

INSPECTION REPORT

PARKLANDS NURSERY SCHOOL

Northampton

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 121788

Headteacher: Mrs S Brooking

Reporting inspector: Mrs O M Cooper
10859

Dates of inspection: 15-17 May 2000

Inspection number: 194534

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Maintained
Age range of pupils:	3 - 4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Spinney Hill Road Northampton
Postcode:	NN3 6DW
Telephone number:	01604 642118
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs S Bamford
Date of previous inspection:	27-30 January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs O Cooper	Registered inspector	Pupils under five	What sort of school is it? What should the school do to improve? The school's results and pupils' standards. How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
Mr R Watts	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mr P B McAlpine	Team inspector	Pupils under five	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? Equal opportunities. Special educational needs. English as an additional language.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This school is a maintained nursery school that caters for boys and girls from three to four years old. It has 79 part-time pupils attending morning or afternoon sessions. Pupils come from the immediate area and from further afield. Almost all of the pupils are admitted at the start of the school year and transfer after three terms. About half the children transfer to the lower school that shares the campus; the remainder transfer to one of eight other lower schools. Taken together, pupils' attainment on entry is above average as nearly every child is admitted with knowledge and skills at levels that are typical or better for their age. Two pupils have special educational needs; a proportion that is much lower than most schools. There are five pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds; this proportion is about average and none of these children are in the early stages of learning to speak English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school that is in a period of transition. Since the arrival of the current headteacher, the emphasis in teaching methods has changed from planning many activities led by adults to encouraging the children to make choices and take responsibility for their own learning. This change has been successful in most aspects. High standards have been sustained since the previous inspection; the proportion of children reaching the level expected for their age, or higher, is well above average. Teaching is good and helps many children to achieve their potential in most areas of learning. The new headteacher provides good leadership and has implemented changes at an appropriate pace. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The children's personal and social skills are very well developed for their age. Their confidence and independence help increase their rate of progress.
- Children make good progress in speaking and listening, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative and physical development.
- The leadership by the headteacher is good and has a positive impact on standards and provision.
- The teaching is good overall and supports the children's progress.
- The children's attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good.
- The school provides a wide range of interesting activities throughout each session, which encourage the children to learn and make progress.

What could be improved

- Progress in developing early reading and writing skills is unsatisfactory for a significant number of children.
- Records of attainment and progress are inconsistent in content and quality and this makes them difficult to use for planning purposes.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in January 1997 when it was found to be a very good school with many strengths. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards, as shown by the results of baseline assessment on entry to the neighbouring lower school, have been sustained since the previous inspection. This inspection found standards in personal and social development and in speaking and listening to be higher than in 1999. The action taken in response to the key issues identified in the previous inspection report has been successful in overcoming weaknesses in the curriculum documents and the school development plan, both of which are now satisfactory.

STANDARDS

A high proportion of the children are on course to reach the nationally agreed benchmarks for pupils entering compulsory education after the age of five in all areas of learning, apart from literacy, where the proportion is broadly average. Standards in personal and social development are high. The school places a very strong emphasis on developing these skills and is very successful in doing so. Attainment in speaking and listening is well above average; in reading and writing, attainment is broadly average. Almost every child extends their speaking and listening skills appropriately but this is not always the case for early reading and writing skills. In mathematics, a few children are already attaining the national benchmarks and attainment is well above average. In knowledge and understanding of the world, creative development and physical development standards are well above average.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Children want to come to school and they enjoy the varied activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good, both indoors and out.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. The children work well with each other most of the time and approach adults when help is needed.
Attendance	Good. Absences are often due to childhood illnesses.

A particular strength in the children's personal development is in the way they gain independence and begin to take responsibility for their own learning. They are also encouraged to consider the impact of their actions on others from an early stage and this leads to the very good behaviour.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years
Lessons seen overall	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

In general, the teaching meets the needs of the children well. All of the teaching is satisfactory or better, including 55 per cent that is good and a further 19 per cent that is very good or excellent. The amount that is good or better, 74 per cent, is a good improvement since the previous inspection and better than average nationally. A wide range of activities is provided, covering all the areas of learning and motivating the children to learn and make progress. The change in the teaching strategies introduced since the previous inspection, from directing children to taking opportunities to talk with them and extend their learning through role play has required training to give all the adults the confidence to do it well. It will take a little longer for all of them to be fully confident in teaching all areas of learning, especially reading and writing. There is good support for children with special educational needs and, from within existing resources, for those with English as an additional language, enabling them to make good progress and achieve well.

The teaching of personal and social skills is a particular strength and leads to the rapid rate of progress for most children. In mathematics, the teaching is good. The adults are confident in teaching mathematics and take every opportunity to develop the children's understanding and skills in all aspects, particularly in number, and these are reinforced through singing number rhymes. In language and literacy, the teaching is good overall, although the time devoted to literacy is low. The teaching enables the children to make good progress in speaking and listening and in extending their vocabulary. Only a small proportion of time is allocated to literacy and progress in early reading and writing is erratic and unsatisfactory for a significant number of children. Towards the end of their time in the nursery, a small number of children who are ready to move onto the next stage in writing need more direction from adults to enable them to do so. The change

in teaching methods has not been so successful in developing the children's skills in writing.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. A wide range of interesting activities is provided each session covering all areas of learning. Visits and visitors to the school enrich the activities on offer.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Children who need additional support are identified at an early stage and one to one support is regularly provided to try and overcome the problems before the children enter statutory education.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are no children in the early stages of English language acquisition. Teachers and nursery nurses provide good support for learning from within existing resources.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Provision is very good for social development and is satisfactory for spiritual development. The children are beginning to understand the difference between right and wrong and develop an awareness of their own and other cultures.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory overall, with particular strengths in procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and in supporting pupils' personal development. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress and using the information to plan the curriculum are improving but there is still much to be done.

The school works in close partnership with parents and this is effective in supporting the children's rate of learning. The workshops for parents are very informative and help parents to extend their child's learning at home. The information in individual profiles about the children's progress is unclear.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides good leadership. She has led the recent changes effectively with support from staff and governors. All adults working full-time have delegated responsibilities and work hard to carry out their roles in a conscientious and efficient manner which is beneficial to the children's learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors play an active part in the work and life of the school and fulfil all their statutory responsibilities except for setting performance targets for the headteacher. Their procedures for monitoring the work of the nursery are good.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has no data to evaluate its performance and no means of self-evaluation in use as yet, although this is already planned.
The strategic use of resources	The school does not have a delegated budget. The funding available is spent on consumable materials and the priority areas identified in the school development plan. The staff and accommodation are used well to support the children's learning. The school applies the principles of best value satisfactorily.

There are sufficient appropriately qualified staff for the number of children. The adequacy of accommodation is good, with particularly good outdoor provision. However, the window frames are rotten and, for safety reasons, in need of repair as soon as possible. The adequacy of learning resources is good overall but there are insufficient big books available for teachers to use with groups and promote early reading skills.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents are well informed about their child's progress.• Children make good progress.• The staff are approachable.• The school works closely with parents.• The teaching is good.• The children's personal and social development.	

The inspectors support most of the parents' positive views about the school. The only exception is the quality of information contained in the children's profiles. This does not give a clear indication of the progress the children have made over their time in the nursery, particularly in reading and writing. This is because the records lack a clear focus on what the children have actually learned.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Overall, standards are well above average. Many children are already attaining, and nearly all are on target to attain, the nationally agreed learning outcomes in personal and social development; language development; mathematics; knowledge and understanding of the world; creative development and physical development. Attainment in literacy is satisfactory but not as high as in other areas of learning as less emphasis is placed on developing reading and writing skills and progress is unsatisfactory, mainly for the more able children. There is no significant variation in the attainment between boys and girls or between children from different backgrounds.

2. Attainment on entry to the nursery is above average, reflecting the larger than typical proportion of children who have language and mathematical skills at levels that are appropriate, or better, for their age. Personal skills are often less well developed. Baseline assessment results for the children entering the lower school in 1999 showed their attainment to be well above average in mathematics, above average in speaking and listening and in reading, and average in writing. Given the standard of attainment on entry, these results indicate, for pupils who have now left the school, good progress in mathematics, satisfactory progress in speaking and listening and in reading, and unsatisfactory progress in writing. These results show that standards have been sustained since the previous inspection.

3. Standards in personal and social development are well above average. More than half the children have already achieved the goals expected by the age of five and this is a big increase since the previous inspection and upon their attainment on entry. The school views this area as the most important for young children and all adults take every opportunity to help the children in their development of these skills. The teaching has a major influence over the children's rapid rate of development in this area. The children's personal and social skills help them to make good progress in other areas of learning as they gain in confidence to investigate and explore their surroundings and experiences. They work alongside or with others, learn from each other and can share equipment, ask for a turn and wait patiently. They show maturity in moving between the activities. Standards are currently much higher than the baseline assessment results for 1999.

4. Standards are well above average in speaking and listening, which is higher than the 1999 baselines on entry to the lower school, and average in reading and writing, which is broadly consistent with the 1999 baselines. The children make good progress in speaking and listening as many opportunities are provided to extend these skills. Opportunities are regularly and consistently taken to extend vocabulary and to encourage children to speak clearly. The progress made by children with special needs relating to speech problems, and for those with English as an additional language, is equally good. Their needs are known well by all adults and the level of support is good. At story times, the children have the ability to listen carefully and to answer questions about the story they have heard. Standards in speaking and listening have improved considerably since the last inspection. The broadly average standards in reading and writing are similar to those found at the time of the previous inspection. Not enough emphasis is placed on developing reading and writing skills in the activities provided and opportunities to raise awareness and knowledge of print are regularly missed. There are, for example, few familiar words on display to encourage early reading skills. As a result, progress is variable and is unsatisfactory overall, particularly for higher attaining children.

5. In mathematics standards, are well above average. Children of all abilities make good progress and, for a significant number of children, progress is very good. Standards have improved since the 1999 baseline results. There is a strong emphasis on developing the children's counting skills. Mathematics is built into many activities and the adults are skilled at maximising the opportunities for developing the children's skills and this increases the rate of learning. For example, children are encouraged to identify and continue patterns and sequences when building models using construction materials. Through such activities, the teachers reinforce children's ability to recognise and name shapes and increase their understanding of which shapes will fit together without leaving spaces. Role-play activities increase the children's awareness of other aspects of mathematics, such as telling the time and paying bills. The adults are confident in teaching mathematics and in taking children on to the next stage in their learning, enabling them to achieve well.

6. Virtually all the children are on course to attain or exceed the expected goals in knowledge and understanding of the world and standards are well above average. The children's natural curiosity is fostered well. Good progress is made in acquiring knowledge and understanding, which will form a sound foundation for future work in subjects such as science, history, geography and technology. Both indoors and outdoors, many interesting activities provide good opportunities for learning and the children respond well and with enthusiasm. For example, when involved in outdoor play the children found some small beetles and used magnifying glasses to observe them more closely and count the number of legs. The children make good use of the computers to support their learning and show confidence in selecting which programs to use.

7. Standards in creative development are well above average. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Again many activities are provided to encourage creativity and progress is good for children of all abilities, including those with special educational needs. They mix their own paint and explore the use of colours in their pictures. The children demonstrate their ability to paint pictures of their family and forms of transport without smudging and with good attention to detail. They begin to show preferences for working with different materials. Some like using clay, others prefer to use paints. They skilfully explore the sounds made by a range of instruments, both tuned and untuned, the keyboard being the favourite. They join in dance and role-play with others, incorporating imaginative touches of their own.

8. Standards are well above average in physical development and have been sustained since the last inspection. All children are on course to attain or exceed the expected goals soon after they are five. Good progress is made in developing physical skills through activities both indoors and out. The wide range of resources is used well to promote the children's physical skills and a positive attitude towards physical exercise whatever the weather. The children often spend some time outside using wheeled toys, climbing apparatus, the swings and slide and show their ability to confidently run, jump, climb and pedal and manoeuvre the range of wheeled toys. Their skills in balancing are particularly good. Indoor activities are planned for developing good manipulative skills, evident in the ease with which the children grasp small items such as pegs used to continue sequencing patterns, clay modelling tools and the cutlery when making their own snacks.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

9. The children display very good attitudes towards their school. At the parents' meeting, parents remarked on how much their children enjoyed coming, such as "It's hard to keep her away, even if she's ill". As soon as they arrive each session, children go straight to an activity. One or two are initially reluctant, but no more than is to be expected with children of this age. Once immersed in work, they display great interest in what they are doing and are very willing to explain this to visitors. They are keen to explore the wide range of experiences provided for them and many work assiduously to complete for example, a painting or model, in which they then show great pride. In activities like singing and story time, they listen carefully and join in with enthusiasm when asked.

10. Children, in the main, behave very well. They have a clear understanding, for their age, of how they are expected to behave. There are few disputes and staff usually resolve these quickly by explaining to the children what the correct course of action would have been. In those activities, which are not directly supervised by an adult, children share resources well and allow others to get on with what they are doing without interference. They recognise the rules for allocating activities and abide by them. In the outside area, they use and control their cars and tricycles carefully and play on the climbing apparatus, giving due regard to other children. Boys and girls play together well and there is no gender stereotyping in their play. The few children of ethnic minority origin are well integrated. There is no bullying and no children have been excluded.

11. The school makes the personal development of children its principle aim. This is recognised and appreciated by parents. Children are encouraged to be independent in their selection and use of resources and they take advantage of this very well. At the same time, they are often seen co-operating together, for example with the sand moving equipment in the outside sandpit or making a wheeled vehicle inside. They are taught to be considerate to each other and their very good relationships demonstrate that they are learning this well. They know that they must consider the feelings of others and that some things are right and others wrong. They take personal responsibility, for example in making their own cold snack or in enthusiastically wielding the mop when too much water in the water tray spills onto the floor.

12. Attendance, at around 95 per cent, is good for a nursery. The register is taken informally close to the start of each session. The school allows a staggered start time so that staff can give their full attention to each child as he or she arrives. However, this is somewhat extended, so that some children arrive up to 30 minutes after the start time and thus miss a significant proportion of the session.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

13. Overall, the quality of teaching is good and helps the children to acquire knowledge and skills at a good rate. In 74 per cent of activities, the teaching is good; this includes 14 per cent that is very good and 5 per cent that is excellent. All the rest is satisfactory. The good quality of teaching is a strong characteristic of the school, which has been sustained since the previous inspection. The teaching methods have changed recently since the appointment of a new headteacher. The change in approach to teaching in the last year, moving away from mostly adult led activities to allowing children to choose what they do for most of the time, required the adults to change how they teach. The commitment of the teachers and nursery staff, together with the arrangements that they have put in place, are making this method work effectively. Much of the teaching takes place through talking and role-play with children once they have chosen an activity. The adults found this difficult initially, but they are now growing in confidence after training and visits to other nurseries. The small amount of teaching of language and literacy seen, together with the teaching of mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative development and physical development is good. The teaching of personal and social development is very good. Most of the teaching seen in language and literacy involved activities in speaking and listening and not writing.

14. Excellent and very good teaching is evident in activities in story time, personal and social development and physical development. The very good features include the sharing of the purposes of the activity with the children, the enthusiasm of the adult for the activities taking place, for example the ribbon dancing, which inspires the children and builds on their prior learning. There is continuous encouragement and challenge to improve performance and extend learning and a good pace is sustained throughout. Questions are directed at children not participating to check their level of understanding and draw them into the discussion. The skilful questioning is challenging for all children whatever their level of ability. All adults are very good at spotting every opportunity to develop the children's personal and social skills and this leads to the very good rate of learning and improving relationships between children. Good teaching is evident in all areas of learning as the adults know the children well and are secure in their knowledge and understanding of how young children learn and of the areas of learning.

15. The teaching that is satisfactory sometimes involves language and literacy activities. For example, in story time the stories are read well, with expression, and interest the children. However, there is no discussion as to what the story is about or reference to the author or other features of the book. The children are not given sufficient opportunities to answer questions as adults do most of the talking for them and ask questions requiring one-word answers.

16. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. It is good in mathematics and speaking and listening but is less effective in reading and writing where the children's progress is slower. These are areas where children cannot learn for themselves and more direction is needed for the children who are ready to move onto the next stages in reading and writing. Few children worked on a writing activity, which involved using plastic letters, as they did not know what they were expected to do with the letters, so they drew pictures instead. They required an adult to reinforce their knowledge of letter sounds and to help them make simple words.

17. The effectiveness of the planning of daily activities is good. The teachers and nursery nurses review daily the success of the activities they organise and improve them to increase the challenge where necessary. However, the quality of written plans is just satisfactory. Although all areas of learning are included in the written plans, and the purposes for each area are identified, the aims are too general and do not help adults as much as they could when assessing what children have learned. The adults have high expectations of all children and most respond well to them, for example, spending sustained periods of time at activities. Occasionally, they move quickly on from one activity to another. The adults use a good range of teaching strategies to interest and motivate the children. Their communication skills are good.

18. The management of the children is very good. Routines are well established. With many activities

available and the free choice on offer, the way in which children use equipment demonstrates just how well they have been taught over the year. The maturity shown when using tools, such as hammers and drills, is the culmination of established routines and the stressing of safety aspects of all activities. Children only use the tools when adults are close by. On the few occasions when conflict arises, this is swiftly dealt with and children asked if they are happy with the outcome. The very good management is evident in the level of maturity shown by the children.

19. All the nursery nurses and support staff are used very effectively to help and guide the children in their learning; their contribution is clearly seen in the children's good rate of progress. They have responsibility for key groups of children and carry out assessments of children's attainments. The learning resources are used very well to provide variety and interest for the children. The time for learning is used satisfactorily and the school is aware of the need to achieve a better balance between allowing the children free choice and in adults leading the activities, particularly in reading and writing to enable all children to reach their full potential. The school already had plans to review and evaluate the recent changes in the teaching methods at the end of the year.

20. Children's attainment is assessed frequently, often through observations and interactions between adults and children as they work and play. These assessments are of satisfactory quality and the adults meet daily to share the information gained on individual children and to plan activities for the following day. This is good practice and beneficial for those children who have been observed, but they are only a small number of the total. Children with special educational needs are assessed often and notes made by support assistants are used to plan activities closely matched to their needs. Where children are bilingual, the school works closely with the child's parents. Books and jigsaws are taken home and satisfactorily extend learning into the home.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?

21. The curriculum as experienced by the children is good overall. A wide range of appropriate and relevant learning experiences are provided which fully meet national guidelines in every area of learning except literacy, where provision is made but lacks the emphasis necessary for it to be consistent with current national recommendations. The previous inspection found the curriculum to be satisfactory overall but with a lack of planning in personal and social development, knowledge and understanding of the world, and creative development. Since then, these shortcomings have been remedied and improvement has been good. The learning opportunities that are provided highly motivate the children and lead to them quickly gaining independence, autonomy and confidence in learning. The curriculum is rooted in a belief that children learn best from activities that they select for themselves and that an overriding aim is to promote positive attitudes to learning; teachers then work with the children to help them learn as much as possible from their chosen activity. The nursery, indoors and outdoors, is set out to meet these aims, with daily planning meetings to evaluate success and to decide on improvements. The staff are committed to the arrangements and the organisation of the school day is very effective, other than in reading and writing. Very good use is made of the individual and specialist skills of the staff.

22. All of the nationally agreed areas of learning are included in curriculum planning. Greatest emphasis is placed on personal and social development. In this area, the curriculum is extremely successful and leads to the children making very rapid progress. Strong emphasis is placed on mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development and this is why the pupils make good progress in each of these areas. In all areas, speaking and listening skills are appropriately developed. Reading and writing are included but the provision for these is not given sufficient priority and is less well planned, leading to missed opportunities and erratic learning.

23. There is no requirement for the curriculum to include religious education or sex or drugs education. Nevertheless, the pupils have the opportunity to learn about important religious and national festivals celebrated by people from different cultures and to learn about the reproductive cycles of insects and animals. They are also taught about the need for a healthy diet. Such provision is appropriate and helps prepare children for the statutory curriculum. Extra curricular provision, such as educational visits, together with use of the community as a resource are satisfactory. Access to the Internet has been recently installed and plans to use it to establish links with other schools are in hand. Links with the nearby lower school are well established and links with other schools are being developed.

24. The strategy for teaching the basic skills of mathematics is very effective. There are regular, thoughtfully chosen and well prepared opportunities to develop mathematical knowledge and understanding. Knowledge of number is consolidated and extended daily during teacher-directed singing activities, which involve all children. Strategies for teaching literacy are less effective; they are inconsistent, with some children making acceptable progress but others less so.

25. There is satisfactory equality of opportunity and access to the curriculum. The needs of high, average and low attaining children, together with those from different backgrounds and children of different gender, are generally well met and nearly all children benefit according to their needs from what the school provides. An exception is with reading and writing, where the erratic nature of the provision mainly affects children with higher than expected attainment on entry.

26. No additional provision is made, or is necessary, for current pupils with English as an additional language. The provision for children with special educational needs is good. The two children who are on the register of special educational needs have had their needs carefully assessed. The arrangements to meet their needs are effective, including the management of the extra provision from the local authority. The children are fully integrated into the main activities and the curriculum they receive is appropriate. Parents are kept fully informed and involved. Records show that good improvement has been made in knowledge and skills in areas where difficulties occur. All required documentation is in place, including individual education plans, although the quality of these is variable and the organisation of the paper work makes it difficult for outsiders to follow.

27. The provision for personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and reflects the aims of the school. Spiritual development is satisfactory and is fostered when children have opportunities to consider their part in the wider world and a sense of awe and wonder is effectively promoted through the range of activities they experience. For example, when mixing two colours of paint they made a rich brown colour, similar to that of the clay they use. This prompted a child to ask where clay came from and how it was formed. The provision for moral development is good. The values of fairness, respect and care are promoted well and the children are beginning to understand the difference between right and wrong. The staff are skilled at encouraging the children to find the best solution to problems such as when wanting to use equipment being used by others. They are encouraged to ask others if they have finished using the equipment and if they mind it being taken for use elsewhere. The provision for social development is very good and evident in the children's interactions with each other and adults. The provision for cultural development is good. Through music, art, dance, role-play and celebrations the children learn about their own cultural heritage and that of others. The school places appropriate emphasis on preparing the children for life in a multi-cultural society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

28. Overall, the school's procedures for ensuring the welfare of its children are satisfactory and similar to those found at the time of the previous inspection. All staff are very caring towards children, comforting them if they are reluctant to leave their parent but quickly interesting them in an activity. First aid trained staff look after children well when minor accidents occur. The policy of promoting a caring and sharing attitude amongst the children promotes an ethos in which disputes and accidents are less likely. The headteacher is the designated teacher for child protection and is very experienced. However, her training in this role is not up to date. Staff are guided by a good policy. Children are taught to 'feel strong' and encouraged to know that they have personal rights that they should not allow to be infringed. Where there are child protection cases there are satisfactory relationships with other agencies. Overall, health and safety is the responsibility of the local authority and equipment inspection and regular risk assessment takes place. The headteacher and chair of governors also regularly check the school. There are one or two concerns however:

- the outside of the building is in a poor state of decoration and rotten woodwork around windows will soon render them dangerous if corrective action is not taken;
- the practice of serving of hot drinks to staff while children are present is currently unsafe;
- whilst children are trained in the use of woodworking tools, staff should give further consideration to the risks of their use, or misuse, without direct adult supervision;
- the proximity of the track for large wheeled toys to the outside sandpit, which has concrete edges and a considerable drop, poses a risk both to riders and children playing in the sand.

29. The assessment arrangements are changing and there is currently a fine balance between strengths and weaknesses. A wealth of detail is included in the documented records but a lack of rigour in linking them to specific curricular objectives makes them unwieldy and difficult to analyse or use for planning purposes. Since her appointment, the headteacher and the teacher with responsibility for curriculum and assessment have given priority to improving the curriculum, with assessment to be bettered once the curriculum is established. This is appropriate. The current assessment arrangements have upgraded the previous ones but there is still much work to do.

30. All children are regularly assessed through observation and staff discussion involving all nursery staff, which is good practice. Detailed records and notes of observed behaviour are maintained, together with records of achievement. The observational records appropriately have a page for each of the nationally agreed areas of learning. The achievement records contain samples of work collected every few weeks and are accessible to parents, which is good practice. In both records, the quality of the observations varies and the relationship of the assessments to the nationally agreed Desirable Learning Outcomes is inconsistent.

31. The staff know the children very well, especially in terms of their personal and social development, and the knowledge they carry with them is considerably greater and more up to date than that which is recorded. It is this unrecorded knowledge that is used most when discussing the progress individual children make, which the staff do weekly, and when deciding what should be done next to boost progress where this is necessary. These basic principles are excellent practice and the informal assessments made in this context are very much a natural part of the teaching and learning.

32. The rigour of the discussions is increased by the use of lists of children and checking that no one is left out. However, the absence of specific curricular objectives against which progress can be tightly monitored in areas such as reading and writing is a shortcoming. This is also the case with the documented assessment records, making it difficult to evaluate individual progress and to reach overall conclusions about how many children are making satisfactory progress in each area of learning and how well boys and girls and other groups are doing. The latter is important to senior management and governors when carrying out self-evaluation, so that they know how well the school is performing. At present, the assessment records completed by different members of staff are not cross-checked for consistency and validity nor is there an arrangement to establish consensus about different levels of attainment; these are weaknesses.

33. The arrangements for identifying children with special educational needs are effective and no child was found who was not on the register and should have been. The weekly discussions are resulting in the special education needs of the children being met and the provision updated when necessary.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

34. Parents are very pleased with the education that their children receive. At the meeting held before the inspection, all parents who attended were warm in their praise of the school. They thought that standards are high in literacy and numeracy. Children are treated as individuals and taught to become self-confident. They learn well through fun. The parents' questionnaires confirmed this positive view, with no significant negative aspects. The inspection team agrees with almost all these views. The personal development of children is very good and they are well taught. The team had some reservations over standards in literacy, however.

35. The school makes very good efforts to involve parents in the running of the school and in supporting children from home. These efforts have borne dividends and parental links have a very positive impact on children's learning. Before children start, staff visit them and their parents at home to discuss parents' concerns and to assess children's needs. Parents can see their child's assessment file at any time or add work they have done at home. Progress is discussed both informally and formally twice a year. Parents receive a written report containing comments on all the areas of learning. The school has taken part in an initiative to improve parental involvement. Parents' views are sought and proposed changes in the way the school is run are evaluated. Parents feel that they have a real say. Staff conduct workshops at which parents can experience the activities the children undertake. This increases both parental awareness and their child's interest as they rush in the following day to see their parents' work. The lobby notice board tells both parents and children the activities of the day or week.

36. As well as being able to support their child in its first few days, several parents provide valued help with

activities throughout the year which support the children's learning. The school has issued good guidance to parents on appropriate behaviour while in contact with the children. They help children with learning activities and also support staff with practical help such as odd jobs or shopping for the children's break time snacks. Parents run the lending library for books and games. Working parties are helping to build up resources for use when reading stories, using ideas and skills in craftwork. The giant crocodile was well on its way to completion while the inspection team was there!

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

37. The headteacher provides good leadership and management for the school and promotes high standards and effective teaching and learning in most areas of the curriculum. She is well supported by all the staff who are committed and work hard for the benefit of the children. All full-time staff have delegated responsibilities which they carry out conscientiously, although they are not always sure what is expected of them. Job descriptions define what each person is expected to do but they are not sure how or when to do some of the tasks. For example, they are not sure what to record in the children's profiles as the purposes of assessments are not clear to them. The communication channels are not quite as clear as they should be.

38. The changes in organisation and teaching strategies have been well thought through and training provided prior to implementation to ensure high standards and good teaching and learning have been sustained through the transition period. The school is aware of the need to review and evaluate the impact of the change at the end of the year and to discuss where further improvement can be made. The nursery nurses have played a key part in securing the successful transition. They show, for example, willingness to undertake distance learning courses in their own time to increase their understanding of how children learn and how they can teach them effectively.

39. The aims of the school focus on meeting the children's emotional, social, physical and intellectual needs. They are met successfully, with the exception of reading and writing. The school is very successful in meeting its aim of providing for the emotional and social needs of each child.

40. The governors have good procedures for monitoring the work of the school. Different areas are assigned to individual governors and observations are carried out, reports written and information fed back to governors' termly meetings. This helps all governors to understand the strengths and weaknesses and play an active role in shaping the future direction of the school. The governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities, with the exception of setting performance targets for the headteacher.

41. The headteacher has implemented a satisfactory system for staff appraisal and monitors teaching on an informal basis when working in the same room as other adults. There are plans to formalise the monitoring procedures once the transition year is over. The staff are committed to continuing to improve and there is capacity for further improvement with clearer communication of what is required. Induction procedures are good and for nursery students are very good. They are well supported, made to feel part of the team and soon gain confidence in putting their training into practice.

42. The school development plan was in need of improvement at the time of the previous inspection and was a key issue. The weaknesses have been overcome and the current plan is satisfactory. However, the recommendation in the most recent auditor's report, to include costs, has not been remedied. The areas for improvement as identified by this inspection are partly included in the current plan. An updated policy on writing is due to be implemented in July 2000. Other priorities in the plan include information technology as the school has been given funding to access the National Grid for Learning. The staff has appropriately identified information technology as an area where they could improve their knowledge and skills. Progress towards the targets in the school development plan is monitored effectively.

43. The school does not have a delegated budget and, therefore, only has responsibility for purchasing learning resources and using the funds allocated for school improvement and development. The funding delegated to the school is used satisfactorily to support development in the priority areas and to maintain a good range and level of learning resources. The only deficiency is in the number of large books for literacy. The accommodation is good and is used well to support the children's learning in all areas of the curriculum. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is good. The adults have different talents and interests and through effective organisation all children work with all adults at some time each month and this helps their rate of learning. The school provides good value for money.

44. The good leadership and management have been sustained since the previous inspection. The changes have been implemented with careful thought and consideration for those involved to ensure that high standards of attainment have been maintained.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

45. To make this good school even better the headteacher and governors should:

□ Increase progress in reading and writing by:

- writing and implementing a strategy for teaching literacy more often;
- increasing staff knowledge of the Early Learning Goals for literacy and of the methods and organisational strategies necessary to achieve them efficiently and effectively;
- increasing the amount of time that children spend on early reading and writing activities;
- identifying specific objectives for literacy when planning activities in other areas of learning;
- setting targets for improvement and monitoring progress towards achieving them.

Discussed in paragraphs 3, 15, 16, 24, 25, 39, 58, 59, 60, and 61

□ Improve the quality of assessment by:

- writing and implementing a clear policy for assessment and developing a system that is manageable and effective;
- linking assessment to specific learning objectives in the curriculum;
- introducing arrangements to cross-check the assessments completed by different members of staff for consistency and validity;
- introducing arrangements to achieve consensus among the staff about the levels attained.

Discussed in paragraphs 20, 29 –32, 37, 69, and 74

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	22
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	8

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	14	55	26	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	40
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	N/A

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	2

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	75
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	47

Number of pupils per FTE adult	8
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	80
Number of questionnaires returned	33

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	82	12	6	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	55	42	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	55	6	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	12	0	0	70
The teaching is good.	76	18	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	67	33	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	82	18	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	21	42	9	0	28
The school works closely with parents.	67	33	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	48	36	3	3	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	58	33	9	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	24	6	0	28

Other issues raised by parents

Five letters were received from parents nearly all praising the work of the staff. There was also the opinion expressed in one letter that the discipline and leadership are not as good as previously. The inspectors disagree with these negative comments.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Personal and social development

46. The children's personal and social skills are well above average and progress is good. Virtually all the children are on target to achieve or exceed the level expected by the age of five. Over half of them have already reached the stage of development expected on entry to compulsory education; this is an improvement since the previous inspection. Strong emphasis is placed on developing the children's skills in this area of learning and the adults are good at taking opportunities to promote their development. The change of organisation in the daily routines has done much to support the development of these skills. As a result, the children make very good progress and are confident in moving around the different activities and in approaching adults. Parents report their children look forward to school each day and want to come in the holidays. They are happy to be left to organise themselves, taking responsibility for their own learning for a large part of each session, choosing when to join adults at different activities or to ask for help. They collect most of the equipment they need for themselves and often mix their own paint. They move independently from one activity area to another to complete the next stage of their work. For example, a toy car made from wood was painted and then used on the road made from wooden blocks.

47. Most children have established effective relationships with each other. They work together in groups, initiate their own games, for example when they make a road with building blocks, decide who will have which vehicle to begin with, and agree to change over after a while. Children with special educational needs and who have difficulty in establishing relationships receive good support from classroom support assistants and nursery nurses. The children make good use of the space and the activities and wait for their turn, for example on bikes or the computers. They are responsive to learning situations and most sustain their concentration for a good period of time for their age. A few children, often those with higher attainment, flit from one activity to another when insufficient challenge is offered.

48. The large majority of children sit still and listen with interest to stories and their concentration is good. They listen to instructions, such as when tidying away and respond to them. They play games accepting that they cannot always be winners. They show maturity in controlling impatience or frustration when they cannot complete a task to their satisfaction. They have many opportunities to explore and investigate both indoors and out and they share their findings with adults. When some beetles were noticed during outdoor play, the children fetched magnifying glasses to have a closer look. They enjoyed a recent train journey, which for some was their first-ever train ride.

49. All the children demonstrate good levels of independence in dressing themselves, in personal hygiene and in preparing their own snacks. They change into wellingtons for outdoor play and put on jumpers and coats themselves. They decide when to have their snacks during the session and pour out their own drinks. Children who forget to have their snacks are politely invited to have them. The children are actively encouraged to express their feelings verbally when someone is unkind to them, for example in knocking their models over, which is good preparation for later in life.

50. Children of all backgrounds work and play happily together; they respond well to praise and accept criticism if the reason for this is carefully explained. They recognise the difference between right and wrong behaviour and tell adults when another child has been unkind to them. The children's personal and social skills help them to settle quickly and easily to the next stage of their education.

Language and literacy

51. Standards are well above average in speaking and listening and broadly average in reading and writing. Progress towards the nationally agreed benchmarks for pupils entering compulsory education is good in speaking and listening but unsatisfactory overall, in reading and writing. This does not mean that standards have slipped since the previous inspection. Using today's greater evidence base, progress has improved in speaking and listening and is comparable to the previous inspection in reading and writing. The variations in progress are the result of a greater and more consistent emphasis being placed on speaking and listening than literacy. Records show that almost every child increases their skill in speaking and listening in line with or better than expectations but not every child does this in reading and writing. There are no significant differences in progress between boys and girls. Children with special educational needs receive good levels of additional support and make good progress in relation to their difficulties. The four children for whom English is an additional language speak English well, do not need additional support and make similar progress to their peers.

52. Baseline assessments conducted in the nearby lower school in 1999, soon after children had transferred, show that virtually every child had attainment that was appropriate or better for their age in all four aspects of the subject. In speaking and listening, about two fifths of the pupils had already attained the benchmark for entry to compulsory education several months, in the case of summer born children almost one year, ahead of time. In reading, about one child in ten had reached that benchmark, with one child in fourteen in writing. Because no child had significantly low attainment, the results in speaking and listening and in reading were above average overall; those in writing were average. However, the results in mathematics for these same pupils were well above average, showing that despite above average standards in language and literacy, there was nevertheless underachievement compared to mathematics. Baseline assessments for 1998 showed a similar picture. This performance data is consistent with the inspection findings in reading and writing and shows that standards are broadly the same as those found during the previous inspection. The findings in speaking and listening are that standards are now considerably higher than in the 1999 baseline and have risen since the previous inspection.

53. Records indicate that nearly every child currently at the school had attainment in speaking, listening, reading and writing that was typical for their age when admitted in September, with about one child in five having better than expected attainment; this means that standards on entry were above average overall. Only a very small number of pupils were found by their teachers to have difficulty with speech and language.

54. In speaking and listening, the children's knowledge and skills are increasing at a rate that is faster than typical. Already, after two terms at school, more than half the children have attainment that is consistent with the national benchmark for entry to compulsory education and standards are well above average overall. Children listen well in all situations and show good levels of respect for those who are talking. Almost every child has a broad vocabulary and can express themselves well for their age. When listening to stories, they enthusiastically express opinions about, for example, why it is not sensible for an insect to hide under a frying pan, giving clearly explained reasons to support their opinion. Nearly all of the children speak clearly and more than half have the confidence and the language to talk to other children and to adults in all situations they find in the nursery. The substantial majority of children join in with familiar stories and rhymes, anticipating repeated words and phrases, and show that they have memorised nursery rhymes and songs. Most children ask questions such as "Where is Suzy the snail?" when arriving at nursery and will go and look where directed, which is one of the indicators of attainment at benchmark level.

55. The good progress that children make in speaking and listening is a result of the strong emphasis placed on independent learning, the wide range of challenging activities, and the high level of appropriate adult support. The emphasis on independent learning helps children gain confidence when talking and listening to others. The wide range of challenging experiences helps to increase children's vocabulary significantly, giving them frequent opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings. Most importantly, the high levels of appropriate adult involvement with children during activities help them sustain and extend their dialogue and learn the best form of words to use. When, for example, two girls were using construction equipment to make a car, they found that a boy had already used the wheels a few minutes earlier; the boy had by now moved to the painting equipment. To resolve this situation, the girls discussed various possibilities between themselves and then decided to ask a nursery nurse if they could take the wheels off the boy's car as he had now finished with them. The discussion with the nursery nurse meant that the girls had to explain what they wanted to do, using appropriate vocabulary, and then concentrate on solving the problem without

upsetting the boy. The girls decided that they must ask the boy's permission. The nursery nurse helped the girls find the best way of phrasing their request. One girl then went on her own and confidently asked; the boy gave consent. At each stage in this example, the nursery nurse cleverly helped extend the children's speaking skills without taking any of the independence or initiative away from them.

56. The rate of progress in the acquisition of early reading and writing skills varies between children. About three fifths of the children in reading, and about half in writing, make the expected progress but the others do not. This means that progress overall is slow. In general, the children admitted with greater knowledge and skill in reading and writing make the least progress, though there are exceptions. The overall slow progress in reading and writing reflects mainly, but not entirely, curriculum planning rather than teaching issues.

57. In many of the activities and displays, opportunities to raise children's awareness of text using well-selected captions, labels and signs are missed. Little mention is made in the planning in other areas of learning to show that the development of literacy skills has been considered and built into the activity where relevant and it often does not happen in practice. In a good teacher-led activity, for example, which was designed to increase children's investigative skills and their knowledge of living things, the children observed snails crawling, feeding, breathing and eating. The children were highly motivated and verbal language content was good. The children extended their spoken vocabulary by learning the names of different parts of the snail but no text of appropriate level of difficulty was available to make links between spoken and written names. A book was used, and the children did extend their knowledge of different uses for books and book handling skills appropriately, but no attempt was made to show the children that the teacher was reading the text and obtaining information from it as well as from the illustrations.

58. At times, the children show that they enjoy books, understand their purpose and handle them carefully. One boy clutching a book, for example, arranged several dolls on a settee in the book corner, sat on the settee, arranged a blanket over his legs as if sitting in bed at home and proceeded to tell the dolls a story, holding the book and turning the pages appropriately. In conversation, he revealed that the story was a favourite and had been previously read to him by a teacher. However, during the inspection, only a handful of children were seen using books independently, most of them chose to work at other tasks unconnected with literacy. When a teacher based herself in the book corner, a small number of children gathered. The teacher very effectively taught book-handling skills, discussed the characters and the story, and raised awareness of text but only two girls sustained their involvement throughout the ten-minute period; these children extended their literacy skills appropriately. The others, mainly boys, were attracted away by other interests. An adult was based at the book corner for only a small proportion of the teaching time during the inspection. With this organisational strategy, the amount of time that children choose to devote to literacy is often insufficient for them to attain the national benchmark for entry to compulsory education.

59. Only about five per cent of the teaching time each day is given to teacher directed activities that involve literacy and this is not enough. All of the time that is devoted in this way is used satisfactorily and some is very well spent. In an excellent story session, a nursery nurse used methods from the National Literacy Strategy very effectively with eight children aged from three to four years. The story she read was part of a favourite series, so the children were already familiar with some of the characters. What the children were to concentrate on during the story was explained at the beginning, which is excellent practice. The nursery nurse's own enthusiasm for the story was very well shared with the children, who followed it with great interest. Appropriate questions were asked to extend understanding of the plot and characters. The children had to explain reasons and this needed reference to the events and the illustrations. Questions were well targeted at specific children, so that all were fully involved at an appropriate level. After the story, the children were asked to read their own names from cards. Every child could recognise his or her own name. Several boys showed that they could read the names of other children as well as their own. Attention was drawn to initial sounds and letters, which is appropriate for the age group. None could identify separate sounds in the names apart from one boy who recognised that two names began with the same letter. The session lasted about ten minutes and the interest of all children was sustained throughout. Not all directed sessions, however, are devoted to literacy or use methods associated with the National Literacy Strategy.

60. There is good opportunity each day for every pupil to be involved in singing and rhymes and nearly all pupils join in with these with gusto, showing that they can anticipate repeated words and phrases and memorise the rhymes and songs appropriately for their age. During these and other directed story sessions, not enough is done to raise awareness of the sounds that are repeated, or to identify patterns or syllables in spoken words, or to recognise the sound of a familiar word from its shape on the page. This aspect of

teaching early reading skills is hampered by a lack of big books with appropriate text.

61. Writing is developed through “emergent writing” methods. Each day, for example, a child accompanied by an adult goes round to all the adults and asks them what drink they would like at break. The child then makes a mark against the chosen drink. Children are asked to write their names on work such as paintings and drawings, with most children drawing a line or a series of shapes. These activities are satisfactory. Records show that almost every child is able to make marks on paper to represent writing and this is confirmed by the findings. A few children can write their name using recognisable letters, one or two with upper and lower case used correctly. At least one child can write two or three words independently, which is the benchmark for entry to compulsory education. In general, however, not enough is done to take children beyond the stage of making marks towards the formation of letters. Records show that the vast majority of children are at the mark making stage, or beyond, when admitted and that about half have advanced their knowledge of letters or their skill and accuracy in forming them during the school year but the others have not.

62. Bearing in mind that not enough time is given to the teaching of literacy, which is a curriculum management issue, the teaching that is provided is never less than satisfactory in quality, about two thirds is good or better, including some that is excellent. The teaching is good overall. On balance, the curriculum is satisfactory overall, reflecting the strength of provision for speaking and listening. Curriculum planning processes have changed for the better since the previous inspection. The plans for the year and for each term and half-term are now appropriately based on learning objectives and the teachers are building into the plans an element of progression. Some of the objectives are too generally worded and this is leading to weekly and daily plans that lack specific targets for literacy. The assessment arrangements are being improved. They are better than at the time of the previous inspection and are still evolving. Detailed observations of each child are made and a wealth of information recorded. However, the criteria for assessment are not yet fully linked to the curriculum objectives. This makes it difficult to manage the information for curriculum planning purposes and is one of the reasons why slow progress in literacy for some children is not being identified and remedied.

63. The management of the curriculum by the headteacher is good, despite the shortcomings. She is setting a clear educational direction, leads effectively by example, is supporting developments through the provision of staff training, including some in the National Literacy Strategy, and has an appropriate programme for development over the next year. Resources are satisfactory in the main, although there are too few big books and no white boards suitable for adults and children to use during emergent and guided writing activities. The headteacher is aware of this and is planning to increase resources as funds allow. Other books are adequate in quantity, quality and range and a loan stock for parents is appropriately available and used.

Mathematics

64. Standards are well above average and have improved since the last inspection. Progress towards the nationally agreed benchmarks for entry to compulsory education is good in number, in gaining knowledge of shapes and measures and in learning mathematical vocabulary. Virtually all of the children are on course to achieve or exceed the nationally agreed learning outcomes expected soon after the age of five; 30-40 per cent have already attained them several months ahead of time. These inspection findings confirm the baseline assessment results in 1999. These baseline assessments showed that virtually every child was in line with, or beyond the national benchmarks for children aged five. The children experience many practical activities that develop their skills in counting, raise their awareness of numbers in their everyday lives and encourage the use of mathematical language. All adults are confident in teaching mathematics and know what children need to move on to in the next stage of learning. This enables most children, whatever their level of ability or special needs, to learn at a good rate and achieve their potential. The adults make good use of role-play activities to extend awareness of mathematics such as when visiting the pretend hairdressers; appointment times were given, bills were paid and change given.

65. Most children can recognise and name shapes such as circles, squares, triangles and rectangles and higher attaining children are beginning to understand that some shapes will fit together without leaving spaces. They can follow directions to collect resources situated on shelves under or above other objects. They can predict where their height will be on a measuring chart and, with the help of an adult, measure their height accurately. All adults take opportunities to develop counting skills, recognition of shapes and

awareness of space when working with construction apparatus and children make good progress through these activities which they find as fun.

66. Many children recognise and can continue sequencing patterns using two colours and higher attaining children are beginning to create their own patterns, for example, alternating the colour or shape of beads on a string. All children can set a table for four people matching cups to saucers. Most children can sequence events in their lives, such as deciding which items of clothing go on first when getting dressed and demonstrate this when using a computer program to dress a teddy bear.

67. There are many opportunities for the children to become familiar with number rhymes and this reinforces their skills in counting and leads to an understanding of addition and subtraction. They are good at touching and counting one object at a time. Higher attaining children recognise larger numbers up to 100, can count to 99 with little adult help and identify numbers on a 100 square. They are aware of the numbers on their houses but as yet are not aware of their telephone numbers. They are beginning to add and subtract numbers mentally. They enjoy following the numbered carpet tiles, counting them as they step onto them. Most children can count to ten and half count beyond that. Over half the children recognise numerals to nine and higher attaining children can write them. They are beginning to use words such as add and take away and understand the meaning of half which is evident when they fill containers half full of coloured rice.

68. When adults work with the children they sustain their concentration for good periods of time and learn at a good rate, for example when completing a jigsaw and putting the numbers in order to 9. Children with special educational needs make good progress when learning sequence patterns and counting the number of beads used. The teaching is good in all activities in this area of learning because the adults have the skills to extend children's learning and reinforce the learning directly and through other activities. The daily singing sessions often include number rhymes and all children participate in these activities and so get consistent teaching in number skills. Mathematics activities feature in the planning each day and many children choose to visit them. Those who don't are targeted by adults and invited to join in. The varied resources are used well to increase children's knowledge and understanding. In a subtle way, the children are encouraged to remain at an activity until it is complete. There are weekly aims for children's learning identified in the planning and these are evident in different activities throughout the week.

69. The curriculum is well managed by the headteacher. The weekly planning contains learning objectives, although some of these are too general and do not help adults as much as they should in assessing exactly what the children have learned. The staff are in the process of changing their assessment procedures and current systems are an improvement on previous procedures. Further work needs to be done to improve the quality of information recorded.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

70. Standards are well above average. Progress towards the national benchmarks is good. In the wide range of activities provided, almost all pupils increase their awareness of the world around them quickly. Knowledge that will eventually contribute to work in geography, history, science and technology accumulates well. Almost all children are on course to attain or exceed the national benchmark for those entering compulsory education by the appropriate time or before. Currently, about one third of the children have already attained the benchmark, several months ahead of time. This is a satisfactory improvement upon the standards found at the time of the previous inspection and is a result of the much improved teaching and curricular provision in this area of learning. There are no significant variations in attainment or progress between pupils of different gender or background. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and make satisfactory progress in relation to their difficulties. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress.

71. Nearly all children talk about their homes and can distinguish between various locations in the home. In an activity with a nursery nurse, children planned a journey to the shops. In so doing, they showed that all in the group had a good knowledge of features and places in the immediate locality and were developing an understanding of the purpose of places such as shops, car parks and airports. Children volunteered information about journeys they had been on, including holiday flights abroad, but few are yet at the stage when they name places further afield. Day to day domestic life features strongly in role-play. One girl in the home corner said to her friend "I'm going to get married". She then proceeded to select appropriate clothes and go through events surrounding a wedding ceremony. Other children busied themselves with domestic

chores such as ironing and dishwashing, showing good understanding of the purposes of many domestic appliances and the organisation of daily life. In discussion, they are developing a satisfactory sense of past and present events that are important, such as festivals and birthdays but these are not yet linked to calendar knowledge; when asked "Do you know when your birthday is" a girl answered "Yes, when it's at my house".

72. A range of living things, such as tadpoles, snails, rabbits and plants are available, with the need to care for them built into daily routines. This is very effectively leading to children gaining appropriate knowledge of these things, learning to recognise and name different features as well as learning about the conditions that are necessary for insects, plants and animals to sustain life. The children respond very well to the opportunities provided, showing good levels of curiosity and demonstrating through their comments, sometimes days after the activity, the strong impact that has been made upon their understanding. The children are also developing a satisfactory knowledge of materials and their properties and of the language to describe them. When cutting a large block of clay in half, for example, one boy remarked "Phew, this is hard work, its all sticky".

73. Progress in technology is good. Almost all children have appropriate making skills and show good levels of accuracy and control when handling tools. They demonstrate the ability to think ahead and plan what they are going to make and what will be needed to make it. Children can mark, cut, glue, hammer and join a range of materials independently. This reflects the very appropriate teaching, which models and demonstrates the use of tools but then leaves children to carry out tasks for themselves and so learn through experience. Computer skills are generally good; all pupils seen using computers could operate the mouse and manage programs appropriately.

74. The teaching is good. Real tools and equipment are provided, where possible, and the involvement of adults to support children using the resources is appropriate and effective. The curriculum is well planned and the learning objectives are generally clear. Recorded assessments are detailed but not easily analysed or manageable for use when planning. However, the teachers and nursery nurses know the children well and use instead this informal knowledge to keep children challenged effectively. Management of this area of learning is good and resources are good. The headteacher is aware of the need to improve the written recording of children's progress.

Creative development

75. Standards are well above average. Progress towards the national benchmarks is good. At least one third of the pupils have attainment that is consistent with the national benchmark, which is an improvement since the previous inspection. There are no significant variations in attainment or progress between pupils of different gender or background. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

76. A wide range of art, music, dance, stories and imaginative play activities is provided. This is leading to all pupils gaining a broad, balanced knowledge of two and three-dimensional materials, suitable tools, instruments and other resources to express their ideas and communicate feelings. The vast majority of children are eager to explore the creative media and have quickly acquired the skills to do so. All of them join in with collaborative musical activities and will turn to instruments made available during lessons and experiment confidently. During outdoor play, for example, some boys began to beat a rhythm on various drums that had been provided for them. Taped music was being played at the time and they hit the drums in time to the music, changing from large to small drums appropriately.

77. No child was found who could not name some of the basic primary colours. One boy realised that the safety of other children riding bikes along the pathways near the sandpit would be improved with traffic lights. His teacher fetched red and green paper so that they could be made and the boy, noticing one colour had been omitted, said "and the orange". When painting and colouring, the children have high levels of confidence in handling brushes, crayons, and felt pens. The children are beginning to explore the mixing of colours and many of them match the colour of the paint chosen to the colour of the object they are representing. The artwork on display is of good quality. Representation skills are good and objects recognisable. In dance, mainly an adult led activity, the children involved showed that they could all move spontaneously and appropriately to rhythm and music.

78. The teaching is good overall, with many of the adult-led activities being very good. In a very good dance

session, for example, the nursery nurse conveyed her own considerable enthusiasm for dance to the children, motivating them highly. She modelled the movements, used her voice and instructions to set various challenges and guided the children towards routines and rhythmic patterns in advance of expectations. The curriculum is very broad, includes a highly appropriate range of two and three-dimensional media, dance and music and has improved significantly since the previous inspection, when no planning for this area of learning had been developed. The planning is appropriately based on learning objectives. Assessment is detailed but not easy to use for planning purposes. Subject management and resources are good.

Physical development

79. Standards are well above average and have been sustained at similar levels since the previous inspection. Virtually all the children have attained the learning goals expected by the age of five. The outdoor provision is very good and is used effectively in most weathers to enable the children to make good progress in developing their body control and confidence. The children move confidently and imaginatively around the different activities they choose, for example from the swings to the wheeled toys, or from the sand pit to the stepping stones onto the wooden bridge. They can climb, swing, run and jump and are confident in moving along the balancing bar across the top of the climbing frame. The only time they request adult support is when getting off the balancing bar back onto the platform. They manage to do it unaided when thinking about it but want the security of knowing that help is at hand if needed.

80. The children pretend to go shopping and make their own traffic lights to control the flow of traffic. They pretend to be bus drivers and carry passengers on the trailers, which they attach to the wheeled tricycles. There are many wheeled toys available which the children share and take turns to use. They pedal, steer and manoeuvre them well around the pathways and when going up or down the sloping path. When all the children choose to go outside in sunny weather they use the whole area sensibly and do not waste time queuing up for a turn, going off to use other equipment instead, or asking for a turn afterwards. There is little evidence of children falling, tripping or bumping into others.

81. An outdoor dance session using ribbons appealed to all the children and many sustained the physical activity for a good period of time for their age. They responded well to the change of tempo in the music, slowing down their movements. They understand that different arm movements create different patterns with their ribbons, such as spirals and zig-zags. The very good quality of the teaching due to the pace, appropriate choice of music and the enthusiasm of the nursery nurse leading the session led to its success. The children enjoyed using a parachute, working together successfully in raising it off the ground to lift the toy frogs and turtles high into the air. All the children have a good attitude towards physical activity, changing into wellingtons and putting on coats when they feel it is necessary. This is good training for later life.

82. When working indoors, the children have good manual dexterity. They handle tools, objects, construction and malleable materials safely and with increasing control. The hammers and drill in the woodwork area are used when an adult is close by. They set the table for four people in the role-play area, use paint brushes and glue spreaders adeptly and grip pencils and crayons when writing or drawing. They can complete jigsaws of up to 25 pieces and build their own train from construction equipment joining the pieces with nuts and bolts which they tighten using a spanner. They can mould clay and play dough and use modelling tools to make attractive patterns on clay plaques. They pour juice from the jug into their beaker at snack time without spilling it.

83. The teaching in this area of learning is good and often very good. The learning objectives for indoor activities are reinforced in outdoor activities, for example, learning about swirls, spirals and zigzags indoors was repeated in the ribbon dancing outside. The activities vary from day to day to provide new challenges. There are shaded areas and a playhouse for quieter activities in hot weather and appropriate precautions are taken to protect children from the sun, evident in the children wearing sun hats. The adults interact and join in the role-play activities to pose questions and extend the children's learning. Assessment of the children's attainment is satisfactory in this area of learning. There is a good range of resources available, both large and small apparatus. The management of this area of learning is good. Frequent assessments are made of the children's progress in developing their skills. The information gained is shared with all adults in order to plan the next stage in each child's development.