

Martenscroft Nursery School and Sure Start childrens centre

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 105384 |
| Local Authority | Manchester |
| Inspection number | 308845 |
| Inspection date | 14 May 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Sarah Drake |

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 | 46 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Ms Altheia Thompson |
| Headteacher | Mrs Kathy Coates Mohammed |
| Date of previous school inspection | 6 July 2004 |
| School address | 33 Epping Street Hulme Manchester Lancashire M15 6PA |
| Telephone number | 0161 2261266 |
| Fax number | 0161 2329677 |

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

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Nursery school shares its accommodation, leadership team and some staff with the Sure Start Centre that caters for children from 6 months upwards. It provides full-time education for children who live in the surrounding inner city area which has high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The children belong to a wide range of ethnic groups and almost half speak English as an additional language. A large proportion is eligible to receive a free school meal. The proportion that has learning difficulties and/or disabilities is relatively small but some of their needs are very complex.

Since January 2007, there have been significant changes to the leadership team. The headteacher took up her post as principal of the centre in February 2008, after acting in the role for 12 months during the previous headteacher's secondment to another school. The deputy headteacher's role has extended to include Sure Start Head of Centre, and a new post of Assistant Head (Operations) has been created.

The day care provision was inspected separately in November 2006.

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 outstanding Nursery provides its children with an exceptionally supportive environment in which to develop their individuality and all-round skills. They make excellent progress here because the highly-skilled staff, who have a deep-seated understanding of how young children learn, tailor all activities to build on the children's interests and cater for their particular needs. This means that the children greatly enjoy their learning. They really think about what they encounter and are curious to find out more. They say they have great fun at Nursery, 'because there are lots of things to play with'. It is due to first-rate leadership, management and teaching that these playthings enable them to achieve highly during their time at Martenscroft. The majority join the Nursery class with skills that are below those typical for their age. By the time they leave to join their Reception classes elsewhere, their skills are in line with those typical for their age, or higher than this.

Parents and carers are delighted with the way that the Nursery staff look after their children and help them to 'come on in leaps and bounds'. Comments such as, 'I have found this place to be supportive, progressive, dynamic and forward-thinking,' confirm just how strong the provision is. Excellent relationships with parents and carers start developing from their first encounter with the Nursery staff. The respect shown for their knowledge of their child, the quality of the information provided for them and the time taken to help them and their child gradually grow used to separation, all form the basis of a strong partnership that helps the children feel secure. Staff make detailed notes of their observations of children's skills and preferences, especially their personal development and communication skills, from their very first meeting. However, unlike in other areas of its work, the school does not yet use this early information to best advantage either to plan activities or to gauge the progress of individuals during their first weeks at Nursery. Exceptionally fruitful partnerships with outside agencies further enhance both the support and guidance provided for children and the high quality curriculum. This is a school where care and education are inextricably linked.

The maturity of the children's personal development is impressive. They are experts at avoiding others when pedalling at speed around the outside area and show real concern if someone scrapes an elbow or finds a ladybird that needs looking after. They know that fruit and vegetables are healthy to eat and will help them to grow strong. The children, sensibly, choose hats and carefully rub in cream to protect themselves when playing outside because, as they say, 'the sun will burn my skin'. They understand about taking turns and helping to tidy up. They have the self-confidence to try new things and the persistence to keep trying. Above all, the children are clearly happy to be themselves. They leave the Nursery fully ready to take on the challenges of a new setting.

Key to the success of the Nursery is its outstanding leadership and management. It is because everyone who works there is crystal clear about expectations, priorities, routines and responsibilities that they can be so flexible in adapting their actions according to the children's needs. Excellent communication ensures that all resources are expertly directed to achieving the best outcomes for the children. Staff are thoughtful, open to innovation and hugely enthusiastic. The school has excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

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

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the incidental observations recorded from when children make their first visits to the Nursery are used to full effect.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Most children join the Nursery with skills below those typical for their age in all areas of learning. The mathematical, communication and personal development of those who have not experienced the day care provision offered by the centre are all particularly weak. By the end of their time in the Nursery, the overwhelming majority have all-round skills that are at least in line with those typical of four-year-olds. Of the children due to leave in July, over half have skills above those typical for their age. Their personal development, ability to link letters to sounds, use of language to communicate and use of numbers for counting are all strong. This represents outstanding achievement. Children of different abilities, different ethnicity and those who are learning English as an additional language all make excellent progress from their individual starting points. This is because the staff are so skilled at using their knowledge of individuals' prior learning both to plan activities that will engage their attention, and to invite them to think and talk about what they are doing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development means that they build trusting relationships with each other and adults. The Nursery operates as a happy, harmonious community where difference is respected and children grow in self-esteem. When children first join the class, many would rather play alongside others than with them. However, in the stimulating and inclusive setting they soon find that it is much more fun to join in than to be on the sidelines. Inevitably, they have fallings out, but are largely able to sort out minor squabbles by themselves and to take responsibility for their own actions and words. They are tolerant of those who find self-discipline more difficult to achieve. Overall, their behaviour is excellent because they clearly understand what is and is not acceptable. Lunchtimes are very enjoyable, sociable occasions where children sit with staff at small tables and engage in conversation. They grow in independence as they serve themselves and join with younger children from the centre for a play session afterwards. Most children attend regularly and staff work very closely with families to ensure this is maintained. However, the difficult home circumstances experienced by some families and a few extended holidays abroad mean that overall attendance levels are just satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

High quality teaching by all staff ensures that children have excellent opportunities for learning. Staff are exceptionally skilled at making the most of whatever way the children choose to use the planned activities. This is because, through careful observation and record-making, they know the individuals' strengths and needs intimately and can adapt the provision accordingly. For example, a session using the new interactive whiteboard started as an exploration of using fingers to 'paint' on the board while developing language such as 'larger', 'smaller' and 'dripping', as well as colour recognition and information and communication technology skills. Suddenly, this changed into an exciting journey of discovery, with excellent development of logical thinking, as the teacher and children together worked out how to use the pens and eraser that accompany the board. Sessions move at a good pace to ensure children do not lose interest. For example, one packed in practical comparison of the seeds of a butternut squash, an apple and strawberries, with fascinated observations by the children of how the pumpkin seed that they had planted earlier had developed roots, a stem and leaves. Throughout the day, the staff's engagement of children in discussion consistently extends their powers of concentration, reasoning and communication and, consequently, their understanding of how to move their learning forward.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

While based firmly on national guidance, the curriculum is remarkably well adapted to the needs of each child, because it is so securely founded on observation of what they can already do. For example, the current focus on developing calculation skills builds on children's good understanding of numbers for counting. Parents comment on how well the 'children seem to develop through imaginative play and are given space to learn and increase their confidence'. A bid for Sure Start funding has led to increased and highly successful focus on creative learning. This has included working with an artist over 12 months, producing some impressive paintings and sculptures. An off-shoot of the project has been a growing partnership with the Manchester Museum. This has helped the museum staff develop their education programme and brought great benefits to the children's language development, literacy skills and in forging new friendships and experience of the wider world. All elements of the curriculum are catered for richly both outside and inside, providing children with plentiful opportunities to learn by experience and revisit activities to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

'I wholeheartedly trust everyone at Martenscroft to care for my child. If ever I have concerns, I have always found support within minutes of asking for it.' These words echo those of many parents and carers regarding the high quality care, guidance and support offered by staff. Procedures are in place to promote child protection and health and safety. Clear expectations of behaviour, combined with staff who listen to children and use praise highly effectively, ensure that children feel secure in school and confident to try out new things. Their clear understanding of who is their key worker and which group they belong to strengthens their feeling of belonging. Excellent practice helps children settle swiftly into the Nursery and prepare

for the move to primary school. Detailed diagnosis of the needs of vulnerable children and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, combined with close working with other agencies and their families, ensure they make excellent progress alongside their peers. The school even provides parents and carers with duplicates of its resources to use at home to help ensure a consistent approach to the identified areas for development in children's individual education plans.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership and management have guided the Nursery through a period of unsettled staffing and helped it emerge as a highly successful organisation. The headteacher combines modesty with a meticulous attention to detail and deep-seated commitment to improving the life chances of those who attend the centre. All five members of the leadership team are expert practitioners and value the different skills and experience that each brings to the group. They are reflective and alert to possible ways of making the Nursery even better. For example, they are aware of the potential benefits and improved efficiency to be gained from using their carefully recorded observations of children's first visits to the Nursery to improve the planning of their early lessons. Development planning is firmly based on data arrived at through monitoring current practice. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The impact of previous actions is evaluated in depth. Staff training has a high priority. The centre runs extremely smoothly due to excellent organisation, relationships and teamwork. The sharing of staff, including a teacher, between the Nursery and the day care provision leads to the continuity that is crucial for children's well-being. Governors fulfil their role well. They are growing more confident about holding the Nursery to account for children's achievement rather than concentrating mostly on organisational issues.

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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 | 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

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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 | 3 |
| 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 |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Martenscroft Nursery School and Sure Start Children's Centre, Manchester, M15 6PA

What a warm welcome you gave me when I inspected your Nursery a little while ago! Thank you very much indeed for chatting with me so openly and not minding me watching you as you played. You are so lucky to go to such a super Nursery! You told me what you like best about it. I know the climbing frame is very popular. I would like to tell you some of the things that I think make the Nursery really special.

First of all, you all have great fun, learning new things every day. Your teachers organise such exciting things for you to do that you don't have any time to get bored. There is always somebody else to join in games with and an adult to go to if you're feeling sad, but what really impressed me was the way that you can often sort out your own problems or offer each other help. This means that the Nursery is a really happy place for you to be.

All the Nursery staff work very hard to make things as good for you as possible. They help you to settle into the Nursery very quickly and to get ready thoroughly for moving on to Reception. They note down what you can do already and make sure that they organise activities that will interest you. This means that you want to find out more and you learn things more quickly. I think they could make even better use of the notes they make when you first start in the Nursery, so I have asked them to think about how to do this.

I was very impressed by how much you know about keeping safe and healthy and also, by your behaviour. I do hope that you remember to take good care of yourselves and each other as you grow up.