

Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109748
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	325020
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

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	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Neil Barr
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Mitchell
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2006
School address	Blagdon Road Whitley Reading RG2 7NT
Telephone number	01189 015425
Fax number	01189 868305

Age group	3–5
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Blagdon Nursery and Children's Centre consists of the Blagdon Nursery School and Willows Day Nursery. Together they provide integrated nursery education and day care for children between birth and five years. Willows Day Nursery provides childcare all year round. In addition, the centre provides family support through the provision of a family centre. There is a breakfast club, after school club and holiday club. All of this care provision is managed by the governors of the school.

Most of the children are of White British heritage, though there are children from other ethnic backgrounds. The largest of these is Black or Black British-African. A few children speak English as an additional language and the main languages spoken at home are Twi and Urdu. A significant proportion of children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most of these have speech, language and communication problems.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Nursery provides a good standard of education and has some significant strengths. It promotes the children's welfare exceptionally well and offers a good-quality day-care provision for children in Willows. There is an overwhelming atmosphere of support and nurture in which parents are highly valued as partners in their children's education. Parents are unanimous in their support and many express their delight at choosing both the school and Willows for their children. Their views are summed up by the parent who wrote, 'My children love coming to Blagdon and they can't wait for the weekend to be over. They go to school happy and leave happy.' Children's personal development is excellent. They behave exceptionally well, show genuine care and concern for each other, and are very happy. By the time they leave, they become confident and secure young children who have high self-esteem and very positive attitudes to school and learning.

Many children enter the Nursery with skills and abilities that are low in comparison with those typically found, particularly in their problem-solving and reasoning skills. However, they make good progress and achieve well in all areas of learning. They achieve particularly well in their personal and social development. Here progress is outstanding. Even so, when they leave the school their attainment is below average in most areas; though at the national expectation for their personal, social and emotional development. Staff are keenly aware that children's progress in writing lags behind other areas of communication and language and that there is a need to ensure that there is high-quality continuous provision for mark-making both indoors and outside.

Children in Willows are also helped to learn and develop well. Here the good care found at the previous inspection has been maintained and the provision is good. Children in its care are looked after well, their welfare is promoted exceptionally well and because the Nursery education has improved from its satisfactory level at the previous inspection, they now also achieve well. These children generally have skills that are higher than those of children entering the school and, by the time that they leave Willows, their learning, particularly in their communication, language and literacy, is above expected levels.

The provision to secure the children's development is good throughout the school. This is the result of the staff working closely together as a team of key workers who ensure that each child's individual needs are met well. The recent focus on strengthening children's learning is paying dividends, quickening progress and securing the strong involvement of children in their learning. The children enjoy having talking partners who enable them to share learning and experiences, and key workers use this strategy well to motivate children's learning. However, there is some variation in the ways in which key workers use assessment information for learning and the school rightly has an improvement priority to ensure that these arrangements need to bed down across all key worker groups. The focus on developing success criteria also helps to involve children in their learning and establish clear routines. They proudly show the success criteria for outdoor play and this helps them to understand boundaries and be clear about what they need to do. Staff in the school accurately plan the next steps in children's learning based on thorough observations of children's learning. 'Learning journals' have recently been introduced in Willows and these are starting to provide key workers with a clear understanding of how the children are progressing in all areas of learning and are starting to be used effectively to support future learning. The experiences of the youngest babies in 'Jelly Babies' are meticulously recorded in daily diaries and these are shared each day with parents.

The leadership and management of the headteacher is pivotal to the school's improvement. Her leadership is outstanding and she has steered the whole centre exceptionally well. She has a clear vision for the school and the children's education that is shared by all staff. This has resulted in high staff morale and effective teamwork because all the key workers know that their views are valued and that they have a part to play in the improvement of the school. Leadership and management overall is good because the headteacher is supported well by the senior leadership team, key workers and governors, who all work closely together to ensure that the school's provision is evaluated effectively and that there is a firm focus on further improvement. The improvement in the school and in Willows demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the assessment for learning practices across all key worker groups and, in Willows, strengthen the use of 'Learning Journals' to aid the assessment of children's learning.
- Accelerate children's progress in writing.
- Improve the quality of resources for outdoor learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and all groups of children achieve well. Because there are very good induction procedures and close and well-established links between the school and Willows, children settle quickly into routines and make good progress. They thoroughly enjoy the wide range of purposeful activities that are provided in each classroom. Even though they make good progress, standards are generally below average when they move on to infant classes. The particularly good support for children who find learning hard and those at an early stage of learning English ensures that these children are integrated exceptionally well and that they make good progress towards the targets in their well-conceived individual learning plans. Progress is best in personal, social and emotional development. This is because the children are helped to become confident and the rich and consistent provision in this area aids their progress. They thoroughly enjoy working in groups and the use of talking partners is aiding their social development particularly well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Children are taught carefully how to show respect for others and to understand their feelings and those of their friends. The recent emphasis on developing children's emotional understanding, particularly through the use of 'circle time', is having a positive impact. In consequence, children develop a good understanding of right and wrong. All the adults provide excellent role models with the expectations that they have for the children. This is particularly evident in the outside areas where the staff's consistency in managing the very large numbers of children aids their security and confidence. Children are developing an excellent understanding of how to be healthy. They know about the importance of healthy food and exercise. 'I like to walk because it helps me to be fit', announced a proud child. Children say they feel safe and they know about safety rules, such as those for using large climbing apparatus, and they are aware of the importance of road safety. The inner garden, as well as providing healthy fruit

and vegetables for the school kitchen, also provides children with good levels of responsibility for watering and maintenance.

Quality of provision

Effectiveness in promoting children's learning and development

Grade: 2

The good quality of the teaching and the rich curriculum promotes children's learning and development well. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection because there has been a good focus on strengthening the use of assessments to ensure that work is suitably challenging for children. There is scope for these assessments for learning to be consistently used by all key workers. Key workers ensure that there is a good balance between activities that are play-based with the right balance of adult led and child selected opportunities. Practitioners question children well and draw out their spoken language effectively both indoors and outside. There has been a marked improvement in the range of activities provided in Willows. Previously, children's behaviour and focus deteriorated because there were insufficient well-organised activities for them. This is not now the case and children's engagement and play are enhanced by the good range of activities and resources. However, there is a need in Willows to ensure that all areas of learning are effectively promoted outdoors and although learning resources are readily available in the outdoor area in the Nursery, some are old and in need of replacement.

The inner garden is a particularly rich resource for learning and this is organised well. It has improved the children's experiences of the natural world and this is complemented by the consistent use of a local wooded area. This enables children to experience a range of different environments. In addition, the school benefits from its close links with the Whitley Excellence Cluster of schools who provide funding for enrichment activities. This has enabled children to experience trips to museums and theatres as well as having many visitors to the Nursery, including artists.

Effectiveness in promoting children's welfare

Grade: 1

Children in both the Nursery and Willows are very well cared for. There are robust vetting and child protection procedures with children's health and safety being safeguarded exceptionally well. Children benefit from the very close partnership that the school has with a wide range of external agencies that provide regular dedicated support to meet the needs of children, particularly those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Children enjoy learning about safe, healthy practices. For example they follow instructions carefully when watering and tending plants, learning safe practices in an enjoyable way. Parents are valued as active partners because not only do staff spend time with them gathering information, including having home visits for children entering the school, but there are also excellent arrangements for supporting parents' learning. The outstanding new accommodation, developed through the school's own funding, enables the dedicated family worker staff to provide a supportive and positive atmosphere for the many parenting classes operating in the centre. These are complemented well by parent and toddler groups and also a weekly session for local childminders. Parents enjoy the very beneficial workshops, for example that on healthy teeth provided during the inspection. The transition coordinator plays an important role in supporting children and their families when they move into or out of the school. She accompanies children to aid transition into local primary schools and ensures that those with learning

difficulties are particularly well prepared for the move. The breakfast and after school club is of high quality and makes use of the excellent and rich range of resources in the family centre. Children are cared for exceptionally well by dedicated and supportive staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The improvements in provision and achievement have been driven by the headteacher, whose outstanding leadership has resulted in the staff team working closely together and providing good leadership overall. The roles of the many staff are well developed. Staff are now more consistent in their approach to the children and their learning and the headteacher has ensured that Willows practitioners benefit from the skilled and effective curriculum coordination provided by senior staff. Organisational changes in the way that teachers take responsibility for coordinating areas of learning by the development of curriculum teams have provided additional opportunities for staff to regularly check provision and achievement. This has also given opportunities for key workers to be involved in the improvement process. Not all curriculum leaders have the same good level of management skills as others and appropriate plans are in place to address this. Monitoring information is used well to contribute to the school's good integrated improvement plan. Community cohesion is promoted well. The local community is used to promote pupils' awareness of belonging and many opportunities are taken to celebrate the many ethnic backgrounds represented in the area, including visitors, to promote a wide range of music and art activities including Indian and African drumming.

Governance is good. Under the determined and effective leadership of the chair, governors are now much more involved in supporting and challenging the school. The strategy for each to be responsible for checking a priority for improvement is beneficial and helping them to be less reliant on the headteacher for provision of information.

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Annex A

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 is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do children in the EYFS 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/or disabilities make progress	2

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	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	2

The quality of provision

How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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**

29 June 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre, Reading, RG2 7NT

I really enjoyed visiting your school and finding out about how well you learn. Thank you for making me feel so much at home. I particularly enjoyed looking at all the plants you are growing and I know you can't wait for the fruit and vegetables to be ready for you to eat! I know you really enjoy school and your parents think yours is a good school. I agree. Here are some of the things that make your school special.

- You really enjoy learning and being together and you behave really well.
- You learn well because there are many exciting things for you to do.
- The adults all work really hard and well together to make sure that there are new things for you to do both indoors and outside.
- The adults look after you really well and make sure that you are kept safe.
- Your headteacher is doing an excellent job and she has helped the Nursery to get much better since the last inspection.
- Your parents are well catered for, because the family centre is a really good place for them to meet and learn together.

There are three things which would make your school even better, so I have asked the adults to work on the following.

- Make sure that all the adults check how well you are learning in all your key worker groups.
- Make sure that you make as much progress in your writing as in speaking and listening and reading.
- Make sure that all the materials for your outdoor activities are of good quality.

I know that you will have fun learning in the Nursery. It was lovely to meet such happy, kind and friendly children.

Yours faithfully

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector