

Thornton Lodge Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107593
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	309442
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Gill

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	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Blakeley
Headteacher	Mrs Peta Stringer
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	128a Yews Hill Road Huddersfield West Yorkshire HD1 3SP
Telephone number	01484 226842
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thornton Lodge provides 120 part-time nursery places in two buildings (Dryclough and Yews Hill) that are one and a half miles apart. The Dryclough site moved in with the Crosland Moor Sure Start Day Care Nursery when it was established in 2004. At the Dryclough site there is an integrated team of day care and education staff who work closely together. Both sites are situated in areas of social and economic deprivation. The school has a high proportion of children from minority ethnic heritages, many of whom speak English as an additional language. There have been considerable changes since the last inspection. The school is now led by an acting headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher. Thornton Lodge will federate with Dryclough infant school from September 2008. The Yews Hill site has remained relatively settled; plans to establish a children's centre on that site have been discontinued. Children enter with broadly typical attainment for their age, across all six areas of learning. However, key skills in language and mathematics are generally below what is expected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thornton Lodge provides a satisfactory education with good features, which is exactly what the school's own self-evaluation has determined. The difficulties faced, at the Dryclough site, in establishing a Nursery school within a day care setting have been largely overcome. The dedication and hard work of the acting headteacher ably supported by the acting deputy headteacher have been responsible for these advances. There are still some organisational drawbacks to older three- and four-year-olds being fully integrated with two-year-olds, but enormous strides have been made in creating policies and protocols for this shared establishment.

Parents are correct in their view that this is a happy school in which children develop good personal skills and habits. A common opinion is that, 'It feels like a perfect place for a child who wants to learn and enjoy.' Each site has its own attributes that prompt parents to offer praise. Yews Hill has a very well developed outside area that children explore, fascinated by what they find. Two children, for example, spent a long time staring in awe at, and chatting about, spiders' webs in the hedgerow. At Dryclough the continuity of being so closely linked to a day care facility has its benefits for both parents and children. Older children can act as role models for the two-year-olds. This opportunity for responsibility boosts their confidence.

Good relationships and children's sensible behaviour stem from the good care that they receive. Key workers observe children very closely and make detailed notes about what they see. These notes form the foundation of an extensive record of children's progress, entitled 'The Learning Journey'. These records provide practitioners with a great deal of useful evidence which is used to plan the next step for individual children. They are used less well for showing progress over time in specific areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, teaching often lacks the precise information it needs to judge how effective children's learning has been in these areas. Therefore, school self-evaluation is not based on detailed enough evidence about learning across every area of the curriculum.

Children's achievements are satisfactory by the time they leave. The standards they reach in relation to the nationally expected levels for four-year-olds are very broadly typical. This takes into account aspects such as children's physical, creative and social development. Many attain lower than typical levels in literacy and numeracy but nevertheless progress is sound in these key skills.

Teaching, across both sites, has a satisfactory impact but is inconsistent. This lack of consistency is due to the limited space at Dryclough for older children to pursue more demanding tasks for longer periods, away from the two-year-olds, but it is also a quality of teaching issue. The generally competent teaching, at Dryclough, is not so skilful at asking probing questions or extending children's thinking through talk and play, capitalising on children's own ideas. This causes, for example, the occasional slower progress made by children capable of achieving more highly. In contrast, teaching at Yews Hill in these respects is generally good and sometimes outstanding.

Leadership and management are satisfactory in their effect on children's achievements. There are good features associated with the implementation, across both sites, of consistent systems to assess children's progress and the delivery of an appropriate curriculum. All this is achieved despite the organisational difficulties faced by the school. The progress made to date in establishing and extending practice across both sites demonstrates a good capacity to improve even more in the future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

As a nursery school, the Foundation Stage is completely covered by the overall effectiveness section.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use the results of assessments more effectively, particularly in literacy and numeracy, to improve children's achievement and aid school self-evaluation.
- Improve the consistency of teaching particularly in developing children's thinking through talk and play.
- Use space more effectively at Dryclough to improve the learning of the three- to four-year-olds.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children enter the nursery with skills and knowledge that are in line with national expectations. Achievement is satisfactory overall although it is slower in literacy and mathematics because these aspects depend heavily on competence in English. Several site-related factors impact on the rates of progress made by groups of children. For instance, the good bilingual support at Yews Hill ensures minority ethnic children, as well as the other children, progress well. They enjoy the lively sessions that focus on imagination, role play, excitement and challenging tasks to complete. By contrast, progress at Dryclough is generally satisfactory. Between the two sites, it is the differences in the development of thinking as expressed through talk and play that influence the standards reached. At Yews Hill, learning is far more practical.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children enjoy virtually everything that they do. Occasionally, some groups, generally boys, tend to want to switch off when talking about their learning in groups. However, the dominant atmosphere across both sites is one of involvement, laughter and joy. Children derive great pleasure from activities such as painting their hands pink, digging deep into the 'musical bag' to pick out objects to sing about, watching tadpoles and going off to meet an imaginary sea monster. Socially, children show care and consideration for others. The use of large child-sized dolls, designed to develop concern for others, is a great success. As a result, children are considerate to their friends, for example at snack time and when using the bikes. Skills of independence are developed through play, but sometimes children at both sites are not given enough time to clear up after themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is planned thoroughly and children's comments are often written down to show their thought processes. Some teaching is skilful at developing children's thinking but overall, not enough time is devoted to this. The emphasis on active play enables most children to make good progress in areas of learning such as physical and personal development. The highly imaginative aspects of learning, particularly those at Yews Hill, help children to forge ahead in creative learning and the ability to express their ideas. By contrast, there are occasions when learning, whilst satisfactory, lacks imaginative spark. The very detailed records of children's progress are used well to plan new activities and share children's learning with parents. However, some observations from children are not precise enough in describing what learning has taken place. Moreover, sometimes the written record of children's comments is not completed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with good features. It is inconsistent in its use of practical learning experiences to aid children's thinking. Nevertheless, children are often surrounded by a wealth of appealing things to do. This is a strong feature of the school's provision. All children are advantaged, particularly minority ethnic children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The curriculum often stems from children's own interests. For example, a comment such as, 'I see one tadpole, he is hiding in the bushes,' was used to extend that child's thinking and formed the basis for a new topic for everyone.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support provided are directly responsible for children's good personal development. Parents are closely involved at every stage. They have regular updates about their child's learning. This is particularly true of parents of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who rightly praise the school for its helpful advice. Child protection arrangements and health and safety procedures are in place and working effectively. The way that children are guided in their learning at an individual level is good in many respects but it is not consistent across both sites and with all key workers. Information from assessments is not used well enough to show rates of progress for groups of children across the six areas of learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher's aim that children will receive top quality adventurous and imaginative play is evident in some aspects of current practice. However, the effect of a series of temporary managers in the children's centre has diverted the school from its task of raising standards and improving achievement. The governors correctly applaud the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher for their efforts in managing this very unusual situation. The governors are pleased that progress is back on track again at Dryclough and that space for the older children has been identified as a limiting factor. The school realises that it does not use information from

assessment rigorously enough to be able to judge achievement precisely. It has begun to evaluate children's achievements but it is too soon to see the value of this. Governors' contribution is satisfactory but they have not seen enough practice at first-hand to be fully involved in self-evaluation.

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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, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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 Thornton Lodge Nursery School, Huddersfield, HD1 3SP

My colleague and I really enjoyed our visit to your school and I want to remind you about some of the things we saw.

Children at Yews Hill loved being in the boat eating their Pirate Pete pizza and children at Dryclough were expert at racing around on their bikes, taking them to the garage for repairs and generally having great fun together.

Your parents told us that you like school. They told us that some of you even want to go at weekends. That would be fun, but your poor key workers would never get a rest.

I had lots of chats with Mrs Stringer and told her about all the good things going on. We also talked about what all the adults need to do next. I want them to use your 'Learning Journeys' a bit more so that everyone can see how well you do. I would like key workers to give you all plenty of chances to get better at thinking about things. When children had to mend the pump for Pirate Pete's boat; they had to think what tools they needed and race to get the job done before the sea monster got them. It would be great if you all had chances to think like that. Last of all, I would like the older children at Dryclough to have a bit more space to themselves. They could then play and talk with their key workers without having the younger ones around all the time.

I hope that you love the rest of your time at Thornton Lodge and then enjoy your next school just as much. Please thank the day care children for us because they were so friendly at lunchtime.