

Low Hill Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104278
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	308560
Inspection date	13 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Hazel Callaghan

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	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Sweet
Headteacher	Julie Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2004
School address	Jenks Avenue Low Hill Wolverhampton WV10 9JN
Telephone number	01902 558124
Fax number	01902 551800

Age group	3-4
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Low Hill Nursery works in conjunction with the Roundabout Children's Centre in an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage. Whilst most of its pupils are of White British heritage, there is a small number of children from Irish Traveller families and from minority ethnic groups. Many children have a very limited range of knowledge and experiences when they start in the nursery. Language skills and early mathematical development are well below average for their age. The acting headteacher has been leading the school since September. No substantive headteacher has been appointed as yet.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Low Hill Nursery provides a good education for the children in its care. Children thoroughly enjoy their time in the nursery and make good progress especially in the personal and social development and in early language skills. This is because all adults in the nursery have a good understanding of the learning needs of such young children. They provide them with an environment that stimulates their interest and curiosity. Teaching is good and activities are usually well matched to the different stages of children's development. Many opportunities are provided to encourage children to speak and express their ideas. Early reading and writing skills are also promoted well. Despite this good progress, standards are still below those expected when the leave the nursery. Children make less progress in developing their mathematical knowledge and understanding. Staff recognise that they are less confident in teaching mathematics and have started to improve their understanding. Teaching of mathematics, whilst satisfactory, is the least effective part of a good curriculum.

The real strength of teaching is the promotion of children's confidence in their own abilities and in their personal and social skills. Children show good levels of independence in their learning. They organise themselves well and work with other children cooperatively, sharing toys and resources sensibly. Children respond very well to all the adults in the nursery who provide good levels of care, support and guidance. Children feel safe and secure. The comments of one parent are typical of many. 'It is a safe and happy place for children and us as parents too.' Staff monitor children's progress frequently and instinctively provide the activities and support they need to make progress. However, assessment information is not used as sharply as it might be to help staff plan. Staff discuss children's progress constantly, but rarely record what the next steps should be. As a consequence, opportunities to work towards the informal targets set through discussion are sometimes missed in the busy life of the school day. A new system is in place to help staff assess children's standards, but not all staff are, as yet, accurate in the assessments they make.

Leadership and management of the nursery are satisfactory. The acting headteacher has provided good leadership and, in a very short time, has greatly improved staff morale. Professional training and development have been significantly improved and staff confidence has risen. Staff work as a strong and supportive team building on each other's strengths. Many of the procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are new and have not yet been fully carried out, but the acting headteacher has a good overview of the nursery's strengths and weaknesses. This has led to a new school improvement plan which is successfully leading the way forward, but many of the initiatives are new and yet to have a full impact on standards. Staff take turns in leading the planning for activities each week, but do not as yet take formal responsibility for leading or managing aspects of the curriculum or whole school initiatives. This has not mattered this term as the drive for improvement has been led by the acting headteacher, but is likely to slow improvement in the future. The capacity for improvement is consequently satisfactory rather than good. Governors are very supportive on a personal level and are kept well informed by the acting headteacher. There are only a small number of governors, however, and absence from meetings makes planning difficult.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

As a nursery school, the Foundation Stage is completely covered by the Overall Effectiveness section.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the teaching of mathematics is secure so children make good progress.
- Ensure assessment of children's learning is accurate and leads to clear targets for the next stage of learning.
- Enable all staff to take on the leadership and management of aspects of the school's improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children achieve well from a low base across most areas of learning. Despite this good progress, they attain standards below those expected for their age. There is very little difference in the speed of learning of children from different ethnic groups. Personal, social and emotional skills are below average when children start in the nursery, but under the sensitive care and support of all staff they blossom to become confident learners. Children show good levels of independence. They choose their activities with confidence and by the end of their time in nursery many are already able to evaluate their work and make changes to 'make it better'. Children's language skills are weak when they start in the nursery. Many respond to questions with nods or gestures rather than talk. They rarely chat to other children spontaneously. After a term in the nursery, most are chatting happily and will talk about what they are doing. They show an interest in books and several children are already making lists and 'writing' in their play, using marks and shapes with a variety pencils and pens. The development of early mathematical skills is less strong, although it is broadly satisfactory. Children are starting to understand the process of counting and several say their numbers to five.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Attitudes to work are good and children behave well. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Children of all backgrounds get on well together and they calmly accept each other's way of working. Upsets are few and children show care and support for each other. Children find delight in many of their activities and gain a real sense of awe from their discoveries. One little girl, for example, was fascinated by the flow of water down a tube and into the bath. She loved the pattern it made down the tube and repeatedly poured the water into the funnel to watch its descent. Given their very young age, children show satisfactory understanding of how to be healthy and safe. They enjoy eating fruit and recognise where they have to be careful in their play. They feel safe in all parts of the nursery and clearly understand the importance of gates that need to be kept closed. Children make a good contribution to the life of the school and enjoy acting as helpers. They are soundly prepared for the next stage of their education. Standards when they leave the nursery are below average, but children have developed an enjoyment in learning that will stand them in good stead when they start at the infant school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

All staff have a good understanding of how children learn and provide a stimulating environment that motivates children's curiosity and interest. They are highly effective in developing children's personal and social skills. Staff also recognise that the most important first steps are in the development of children's language skills. Staff are skilled in promoting children's language through discussion and offer children many good opportunities to talk about what they see and what has happened. Staff are not as skilled at finding opportunities to develop children's early mathematical skills. Children's own interests are encouraged and learning is stimulated through self-chosen tasks. Some children prefer to play outside and the outside area has been well designed by staff to allow children to learn about all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Staff naturally adapt their teaching to match children's abilities and maturity using a wide range of resources. They identify those who need additional support and those who can be challenged and react accordingly so all children make good progress in the first important steps of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and well balanced. It is designed to build on children's interests and develop a wide range of knowledge and experiences. There is an effective balance of adult led activities alongside children's independent play that provide good opportunities for learning. Children's creative development is stimulated by a wide range of resources that enable children to express themselves and experiment. There are plenty of opportunities for children to make choices and organise themselves. The mathematics curriculum is not as stimulating, although staff are already making improvements. Children's mathematical knowledge, for example, was well promoted when children considered how large a piece of paper was needed to wrap parcels of different shapes and size. Children do not get enough opportunities to apply their mathematical skills like this at present.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All staff provide good levels of personal and pastoral care for the children. Child protection procedures are rigorous and all aspects of children's safety are well planned. Staff are developing a good partnership with parents, which starts before the children begin in the nursery. Strong links are being forged with the Children's Centre, and care for families, as well as the children, is seen as a priority for both the manager of the Centre and the acting headteacher. Many strategies to support parents in helping their own child are recognised as the way to promoting children's good learning. Attendance at the nursery is not compulsory but staff encourage parents to send their children regularly and to arrive promptly.

There are new and effective systems for monitoring children's progress. All staff are involved in tracking their development and see real benefits in the new systems, but assessment of standards is not always accurate. Strengths and difficulties in children's learning are discussed thoroughly by staff, but there is little formal target setting. Children's targets or 'next steps'

are not sufficiently recorded to enable all staff to be aware of them in their work throughout the nursery.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The nursery is a happy place where staff, parents and children work well together. Many important changes have been made under the leadership of the acting headteacher and have provided staff with a clear direction. A lot has been accomplished in a short time and staff respect the strong philosophy for children's learning that she inspires. The headteacher's evaluation of the school's strength and weaknesses are accurate, if a little lacking in confidence. The areas for improvement are well chosen. Most staff are not yet taking the lead in developing new ideas or managing whole school initiatives, but are keen to be part of the school improvement. The nursery is well supported by the governing body, which has played an important part in the setting up of the Children's Centre. Many governors are new, however, and are not yet sufficiently involved in monitoring the work of the nursery or helping staff to plan the way forward.

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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?	2
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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

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?	2

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?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
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

14 December 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Low Hill Nursery School, Wolverhampton WV10 9JN

I am writing to say much we enjoyed visiting your school recently. We loved your pink castle and were pleased that you were having so much fun. I thought you would like to know what we found out about your nursery.

What we found out

- We agree with all the parents who wrote to us saying that you have a good school that looks after you well.
- You make good progress in most of your work but are not yet quite up to the standards of other children your age.
- Teaching is good and all the adults help you to develop new skills and find out about lots of new things.
- You make good progress in expressing your ideas and are starting to enjoy stories and books.
- You play together sensibly and enjoy your activities.
- All the adults in the nursery work well together to make your activities fun so you want to learn.

- What we have asked the staff and governors to do to make the nursery even better
- Help you to learn more about mathematics in all your activities.
- For staff to know understand how well you are doing and to write down what you need to learn next so everyone can help you.
- For all the staff to help your headteacher to plan new ways of working.

Thank you for making our visit such a happy time.

Best wishes

Hazel Callaghan Lead inspector

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Hazel Callaghan
Lead inspector