectations for their achievement. Children are very confident and readily engage in conversation, singing, writing poems and stories to share. Assessment is purposeful and the secure method of recording children's progress and achievements informs the planning process. However, plans do not always include how activities are adapted for the more able child and whilst there is good coverage of all areas of the Foundation Stages, children sometimes have less opportunity to initiate their own play. This does not always fully maximise their learning.

The strong emphasis on learning through themes and practical activities means that children are well motivated and stimulated to learn. Children with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language, receive very good support from staff who work with parents and professionals to provide a fully inclusive learning environment. The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Staff place strong emphasis on helping children respect others. Consequently, children behave exceptionally well which has a significant impact on their learning.

The leadership and management of the nursery education is outstanding. Children's education and learning is actively promoted by the exceptional dedication of the head teacher and her staff who clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Staff are motivated and create a thoroughly stimulating environment where children reach, and some exceed, the early learning goals. The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. They receive good quality information about the Foundation Stage and are actively involved in their children's learning. The needs of all children are being met.

Recommendations or actions to improve the funded nursery education

To improve the quality and standard of nursery education the registered person should take account of the following recommendations:

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- Continue to develop the activity planning procedure so that this clearly demonstrates how the activity will be adapted for the more able child and how the assessment evaluations clearly and consistently feeds planning
 - Provide more opportunities for children to make independent choices, and to plan, and initiate activities themselves.

School details

Name of school	Orchard School and Nursery		
DfES number	820/6018		
Unique reference number	133596		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY298247		
Type of school	Pre-preparatory school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2001		
Age range of pupils	2-6		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 18	Girls: 11	Total: 29
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 21	Girls: 37	Total: 58
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,650		
Address of school	Higham Gobion Road Barton-le-Clay Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 4LT		
Telephone number	01582882054		
Fax number	01582882162		
Email address	orchardnu@fsbdial.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Anne Burton		
Proprietor	Mrs Anne Burton		
Reporting inspector	Andrew McDowall HMI		
Dates of inspection	21-22 March 2007		