

Highfield Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124525
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	340590
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

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	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms A Janes
Headteacher	Mrs S Wilks
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors made 10 observations of varying lengths of children's learning, and held meetings with governors, staff, parents, carers and children. They observed the school's work, and looked at policies and other documents, including the school development plan, documents relating to safeguarding and the curriculum, and questionnaires completed by 39 parents and carers.

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

- the effectiveness of measures to raise attainment in language, writing and knowledge and understanding of the world
- the impact of using children's interests to plan aspects of the curriculum
- the key features of leadership and management that contribute to the school's success.

Information about the school

The school became a designated Children's Centre in November 2006. The vast majority of its children are from White British backgrounds. There are 52 part-time places in the morning and 52 in the afternoon. Children usually join the Nursery when they are three years old, although some join earlier. Few children have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The headteacher also runs an infant school that is federated with the Nursery. Daycare is provided on site and funded separately. This provision is the subject of a separate inspection report.

This is the only nursery school that is funded by the local authority in Suffolk. The headteacher and pedagogical leader are involved in providing training for staff from other settings and speak at conferences locally and nationally about its work. The school has the Eco- Schools Bronze Award.

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

Highfield Nursery is an outstanding school. Children achieve extremely well because of the high quality provision that is tailored around their interests and aspirations. The rich learning environment embraces and engages children, enabling them to sustain concentration through a wide variety of stimulating activities. Children are given the freedom to explore what interests them both inside and outside, and to choose the resources they need for the task. This develops a strong sense of independence. All adults make an excellent contribution to children's learning through their deep knowledge and understanding of how young children learn, and through sensitive and timely interventions. Parents unanimously support the Nursery's work. One commented, 'All staff are very approachable and adaptable, making Highfield a very happy environment to learn in.'

Excellent leadership from the headteacher and pedagogical leader ensures that children's learning is at the centre of all that goes on, supported by a highly effective team of practitioners who are constantly seeking to develop their skills. Staff are extremely well qualified and foster their own areas of expertise through research projects. The school's culture of reflection and innovation makes it an exciting place to work, with the highest expectations of all staff resulting in exceptional provision for the children.

The school has an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement, because its assessment systems are rigorous and comprehensive, enabling staff to build up a very clear picture of each individual child's strengths and needs from the moment he or she joins the Nursery. Particular attention is given to finding out what interests and inspires the children, so that this can be incorporated into plans. A topic on space and aliens arose from children's enthusiasm for all things astronomical. Leaders are quick to identify areas of potential weakness and move swiftly to narrow any gaps, for example through devising a range of imaginative activities to encourage boys to want to write. A group of boys were observed writing letters in the post office role play area outside, which they then stamped and delivered. Thorough monitoring ensures that self-evaluation is excellent. Governors share the staff's passion for the school, but do not keep sufficiently clear records of their monitoring visits.

Staff maintain the right balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities, with outstanding teaching inspiring children and giving them a love of learning. All staff are highly skilled at questioning children and modelling the correct use of language to encourage them in their conversation. The curriculum is exceptionally creative and relevant for children, with some particularly effective work focusing on story books to develop all areas of learning. The school also gives children memorable experiences

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outside working in nearby woodland, and helps them to understand the issues of sustainability and conservation extremely well.

Children's behaviour is especially good as they quickly learn to socialise together and to share resources. They have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and have contributed safety instructions to the apparatus outside. Children love taking full advantage of all this equipment, and are allowed to challenge themselves physically within a safe environment. Children also enjoy regular opportunities to dance both inside and outside the classroom. Despite their young age, children play a full role in helping around the Nursery, tidying up sensibly. They contribute a wide range of ideas for what they would like to find out, and sometimes plan whole programmes of work, such as around the theme of castles. Children very rapidly develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills, and are prepared extremely well for Reception and later life.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the governors keep careful records of their monitoring visits by systematically logging their findings.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

Children join the Nursery with skills and abilities that are often below what is typically expected, especially in language and communication. Children make

Children are extremely enthusiastic about learning and cannot wait to come to Nursery, as reflected in the excellent attendance. When they arrive in the morning, they eagerly explore all the attractions to see what is new and to return to old favourites, settling quickly. Adults engage them in exciting activities, such as making 'moon rock' cakes, or building a collage of the moon's surface. Staff take time to sit with more hesitant children, building their confidence gradually. This ensures that all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make excellent progress.

Children enjoy growing vegetables in the school garden and planting fruit trees. They take pleasure in the different healthy snack they have each day. They have also been young farmers, harvesting sweetcorn and picking apples at a local farm, and know all about keeping healthy. Children contribute to the life of the Nursery in many ways, having a say in how the garden should be laid out, and requesting 'bushes to make potions'. They understand about the rights all children should enjoy from the United Nations charter and take an active role in monitoring the school's consumption of energy. A child representative on the school's sustainability group reported back on an inspection of class recycling bins that two yoghurt pots had been found in the wrong bin!

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as they learn about other cultures through dance, art and music, and celebrate festivals such as Eid and Diwali. There are moments of awe and wonder each day, as they experience something for the first time, or learn something new.

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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	1
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Highly effective practitioners take children's ideas and turn them into meaningful learning experiences. This was particularly the case when children put together an erupting volcano dance and then, to the same cataclysmic music, drew what was happening on a long sheet of paper with crayons in both hands. The boys entered into this activity with great gusto, thus practising their fine motor skills without realising it. Very positive relationships underpin the excellent teaching combined with adults' high expectations of what children can do. They take every opportunity to extend children's learning, whether through sensitive questioning or making a link to another area of learning. When a boy was talking about his project on the planets, and why Pluto was too cold and Venus too hot, but the Earth 'just right' for life, the teacher reminded him of baby bear's porridge. He was delighted by the comparison.

The vibrant curriculum is enhanced by an extremely well resourced learning environment and attractive displays of children's experiences that 'tell the story' of how

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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they came to compose a story or paint a picture. The Nursery is brimming over with role-play areas, cosy corners and secret dens for the children to enter and enjoy. A space-age 'dark den' is especially popular. Each base or activity promotes all the areas of learning and enables children to develop their skills both inside and outside, as they flow freely between the two. Outstanding care is apparent in the support and guidance given to vulnerable children and their families, and in the excellent provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Key workers know the children they look after extremely well, compiling detailed 'learning journeys' that record how children develop in their time at the Nursery.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
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 headteacher and pedagogical leader have worked extremely hard to build a united team within a genuinely collaborative culture. This has been a key to their success, as their vision is shared by all staff and the positive drive of the Nursery towards ever greater excellence is something all are keen to share. Continuous professional development is particularly effective, with each member of staff developed as an individual to realise their strengths. Everybody is willing to be held accountable and aspire to the same high standards. The school's motto of 'Growing and Learning Together' applies to the whole school community.

Self-evaluation is excellent, with children's progress tracked meticulously and very rigorous monitoring ensuring that leaders know exactly what is working and what can be improved. This is set out in perceptive strategic plans. All staff contribute to monitoring the school's work and all take lead roles in aspects of its performance. There are excellent links with other agencies and schools, including a local special school. These make a valuable contribution to children's outstanding progress. Equality of opportunity is outstanding, as children are fully involved in the Nursery's work, and the performance of all groups is very carefully checked. The school promotes community cohesion particularly well, reaching out extremely effectively to its local community. Regular family days bring together a wide cross-section of the community on a Saturday to enjoy a trip together or to work in the school grounds. There are links with a school in India, and the school is introducing video-conferencing to enhance further its links with other schools in the United Kingdom. All safeguarding arrangements are in place and

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exemplary procedures are followed, such as in the guidance given to parents about safety on the farm trips.

Governors support the school well and bring a wide range of experience and expertise. While they visit to monitor its effectiveness, they do not record their findings in a systematic way.

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	2
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

All parents are supportive of the school's work, with the vast majority strongly agreeing that their children enjoy school and that they are happy with their children's experience. None of the parents who returned questionnaires disagreed in any of their responses to the statements. Several parents sought out the lead inspector to say how much they valued the school and how happy their children were.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Highfield 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 39 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 100 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	90	4	10	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	87	5	13	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	24	62	15	38	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	72	11	28	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	33	87	5	13	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	63	13	34	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	74	10	26	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)	23	59	13	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	72	11	28	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	64	14	36	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	74	10	26	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	29	74	10	26	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	90	4	10	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.



23 November 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Highfield Nursery School, Ipswich IP1 6DW

Many thanks for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed our visit and are very pleased to tell you that the Nursery is outstanding. Here are some of the best things about it.

You make excellent progress in your learning.

The teaching is outstanding and there are so many things for you to do and enjoy.

You behave extremely well and look after one another.

You know all about keeping safe and staying healthy.

The staff care for you particularly well.

The adults listen to you and try to plan work that interests you and that they know you will enjoy.

The Nursery is led exceptionally well.

Everybody checks very carefully how well you are doing. Governors visit the school to see how you are getting on but do not always remember to write down what they have found out. We have asked them to keep better records.

Thank you once again for your help. We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt

Lead Inspector

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