

Histon Early Years Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110595
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	337529
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.
The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jacqueline Wade
Headteacher	Mrs Lee Robertson
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2007
School address	New School Road Histon Cambridge
Telephone number	01223 712075
Fax number	01223 712075
Email address	office@histon.cambs.sch.uk

Age group	3–5
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2009
Inspection number	337529

Registered childcare provision	Histon Nursery School - Little Owls
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	67
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	Not previously inspected

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They visited seven lessons and activity sessions and held meetings with the headteacher, staff, representatives of the governing body and some of the children. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including the tracking of children's progress, the school improvement plan, minutes of the governing body and a sample of policies. The inspectors also scrutinised 38 parent questionnaires and 19 answered by staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether all children, and particularly the boys and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, make equal progress
- if all areas of the children's personal development are supported effectively
- whether staff make full use of assessment information to provide activities that challenge all groups of children
- if the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the setting is sufficiently rigorous to identify areas for further improvement.

Information about the school

The large majority of children are of White British heritage, together with a very small number from other heritages and at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. In the Nursery section, children usually attend morning or afternoon sessions during the year before they start full-time education. There is also full day-care for younger children in the 'Little Owls' section. The setting is designated as a Children's Centre and is a base for family learning services and outreach work in other communities, including working with Traveller families. The setting holds Health Promoting School status, the ICT mark for Early Years (for information and communication technology), the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investor in People accreditation and various local awards. A new head of centre and deputy were appointed in the autumn term 2008.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Histon Early Years Centre provides an outstanding quality of care and education for the children of the area. This has been an excellent setting for some time but has the capacity for further improvement because of the sheer determination of staff and governors to keep moving forward and not become complacent. This is shown not only in the updated and excellent learning environment that provides stimulating resources indoors and outside but also in the determination of the staff to welcome and work with a growing number of additional services to this complex setting.

Children enter the 'Little Owls' section or the Nursery with skills that are generally above the expectations for their age. The progress that they make is excellent overall and, most particularly, in the 'Little Owls' group where teaching and learning is exemplary. Children make particularly strong progress in developing their personal and social skills alongside other key areas. Staff are expert at encouraging all children to develop the confidence to make choices in their learning which ensures they are interested in what they are doing and concentrate for lengthy periods. This enables most to become very enthusiastic and confident young learners. Children know how to keep themselves and others safe and how to lead a healthy lifestyle.

The quality of teaching is never less than good and is often outstanding, particularly for the younger children. Assessment is good overall but, at times, staff could make even more effective use of such information to ensure children are consistently challenged to do their best. Senior leaders recognise the need to keep abreast of changes by enabling staff to benefit from visiting other providers and mentoring colleagues in other parts of the setting. The curriculum is also outstanding, with very effective use made of the outdoor area, visits and visitors, alongside hugely enjoyable and imaginative day-to-day activities. The care, guidance and support of the children is a real strength of the setting. With the change to children's centre designation, all staff work very closely with a wide range of other agencies, including health services. This has a very positive impact on the development of family services and, subsequently, children's learning and development.

Leadership and management are outstanding and the head of centre is driving improvement very successfully. She is very well supported by colleagues in senior roles and by governors. Monitoring procedures are appropriate and staff are keen to develop even closer links between the different teams working in the centre. The staff have worked with considerable success to ensure that services meet the needs of the families in a changing society.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make even more effective use of assessment information by
 - encouraging the building of adult skills to consistently challenge all groups of children
 - developing peer mentoring and visits by staff to other settings to identify what else can be improved in teaching.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

In 'Little Owls' and the Nursery, most are happy and well adjusted children who are eager to join in the interesting array of activities. Many have good early speaking and listening and other basic skills.. All groups of children make excellent progress. Children in the 'Little Owls' group have very good skills in using the computer and drawing their pictures on the interactive whiteboard. Those in the Nursery looked at pictures of castles and, through complex discussions, identified that adding steps would improve their own constructions. They then worked out how many steps would be needed and where they should be placed. Others enjoyed digging for worms, looking at them with magnifying glasses and knew that if they handled them they had to do this very carefully. Overall, attainment is outstanding. Boys and girls make equal progress. When they leave the Nursery many are working within the early stages of the National Curriculum, normally expected of children in Year 1.

The behaviour of the children is excellent, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The learning environment is usually very calm and purposeful and staff are excellent role models so that children know how to speak to others and behave with consideration for the safety of those around them. The setting does a lot to ensure that children develop healthy lifestyles. They are provided with healthy fruit snacks and excellent 'home cooked' lunches that are given imaginative titles such as 'Gruffalo crunch' to encourage them to try a range of foods. Very effective use is made of the outdoor areas to enable children to develop physical skills when using an exciting range of resources. There are relevant opportunities for them to take on responsibilities within their community, as seen when during 'family' style service the three-year-olds are given the responsibility of collecting plates, cutlery and beakers and other jobs around the classroom. Children are involved in local environmental activities such as 'Greening Histon' and have produced their own bricks from recycled paper. The centre is also active in pursuing global elements to its work. Children learn about a range of cultures and enjoy taking part in celebrations such as Chinese New Year through involving their families and friends. All of these activities help children prepare very well for their future. Attendance is satisfactory. The centre has adopted a staged entry programme for children which means that whilst some are enrolled at the setting they are not yet attending every day. Alongside childhood illnesses, this affects attendance which is not compulsory for children of this age.

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These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Children's attainment ¹	1
The quality of children's learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
Children's behaviour	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Children's attendance ¹	3
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum is stimulating and resources, including new technology, make a marked contribution to the quality of learning, as does the precisely targeted support for children with additional needs. Parents and carers are rightly very pleased with the education and care provided as summarised by one who notes, 'Whenever we come to collect our child, every adult is engaged with a group of children, encouraging and supporting their play and learning.'

Teaching in the 'Little Owls' section is exemplary. The many adults are very well briefed which produces a seamless quality of care and education that continually prompts the children to extend their learning. Here staff have developed outstanding systems to track the progress the children make. They note this in exemplary displays for parents, carers and visitors and 'learning journey' records which are rightly valued by the children, parents and carers. However, some other aspects of assessment are not quite as effective and, occasionally, while teaching is still good, better use could be made of

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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assessment information to provide challenging activities that move learning along even further.

The pastoral care of children is of a very high quality. This is seen to particular effect with the younger children, with gentle reminders of what to do next or to take turns which ensures even the most self-centred child learns to share happily. Staff know the children and recognise their individual needs exceptionally well so that, for instance, when children are tired there are well organised routines for naps and there is a gentle stroke of the hair if a child is upset. First aid procedures and child protection training fully meet current requirements.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The head of centre came to an already successful setting and has continued to drive improvement further forward. This is ensuring that practices are continually examined to see what else can be improved. The senior leadership team has a clear grasp of what is most successful and where further improvement can still be made. There is no 'easy ride' for any member of staff or governors. Leadership of the 'Little Owls' group is particularly effective and translates into very high quality provision. The centre places a high priority on continuing professional development with several staff working to further their qualifications. There are extensive links with other groups and several staff have benefitted from visits to Italy to study the working of the Reggio Emilia Foundation. The programme of formal monitoring and evaluation focuses upon the effectiveness of planning and teaching.

The centre provides a base for a wide range of additional activities including working with individuals and groups in the local and wider community. The family workers strive to maintain and further develop services for different needs in the outreach area. These extensive links ensure that equality of opportunity is a high priority and vulnerable families are very well supported. The setting's values regarding inclusion are reflected in policies and practice with a focus for this year being on developing even further the commitment to community cohesion. This is reflected, for example, in the re-titling of a governors' committee to 'Teaching, Learning and Community Cohesion' to ensure this is prioritised by all. The setting has sought out governors with specific skills and experiences to supplement the group of very keen and enthusiastic parent governors,

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ensuring a sharp focus on continual improvement. Staff and governors take seriously their responsibilities to safeguard the children. They take advice from, among others, the local authority and police regarding security and safeguarding matters, and are very keen to provide the very safest environment for the children by regularly questioning what else needs to be done.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The large majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire are very pleased with the quality of provision for their children and families. Many speak of the fun the children have and how they are eager to attend with several echoing the thoughts of one family that 'the children's learning experience is brilliant'.

Nevertheless, several feel they would like more communication about the events the centre organises and the progress the children make. Inspectors believe there is an excellent range of information available through the children's 'learning journey' records but that some parents and carers may not be aware of this. There is also information available about forthcoming events and how to support their children's learning but the setting could do a little more to ensure that this is more readily available for busy families.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Histon Early Years Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 38 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 147 children registered at the setting.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	87	5	13	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	71	9	24	1	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	32	20	53	3	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	53	17	45	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	61	14	37	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	55	11	29	3	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	68	12	32	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	42	10	26	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	58	14	37	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	42	13	34	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	39	16	42	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	20	53	15	39	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	71	10	26	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of children.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



16 November 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Histon Early Years Centre, Cambridge CB4 4LL

Thank you very much for looking after us when we came to visit Histon. I really enjoyed meeting lots of you and some of the grown ups who look after you. Those of you that I talked to were very good at explaining what you like to do and especially how you like playing outside. I think that you learn a lot and that your behaviour is excellent. In fact I think most things about Histon are outstanding - well done everyone. Hurray!

I really liked to see how happy you are and that you have plenty of fun. I especially enjoyed my time in 'Little Owls' and wish my grandchildren were nearer to you so they could go there too.

Your progress is excellent because the staff plan lots of interesting things for you to do. I think Mrs Robertson has some really good ideas about what else can be done to make sure everything continues to be excellent. I was pleased that all grown ups who help to lead the centre are working really hard to make sure things keep on improving.

I think the staff also look after you very well and I liked how they encourage you to have better table manners and to try new food. Your school meals are excellent!

Because everything is so good there are not a lot of things that the staff need to improve. But, I have asked them to check what you can do a bit more carefully and see what happens elsewhere to make sure that your activities are just occasionally a bit harder for you.

You can also help to make sure that Histon keeps on improving by trying your best all the time and getting your parents to join in all the activities available for your families.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sue Hall

Lead inspector

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