

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **RYE PARK NURSERY SCHOOL**

Hoddesdon

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117072

Headteacher: Mrs Kim Frazer

Reporting inspector: Mr Fred Riches  
23235

Dates of inspection: 12-14 March 2001

Inspection number: 195196

Full 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:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3-4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Walton Road Hoddesdon Hertfordshire
Postcode:	EN11 0LN
Telephone number:	01992 462820
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Neil Harvey
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Area of learning responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
23235	Fred Riches	Registered inspector	Mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; English as an additional language.	The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
09528	Derek Bowers	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?
03764	Stephanie Lacey	Team inspector	Communication, language and literacy; creative development; personal, social and emotional development; special educational needs; equal opportunities.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Rye Park Nursery School currently has 96 children on roll, all part-time, aged three and four. Almost all live in Rye Park, with around ten per cent travelling in from neighbouring areas. The number of boys and girls is almost equal. Most children are of white European origin. Just over ten per cent are from other ethnic heritages. A few speak another language at home as well as English, but none are learning English as an additional language. Children's attainment on entry to the school covers a wide range. It is similar to the Hertfordshire average in terms of personal and social development, but a little below in language, literacy and mathematical development. Children come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Health visitors in contact with a number of families refer several children for early acceptance into the nursery. The school has just over eleven per cent of children on its register of special educational need. Three children have statements of special educational need. (The school roll is usually 120, with 60 morning and 60 afternoon places. Changes in the timing of transfer to primary school have resulted in the temporary lower number on roll this term.)

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Rye Park Nursery is a very effective school with many strengths. The high quality of teaching is underpinned by a curriculum which is very carefully structured to meet the needs of young children. The headteacher and senior teacher give very good leadership and the governors play an appropriately supportive role. Excellent teamwork by all staff ensures that the school's aims and values are fully reflected in its work. The school gives very good value for money

#### **What the school does well**

- Children of all abilities achieve very well because of the high quality of provision.
- The school's aims and values are fully reflected in its work, especially in the relationships between staff, children and parents.
- The quality of teaching is very good in all six areas of learning. Thorough planning, meticulous preparation, highly skilful conversation and caring management of children are key features.
- The routines and organisation of the curriculum ensure a helpful balance of structured and chosen activities, promoting very good learning.
- Dedicated leadership by the headteacher and senior teacher has created a high level of commitment and a sense of team spirit among all practitioners.
- Every child is valued and cared for as an individual. Thorough assessment supports children's progress through their three or four terms at the nursery.

#### **What could be improved**

- Toilet and washroom facilities for staff and disabled children.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school has maintained good standards since the last inspection in 1996 despite slightly lower attainment on entry. The school had no key issues to address, but has continued to review and refine its curriculum and practice. The quality of teaching was already good and has improved still further. Staff provide a rich and stimulating curriculum. Leadership and management under the new headteacher are again a strength. The school has made good improvement overall.

## STANDARDS

In all six areas of learning, personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development, children learn very successfully. This is due to the carefully planned programme of daily routines and activities and the accompanying high quality of teaching.

Children's attainment in all six areas of learning is good by the time they leave. They bring differing levels of knowledge, experience and ability to communicate when they start the nursery. Staff assess children carefully and give them a rich experience. As a result, children learn successfully and make very good progress towards the early learning goals (which most children are expected to meet by the time they begin Year 1 in primary school). The oldest children currently in the nursery show well-developed skills in communication and language. Many express themselves successfully in complete sentences. Most follow stories well, recognise their names, pick out the initial sounds in words and recognise them in written form. They enjoy making marks on paper and other surfaces. They form letters correctly to write their own names. A few children with identified speech and language difficulties succeed in explaining themselves when given time and encouragement in small groups. Most older children count and match successfully to ten and some beyond. They sort by colour, shape, size or material and know the names of common shapes.

Children develop good knowledge and understanding of the world through structured opportunities for experimentation, exploration, play and conversation. They construct successfully with a variety of equipment, sow seeds and watch the life cycle of butterflies and frogs. They learn about themselves, gain a sense of the past, present and future through looking at their own lives and their families. They make plans of different parts of the nursery, developing early geography skills. They use mouse and keyboard to give instructions to computer programs and show confidence in using information and communication technology (ICT). They participate regularly in artistic and musical activities. They develop confidence in their use of paint, clay and a range of materials. They enjoy regular opportunities to sing and feel a sense of rhythm through action songs and rhymes. Both indoors, when manipulating scissors, tools, pencils and brushes, and outdoors, when climbing, balancing, jumping, hopping and pedalling, children are developing good standards in their muscular control and energetic, healthy attitudes to physical activity.

## CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Children take part enthusiastically in all nursery activities.
Behaviour	Very good. Children adapt very well to the secure routines. When they show inappropriate behaviour, staff respond with calm sensitivity.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Children accept the opportunities to show initiative and independence in their choice of activities. They relate very well to all adults and other children, taking turns and sharing equipment.
Attendance	Very good.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

<b>Teaching:</b>	
Sessions seen overall	Very 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.*

The quality of teaching by all practitioners in all areas of learning is very good overall. It is satisfactory or better in all sessions, including 85 per cent in which it is good or better. It is very good or excellent in 35 per cent. Teachers and nursery nurses share responsibility fully. Joint planning, preparation and teamwork are the major strengths underpinning all teaching. Learning support assistants are successfully deployed and give very good help to children with statements of special educational need and others requiring close support. All staff know children well and observe them closely, assessing and noting what they do and how they make progress. All adults earn the children's trust through their positive relationships with them.

Staff look for opportunities to promote children's communication, language and literacy through conversation alongside all activities. Similarly, staff ensure that they include structured opportunities to further children's mathematical development in a variety of contexts. In the best examples, staff encourage children to explain what they are doing and clarify their understanding by asking questions and giving each child the time and attention needed to make a response. It was on the few occasions that this active conversation was less apparent that teaching was not so effective. The use of songs and rhymes is another strength, particularly during activities requiring up to ten children to plan or comment in turn. Simple, effective strategies ensure that all children feel valued. For example, staff use rhymes and actions which include children's names, so that each individual is recognised by the whole group and all others enjoy waiting to hear their names.

Small group sessions, in which the adult takes the lead and directs, are very well balanced with more open-ended activities, chosen by the children. This thoughtfully structured mixture of directed and chosen activities offers regular opportunity for assessment and promotes very good personal, social and emotional development. Staff offer equal opportunity to boys and girls. They keep very good records of how children are getting on and share these to ensure that they meet the needs of all children. As a result, children of all abilities learn very successfully.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Activities planned in all six areas of learning are rich and stimulating. Staff give children opportunity to plan, as well as focusing in small groups with adults on directed activities.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Very good. Staff support very sensitively, working alongside children, outlining what needs doing and maintaining careful records.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Provision for children's personal development underpins all work at Rye Park. All staff act as positive role models, encouraging children to take turns, share and play their part in routines, such as tidying up.
How well the school cares for its children	Very well. Staff know children well. Health and safety, child protection and assessment procedures are thorough. Staff work successfully in informal partnership with parents.



## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher gives very good leadership and is ably supported by the senior teacher. Together, they ensure that all staff share responsibilities for co-ordinating aspects of the curriculum and work as a united team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are supportive and have the good of the school at heart. The chair gives stability in a comparatively inexperienced governing body. An appropriate school development target is to raise governors' profile.
The school's evaluation of its performance	All staff use the school development plan as a working tool. Regular monitoring of teaching supports staff development and monitoring of children's portfolios ensures that their progress is assessed well.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of its budget, with excellent support from secretary and bursar. It deploys staff efficiently and applies the principles of best value well in spending decisions. Staffing levels are good. Learning resources and accommodation are mainly of high quality. The only aspects in need of attention are the washroom and toilet facilities for staff and disabled children.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

*The inspection team received 41 replies to 96 questionnaires sent out and 22 parents attended the pre-inspection meeting.*

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents at the meeting were wholly enthusiastic in their support of all aspects of the nursery provision.</li> <li>Questionnaires show that everyone feels leadership and teaching are good.</li> <li>Parents are all comfortable about approaching the school and feel the school works closely with them.</li> <li>They are pleased with the progress children make, the standards they achieve and their behaviour.</li> <li>Everyone feels the school is helping their children become mature and responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The only area a few parents feel needs improvement is for the school to give more regular formal opportunities for a review of their children's progress.</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees wholeheartedly with the extremely positive views expressed by parents. The team is happy that the school offers regular informal opportunities for parents to discuss children's progress and that staff are always ready to respond, should a parent wish to see them. The school makes very good provision for parents of children with special educational needs to review their progress. It organises a comprehensive review for parents of all children before transfer to primary school, but does not offer sufficient formal opportunities for review conversations during children's time at the nursery. The school will be looking to extend its provision in this area.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and children's achievements**

##### *Overview*

1 Children starting at the school come from a variety of backgrounds and bring a considerable range of knowledge, experience and communication skills. Some mix well and talk easily. Others find the new situation difficult and say little. While children's attainment on entry covers a broad spectrum, it is a little below average overall. Staff assess children carefully and give them a rich experience across all six areas of learning identified in the new foundation stage curriculum for three to five-year-olds. As a result, children learn very successfully. They make very good progress towards the early learning goals (which most children are expected to meet by the time they begin Year 1 in primary school). By the time they move on to a local primary school, children's attainment in all six areas of learning is good. Most are well on the way to reaching the early learning goals and a significant minority of children have already met them. The school has maintained the standards noted by the last inspection.

##### *Communication, language and literacy*

2 The oldest children show well-developed skills in communication, language and literacy. Most follow stories well, joining in when they recognise repeating phrases. They recognise letters and their own names. They pick out the initial sounds in words and recognise them in written form. They enjoy making marks on paper and other surfaces. They form letters correctly to write their own names. When they first start, a significant minority are not talking in complete sentences, using nods, shakes of the head, single words and clipped phrases to communicate. Within a short time, many learn to express themselves successfully in complete sentences. A few children with identified speech and language difficulties succeed in explaining themselves well, because of the time and encouragement given in small groups. The use of signing by all staff and children adds extra support in this context.

##### *Mathematical development*

3 Children achieve very well in mathematics. Most older children count and match successfully to ten and some beyond. One boy, for example, successfully counted all nineteen children in his register group, pointing to each in turn as he counted. All children have opportunities to count regularly, particularly during registration and small group times. They develop initial understanding of adding and taking away, through active participation in number songs and rhymes, for example. They sort objects by colour, shape or material and know the names of common shapes. Children quickly pick up and use the language of number, shape and size because of the regular use of mathematical language in relevant contexts.

##### *Knowledge and understanding of the world*

4 Children develop good knowledge and understanding of the world through a series of structured opportunities for experimentation, exploration, play and conversation. They construct interesting models successfully, using a variety of recycled materials and manufactured kits. They learn about plants by sowing beans and cress seeds, observe caterpillars and tadpoles during the summer term and discover about the life cycle of butterflies and frogs. They learn about themselves, comparing what they were like as babies and how they are now, and begin to gain a concept of history, understanding past, present and future by looking at their own lives and their families. They observe an area of the nursery and draw up a plan, developing map-making and early geographical skills. They use mouse and keyboard regularly on a variety of computer programs supporting their

understanding in literacy, numeracy, art and in their knowledge and understanding of the world. They show confidence in using ICT.

#### *Creative development*

5 Children show good levels of attainment in their creative pursuits. They participate regularly in artistic and musical activities. They show confidence in their use of paint, brushes, glue, scissors and clay. They concentrate for lengthy periods at an easel when using brush, fingers, hands and paint and enjoy the fascination of exploring the effects they create. They mould and shape play-dough and clay, talking with accompanying adults about the effects and the shapes they create. Displays show a wide range of recyclable materials used in modelling. All children enjoy regular opportunities to sing and feel a sense of rhythm through action songs and rhymes. They listen to music and discuss how it makes them feel. They dance to music. They join in role-play in an imaginative play area, which changes focus every few weeks.

#### *Physical development*

6 Indoors, when using scissors, tools, pencils and brushes, children develop deft manipulative skills. Outdoors, when climbing and balancing on the apparatus, jumping and hopping on the play area markings, and pedalling or pushing the wheeled toys, children show good muscular control. They are developing energetic, healthy attitudes through a range of physical activities. Children make good use of the outdoor area in particular to develop good skills of co-ordination on safe, but suitably challenging apparatus and equipment.

#### *Equal opportunities*

7 About eleven per cent of the children at Rye Park are identified as having a special educational need of some kind. Most of these children have either some difficulties with language and communication or find it hard to relate to other children and adults. Three children have more pronounced learning difficulties and have statements of special educational need. All children with special educational needs achieve very well because of the early identification of their needs, the very good support they are given and the close liaison between staff and parents.

8 The school does not analyse the performance of children by gender or ethnicity. However, in assessment records and in the sessions seen, there was no overall difference noted in the achievements of boys and girls or of children from different ethnic backgrounds. The few children from African, Caribbean, Italian and Pakistani families do as well as their English peers in a school which celebrates cultural diversity. Children who speak another language at home do so in addition to English. No children are learning English as an additional language.

#### *Summary*

9 In all areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development) children learn very well. This successful progress is due to the carefully planned programme of daily routines and activities and the accompanying high quality of teaching.

## **Children's attitudes, values and personal development**

### *Attitudes and behaviour*

10 Children have very good attitudes to their work and behave very well. This replicates the high standards found by the last inspection. They settle quickly when they arrive at school and listen carefully to adults when they are giving instructions, telling a story or leading a discussion. They show a great deal of interest and enthusiasm in the wide range of carefully planned activities. The skilful management of the children by all staff ensures that any calling out, restlessness or lack of co-operation have no significant impact on the progress of an activity. Rare instances of inappropriate behaviour are very well managed by staff. Children know what is right and what is expected of them and they respond positively most of the time.

### *Relationships*

11 Children enjoy very good relationships with one another and with all adults in the school. They show good appreciation of the achievements of others in assemblies and during the reviews at the end of activities. They generally play together well and frequently help each other. For example, they share equipment and games amicably and help each other with computing tasks.

### *Personal and social development*

12 Children gain confidence and independence during their time in the school. They use the cloakroom and toilet areas independently. They frequently work or play with the minimum of close supervision and respond to the opportunities for choice by acting responsibly. They plan a part of the session themselves to match their own preferences and interests and show considerable initiative and concentration as they focus on their chosen activities. At the end of a session the children readily help the teachers to clean surfaces and store equipment and materials.

### *Special educational needs*

13 A few children are on the school's register of special educational need because their personal and social skills are not as well developed as those of their peers. These children are quickly settling into nursery routines and making very good progress in this area because of the firm and consistent support of the staff.

### *Attendance*

14 Attendance is very good. The children like coming to school and are usually punctual each day.

## **HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN TAUGHT?**

### *Overview*

15 The quality of teaching is very good in each area of learning. Teaching by all practitioners is satisfactory or better in all sessions. In 85 per cent of these it is good or better. This includes 35 per cent of sessions where the teaching is very good or excellent. The high quality of teaching is fully reflected in the quality of children's learning. The school has improved the already good quality of teaching reported by the last inspection.

### *Teamwork is a strength*

16 Teachers and nursery nurses share responsibility for leading short, tightly-focused teaching sessions with small groups of ten children. They take turns in leading registration and story times with the class groups of twenty. This gives each practitioner some time for resource organisation and recording of assessments. All practitioners play a full and equal part in supervising and supporting learning during the general activity time, when all children

have access to the full range of nursery facilities. Joint planning, preparation and teamwork are major strengths underpinning the quality of the teaching in both directed and chosen activities.

17 Staff deploy learning support assistants very effectively. They give particularly sensitive and caring support to children with statements of special educational need and other children who require additional support with their emotional, behavioural and learning needs. All staff know children well. They share their observations with each other. Each member of staff assesses the progress of children in their own attached groups, making notes on what they have planned and undertaken each day, with weekly summary comments on points of particular importance. All adults earn the children's trust and help them to feel secure through the positive way they relate to each individual, listening, encouraging and praising, in order to build each child's self-esteem.

*Teaching communication, language, literacy and mathematical skills*

18 Staff look for opportunities to promote children's communication, language and literacy through conversation alongside activities set up throughout the nursery, both indoors and out, during focused group times and open activity times. They also plan to include structured opportunities for children to experience a range of activities to do with number, calculation, shape, space and measures. They promote children's mathematical development again in a variety of contexts throughout the nursery, not just in the designated mathematics resource area. Practitioners' conversation, questioning and prompting of children to use mathematical language was more clearly focused during registration, small group, snack and review, and story times than when coming alongside children during their chosen activity times. In the best examples, staff encourage children to explain what they are doing and clarify their understanding by asking questions and giving each child the time and attention needed to make a response. Occasionally, during children's chosen activity time staff take on a passive supervisory role. On these few occasions, the teaching and learning is still satisfactory because of the planning and organisational strengths behind the activities. However, it is not as effective as when staff are more actively engaged in questioning and assessing. Staff make excellent use of songs and rhymes in registration, group times, 'assemblies' and story times. On a number of occasions, staff used little rhymes and songs particularly effectively to help each of the ten children in their group to plan or comment in turn. One simple, but very effective strategy to help each child feel special was to roll a ball to each in turn while singing a rhyme including the child's name. Each individual felt recognised in turn by the whole group and all of the others enjoyed waiting to hear their name.

*Equal opportunity through close observation, assessment and record keeping*

19 Staff take care to offer equal opportunity to boys and girls in discussions and activities. They work hard to avoid gender bias in their provision of materials and resources and in their use of displays. Time allocated to activities led by the adults is very well balanced with time allocated for children to explore more freely. This thoughtfully structured mixture of directed and chosen activities offers all practitioners regular opportunity to observe and assess children. It builds in time for staff to share responsibility for leading group times and setting up resources. It includes time to record notes tracking children's progress. It offers time for some monitoring. It promotes very good personal, social and emotional development.

20 Staff keep very good records of how children are getting on and share these with each other to ensure that they meet the needs of all children. As a result of joint planning and assessment, staff have a picture of each child's current levels of achievement. Children who are moving on quickly learn very successfully because they enjoy the challenges available. Children who have special needs learn very successfully because close assessments help staff focus on areas needing particular support. Children of all abilities achieve very well because they receive an appropriate balance of challenge and support. Teachers have

regular day-to-day informal contact with many parents and carers. They send books home and items that children have made so that parents and children can talk together about the stories and discuss what they have done in the nursery. The nursery organises little formal contact between practitioners and parents unless children have special educational needs or there is a specific issue to discuss. Despite the very good informal contact, this lack of formal review opportunities leaves some parents without a sufficiently clear picture of how their children are getting on.

#### *Teaching and support for pupils with special educational needs*

21 Pupils with special educational needs are taught very well. Each child has clear personal targets based on their particular areas of need, which are known by all staff. Within the activities and group sessions staff take care to support and encourage these children in relation to their particular needs. This helps these children to make very good progress towards the targets set for them. Children with statements of special educational need have extra adult support and this enables them to work alongside their friends on very similar activities. These children also make very good progress. In one session, for example, a child with significant learning difficulties worked in a group to make a book of 'patterns'. She coped well and understood what she had to do because the teacher and learning support assistant gave her very good support. The attached assistants complete a home-school diary daily for each child with a statement, so that parents have a full picture of what their children are achieving.

#### *Summary*

22 Overall, the effective routines, the accessibility of resources and the purposeful atmosphere reflect the highly successful levels of teamwork and organisation. The nursery staff are professional in their approach and show children their expectations. As a result, children feel secure and confident. They thrive on the opportunities and conversation offered and learn very successfully.

## **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO CHILDREN?**

#### *A stimulating learning environment*

23 Rich learning opportunities are provided for the children, enabling them to learn through exploration and play. The activities planned are varied and interesting. They are firmly based on the new curriculum for the foundation stage and help children to develop skills, knowledge and understanding in the six areas of learning. This very good provision has been developed well since the last inspection.

#### *Careful organisation*

24 There is a very good balance between activities that are initiated by members of staff and tasks which children plan and choose for themselves. Children and staff also come together for an 'assembly' towards the end of each session. When children start at nursery they join a small 'Beatrix Potter' group, who are attached to two key members of staff and work with them on activities which they direct. The children remain as 'rabbits', 'kittens', 'ducks', 'mice', 'hedgehogs' or 'squirrels' for their three or four terms at Rye Park. This helps them develop very close relationships with a small number of other children and adults. They also have the opportunity to work with other adults and children in the 'activity time' session.

25 The nursery is divided into three main areas: the yellow area (communication, language and literacy), the green area (mathematical and scientific) and the pink area (creative). Staff set up the activities for their small groups in each of these areas in turn on a fortnightly basis and this helps to keep the lively momentum going. During the week of the inspection the

yellow area was not as popular during the 'activity time' session as the rest of the nursery. Apart from the computers, there were not enough interesting activities to grab children's imaginations or encourage their enjoyment of books. The outside area is also used well, for part of each session, as a basis for work in all areas of learning.

#### *Meeting all children's needs*

26 The school's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all children underpins its written policies and is evident in the everyday life of the nursery. There is no difference in the planning for morning and afternoon sessions, for example, and parents are able to opt for the session that suits them best. The display in the school's entrance hall exemplifies its celebration of diverse cultures, with welcome greetings in many languages. Close informal contact with parents and thorough assessment ensure that the school meets the needs of pupils from all ethnic backgrounds. The commitment to equal opportunities is especially strong in relation to the provision for children with special educational needs. These children undertake the same activities as their friends, but receive extra support from a teacher, nursery nurse or learning support assistant. Staff are mindful of these children's individual learning needs and give them particular help and attention in areas where they need it most.

#### *Providing for children's personal development*

27 Overall, there is very good provision for the development of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and this too has been developed well since the last inspection. Helping children to develop personal and social skills lies at the heart of the curriculum and is planned for very effectively. Clear daily routines give children a sense of security and help them to measure the passing of the session. Each child works particularly closely with two practitioners and the very good relationships formed provide a firm foundation for children to develop their own skills in this area.

28 Every opportunity is taken to help children to appreciate the wonder of creation and the excitement of learning. They are given time to reflect on what they have learnt and this helps them to develop a spiritual dimension. In one story session, for example, the teacher read Martin Waddell's 'Owl Babies' to her group. She gave them plenty of time to think about what was happening in the story and at one point a child whispered, '*This is going to be sad*'.

29 Staff are very clear about the behaviour expected in the nursery and children respond well to these high expectations. School routines are well established and children know that they have to walk inside the building, listen carefully in group times and 'assemblies' and tidy up at the end of sessions. Staff also encourage children to be kind to each other. They praise children who manage this well and are patient, and yet firm, with those who find this more difficult. Consequently children are clear about the difference between right and wrong.

30 Many opportunities are provided for children to develop their social skills. These are especially rich during the 'activity time' when children play and work with and alongside their friends in a range of situations. A group of children co-operated well for an extended period moving boats along water-filled channels, for example. In another area of the nursery children worked together to build high towers from lego. At other times children learn to take turns, when choosing their biscuit at snack time, for example. They are also taught to think of others and at the school's harvest festival, for instance, they brought in gifts to share with local residents.

31 Staff help children to appreciate the rich cultural traditions around them and the school's provision in this area is also very good. Children are taught nursery rhymes and stories that have been handed down the generations. Staff read them good quality stories by modern writers and illustrators. Children listen to music and have the opportunities to make their own music. They learn how to use their imaginations and enjoy painting, printing, drawing and

working with clay and fabrics. They learn about festivals from a range of cultures, such as Chinese New Year, Diwali and Christmas.

#### *Links with the community*

32 There are good links with the local community. These include visits from and to local playgroups, which help children to make a confident start in the nursery. Local colleges and secondary schools also send students to Rye Park on work experience. A very good partnership is being developed with the neighbouring church and the recent harvest and Christmas services were highlights of the term.

#### *Moving to the next school*

33 Children move on from Rye Park to a range of local primary schools. There are good preparations made for this next step in children's formal education. Reception teachers are invited to the nursery to meet the children and the school sends very detailed information about each child's skills, knowledge and understanding to their next school.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS CHILDREN?**

#### *Strong levels of care and guidance*

34 The experienced, caring staff know the children and their families very well and this helps to create a warm, safe and secure environment. The grouping arrangements help to ensure consistent monitoring and support by the same adult throughout each child's time in the nursery. The children also have the benefits of working with other adults during their time in the school. The thorough, well-established policies for behaviour, health and safety and child protection are reviewed annually. Staff are familiar with these policies and there is frequent informal and formal sharing of information. The school has maintained the strong levels of care and guidance reported by the last inspection.

35 There is great consistency in child management and expectations are made clear to the children and reinforced well. If any significant difficulties arise within groups the staff employ a good range of strategies to contain and improve the situation for the benefit of all. All staff are aware of child protection procedures. There is good communication and liaison between the local health, social and family support services. The school monitors attendance well and contacts parents promptly if there are significant periods of absence.

36 All key aspects of health and safety and security are covered effectively. All staff are alert to potential hazards in their work areas and there is good supervision of the children at all times. Regular health and safety inspections of the premises and equipment are recorded properly. There are very good arrangements to manage any accidents or illness.

#### *Arrangements for assessing children's attainment and progress*

37 Assessment arrangements were good at the time of the last inspection and this remains a strong area. The school has very good procedures in place for assessing children's skills, understanding and knowledge and for measuring how quickly they are making progress. Within a few weeks of starting school, staff assess children using a range of assessments devised by the local authority. These not only give a picture of how each child is doing, but also enable the school to make comparisons with the achievements of children starting in other nursery schools and classes in Hertfordshire.

38 Children's achievements are noted on a very regular basis, with staff making daily notes on strides forward made by individual children. Children who find difficulty in particular areas are also noted. These notes are used to complete each child's 'Record of Achievement', which is updated regularly and shows achievements in all areas of learning. At the time of



the last inspection the school was moving towards incorporating assessments on entry onto this record and there is now a space to do this. This record covers the whole of the foundation stage and is sent to the reception teacher in the child's receiving school. This is very useful in providing the child's new teacher with a clear profile of how well the child is doing.

#### *Using assessment to guide planning*

39 Assessments made when children start at the nursery indicate that they are a little behind their peers in the areas of communication, language and literacy and in their mathematical development. Consequently there is a particular emphasis on helping children to develop their skills in these areas. Staff know children well and use this understanding to help individual children, in their use of questioning, for example.

#### *Using assessment to provide support for all children*

40 Staff use their understanding of children's needs to support all of them well. Children with special learning needs are identified early and given appropriate help. Staff draw up special plans for these children and share the targets set for them with their parents and carers. Children with statements of special educational need are carefully assessed by both the school and other agencies, such as the advisory teacher. As a result of this these children are provided with extra help, which enables them to make very good progress.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

#### *Overview*

41 The school has maintained its strong partnership with parents since the last inspection. This is due to the conscientious leadership of the senior teacher during the illness of the previous headteacher and to the very positive attitudes towards partnership shared by the current headteacher.

#### *Parents' views*

42 Parents are very positive about all areas of school life. The inspection fully endorses parents' positive views about the standards achieved, children's behaviour and the high quality of leadership, teaching, nurture and care. Among the questionnaires only one parent tended to disagree that behaviour is good. Two disagreed with the view that they are well informed about progress and the possibility of more regular review meetings was also suggested at the parents' meeting. At the meeting there was universal praise for all of the staff and for the high standards of care and of children's personal development. The parents' and community's high regard for the school is also clear from their substantial lobbying just over two years ago to ensure the continuation of nursery school provision in the area.

#### *Information for parents*

43 Parents feel well informed about school life, routines and events through the well-presented newsletters, prospectus and annual governors' reports. Staff are very accessible to parents throughout their children's time at the school. Parents are able to discuss the baseline assessments, which are carried out during the first term at school. They are also given comprehensive, carefully composed end-of-nursery reports, together with their child's full record of achievement and 'work' portfolio, before their children transfer to infant schools. These documents are discussed at a parent-teacher review of each child's progress at the end of their time in the nursery. The school does not routinely set up opportunities for parents and carers of all children to review their children's progress during their time at the nursery. To a large extent, the need for this is obviated through the good informal links. However, a few parents who have less day-to-day contact feel the need for more information on how their children are getting on and the inspection team agrees that this is an area worth

developing.

44 Staff keep parents and carers of children with special educational needs well informed about their children's progress throughout their time in the nursery. They discuss the assessments made and let them know of any special targets set and how well their children are doing. Parents of children with statements of special educational need are well informed and fully involved in the annual review of their child's statement.

#### *Parental support*

45 Parents support the school very well in all areas of school life. A small number help regularly in classrooms each week. They give substantial support for fund-raising events and most make voluntary donations each week. Parents also respond very well to any suggestions to participate in any action to improve behaviour or other aspects of their children's personal development.

### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

#### *Overview*

46 The headteacher and senior teacher give very good leadership. They ensure that the educational direction of the school is based on a clear understanding of how young children learn. They have nurtured a high level of commitment among all practitioners. The school's aims and values are fully reflected in its work, especially in the relationships between staff, children and parents. The school has fully maintained the very high quality of leadership reported in 1996.

#### *The role of the headteacher and key staff*

47 The headteacher is a very positive leader. She is very well organised and clear-thinking. She ensures that she is approachable to all staff and parents. The senior teacher is an excellent support to the headteacher. She led the school well, to ensure continuity between headteachers, prior to the current headteacher's appointment. Both work very well to create a positive team spirit and ensure that all staff receive recognition for their commitment. All have a part to play in contributing to the nursery's ethos. Staff accept delegated co-ordinator roles and undertake these efficiently, monitoring planning and sampling activities pursued within the subject for which they have responsibility. They also manage the delegated resources budget for their subject area.

#### *Development planning underpins the school's work*

48 School development planning has benefited from the innovation of a conference day involving all staff and as many governors as possible. All staff are fully committed to continuous review and improvement. As a result of staff dedication and a very positive ethos, the school has every capacity to succeed. All children are valued. Their progress is monitored closely and the team shares high expectations that all children will do as well as they can. Each practitioner maintains a working copy of an action plan derived from the full school development plan. The school's mission statement, its aims and values are fully reflected in its work with children, its organised routines and resources, and positive staff relationships with parents and children. Development planning contains no long-term view, however, as the school feels this is dependent on local education authority strategy concerning proposals for the adjoining empty building. This outlook prevents the school embracing and working towards a vision for integrated early years and young family provision, as outlined at the time of the previous inspection. This is still a cherished aspiration of the current leadership.

#### *Monitoring of staff and delegation of roles*

49 Systems for staff appraisal and for monitoring and evaluation of teaching and of children's progress are very good. The headteacher maintains the high quality of relationships and effective teamwork among all staff by involving everyone in planning and reviewing the work of the school and by holding annual professional development interviews with all teachers, nursery nurses and learning support assistants. Each nursery nurse and teacher, whether working full-time or part-time, takes on a co-ordination responsibility for a subject within each area of learning. Teachers take responsibility for minuting fortnightly joint planning meetings and distributing copies. They are also responsible for the writing of children's end-of-nursery reports. The headteacher is keenly aware of the equal commitment shown by full-time and part-time staff, learning support assistants, nursery nurses and teachers. Together with the governors, she seeks to offer parity in opportunities for staff development for nursery nurses and teachers, in ICT training for instance. At the same time, the school requires appropriate additional record-keeping and reporting responsibilities for teachers, in view of qualification and salary differentials. Given the high proportion of part-time staff, the school strikes an appropriate balance in terms of shared responsibilities and opportunities for all staff.

#### *The role of the governing body*

50 Governors offer positive background support to the school. When active involvement was required, as at the time of a threat to close the school just over two years ago, they proved effective lobbyists. Frequent changes in the composition of the governing body have weakened its overall effectiveness, but the chair has offered an element of consistency. He has been ably supported by a knowledgeable vice-chair, who shares a clear vision of the possibilities for extended provision for children in their early years and young families. Because of the short-term nature of parents' association with the nursery, few take on the responsibility of parent governor for any length of time. With the exception of the chair, vice-chair and staff members, the governing body lacks experience and expertise. The school is aware that there is still work to do to inform the governing body and raise the profile of its role as critical friend. Nevertheless, procedures are sound and the governors ensure that the school meets all statutory requirements.

#### *Equal opportunities*

51 The headteacher also manages the work with children who have special educational needs. She is experienced in this area, particularly with children who have communication difficulties. She offers very good support to staff. There are three children with statements of special educational need and all statutory requirements related to these statements are met.

52 The school values all of its children and aims to provide everyone with a rich learning experience. The school's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all, summarised in its equal opportunities policy, underpins management decisions. Currently, however, the school is not adapted for children with mobility or specific physical difficulties. There is no disabled lavatory, for example, and no low-level shower available to use if necessary. The school has raised this issue with the local education authority, as facilities for a disabled child will shortly be required. Plans have been drawn up to adapt facilities in an adjacent, disused building.

#### *Consultation in priority and budget setting*

53 There is wide consultation of staff and governors in deciding key areas for school development. The agreed priorities are important elements in the subsequent financial planning and budget-setting. There is some consideration of the effects of possible future developments on staffing and resourcing. Governors are more active in planning and monitoring the budget than at the time of the last inspection.

#### *Positive support from administrative staff*

54 Financial management and control are very good and owe much to the experienced bursar and administrative assistant. The finance service contract is very good value for money. The financial and other school records are in very good order and there are clear, easily accessible filing systems. The very good systems and organisation in the office ensure that the school runs very smoothly. This is particularly impressive in view of the complexities of the half-day attendance of children and the high proportion of part-time staff. Parents contacting or visiting the school for the first time find a helpful response and a warm welcome. This is in no small part due to the calm and friendly manner of the administrative assistant. The most recent auditors' report in January 2000 confirmed the very good financial procedures and records in the school. The few minor suggestions for additional procedures have been implemented.

#### *Application of the principles of best value*

55 The school applies the principles of best value well. There is a good degree of consultation and good challenge in use of parental support and other sources of additional funding. The building services contract ensures competitive tendering. All contracts are reviewed annually and the school is prepared to make alternative arrangements to secure better value for money. For example, the school has changed from the relatively expensive county library loan scheme to a more economical alternative. There is currently limited benchmarking information on nursery schools to enable the school to make comparisons with other institutions.

#### *Staffing, accommodation and learning resources*

56 Staffing levels are good and accommodation is very good overall. Both building and grounds offer high quality facilities. Staff use these efficiently. The only drawbacks are the shortage of staff toilet facilities (there is only one in the whole building) and the lack of accessible toilet and bathroom facilities for disabled children. Learning resources are sufficient and of very good quality. Staff have organised them particularly well, making them attractive and accessible to children. All areas of learning are well resourced and the school is well maintained. Staff use budgets effectively to replenish and add resources, though after the first year of budgeting for co-ordinators, the headteacher is aware that there is a need to review budget planning in order to prioritise funding for certain resources.

#### *Efficiency*

57 Overall, the school makes very effective use of the staff, buildings and learning resources. It accounts properly for any earmarked expenditure for special educational needs and improving school effectiveness. The staff make good use of information technology to support teaching, planning, record-keeping and administration.

#### *Effectiveness and value for money*

58 Rye Park is a very effective school. The attainment of the children on entry to the school is slightly below average and the socio-economic circumstances of their families are wide-ranging, but broadly average. The unit costs per pupil are average in comparison with similar schools. Taking these together with the good attainment, very good progress and personal development of the children and the high standards of teaching, the school is giving very good value for money.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

59 The headteacher, governing body & staff with management responsibilities should:

- Ensure that appropriate and sufficient toilet and washroom facilities for staff and for children with physical disabilities are made available.  
(reference paragraphs 52, 56)

Within the very strong picture overall, a few areas of the school's provision are satisfactory, rather than good or very good. These may offer a useful list of minor issues for consideration during development planning review:

- The use of the yellow area during activity time, particularly for encouraging the enjoyment of books. (paragraphs 25, 71-73)
- The offer of more formal opportunities for parents and carers to review children's progress together with the teaching team. (paragraphs 20, 42, 43)
- Analysis and spread of the best practice of staff conversation, observation and assessment alongside children during activity times. (paragraphs 18, 76)
- Development of a long-term vision to extend the range of services attached to the nursery. (paragraphs 48, 50)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of sessions observed	20
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	27

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	30	50	15	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

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Nursery
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	48

FTE means full-time equivalent.

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	10

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and support staff**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	152

Number of pupils per FTE adult	6.0
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*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Financial information**

Financial year	2001
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Total income	219562
Total expenditure	224705
Expenditure per pupil	1873
Balance brought forward from previous year	17589
Balance carried forward to next year	12446

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	96
Number of questionnaires returned	41

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	88	10	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	68	22	0	0	10
Behaviour in the school is good.	56	32	2	0	10
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	12	5	0	63
The teaching is good.	85	10	0	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	51	34	5	2	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	93	7	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	34	44	0	0	22
The school works closely with parents.	59	39	0	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	88	10	0	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	76	22	0	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	20	0	0	39

*Percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number and may therefore not total exactly 100.*

A high proportion of the percentages in the 'Don't know' column derive from questionnaire replies which stipulated that certain questions on the form were inappropriate for nursery schools.



## **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, social and emotional development**

60 Children move forward very quickly in their personal, social and emotional development at Rye Park because of the very high profile the staff give to supporting the development of these skills. They place great emphasis on enabling children to increase their independence through engagement in stimulating and interesting play activities. Consequently, most children are well set to reach the early learning goals in this area by the time they reach the end of the foundation stage. Many are set to reach them by the time they leave the nursery. Staff appointed to oversee the progress of each small group keep a careful record to note children's progress through the stepping stones towards the early learning goals. Very good teaching promotes positive personal, social and emotional development. The school has maintained and further developed the standards reported at the last inspection.

#### *Taking responsibility*

61 Staff make learning exciting for the children by providing a range of very interesting activities each day. Children are expected to plan what they do for part of the session. Most manage this very well. They select two or three activities, tell the adult working with their group what they intend to do and then move independently to play in the area they have identified. Most remain fully engaged in their chosen tasks for some time.

#### *Security, independence and a sense of belonging*

62 Children work so well independently because they feel secure and staff have given them the confidence to use the facilities. They trust and like the staff. Most children part easily from their parents and carers at the beginning of each session. The one or two who feel a little upset initially, soon settle happily. Children are helped to feel secure because they begin each session in a small group with a well-known adult. They quickly identify with their own group and happily engage in activities as 'rabbits', 'kittens' or 'squirrels' for example. This sense of belonging is reinforced by the shared snack and review time, when children enjoy some refreshment and talk about what they have learnt.

#### *Relationships - learning to respect themselves and others*

63 Most children form very good relationships with their peers and adults. They clearly understand the conventions established in the nursery and know what it is to take turns and share. Sometimes one or two children find this more difficult, but they are well supported by staff. Most are very friendly and enjoy playing alongside or with their friends. Most children are also clear about the difference between right and wrong. This is taught well by staff, who concentrate on the positive. 'Let's have kind hands', for example, when one little boy banged against another.

#### *Looking after themselves and their surroundings*

64 Most children look after themselves well. They manage to visit the lavatory unaided and blow their own noses. They put their coats on to go outside, although some have difficulties with the fastenings. They are taught to take care of their possessions and put paintings and drawings in their own drawers ready to take home at the end of school. Most are good at tidying up, responding sensibly as the session draws to a close. They manage this well because staff have established sensible routines and signals, such as the playing of music when it's time to tidy away and settle for assembly.

#### *Self-esteem and attitudes towards others*

65 Some children are beginning to build up an awareness of the differences between the people that they know. They are kind and caring to children with special needs, for example. Staff help them to appreciate that differences between cultural traditions are sometimes occasions for celebration, such as Christmas festivities and Chinese New Year. As a result of the care and interest shown by staff, all children feel good about themselves. They know the kind of behaviour expected of them and they enjoy the praise and encouragement given, particularly in the daily recognition in 'assembly' of the achievements of one child from each group. A 'thumb up' sign from Handy Andy, a large glove puppet, brings a glow to each face in turn as the chosen children return the greeting in acknowledgement.

### **Communication, language and literacy**

66 Children make very good progress in the development of their communication, language and literacy skills because of the very good teaching in this area. Also, the co-ordinator gives a strong lead in maintaining a clear focus on this area of learning during planning and through monitoring. Most children are well set to reach the early learning goals before the end of the foundation stage. They are well on their way to meeting these by the time they leave the nursery. This maintains the good standards reported at the last inspection.

#### *Communication through speaking and signing*

67 Every opportunity is provided for children to communicate with one another and with the adults in the nursery. Staff often initiate discussion in small group times and when they are alongside children in 'activity' sessions. Children respond well to these questions and older children use increasingly complex sentences in reply. In one session, for example, a small group was on a scavenger hunt in the nursery garden. This provided great scope for discussion, one child asking '*Can you feel the strong wind?*' while another commented '*I can see a bird house*'. Children are also taught to sign, so that those with difficulties in the area of spoken language are not isolated. Signing is used to say 'please' and 'thank you' and sometimes to accompany songs, for example. In one planning session, when children were deciding what they were going to do, the member of staff signed the choices for them.

#### *Communication through listening*

68 Very good attention is paid to the development of children's listening skills. In most 'assemblies', for example, mention is made of 'whole body listening' and children are reminded of what that involves. Most manage to listen well for extended periods, both in 'assemblies' and also at story times. They show that they are involved in what is being said by maintaining eye contact with the speaker and nodding and smiling at what is being said. Most listen to their friends carefully. They take turns, for example, in talking about what they have done in the work sessions and listen sensibly to each other.

#### *Extending vocabulary and developing confidence*

69 Staff are careful to help children extend their vocabulary. They envelop children in challenging and stimulating language. They talk to them about what they are doing and teach them new words. In one session, for example, a small boy was using a water pump to move water. A member of staff worked alongside him to help him to do this more effectively and explained that he was 'pumping' water. Some minutes later, when the adult had moved away, the boy excitedly explained to his friends '*I'm pumping water.*'

70 Most children speak confidently and the nursery sessions are well planned so that all children have the opportunity to speak and communicate to adults and children. Children are expected to answer the register, for example, to tell the staff member their plans for the session and to report back on what they have done. Children also talk to their friends while they are playing with or alongside them. Some are beginning to use talk to clarify their own

thinking. One boy, for example, talked about his proposed holiday. He explained that he was going on an aeroplane, that the weather would be hot and he would have to wear sun cream. He used talk well to describe an event not yet experienced.

#### *Recognising sounds and symbols and making marks - the beginning of reading and writing*

71 Staff pay very good attention to helping children to understand the relationship between sounds, words and meaning. There is an appropriate emphasis on singing rhymes and songs and so children are developing an appreciation of rhyming sounds. Staff also draw children's attention to initial sounds of words and encourage them to relate sounds to letters. In one assembly, for example, the headteacher talked about the initial sounds of 'caterpillar', 'monkey' and 'lion'. The majority of children put up their hands because they felt they knew the letter 'C', which one girl correctly identified as a 'curly c'. Children then joined to trace a C in the air and sang 'A caterpillar, a caterpillar', again tracing the letter 'C' with their fingers. This work on developing an awareness of initial sounds is reinforced well by work on computer programs. The computers are sited in the 'yellow' area, which is designated as a language area. Children enjoy working on their own or in twos on the computers. Generally this area was not used as much as the other areas during the inspection period, partly because the activities planned for this area did not grasp children's imaginations sufficiently.

#### *Early experiences with books and reading*

72 Children enjoy books and stories. They are encouraged to take books home to share with their parents or carers, who come and choose books from the library with their children at the beginning of each session. There is a good range of interesting and high quality books available for the children. These are kept in the little room in each area and in the library in the 'yellow' area. Books are changed regularly so that there is always something fresh for the children. The library was not used a great deal by children during the inspection, however, and staff were not observed sitting alongside children to encourage them by sharing books with them in this area. Staff do read with the children though. In one session two boys shared a book about transport with a teacher and were fascinated by the illustrations and the information given. Story time is a focal point for many sessions and at these times children sit in groups engrossed by the story. In one session about 'The Old Woman who swallowed a fly', for example, children were fascinated by what happened. The story was brought alive by the use of soft toys to accompany the unfolding plot. Children clearly understand that print conveys meaning and are familiar with the conventions of English text in books, with print running from left to right and pages turning from right to left. Many children recognise their own names in print.

73 Some children are beginning to make their own marks to convey meaning in written form. Currently the veterinary surgery in the role play area provides a good opportunity for this as children book appointments in the diary for sick animals. There are opportunities for children to write in the 'yellow' area, but the writing corner is not sufficiently stimulating to attract children to this work and few children worked there during the inspection. As they become older children are encouraged to write their own names on their work. Samples of children's work from those who moved to primary school last Christmas show that they are beginning to write labels and captions.

### **Mathematical development**

74 This area of learning receives appropriate emphasis in all practitioners' planning. Staff make good use of daily routines and opportunities within all areas of the nursery to use mathematical language and pose mathematical questions. As a result, children of all abilities achieve well. They develop good understanding and use of mathematical language. By the time children move on to reception classes in neighbouring schools, most have met the early

learning goals for mathematical development and a few have exceeded them. Only a few with special educational needs still have some way to go to meet the goals. The school has maintained the good standards reported in this area of learning at the last inspection.

*During directed registration, small group, assembly and story times*

75 Children participate enthusiastically in the mathematical activities planned for directed group times. They sing and recite number rhymes and songs with gusto, becoming familiar with the concepts of adding and taking away, as they join in 'ten in the bed' or 'five little speckled frogs'. Children in their first or second term at the nursery enjoy watching four glove puppet elephants dancing on a spider's web and guess how many are hiding beneath the sheet when only one or two are dancing. Adults ensure that learning is active and fun for the children during small group times, when up to ten children participate in activities such as making sandwiches. They count out the number of plates and knives needed and name the shapes after cutting triangular or rectangular sandwiches. During one registration, children kept count of how many children were absent, matching a finger to each absent child named. In another, all the children tried to keep a check as one boy independently counted the nineteen children present. In each registration room there are mathematical displays, showing how staff involve children in comparing and combining numbers. Children and adults have worked together to create collage picture charts of favourite colours and breakfasts, to compare how many children prefer one or the other, for instance. A vivid display of ladybirds with different numbers of dots offers adults and children further stimulus for conversation about 'how many', 'more', 'less' and 'fewer'.

*During children's chosen activity times*

76 Labels throughout the nursery help children to recognise, match and sequence numbers. Whether indoors or in the outdoor area, staff encourage children to sort, match and count, conversing with small groups about the number of flowers planted in a pot, for example. They ensure that regular and irregular two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes are available and accessible. Children complete jigsaw puzzles, choosing whether to tackle those with twelve pieces or more, up to twenty. They use sand-timers to see if they can complete set activities before the sand runs out. They fill and empty containers in sand and water areas both indoors and outdoors. Children's readiness and ability to learn mathematical concepts and use mathematical language during activity times stems from the fact that they have chosen activities with inherent mathematical possibilities. The role of the adults, having prepared the resources, is to come alongside and draw them into structured mathematical conversation. The quality of interactions observed in this situation was not usually as strong as in the small group times and registration sessions. Staff plan an exciting array of activities which include opportunities for mathematical experience and children learn well through their take-up of the well-planned activities. However, the adults' focus on specifically mathematical conversation and observational assessment was not clearly evident during the inspection. Nevertheless the overall quality of children's learning in this setting is good, because of the adult expectations in the routines and the careful organisation of options.

*Teaching strengths*

77 The quality of teaching in this area of learning is very good overall. All staff use a common system for assessing children's progress. They note achievements against activities undertaken each week in order to update assessment booklets regularly for each child, using a bank of statements. Staff have organised resources well and ensure that they are accessible. They make very good use of displays and labels to stimulate children's interest in numbers. Photographs show how a display of an enormous dinosaur and an array of snakes were used as focal points to develop children's understanding of size and length. Children also portrayed a giant abacus by gluing rows of coloured circles to match the abacus beads and used this alongside the apparatus for counting.

### *Routines, planning, reviews and assessment*

78 The children's awareness of the regular routines of each nursery session gives them a good initial concept of time. Mathematical activities are a focus for each group of children on at least two of the directed group sessions each week. The co-ordinator keeps an updated overall picture of the action taken to meet objectives within this area of learning, as agreed for the current year's development plan. Children's learning is appropriately assessed and recorded, using agreed Hertfordshire assessment statements as benchmarks.

## **Knowledge and understanding of the world**

79 The school has maintained the good standards reported at the last inspection. Children develop their knowledge and understanding of the world very successfully as a result of the very good planning, teaching and support given in this area of learning. By the time they leave the nursery, the majority have met the early learning goals in knowledge and understanding of the world, set for the end of the foundation stage.

### *Early experiences linked to science*

80 During their three or four terms at the nursery, all children participate in an extensive range of activities, both indoors and in the outdoor area, during which adults engage them in focused conversation. Children learn how plants grow by talking about seeds they have planted and watching plants such as cress, mustard and various types of bean grow. Much of their early knowledge of science stems from activities linked to seasonal themes, such as fruits at harvest time, feeding birds through the winter, new life in the spring and the life cycle of the butterfly, observed first hand through the summer term. Staff ensure that children learn about a variety of cultures through science-linked themes, celebrating Chinese New Year by tasting foods and Diwali while investigating light, for example.

### *Early concepts of history and geography*

81 Children's knowledge of history is linked to mathematical development as they learn to use the language of time. They use the language of time well, during the regular routines of finding the name of the day and discussing which day was yesterday and which will it be tomorrow. Children look back to when they were babies and learn about how they have grown. Children experience early studies of geography by using their outside and indoor environment. They discuss the weather daily. Some have recorded plans, showing where certain items are positioned in a particular area of the nursery, for instance. Staff use, and encourage children to use, the language of direction and place. Displays show 'how we used to wash clothes' and pictures of people and languages from a variety of cultures. These all help promote children's knowledge and understanding of the neighbourhood in which they live and the wider world.

### *Early ICT, design and technology skills*

82 Children also make very good use of opportunities to develop keyboard and mouse skills and to use computer programs and other information and communication technology equipment, such as listening centres. Children are confident in their use of ICT equipment. They also make very good use of the wide variety of construction and modelling equipment to develop their early skills in planning and making things. A display of modelling using recyclable materials shows a 'Buzz Lightyear spacerocket' and 'a cupboard for my toys' amidst a varied array of imaginatively-labelled completed articles. Photographs in records of achievement show children proudly showing various items they have constructed with the building, fixing and moulding materials available. Children show high levels of independence and concentration when exploring ways of using resources for making and constructing. This stems from the staff's attention to detail in organising resources and making these readily accessible.

## **Physical development**

83 Early assessments show that the physical skills of children starting the nursery are typical of children in other Hertfordshire nursery classes. Children at Rye Park make very good progress in their physical development and almost all reach the early learning goals by the time they leave. Only a very small number of children with special educational needs are still working towards them. This maintains the positive picture reported at the last inspection.

### *Outdoor activities*

84 Children use the extensive and varied facilities in the outdoor area particularly successfully to develop good co-ordination. Staff supervise and give encouraging verbal support as children use their chosen pieces of equipment. Children show very good balancing skills as they step slowly along two narrow beams erected over the grassed area. An assistant gave gently physical support to a child wanting to copy the achievements of others, but needing a hand to do so. Most children climb with good agility, a few showing well-developed muscular control and determination as they swing on parallel rungs on a climbing frame erected above a safe shredded bark landing. All children pedal, push and steer wheeled vehicles and pushchairs, directing them along marked roadways and sometimes chalking their own routes. Adults encourage safe and challenging use of the equipment, ensuring that children take turns and that they have someone to share the success of what they are trying out or achieving.

### *Indoor activities*

85 Indoors, children also develop good hand-eye co-ordination and dexterity in their use of woodwork tools, brushes and spatulas, pencils and crayons. Having prepared the activities and discussed the options with children, staff situate themselves alongside children, offering very good support through questioning and commentary. They give children the confidence to experiment, while ensuring that they know how to hold the tools and equipment correctly. Where close supervision is required, as during the use of woodwork tools or staplers, for example, an adult is always on hand before children have access to the equipment. In this situation, the adults teach responsible and safe use of tools, whereas for the most part, children are free to choose independently. They make good choices because of the clarity of the adults' explanations of what is available and because of the ready accessibility of the well-organised equipment. Directed activities during small group times offer ideal opportunities for nursery practitioners to teach specific skills. During the inspection, groups of children successfully made sandwiches, using knives carefully to spread butter and fillings and to cut into triangular or rectangular shapes.

### *Action, song and dance*

86 During action songs, rhymes and dance sessions, children clap, jump, hop and respond through body movement to a wide array of musical stimuli. As well as the creative use of ribbons to stimulate a variety of smooth dance movements, staff use exciting stimuli such as a play parachute to develop children's collaborative skills in a fun context. Through regular participation in the whole range of activities planned, children are developing positive attitudes to energetic physical activity. Thoughtful planning and regular monitoring by staff ensure that all children gain a lot from the wide range of opportunities for physical development.

## **Creative development**

87 The very positive picture indicated by the last inspection has been maintained and developed well in this area. Children make great strides in their creative development

because of the very good teaching and the wide range of interesting activities planned. Children due to move to their primary school in September are well on their way to reaching the early learning goals for the foundation stage. There is good attention paid to all areas of creative development.

#### *Art*

88 The 'pink' area is used well for children to experiment with paint, printing, clay and other media. There are usually at least three activities for children to choose from. A member of staff often supports one of these activities in order to give specific help, or to teach new skills. During the inspection, for example, children worked with staff to make prints from 'bubble wrap'. They managed this well because of the effective adult support and produced colourful and lively prints. Other children worked with clay or paint in the sessions seen. They enjoyed manipulating the clay and some produced 'cakes' and 'biscuits'. Other children worked with paint to explore colour, using brushes carefully. Another group used clear water to 'paint' the nursery walls and were proud of their achievements. Records of planning and samples of children's work show that there is a good range of carefully planned activities through the year.

#### *Music*

89 A day does not pass without children singing an action rhyme, nursery rhyme or song. Consequently, children are building up a good repertoire of songs, which they enjoy singing. Staff take appropriate opportunities to sing with children during small group sessions. Sometimes the register is sung and this helps children to gain confidence in singing on their own. Each class also has a small collection of musical instruments, which an adult introduces from time to time. Staff also give children the experience of listening to music. A piece of music, for example, signals the end of the 'activity' sessions and the beginning of assembly. Each group is also timetabled for a weekly music session in the 'Teal' room.

#### *Dance*

90 Staff work well with children in small groups to help them to dance. In one very good session seen, a member of staff worked with nine children to make patterns with ribbons. Children did well because the nursery nurse was very clear in her instructions. They made patterns with the ribbons by running, turning and spinning and concentrated well on the activity.

#### *Role Play*

91 Staff make very good provision for children to engage in role play. The inside focus for this is in the 'green' area. At the time of the inspection this area was a veterinary surgery. The 'surgery' was extremely well equipped with toy animals, x-ray machines and veterinary equipment. There was also a receptionist's desk with telephone, appointment books and leaflets. This very good level of resourcing helped children to enter fully into their role-play. They happily x-rayed and bandaged alongside their friends and showed an understanding of how animals were treated. At times adults entered into play with them and this helped children to broaden their understanding and widen their vocabulary. A child bringing in a rabbit, for example, was guided through the sequence of making an appointment, seeing the vet and having the rabbit treated.

92 In the nursery garden there is also a role-play area. This is a little house with conventional 'home play' equipment. Children make good use of this. During the inspection, taking the babies for a walk in pushchairs was a popular pastime. Children worked well together on this. In one session, two children, one with significant communication difficulties, spent some time together taking their babies around the playground.

#### *Imaginative Play*

93 Children make very good progress in this area because many of the activities planned for them provide the freedom to extend their play imaginatively. In one session, for example, two children were building with duplo. Within a short time the bricks were transformed into rockets, helicopters and aeroplanes, and these became the centre pieces of their 'stories'. In another area of the room, children played with a farm, again making up their own adventures. There is a good range of small world toys available for children to play in a range of situations.