

Whitehills Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121787
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	340010
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge

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 of pupils on the school roll	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sam Thomas
Headteacher	Jan Waller
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out two additional inspectors, one of whom was in the school for half a day to inspect the safeguarding arrangements. Altogether, inspectors observed children learning in five separate sessions, one of which was a visit to a country park for the afternoon. All teachers, key workers and assistants were seen teaching during the course of the inspection. Meetings were held with governors, parents and carers, teachers and key workers. Inspectors examined a wide range of documents, including policies, records, planning and children's portfolios containing evidence of their achievements. Questionnaires returned by staff and 20 parents and carers were also analysed.

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

- How effectively the school caters for children's individual needs through its monitoring and analysis, involvement of key workers and partnerships with parents and carers.
- Whether the school's work to promote community cohesion is based on an audit of its provision, and what evaluation suggests about the effectiveness of the actions it has taken.
- How effectively the curriculum has been developed since the last inspection.

Information about the school

This is a nursery school on a housing estate on the edge of Northampton. Children attend part-time and the vast majority spend a year at the school, arriving after their third birthday. Most join in September, with small numbers arriving after Christmas. Almost all children are of White British heritage; very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. There is a very small number of looked after children. The school provides extended services in the form of a lunch club and extra sessions. It has links with a local children's centre and its premises are used by a range of agencies, such as the National Childbirth Trust, for evening meetings and play sessions.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Whitehills Nursery School is a good school. Children thoroughly enjoy their time at school and this is evident from their excellent attendance. The school is particularly successful in encouraging children to be healthy and contribute to school and the wider community. Parents and carers are delighted with the school, which has a number of outstanding features. Staff work exceptionally well together to develop their knowledge of children and their individual needs. They also forge excellent partnerships with parents and carers, who find staff 'very approachable, caring and compassionate'. Parents and carers are made very welcome in school and they make daily use of the family room; many join sessions in school and visits out, and they are kept very well informed about the school's activities and children's progress. Regular canvassing of parents' and carers' views leads to positive developments, such as the 'new look' parents' evenings, which have been very well received.

Children make good progress and achieve well because the teaching and assessment arrangements are both good and children experience a wide range of appealing activities across all the areas of learning. Staff draw very effectively on all the available information before children join and combine this with their own accurate assessments to plan well for individual needs. Subsequently, planning is constantly revised in the light of careful assessment, monitoring and analysis of children's progress. However, planning does not always find its way into a written form, which makes it difficult for those unfamiliar with the children, such as volunteers and students, to get an immediate understanding of how to move children's learning on through the activities and resources provided. Staff interact very well with children during sessions, encouraging language and skill development. They are most encouraging, intervening at exactly the right time to give support and encouragement, and this helps children to remain on tasks and learn to persevere. However, staff rarely point out what children could do to improve, except in relation to behaviour and interactions between children, where they are very proactive.

The school has improved well since the last inspection, and it has a good capacity to improve further. The headteacher provides very strong leadership, and has developed a distinct, research-based approach to teaching young children. There is strong, shared commitment to this approach, which all staff implement faithfully. Governors contribute well to the school's direction by encouraging links with the local Children's Centre and greater use of the school by the local community. They also visit and observe sessions. Although they are involved in checking the quality of the school's work, and were fully involved in the drive to demonstrate how effectively the school promotes children's well-being, some paperwork checks are not robust enough, such as of safeguarding

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arrangements. Self-evaluation is accurate; staff know the strengths and where improvements need to be made. The school makes effective use of data to measure its success, but it creates an artificial ceiling to children's achievements by not measuring successes that go beyond those expected of four-year-old children. As a result, it is not able to measure the full extent of attainment and demonstrate its success through data. Nonetheless, children achieve well and the good level of development by the time they leave to join a Reception class is well evident in portfolios.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - written plans show clear learning possibilities as well as activities and resources
 - children begin to understand what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the impact of self-evaluation by:
 - making effective use of data to demonstrate the attainment of the most able children
 - ensuring that governors are fully involved in evaluating those areas for which they have responsibility.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children**2**

Most children arrive with knowledge and skills broadly in line with expectations, but a few have speech and language difficulties or limited understanding of English. In some instances, they lack confidence and independence skills. Very good arrangements prepare them well for entry to Nursery. They are warmly welcomed and soon build excellent relationships with adults, so they settle well and soon begin to grow in their sense of well-being and become involved in activities with others. A considerable number are working at a level above that expected by the end of their time at the school even though most are at expected levels when they start. In some instances children make excellent progress, arriving below expected levels and progressing very rapidly to catch up with their friends.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well provided for. External advice is sought, including specialised assessment, and well-designed individual education plans are implemented effectively. Close support from key workers and good involvement with parents and carers ensure that these children make equally good progress. There are also good arrangements to help children who speak English as an additional language, such as involvement of family members in sessions and careful modelling of language by staff. The children who have speech and language difficulties have regular access to speech and language therapy. As a result, all children make equally good progress across the areas of learning.

Children eat and drink very healthily at school and take plenty of physical exercise. They have a growing understanding of foods that are good for them. They help out in many ways at school, tidying up, helping at snack time, growing spring flowers and planting

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strawberries. Some suggest and initiate activities in school, and show an awareness of the need to look after the environment by taking their litter back to school after a visit to a country park. Children also take part in raising funds for charities at home and abroad. They learn well how to keep themselves safe, at school, in the local area and on visits. Their behaviour is good.

Careful attention to hygiene means that children do not need to be reminded to wash their hands before eating, and they readily use hand-gel when outside having a picnic. Those who have difficulty understanding how to play with others are guided effectively so that they learn how to approach others and engage in play. Children develop their basic skills well. The most able enjoy sharing books with their friends, recognise letter sounds and write their names. All enjoy problem-solving activities, such as working together to pour water in order to get boats to flow down a model stream. They learn to recognise numbers and the most able add and subtract up to five. All develop their confidence and independence skills, and some make suggestions for further activities and initiate games. A notable feature is the way in which children persevere and engage in activities for considerable lengths of time by the time they approach the end of their time at Nursery, and this means they are well prepared for Reception classes.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Regular visits to a country park are rich in opportunities for them to marvel at nature. They find mini-beasts, and notice that bark on a tree is, 'like peeling an onion'. Most learn quickly what is acceptable and what is not; they are well mannered, remembering to say 'please' and 'thank you'. An excellent example of social awareness was seen when children were taking turns to make marks on a whiteboard. As one gave way to another he asked, 'Shall I wipe it off for you?' The school provides a good range of opportunities for children to learn about their own culture and that of others. For instance, children understand the significance of the football World Cup, and some recognise the German flag as well as the Union flag. As festivals such as Eid and Diwali are regularly celebrated, children learn about the customs and cultures of others, and children get on well together.

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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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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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attainment ¹	2
The quality of children's learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which children feel safe	2
Children's behaviour	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attendance ¹	1
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school's approach to enabling children to learn works well. Because all staff engage in daily and weekly dialogue and reviews about children's progress, they all share responsibility for encouraging learning. They know the children very well, and assess their learning while children are engaged in activities they have selected themselves. The next steps in learning are shared and so all know what children's individual objectives are. However, these are not routinely included in written daily planning, so that adults who are not familiar with children see only tasks and resources, and have little idea of the learning opportunities these provide for children, such as the key vocabulary to be developed. Staff interact very well with children to extend thinking, skills and understanding, and to give them the confidence to continue with tasks. This was evident when one child was painting a lion, similar to one in Northampton town centre. She became dispirited when she used the wrong colour and was ready to abandon her task, but an adult encouraged her effectively so she persevered and produced something she was pleased with.

Staff use their excellent knowledge of children to provide tasks and resources that appeal to them; they encourage children to influence what is provided, so children have the confidence to make suggestions. For instance, in a session where children were acting out the story of Mr Gumpy and the animals, using furniture as a makeshift boat, one suggested that they might do this using the toy farmyard animals in school, a toy boat and a paddling pool. The next day these resources were provided and children further consolidated their recall of the story in a different and enjoyable way. Half-termly visits to a country park enrich the curriculum and provide opportunities that could not be

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provided at school. During the inspection, children explored the new adventure playground and had a wonderful afternoon using new equipment that provided a challenge in a safe and well supervised setting.

The school takes good care of children and parental confidence is high. There is good guidance and support for children with additional needs or those who are vulnerable. Staff are well trained in child protection matters. Much is done to support children and their families. For instance the staff team work hard to provide personalised services for families and the headteacher is now linking with the new children's centre to access further support and resources. The lunch club provides a good opportunity for children to learn social and independence skills. Transition into and out of the Nursery is very carefully considered and tailored to the needs of children and families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has successfully created a committed team who are highly skilled and share a common philosophy and approach to encouraging children's learning and development. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring that children and families have the support that they need and that parents and carers are fully involved in school life and children's learning.

All staff contribute to school improvement because they are reflective, share good practice and put children first. They learn from one another through peer observations which they record on video and discuss. Developments are also informed by research and successful practice in other institutions and countries. For instance, staff have worked hard to find successful ways of encouraging boys' early writing skills, and boys now choose these activities as frequently as girls do. The commitment to equality of opportunity is evident in the school's inclusive ethos, and the range of policies that underpin this aspect. Although requirements are met, work on the school's equality schemes is still at an early stage.

The school has taken stock of what it does to promote community cohesion, and governors contribute well to this aspect of its work. There is a suitable action plan, based on an audit and evaluation of the impact of this. The school is responsive to the needs of parents and carers, and the local community, and hosts get-togethers which benefit parents and carers, and children of the school and local community.

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Governors contribute well in several ways but have not been thorough enough in their approach to checking that safeguarding arrangements are fully in place. All staff, governors and volunteers are checked to make sure that they are suitable to work with children but some omissions were found in the school's record of staff checks; these were rectified during the inspection. There are several strengths in the way in which the school ensures that children are safe, such as the quality of risk assessments and the curricular experiences that encourage children's awareness of safety.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers have very positive views of the school. In particular, they are unanimous in feeling that their children are safe at school and that they are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors endorse parents' and carers' views. A small number wrote to say that they feel that children would benefit from more formal sessions to develop their abilities in reading, writing and number. Inspectors looked at this and found that able children are challenged effectively and do develop skills that are above those expected at age four. They do not agree that there should be more formal sessions, as there are enough teacher-led sessions to prepare children for Reception classes.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Whitehills Nursery School 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 20 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 79 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	50	10	50	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	16	80	4	20	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	60	6	30	2	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	50	9	45	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	14	70	5	25	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	50	9	45	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	75	5	25	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)	12	60	6	30	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	60	7	35	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	55	7	35	1	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	60	7	35	1	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	14	70	5	25	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	75	4	20	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



1 July 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Whitehills Nursery School, Northampton, NN2 8DF

I had a good time at your school and enjoyed going to the country park best. It was good to see you having fun in the new playground there and learning new things at school.

Your school is good. You learn and play well together. The grown-ups take good care of you and make sure that you have great fun. There are lots of interesting things to do. The best things about you are the way you eat and drink healthy things, and take lots of exercise at school. You are very good at helping tidy, growing things, raising money for others and helping to keep the countryside tidy. You also learn to do things for yourselves, and find out about how other people live. You behave well and are never away from nursery unless there is a good reason.

The staff are good at helping you to learn and taking care of you. They work very well with your parents and carers. They are going to make the nursery even better by making plans that helpers can see when they come in to school. They are going to make sure you know what you need to do to get better at different things. Staff and the governing body are going to show just how well you do by the time you leave Nursery and check up to make sure everyone is doing things exactly as they should.

You can help by playing and learning together well every day!

I wish you all a happy summer holiday.

Yours sincerely

Sue Aldridge

Lead inspector

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