

Alumwell Nursery School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 104140 |
| Local Authority | Walsall |
| Inspection number | 308524 |
| Inspection date | 23 April 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Joyce Cox |

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

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| Type of school | Nursery |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 3-5 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 120 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Shazia Khan |
| Headteacher | Barbara Leese |
| Date of previous school inspection | 10 November 2003 |
| School address | Primley Avenue Walsall WS2 9UP |
| Telephone number | 01922 721264 |
| Fax number | 01922 721264 |

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|--------------------------|---------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of the nursery's tracking system and how it well it is used to raise standards in communication and calculating; the impact of strategies to raise the achievement of boys; and whether the nursery had been too modest in some of its self-evaluation.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation; the school's assessment records; observation of the school at work; discussions with staff, parents and governors; and analysis of parental questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, are not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Children come from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds. The two largest groups are from White British and Pakistani background families. The proportion of children speaking English as an additional language is well above average. Many children, including those whose first language is English, start nursery with very limited spoken English. In May 2002 the nursery set up and organizes a pre-nursery provision called Alumwellies. It was visited briefly during this inspection and clearly provides high quality extended day care for children, and also offers classes for parents, a lunch club, all-day care and holiday play schemes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding nursery in all respects. One of the key reasons for the nursery's many successes is that the headteacher's inspiring leadership enthuses others to have the highest possible aspirations for themselves and for the children. She has skilfully built a staff team totally committed to improvement and who strive for excellence in all that they do. The nursery has maintained and built upon the significant strengths of its last inspection. The successful completion of attractive additional indoor space has been just one of the most significant steps forward. The nursery is very accurate, if somewhat modest, in its self-evaluation. There is no complacency and senior leaders strive constantly to move onwards and upwards. Its capacity for future improvement is outstanding. All the parents speak in glowing terms about the nursery's considerable achievements. One parent, summing up the views of many, wrote, 'My child is the most important thing in the world to me and I know I made the right decision in sending her to this nursery as she has had a fantastic start to her school life.' Others say that they would recommend, 'This wonderful family-centred and well-managed nursery to anyone,' and many parents wish their children could stay there longer.

On entering Alumwell Nursery, visitors are instantly struck by the exciting, stimulating and vibrant learning environment. Bright learning areas filled with excellent displays convey the outstanding achievements of the children and the high expectations of staff. This is a place where every child is valued, totally included in all activities and made to feel special. The children are excited to come to the nursery and love to learn new things. This is because relationships between staff, children and parents are so good and because a well-planned, stimulating and exciting curriculum supports children's learning really well. From a low entry point, especially in terms of their communication and literacy skills, children, including those who learn English as an additional language, attain close to the expected standards, in all the areas of learning, on entry to their Reception classes. As a result of detailed analysis and research into their achievement, boys have made significant progress in the last year and are starting to catch up with the girls. The nursery has found that boys' interest in communicating and early writing is greatly enhanced if they can do this in the outdoor area where there is less pressure for them to communicate and where they are more relaxed and active. The outdoor area is used every day and there are good opportunities for all children to develop their physical skills, where they love to attempt the monkey-bar challenge! However, there are limited opportunities for children to develop their understanding of other areas of their learning outdoors.

A fundamental reason why children's achievement is so high is that the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. By pitching learning and support precisely at children's capabilities, staff ensure that children thoroughly enjoy their work and play and become increasingly confident and self-assured. There are obvious strengths in the skilful way in which staff plan children's learning to be fun and enjoyable, in the exciting and enticing colourful resources they use and in their high expectations for children's work and behaviour. For example, children made considerable gains in the understanding of matching one object to one toy animal and in the concept of needing one more, as a result of skilful storytelling and use of realistic resources. Senior leaders make excellent use of precise assessment information to catalogue and track children's achievements and to identify quickly any children in need of additional support. They go out of their way to ensure all children achieve exceptionally well and are successfully prepared both socially and academically for their next school. For instance, senior leaders noted that many children from minority ethnic backgrounds are not familiar with nursery

rhymes or traditional fairy stories. Consequently, additional bi-lingual learning sessions have been successfully implemented to ensure children learn the rhymes and stories they need to know in preparation for their next school.

The talented staff seize every opportunity to encourage all children to communicate, and expect those children who can to speak in full sentences. During snack sessions the child helper of the day in each group asks the others which fruit they would like today and children respond in full sentences. Staff sensitively and gently encourage all children to communicate in more than single words and gestures, unless the child is at a very early stage of speaking English, in which case the superb bi-lingual staff slip easily between English and Urdu, Panjabi and Miripuri so that children feel secure and totally included in all learning experiences.

Excellent care, guidance and support have a very strong impact on children's outstanding personal development. Staff know the children in their family groups exceptionally well. Detailed records are kept in all the areas of learning, which are shared with and valued by parents. Excellent links with a wide range of outside agencies such as a nearby Children's Centre provide very high levels of support for children and their parents. Children are totally happy, secure and confident and parents say how much their children look forward to the start of each new day. All cultures and festivals are respected and celebrated, and the headteacher, much to the delight of parents, has traditional outfits for all the various cultures, which she wears on special occasions such as Eid and Divali. Children learn to eat and drink healthily and parents are very impressed with the regular healthy-eating parties, where children learn to sample a variety of tastes.

Much of the nursery's success is due to the dynamism and dedication of the headteacher and the assistant headteacher. They provide excellent direction and have exceptionally high expectations for the children. Parents and the local community hold the headteacher in high esteem, and staff and governors share her positive approach and enthusiasm. Senior leaders' considerable expertise is used to very good effect to support other Local Authority schools. Governance is good and governors are developing the ways they evaluate the nursery's work. Outstanding leadership and management are evident in rigorous and accurate evaluation of every aspect of the nursery's performance, which leads to considered and highly effective action. Teamwork is very strong. The nursery works superbly well to unite the local community and to make a significant difference to the lives of numerous children and families in the Alumwell area.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

As all of the children are under five, this section is covered by the 'Overall effectiveness of the school.'

What the school should do to improve further

Make all aspects of the outdoor learning environment as exciting and stimulating as the indoor learning areas.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 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

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|--|---|
| 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

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| 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 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 | 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

24 April 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Alumwell Nursery School, Walsall, West Midlands WS2 9UP

Thank you for the great day I spent with you. I really enjoyed watching all the exciting things you do and I hope that your sunflower seeds grow into tall plants. I am so pleased to tell you that your nursery is fantastic, but you and your parents know that already!

These are some of the things that I thought were excellent:

- You are good at working hard, helping each other and listening to your teachers, and you do well in all your activities.
- The grown-ups care about you very much; they are brilliant teachers and make learning interesting and fun.
- The people in charge are very clever at running the nursery and make sure you all have a really good time and do well.
- Anybody who needs extra help with learning or speaking English is always given it.
- You love learning new things and are very good at sharing nicely, taking turns, and being kind to each other.

The headteacher and staff have many good ideas to make the nursery even better. I agree with their ideas and also think it would be good if they could make sure you are able to learn as much in your outdoor area as you can indoors.

It was good to see that you are all so happy and doing so well and that your mums and dads think it is such a great place.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Joyce Cox Lead inspector