

St Mary's Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110955
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310465
Inspection dates	5–6 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Hatwell
Headteacher	Mr K Jones
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2005
School address	St Mary's Hill Chester Cheshire CH1 2DW
Telephone number	1244 321274
Fax number	1244 321274

Age group	3–5
Inspection dates	5–6 November 2008
Inspection number	310465

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This city centre Nursery school currently has 82 children on roll, around two thirds of whom attend in the morning and one third in the afternoon. The children come from both within the city and more widely. Most are of White British heritage. A tiny proportion speaks English as an additional language. The percentage of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very small. At lunchtime, the school provides a lunch club for 24 children.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that gives its children an excellent start to their education. The richness of children's daily experiences, which result from imaginative teaching, superb levels of care and excellent organisation ensure that children make rapid progress. They develop well above expected skills by the time they move on to Reception classes in other schools. The constant pursuit of improvement and the pragmatic planning by very effective leaders and managers underpin the excellent provision, which is universally praised by parents. The school has built very well on the considerable strengths identified at the time of the last inspection. Governors have taken a much more active role in checking on the school's provision, being especially vigilant in ensuring that newly imposed welfare requirements are fully met. They have also been proactive in helping to manage the school's imminent move to new premises. The very able headteacher and senior teachers have managed the implementation of the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum most successfully. This has sharpened practice, especially in the care with which children's activities are planned and assessed. As was the case at the time of the last inspection, the school is extremely skilled in promoting children's personal, social and emotional development. This is rooted in the school's very successful determination to work extremely closely with parents to make the first few weeks of their child's schooling as stress free and enjoyable as possible. At the same time, children adapt quickly to set routines such as locating and putting on their name badges and identifying their coat pegs. Staff constantly encourage children to be independent but also reassure them that help and support are always available.

The atmosphere in the extremely well equipped and very stimulating learning areas is purposeful and supportive. Children settle immediately to activities which either they choose or are directed to by adults. There is systematic teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills, which is constantly reinforced during less structured activities. For example, children's understanding of number is very effectively enhanced when they count large building blocks to 'see how tall their tower is'. Children's speaking and listening skills are constantly promoted and reinforced because staff engage them in conversation and encourage them to role-play situations in which social interaction is a focus.

The very high quality of care and support children receive is a key factor in their excellent personal, social and emotional development. Staff constantly look out for the children to ensure that they feel secure and safe and can confidently join in all the experiences on offer. Snack times are used very effectively to help children to learn good eating habits and to reinforce good table manners. Testament to this excellent provision are the happy, smiling faces of the children and their obvious enthusiasm for play and learning. The school's managers ensure that all the necessary systems to help ensure child protection and safeguarding are in place and that any risks to children or adults are minimised. The very productive partnership with parents considerably enhances children's learning and development. Because parents are kept so well informed about their child's curriculum, many organise family outings to support the school's current topics. Although parents are constantly updated about any concerns staff have about their child, a significant minority would appreciate, with some justification, formal feedback about their child's personal and academic development during the first term in the school. Many parents help in the school, reading to children and helping with activities such as baking.

The school is particularly good at working with parents and outside agencies to ensure that any child with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is identified early and provided with

exactly the right support to enable them to be included fully in all the experiences the school offers. The headteacher, governors and staff are constantly seeking ways in which to improve, are very open to change and advice, and consult widely with parents and outside agencies. The school is highly accurate in its self-evaluation because it takes great care to check rigorously and regularly on all aspects of its provision. Its excellent improvement since the last inspection and its current outstanding practice indicate that the school has an excellent capacity to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide parents with a more formal indication of their child's progress in their first term in the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Although they vary widely, the skills with which children enter the school are at the levels broadly expected for their age. Because they are helped so well to develop personally and academically, they make extremely good progress and many enter their Reception year with skills well above those expected. This is especially evident in their personal development, in their early literacy and numeracy skills and in their knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

Children listen very well and contribute sensibly and coherently when asked to respond to stories they are read or to talk about the activity in which they participate. Even in their first term, a significant minority progress so rapidly that they write their name legibly and count confidently to 10. Many use a computer adeptly, manipulating the mouse, for example, to identify colours correctly, to sequence story events and to order shapes. A significant majority of the children is able to expertly propel and manoeuvre large-wheeled toys to follow a route and to avoid other 'traffic'. Children create attractive patterns using everyday objects, often linked to current themes. For example, they use pinecones and cross sections of seasonal fruit smothered in paint to create patterns in different colours. Because they are cared for and supported so well, children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language achieve extremely well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

At the heart of the school's success is the outstanding way in which children acquire the necessary personal and social skills to enable them to become active and positive members of a community. They rapidly learn to respect the right of others to 'have a turn' and to express an opinion. Because staff constantly encourage children to do things for themselves, they become increasingly independent in dressing themselves, in personal hygiene and in choosing things to do. Parents express surprise at how quickly their children organise themselves and get on so well with others. They are unanimous in confirming how much their children enjoy school and how happy they are to leave them in the expert care of the staff.

Children soon learn routines, for example, taking their name plates and placing them on a board in the activity area they are currently using. They also know that if they count six names already there, they will have to wait until at least one is removed. This not only reinforces turn taking but also promotes their better understanding of number. From the very start of their time in

the Nursery, children develop a keen awareness of the impact of their actions on others and the effectiveness of being polite to one another and to adults. They are fascinated by nature and delight in bringing items connected to their topics to show their teachers, for example, fallen leaves of all shapes and sizes. Children have a growing sense of community, and are beginning to relate especially well to other members of their class. Parents emphasise how well their children are prepared socially and emotionally to move on to Reception.

Quality of provision

Effectiveness in promoting children's learning and development

Grade: 1

Adults work very effectively as a team to provide children with stimulating and meaningful activities. By jointly reviewing individual children's progress daily, staff are in an excellent position to match the tasks they set exactly to children's needs. This is particularly evident in the skilful way in which adults use questions to tease out children's ideas and to help them to recall essential learning and routines. Because staff are so positive and full of fun, children thoroughly enjoy more structured sessions. In the same way, the richness of the available resources prompts children to explore and experiment. The school has implemented the new EYFS curriculum very successfully. Its system for teaching letter sounds is excellent and children blossom in their early reading and writing skills as a result. A wide range of visitors contributes significantly to children's understanding of safety issues and to their creative development. Staff ensure that children use the outside area as much as indoors to promote and extend all areas of their learning.

Effectiveness in promoting children's welfare

Grade: 1

This is a key strength of the school's work; one which ensures that children thrive in a most supportive and safe environment. Support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is of a high quality. For example, all children are screened for any speech and language deficit in their first half term and those identified as needing extra support receive it immediately. The school also makes special provision for any child with a physical impairment, adapting large-wheeled toys and climbing equipment, for example, so that any such child has full access to the curriculum.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides very strong and sensitive leadership, promoting very effective teamwork and a keen sense of purpose. The senior teacher is highly effective in managing the provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in leading curriculum change. Other staff make valuable contributions to the school's assessment procedures and to promoting the school within the community. Governors manage the school's budget diligently and ensure that funds are directed towards ensuring the best provision for all children. An example is the extra funding they have made available to employ a speech therapist and a language support assistant. Such foresight reflects excellent governance. The school is providing outstanding value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
--	-----------------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
The standards[1] reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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

How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of the children in the EYFS promoted?	1

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Mary's Nursery School, Chester CH1 2DW

I really enjoyed my two days with you when I came into your school to see how you were all getting on. Thank you for talking to me so nicely and being so friendly and polite.

You certainly have an excellent start to your learning. I really liked the way you got on so well together. I could see how much hard work your teachers and all the adults do in the school, especially to help you learn letters, to write and to share and take turns. You seem to enjoy very much all the wonderful things to play with and to learn about. Your mums and dads are very pleased with how well looked after you are, and how well you get on with your learning and with each other. Quite a few of them told me that they would like to find out how well you are doing a bit sooner after you start school than happens now. I have asked your headteacher and other teachers to arrange this.

Thank you very much again for a lovely two days.