

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **BATFORD NURSERY SCHOOL**

Harpenden

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117068

Headteacher: Ms M. Lee

Reporting inspector: Mrs O.M.Cooper  
10859

Dates of inspection: 18 – 20 June 2001

Inspection number: 197790

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 to 4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Holcroft Road Harpenden Hertfordshire
Postcode:	AL5 5BQ
Telephone number:	01582 713872
Fax number:	01582 713118
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs E. Bresslaw
Date of previous inspection:	29 September – 2 October 1997.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Area of learning responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
10859	Mrs O.M.Cooper	Registered inspector	The Foundation Stage. Equal opportunities.	What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements; How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9399	Mr R.H.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?
30705	Mr G.Stephens	Team inspector	Special educational needs.	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**

This community nursery school is situated in a local authority housing estate in Batford but attracts many children from Harpenden a relatively affluent town a few miles away. The school caters for children from three to four years of age and currently has 118 children on roll, most attending for morning or afternoon sessions, with a very small number attending full time. A few children come from minority ethnic families and have English as an additional language. Less than ten children have special educational needs and the majority of them just need additional support in specific areas. There has been a change of headteacher since the previous inspection and, currently, one teacher is on a temporary contract. Attainment on entry to the nursery is above average for the age of the children.

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

This is a very good school that provides its children with a good start to their education. Standards are well above average for the children's age by the time they leave because teaching is very good and helps the children to achieve well. The school is very well led and managed, and the leadership of the headteacher is excellent. The school receives more funding per child than most nursery schools within the local authority but, when the cost of supporting certain community projects is taken out of the expenditure per child, the school provides good value for money.

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

- The children achieve well and, by the time they leave the nursery, standards are well above average for their age in all areas of learning.
- Teaching is very good and promotes learning very well.
- The headteacher provides excellent leadership and clear direction for school development.
- A very good range of experiences and opportunities for learning is provided each session.
- The school helps the children to become independent learners.

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

- The opportunities for parents to meet formally with members of staff to discuss their child's progress.
- The number of educational visits to places of interest.

*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 September 1997 and, since that time, good improvement has been made. The well above average standards overall have been sustained and the quality of teaching has improved. The action taken to deal with the key issues identified in the previous report has been successful in overcoming the weaknesses.

- The curricular provision has improved significantly. Many rich and interesting opportunities for learning are available during each session and children are encouraged to be independent and decide for themselves what to do for part of each session.
- Strategic planning for the longer-term development of the school is now very good.
- The work of co-ordinators has been extended as far as possible in the current circumstances of only one other permanent teacher on the staff.

The school has the commitment and capacity to make further improvement.

## STANDARDS

Standards in all areas of learning are well above average for the children's ages. Virtually all the children are on target to attain the early learning goals expected by the end of the Foundation Stage. By the time the children leave the nursery, virtually all of them are attaining the stepping stones expected for their age. A good proportion of the children are exceeding these stepping stones and are on target to attain some of the early learning goals expected by the end of their year in a reception class, which is the end of the Foundation Stage of their education. All children achieve well in all areas of learning to attain these standards, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as a second language.

The school places strong emphasis on developing the children's personal, social and emotional skills and is very successful in doing so, resulting in the well above average standards. Attainment in communication, language and literacy is well above average. The children are confident speakers and attentive listeners. They begin to understand letter sounds, learn how to form letters correctly and develop confidence in being able to communicate in writing. In mathematics, standards are well above average because the children have many opportunities to practise counting and recognise numbers. In knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development standards are well above average. A particular strength is in the confidence and independence gained from the emphasis on developing the children's personal, social and emotional skills, which help children to make good progress in other areas of learning by investigating and exploring their surroundings.

## CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. The children come happily to school and are eager to learn.
Behaviour	Very good. Children behave very well at all times. There are occasional incidents of boisterous behaviour to which staff react quickly, skilfully but sensitively and so help children to learn how to behave as a member of the school community.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships between children and all adults are very good, with high levels of mutual respect. The children respond well to opportunities to take personal responsibility for their learning. They show good understanding of the impact of their actions on others.
Attendance	Good.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	
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 teaching is very good. All of it is good or better, with 88 per cent very good or better, including 8 per cent that is excellent. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, when only 12 per cent of the teaching was very good or better. The change in the organisation of the children, and in the approach to teaching, have led to this improvement. A wide range of activities is provided, covering all areas of learning which motivate all the children to learn and make good progress.

The teaching in personal, social and emotional development is consistently very good. The children soon feel secure, gain in confidence and in the independence necessary to learn from the wide range of activities on offer each session.

In communication, language and literacy teaching is very good, all members of staff are skilled in developing the children's speaking and listening skills and take every opportunity to extend their range of vocabulary. The teaching of more specific skills in reading and writing with older and more able children is good.

The teaching of mathematical development is very 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. The planning of the activities each week is firmly based on what the children are expected to learn from the activities, and the areas of learning are very skilfully linked between the activities.

The learning needs of all children are very well met through the teaching, including those with special educational needs, the potentially gifted, or those who have English as a second language.

### **OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. A rich and diverse range of experiences and opportunities for learning is provided. The curriculum comprehensively covers all the areas of learning through a series of interesting topics and prepares the children well for the next stage of their education. However, there are very few visits planned to enrich the curriculum.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Good. One-to-one support is provided for those children who need it, although none have formal statements of their needs. Individual education plans are of good quality, with specific targets in those areas of learning where each child is having problems.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	Very good. The staff support these children well, they soon learn to speak English and are included in all activities.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. There are many opportunities planned to foster a sense of awe and wonder at the natural world and the achievements of others. The children develop good understanding for their age of the difference between right and wrong, and develop a keen awareness of their own and other cultures.
How well the school cares for its children	Very well. Child protection procedures are well embedded in the school and there is a high regard for the health, safety and well-being of the children. Arrangements for assessing attainment are excellent, starting when the children enter school, with targets for improvement set for each child each term. There are excellent systems for tracking the progress of each child against the stepping stones that lead to attaining the early learning goals, and for recording progress in records of achievement.

The school works in very close partnership with parents in most aspects and the children benefit from the involvement of parents in their learning.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides excellent leadership. She has led the recent changes very effectively, ensuring training was made available to help staff in the transition from providing adult led activities to encouraging children to build on what they already know. She has delegated responsibilities to other members of staff who are now playing their part in the development and further improvement of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governors fulfil all their statutory responsibilities and monitor the work of the school effectively. They frequently check the school's progress towards the targets in the school development plan.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has implemented effective procedures to check its performance. Teaching and planning are rigorously monitored by the headteacher and curriculum co-ordinators. Targets are set for each child and progress towards them reviewed each term.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The finances, staffing, accommodation and learning resources are used in the best interests of the children, enabling them to make good progress.

There is an excellent match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum, which allows the very spacious accommodation to be fully utilised, both indoors and out. The range and quality of learning resources is very good in all areas of learning and they are used well to promote the children's learning.

The principles of best value are applied well by the school. For example, the school makes good use of its resources to provide extended care for the children who require it, and a 'mother and toddler' group. In addition, 'opportunity classes' that provide pre-school provision for children with special educational needs and support for their parents, and a special educational needs support group for parents of children with autism.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The staff are approachable and children like coming.</li> <li>• The children are well behaved.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> <li>• The teaching is good.</li> <li>• The nursery helps children become independent and responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The opportunities to discuss their child's progress.</li> </ul>

The inspectors support the parents' positive views about the school and share their concern. Whilst there are open evenings held when parents can come along and see the work of the nursery, these do not give parents the opportunity to discuss their child's progress in privacy. A small number of letters received from parents expressed concern that a permanent teacher had not been appointed this year. This has not been detrimental to the education of the children. A permanent appointment has already been made for September.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. Overall, standards are well above average and the children achieve well. Virtually all children are on course to reach the early learning goals by the end of their time in a reception class. Many children are already attaining, and nearly all are on course to attain, the nationally agreed targets (stepping stones) for their age in personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematics; knowledge and understanding of the world; creative development and physical development. A significant proportion of children are attaining, or are close to attaining the early learning goals expected by the end of their year in a reception class. There is no noticeable variation in the attainment of boys and girls or between children from different backgrounds. The weakness in standards attained by the older and higher attaining children identified in the previous inspection report has been remedied.
2. Attainment on entry to the nursery is above average for the age of the children, reflecting the larger than typical proportion of children who have language, literacy and mathematical skills at levels that are appropriate, or better, for their age. Personal skills are often less well developed. Given the standard of attainment on entry, the children achieve well in all the areas of learning, to attain well above average standards by the time they leave. Good achievement is also evident among children with special educational needs or who speak English as a second language.
3. Standards in personal, social and emotional development are well above average. Most children have already attained the goals expected for their age and many have exceeded them. A few children have attained the goals expected by the end of their year in a reception class. The school views this area as the most important for young children to be able to gain maximum benefit from what the school has to offer. All adults take every opportunity to help the children in their development of these skills. The organisation of each session and the very good teaching are major influences 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 because they gain in confidence to investigate and explore their surroundings and experiences. They work alongside or with others, learn from each other and share equipment, asking for a turn and waiting patiently. They show maturity in moving between activities and classrooms.
4. Standards are well above average in speaking and listening. All children make good progress and achieve well because many opportunities are provided to develop these skills. Opportunities are regularly and consistently taken to extend vocabulary and to encourage children to express their ideas clearly. The progress made by children with special educational 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 for sustained periods of time, and to answer questions about the story they have heard. Standards in speaking and listening have been sustained since the previous inspection. Standards in reading and writing, have improved, particularly among the older and more able children, and are also well above average because the level of challenge has been raised. Those children capable of starting to read

simple books do so. All children begin to write their names once they show an interest or recognisable letters emerge in their writing. They learn correct letter formation to aid the development of writing skills. A few more able children can write simple sentences.

5. Standards in mathematics are well above average and have improved since the previous inspection. Children of all abilities make good progress and achieve well. There is a strong emphasis on developing the children's counting skills and understanding of numbers to ten. Mathematics is built into many of the activities and the adults are skilled at maximising the opportunities for developing the children's skills and this increases the rate of learning. Through activities such as identifying and repeating patterns using shapes, the children reinforce their ability to recognise and name shapes correctly. Role-play activities such as in the estate agents, raises the children's awareness of larger numbers when prices are put on houses. In the home corner other aspects include telling the time and paying bills. More able children are developing understanding of addition and subtraction and can add numbers to ten mentally. The weakness in the level of challenge offered to these children has been overcome.
6. Virtually all children are attaining the goals expected for their age in knowledge and understanding of the world. Many are exceeding them, and standards are well above average. Standards have improved since the previous inspection. The children's natural curiosity is fostered well, leading to good achievement. Good progress is made in acquiring knowledge and understanding, which will form a good foundation for future work in subjects such as science, history, geography and technology. Both indoors and outdoors, many interesting activities provide very good opportunities for learning and the children respond well and with enthusiasm. At no time were children seen wandering aimlessly. They all knew where they were going and what they were going to do. The children make very good use of computers to support their learning. They show confidence in using a range of programs and in printing off their work.
7. In physical development standards are well above average. They have improved since the previous inspection as the indoor provision has been developed and improved. All children are attaining the goals expected for their age, with many exceeding them. A significant number of children are attaining the goals expected by the end of their year in a reception class. All children achieve well in developing their physical skills through indoor and outdoor activities. The wide range of resources is used very well to promote the children's physical skills and a positive attitude to physical exercise. The children spend some time outside in all sessions when the weather allows. They use wheeled toys, climbing apparatus, saws, ball games, gardening tools, or construct larger buildings using plastic crates. In these activities the children show their confidence, physical strength and ability to run, jump, climb, pedal and manoeuvre the range of wheeled toys. Skills in balancing are developing well among the older children as they walk along the stepping stones. Indoor activities are planned for developing good manipulative skills, evident in the ease with which the children grasp small items, such as clay modelling tools and beads. All the children having school meals use knives, forks and spoons correctly.
8. Standards in creative development are well above average and have been sustained since the previous inspection. Again many activities are provided to encourage creativity, and achievement is good for children of all abilities, including those with special educational needs. They mix their own paints, exploring the use of colours when creating large group pictures. The children demonstrate their increasing ability

to paint pictures without smudging colours and with good attention to detail. They create clay tiles of houses making attractive patterns on them. They are eager to explore the sounds made by tuned and untuned instruments and put the sounds together in sequences. They demonstrate a very good ability to interpret and move to music when performing a group dance about waking up and going out to look for treasure, based on music from the 'Peer Gynt Suite', which they recognised and named.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

9. The children have very good attitudes towards their school. At the parents' meeting, many parents remarked on how much their children enjoyed coming, saying for example that, even when older siblings were off school for training days, their child insisted on coming to the nursery. When they arrive with their parents at the start of the session, the children take the lead in going to their teaching area and quickly join their group, with scarcely a backward glance. Very few are even initially reluctant, and children generally show more confidence than is to be expected at this age. When they start their group work, they show great interest in what the adult is asking them to do and strive to do their best. Many are keen to explain what they are doing to visitors. When they have the freedom to choose an activity, they are keen to explore the wide range of experiences provided for them. They concentrate well and work hard to complete tasks, in which they then show great pride. When tidying up needs to be done, they use initiative to help.
10. On the whole, children behave very well and the behaviour of many is impeccable. The staff set very high standards for behaviour and the children have a clear understanding of these and respond accordingly. On the few occasions when there are disputes, staff resolve these quickly by explaining to the children more appropriate behaviour and the children accept and learn from their guidance. Children share resources well, even when they are not directly supervised by adults, 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 physical development activities, they are careful to avoid bumping into or hurting other children. Boys and girls play together well and children of ethnic minority origin are well integrated. There is no bullying and no children have been excluded.
11. According to the parents at the parents' meeting, the outstanding feature of the education is in the personal development of their children, and this is indeed the case. Children are encouraged to spend a good portion of their time on activities that they have chosen for themselves and they take very good advantage of this to become more assured and independent. At the same time, they often co-operate and develop very good respect for the feelings and needs of others. Each day a different group leader confidently takes on the responsibility given by staff and receives the respect of his/her peers. Children are taught to be considerate to each other and their very good relationships demonstrate how well they are learning this lesson.
12. Attendance is good for a nursery. Family holidays are seen as an opportunity to broaden children's understanding of the world. Almost all children arrive promptly, although parking and dropping older children at other schools incur inevitable delays of a few minutes for several children. However, the very prompt start to activities ensures that children get the most out of their time.

## HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

13. Overall the teaching is very good, meets the learning needs of all children and is a major factor in helping the children to acquire knowledge and skills at a rapid pace. All teaching seen was good or better, including 80 per cent that was very good and a further 8 per cent that was excellent. The very good quality of teaching is a strong characteristic of the school, and has improved since the previous inspection, when 12 per cent of teaching was very good or better. The teaching methods have changed since the appointment of the current headteacher. The change in approach to teaching, moving away from mostly adult led activities to allowing children to make decisions about where they work 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 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 are now much more confident following training. The teaching of communication, language and literacy, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative development, physical development and personal, social and emotional development is very good. Most of the teaching seen in language and literacy involved activities in speaking and listening, with an emphasis on writing with older and higher attaining children when they work in small groups with a teacher.
14. Excellent teaching was seen in story time and in outdoor activities. The excellent features include sharing the purpose of the activity with the children and the enthusiasm of the adults for the activities taking place. For example, the nursery nurse's obvious love of literature and very good use of her voice in telling the story had the children spellbound. The high level of interaction with the children during the outdoor activities, posing questions and setting challenges, often reinforces previous experiences or moves the children's learning onto the next stage. The good teaching is evident where the level of interaction, and therefore the challenge offered, is not quite so high.
15. The teaching of basic skills is mostly very good. It is very good in mathematics, speaking and listening and reading, and is good in writing. There are occasions when the teaching of writing includes tasks that are not as closely matched to the needs of each individual child as they should be. For example, the children in the group observed practised correct letter formation before attempting to write the first line of their address. The children identified the first letter of their address, but most found writing the name of the street too challenging and tended to give up before they had finished, wanting to go back outside to work with their friends. The time set aside for the activity was appropriate and the use of wipe clean boards for children to practise writing letters and numbers was effective.
16. The effectiveness of the planning of daily activities is very good. The teachers and nursery nurses plan together and so all understand how the activities link together the different areas of learning, and enable children to attain the stepping stones. The planning is securely based on what the children are expected to learn. It provides the focus for adults when interacting with the children and in assessing what the children have attained. The adults have very high expectations of all children and most respond well to them, for example spending sustained periods of time at activities. The adults use a wide range of teaching strategies to interest and motivate the

children, showing a good understanding of how young children learn. Their communication skills are good, quiet but very effective.

17. The management of the children is excellent. Routines are well established. With many activities, and the free choice on offer, the way in which children use equipment demonstrates just how well they have been taught over the year. For example, the maturity shown by virtually all children when using tools such as hand-saws, is the culmination of established routines and the stressing of safety aspects of all activities. The excellent management is evident in the level of maturity shown by the children when moving to different activities in different rooms and working with other adults and children.
18. The teachers and nursery nurses have responsibility for small groups of children and carry out assessments of their attainments. This is good deployment of all adults. The excellent range of learning resources is used very well to provide variety and interest for all the children and stimulates their learning. For example, the outdoor provision each session includes all areas of learning, encouraging the children to move outside and develop a healthy, active lifestyle. The time available for learning is maximised each session, the register being taken by the headteacher as she visits groups at the beginning of each session. This enables other teachers and nursery nurses to give their undivided attention to the children and their learning.
19. The children's attainments are assessed frequently, with notes jotted down that are later transferred to individual records. The information gained from the assessments is usually used very well to meet the learning needs of each child in most activities, and to enable them to make good progress. Children with special educational needs are assessed often. Notes made by support assistants are used to plan appropriate activities to meet their specific needs. Good support is given to children who speak English as an additional language and they are fully included in all activities. Potentially gifted children are identified and challenging tasks are provided to sustain their interest and prevent boredom. For example, a child used a computer program to access information on insects in order to make his own book. The children take books home to share with their parents. They also take the group teddy bear home to look after and write a diary of his adventures.

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

20. The curriculum is broad and balanced and covers all the required areas of learning for the Foundation Stage. The very good planning ensures that all children, including those with special educational needs, are provided with very rich and worthwhile experiences that develop their understanding, knowledge and skills. It also promotes children's intellectual, emotional, physical and social development very effectively through a balanced programme that encourages confidence and independent learning. Children take part in purposeful play, are encouraged to talk to adults and to each other, develop literacy and mathematical ideas through very well organised activities, and are given opportunities to pursue specific interests and activities of their own. These experiences prepare the children well for transition to the next stage of schooling. There is good provision for activities beyond normal daily sessions through the provision of lunches and extended care. However, few visits are planned to places of interest, beyond the immediate locality of the school, to enrich the curriculum.

21. The school is fortunate to occupy a large building that offers plenty of space, which is fully utilised. The learning environment, both inside and out, is organised to ensure that children are stimulated, interested and occupied very effectively, interacting with a wide range of high quality resources. Thorough preparation ensures that no time is wasted and, from the moment they arrive, the children are actively engaged. They are encouraged to explore materials, to experiment, question and consolidate their learning. The very skilful interventions of staff ensure that they are continually challenged. The focused teaching and learning sessions provide a very good balance and routine, as do the many planned opportunities for children to pursue a variety of activities for extended, uninterrupted periods of time. As a result, the children develop both a sense of responsibility and the ability to make informed choices within a secure environment.
22. The very good assessment and tracking procedures ensure that the needs of both groups and individuals, especially those with special educational needs, are met. These children are very well supported and make good progress. Similarly, the children who speak English as an additional language are fully included and well supported.
23. The provision for children's spiritual development is very good. The example set by staff in the way they relate to each other, the warm welcoming ethos and the values of mutual respect and understanding that are fostered, all help develop an insight into the values and beliefs of others. They often display a sense of 'awe and wonder' when, for example, perfectly symmetrical patterns are created on the computer. Other examples are when the teacher suddenly produced strawberries for them to taste, when children discover beetles in the undergrowth or when the caterpillar changes into a butterfly *'in the teacher's hands'* as she is reading the Very Hungry Caterpillar!
24. The provision for moral development is very good. All staff have high expectations that the children will show care, concern and respect for each other. The children learn to care for each other and their environment through play, discussion and by learning from example. On the one occasion observed when intervention was necessary, the nursery nurse resolved the situation quickly, through a quiet, sensitive but firm approach. She also used the opportunity to teach the children about the importance of sharing and 'give and take.'
25. The provision for children's social development is very good. Many of the children have well developed language skills when they enter the nursery. However, for many it is the first time they have played and learned together in a large group. Therefore, the school places great emphasis on developing children's social skills, especially in their first few weeks in the nursery. Adults provide good role models and the children quickly respond. Children work co-operatively together one commenting at the sand tray, "I'll use the scraper first but don't worry, I'll only have a short go!" They often take responsibility for resources, getting them out and putting them away. Each of the six groups has a 'leader of the day' that means that every child has the additional responsibility of being leader once every two weeks. When approached and asked what she was doing at the fridge one child said, "I'm busy, I've got to get the milk out for the others, I'm a leader!" This is an important role and both adults and children take the additional responsibilities very seriously, for example fetching and distributing the milk and leading the lines.

26. The provision for children's cultural development is very good. The curriculum is enriched by a number of visitors to the school. For example, a paper maker made paper with the children, and a group of musicians played woodwind instruments. The children are introduced to a range of traditional stories, nursery rhymes and songs, and percussion instruments are used well to develop children's musical awareness and skills. Parents from ethnic minority groups visit the school to share their cultures and beliefs with the children. Whilst the children do, very occasionally, walk out into the local area, insufficient opportunities are provided. As a result, the children are not experiencing as many different environments as possible, in order that they can share their experiences and have the opportunity to extend their knowledge and understanding of the world. The very good planning ensures that all the major festivals such as Christmas, Eid and Diwali are celebrated and this provides the children with further insights into the beliefs and traditions of people of different faiths.

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

27. The school's procedures for child protection and for ensuring the welfare, health and safety of its children are very good. All staff are very caring towards children, but at the same time treat them with respect and insight in order to develop their independence. The policy of promoting a mutual respect amongst the children develops an ethos in which disputes and accidents are reduced but first aid trained staff look after children who are ill or have minor mishaps. All staff are aware of those pupils with specific medical needs, and have received appropriate training. The headteacher is the designated teacher for child protection and is well qualified by training and experience. Other staff are also guided by regular training and by a good policy, which meets the requirements of local procedures. Where there are cases of children at risk, members of staff receive very good support from other agencies. Staff and governors have responsibility for health and safety procedures and meet these very well. The buildings and equipment are regularly checked and risk assessment of activities carried out and acted on. There are no safety concerns.
28. The school has excellent procedures for assessing children's progress in all aspects of their academic and personal development, and makes excellent use of the information to support further development and good achievement in their time at school. Shortly after the children enter the school, baseline assessments are carried out to indicate the child's stage of development. Parents are also involved in this process. This information is used very well to inform staff on which areas to concentrate and, in some cases, whether additional support should be sought. As the children take part in activities, staff make notes about what they can and can't do. These notes build up a picture, which eventually feeds through into the child's final report. Each term, the child is assessed against each of the minor areas (stepping stones) that make up the early learning goals of the Foundation Stage. Staff stick pieces of the child's work and photographs into a large 'Record of Achievement' book. They add good evaluative notes of how the work was done and point out the features showing progress. These notes are written in a form that brings the record alive for parents and, in future years, for each child when they look back. The information is also gathered together in summary form to give to parents when their child leaves, and to pass on the next school. Staff regularly review the success of what they are doing, based on the evidence of assessment, and refine and improve how they teach as a result. This has contributed to the very high standards of teaching observed in all staff and the children's learning.

29. Staff are very good at guiding children and helping them to fit into the ethos of the school so that they behave very well and treat all other children with consideration and respect. They bring this about by using praise, persuasion and example, with little or no need for sanction. Attendance is recorded carefully, and staff leading the family groups keep their own records as well as the formal registers. The headteacher liaises with parents to ensure that children take the best advantage of their place.

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

30. Parents are very pleased with the education their children receive. At the meeting held before the inspection, all parents who attended were warm in their praise of the school. They think that standards are high and are particularly pleased with the children's development of initiative and confidence. Creative development is also very good. Parents feel that the new headteacher has improved the school even further and that emphasis on learning through fun is exactly what they want. The only minor concern is that of finding out about a child's progress if the parent does not pick up the child personally, and some parents feel inhibited at keeping staff back at the end of the day for this purpose. The parents' questionnaires confirmed their very positive views, with no significant negative aspects. The inspection observations confirmed these very good opinions.
31. The school makes very good efforts to involve parents in the life of the school and in supporting children from home. These efforts have borne dividends and parental links are having a very positive impact on children's learning. Before children start, parents have six opportunities to visit the nursery with their children to gain understanding of the organisation, objectives and teaching methods, to see their child at work, and to help complete the baseline assessment. Parents are able to meet staff informally to discuss progress, but a few parents do not find this practical. The school now plans to have a formal interview for all parents so that they can discuss their child's progress. However, parents currently receive an excellent written report, containing comments on all the areas of learning, together with very detailed assessment information. The lobby notice board tells both parents and children about school activities. There are regular newsletters and the school has recently developed a web site, which has received recognition for its excellence.
32. As well as being able to support their child in school at the start, parents regularly read with their child at home and evaluate books for the school. Parents can also take advantage of the local charity-run toy library in the school. The school offers good guidance on how parents may give the most effective help across the range of their child's development. The visit of 'Batford Bear', the mascot, to home is a highlight of the year. Parents and children alike strive to record the most amazing experiences in his travel diary. A few parents provide valued help with activities during the day and the school makes full use of the special skills of parents to provide wider artistic and cultural experiences for children. In addition, parents have done sterling work in the grounds, for example in constructing the Millennium Garden. They have helped to make the excellent story sacks, and an ex-parent developed the web site.

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

33. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management for the school. She promotes high standards and effective teaching and learning in all areas of the

curriculum. Her drive and determination to offer excellent support for the children, their families and the local community are evident in many ways. The extended care sessions, school lunches, 'mother and toddler group, plus accommodating 'opportunity classes', the support group for parents of autistic children all provide good experiences and valuable support for parents. These activities also help children entering the school to settle quickly and take full advantage of their time there.

34. The headteacher is well supported by the staff, who are committed and work hard for the benefit of the children. On her arrival the headteacher took time to observe the way the nursery was operating, identified the good practice and looked at ways of improving other aspects. This led to the very complex, but nevertheless efficient and effective organisation of activities each session, where the focus is firmly on children's learning. All members of staff found the changes complicated and the transition difficult but, with good training have now mastered the new organisation, and the curriculum, the teaching and learning have improved. The weakness identified in the previous inspection report, in delegating aspects of the curriculum to other staff, developing their role in decision making and monitoring of their aspects, has been overcome, as far as possible, given that currently there is only one other permanent teacher. The temporary teacher has played an important part in developing electronic systems for recording assessments that have led to further improvement in setting individual targets for the children each term.
35. The governors are better informed than at the time of the previous inspection and have increased their role in making decisions about the future development of the school and in monitoring standards. Individual governors monitor the areas of learning and report back to the full governing body meetings. The progress towards meeting targets in the school development plan is rigorously monitored at each termly meeting and targets are amended where necessary. The governors advertised the post twice before appointing the headteacher as no applicants met their criteria at the first attempt. This process was repeated when seeking to appoint a teacher, which is why there has been a temporary appointment for a year. The governors are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and try to ensure their decisions are made in the best long term interests of the children. They offer good support to the headteacher, recognise the difficulty of not having a deputy headteacher, and fulfil all their statutory obligations.
36. There are excellent arrangements for monitoring the school's performance. The teaching is monitored by the headteacher and by co-ordinators. Information is fed back and discussed with each member of staff, and targets for improvement identified and agreed. These procedures have been successful in raising the quality of teaching. The discussions with parents before children enter the nursery are the starting point for beginning to understand each child's needs. The results of assessment soon after admission are used to set targets for improvement, with the evidence for the target being recorded. Each child's progress is reviewed and further targets set each term. Any child found to be having difficulties in any area of learning is closely monitored by the headteacher in her role as the special educational needs co-ordinator, and additional support is provided if necessary. This early intervention is effective in helping children overcome problems and, significantly the number of children on the higher stages of the special educational needs Code of Practice is declining. The availability of full time places for children with specific needs sometimes funded by the school, effectively supports children and their families. The school has received recognition as a provider of quality standards through

Hertfordshire's Quality Standards accreditation scheme, which is thoroughly deserved.

37. The development plan is a very good document for school improvement. It incorporates a clear strategic plan for the next three years and a rolling programme for curriculum development, which has realistic time scales given the number of teachers available to carry out the required action. Detailed action plans for the current year include all relevant information. They provide governors with success indicators by which they can check the progress of the action towards meeting the targets, and judge the value for money in respect of these developments.
38. The school is very successful in meeting its aims to provide a safe, happy and stimulating environment, in encouraging children to develop lively enquiring minds and to respect others. However, it is not so successful in keeping parents informed of their child's progress through formal discussions. The inspectors agree that parents' concerns about this lack of information are justified.
39. Financial planning and administration are very good. The budget plan is clearly linked to the priorities in the school development plan. The income from specific grants is used well and solely for the intended purposes. Funding from the Standards Fund has been used very effectively to provide good quality training, and has had a direct influence on the improved quality of teaching. The recommendations in the most recent auditor's report were related to the headteacher being in post for only a short period of time and still becoming familiar with the procedures involved in full delegation. The recommendations have been implemented. The large underspend has been reduced since the arrival of the current headteacher. Additional funding from other sources helps to develop other projects, such as the 'mother and Toddler' group. The day-to-day management of the budget is efficient and unobtrusive, allowing staff to concentrate on supporting the children's learning.
40. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is excellent and a key factor in the children's progress and achievement. The deployment of the teachers and nursery nurses into two teams is effective in providing support for the nursery nurses whilst ensuring a teacher is responsible for the planning in each team. This is an improvement since the previous inspection, when one team had no support from a teacher. The accommodation is very spacious and used well and there is a very good range of learning resources of good quality. Both factors have a positive effect on the children's learning.

#### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

41. In order to sustain high standards, very good experiences and opportunities for learning, and involve parents fully in their child's learning, the headteacher and staff, supported by the governors should:
  - (1) provide opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress on a formal basis as identified in the school development plan;  
Discussed in paragraph 30, 31, 38.
  - (2) improve the opportunities for learning by including educational visits to places of interest.  
Discussed in paragraph 20, 26.



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of sessions observed	25
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
8	80	12	0	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)	61
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	4

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	9

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	3

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	9%

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0%

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

## **Teachers and classes**

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20.3

Total number of education support staff	5.2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	146

Number of pupils per FTE adult	7.4
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*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## **Financial information**

Financial year	2000/01
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	£
Total income	239,609
Total expenditure	244,292
Expenditure per pupil	4,072
Balance brought forward from previous year	43,505
Balance carried forward to next year	38,822

## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out

140

Number of questionnaires returned

44

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	82	18	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	68	20	2	0	10
Behaviour in the school is good.	61	34	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	9	0	0	52
The teaching is good.	59	27	5	0	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	32	16	14	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	30	2	0	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	43	45	2	2	8
The school works closely with parents.	45	39	14	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	59	30	2	0	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	61	32	0	0	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	48	9	2	5	36

### **Other issues raised by parents**

Thirteen letters were received from parents, some concerned about the staffing situation with a permanent teacher not being appointed in the last year. This has not had any detrimental effect on standards or provision.

## **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**

42. Standards are well above average and achievement is good. This is similar to standards found at the time of the previous inspection. Most children have already attained the stepping stones expected for their age. A good proportion have exceeded these goals, and are well on the way to attaining the early learning goals expected by the end of their time in a reception class. On entry a significant number of children do not have personal and social skills as well developed as skills in other areas of learning. More emphasis is placed on developing these skills to help the children develop self-confidence and the independence needed to move around all the rooms in the nursery and to work with different children and adults. The children are then able to take full advantage of the wide range of experiences on offer. All adults take every opportunity that arises to help the children develop these skills and this is partly why, the children make good progress and achieve well. The teaching is very good. The nursery nurses join the teachers in planning the daily activities that help to build most successfully each child's self esteem, confidence and independence. The organisation of each session, starting and ending with small family group activities, gives each child the opportunity to share any news or concerns with an adult, and makes them feel valued. All children enter happily each morning or afternoon and soon settle to the well-established routines. The staff plan many activities that encourage children to ask questions, take decisions and solve problems, and the children are confident in doing so. For example, a large cardboard box was to be made into a house. The children worked well in a group, decided how to join the parts together to give a house shape, then decided the size of the door, so that the tallest child in the group could enter the house. Because it was a tall house the children decided to change it into a tower and cut turrets in the top. Later in the week they carried out necessary repairs to the tower. Most children maintain their concentration until tasks are complete and, in story time, are usually engrossed throughout.
43. The children are actively encouraged to speak out when they are unhappy about an incident or experience. For example, when a group of boys were playing ball games and a 'rugby tackle' became too boisterous, the child being tackled sensibly called out for help without getting upset. The children feel secure in the quiet, calm atmosphere created throughout the school, which enables their calls for help to be heard even out of doors. They are beginning to develop respect for their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people, such as when they were making pizzas and some children did not want any ham on theirs. The nursery nurse took the opportunity to explain that some children do not eat certain foods in accordance with their religious beliefs, others choose not to, and she introduced the word 'vegetarian'. By the end of this activity the children had learned much about foods that were good for them as well as developing their sense of community. They show a good awareness for their age of the needs, views and feelings of others and show sensitivity. For example, when using a computer program, a child was heard to say, "I will go first, but I won't be very long then you can have a turn." Most children show high levels of self-control and work very well together in small groups without an adult close by. When working in the garden looking for worms, they all put on wellingtons on joining the group, shared the tools, and took turns with the larger spade. They changed the focus of their work

when they found a piece of bone and decided it was a dinosaur's tooth. When they decide they want to have a turn on a seesaw they ask a friend to join them. The children take it in turns to be the 'leader' of their family group for a session, collecting the milk and being responsible for making decisions on behalf of the group. The children respond well to making decisions and solving problems.

44. When preparing for physical activities in the hall the children remove their shoes and socks, coping well with unfastening buckles. All children manage their own personal hygiene very well. Children who have English as an additional language are equally confident in moving around the different areas of the nursery, for example one was heard reading a story to friends in the book corner. The children who have special educational needs are well supported and fully included in activities as far as possible. A very small number of children with more complex difficulties have problems concentrating until tasks are complete, but nevertheless make good progress in their learning and development of personal, social and emotional skills.

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

45. Standards are well above average and have been sustained since the previous inspection. By the time they leave the nursery, nearly all the children attain the stepping stones expected for their age, many exceed them, with a small number well on the way to attaining the early learning goals expected by the end of the year in a reception class. All children achieve well because the teaching is very good overall, with an example of excellent teaching in story time and good teaching of writing skills. The example of excellent teaching resulted from the story being selected with great care to encourage the children to listen carefully. The nursery nurse was aware that the children tended to look at the pictures in stories and did not listen as attentively as they should. The story chosen was a traditional fairy story but in a different setting. Skilful questioning linked the story to the children's lives by asking, "Do you have special bowls at home, perhaps a Christening present?" Excellent reference was made to safety aspects without interrupting the flow of the story, such as when the children were encouraged to reflect on why we don't just walk into other people's houses. The children's listening skills are very good. After twenty-five minutes the children were still fully engrossed in the story owing to the quality of the story telling and the involvement of the children. Speaking skills are equally as good, the children speak with increasing clarity, confidence and politeness to each other, to adults, and to their family groups, for example when a child was telling the family group about the adventures of their teddy bear and his visit to hospital. The children ask questions in order to acquire knowledge and begin to link cause and effect. For example, when they found a worm in the garden they knew they had to handle it carefully when transferring it to the wormery or they might harm it. They happily told inspectors what they were investigating or exploring and explained in detail how they constructed a viaduct to carry the railway lines. Many opportunities are provided for speaking and listening, and adults take great care to use precise terminology in their interactions with children.
46. Early reading skills develop well through opportunities for quiet reading on arrival, through story time each session, which promotes a love of books, and through using computers to research information, for example using a simple dictionary program to find information about insects. There is a very good collection of books in the school. In addition, story sacks, which contain all the characters and other objects, help to bring the stories to life and enable the children to act them out, learning to sequence the events in order. Children are supported in selecting a book to take home and

share with their parents. This effectively encourages good reading habits and greater parental involvement in their child's learning. The children like to explore the use of spoken and written language and were often heard using in other activities rhyming words learned from stories. For example, when making pizzas, one child remembered 'cheese please Louise.' All adults take every opportunity to develop the children's range of vocabulary when interacting with them, in story time or in general conversation at the start of the session. Higher attaining children begin to read early graded books. Other children understand how books are organised, know where to begin to read and that the print tells you what to say. The older and more able children understand some letter sounds and are beginning to put them together in words. A few higher attaining children can communicate in writing, attempting words themselves and having a good try at spelling unfamiliar words. One child had written a sentence about the Christmas story telling clearly that 'there was no crib for the little Lord Jesus.' Another wrote his address with help from an adult. There are many opportunities for children to begin to make marks on paper through role-play activities. When letters begin to emerge in their writing the children are encouraged to write their own name on their work and are helped to form letters correctly. All members of staff monitor closely the progress of the children in their group. They use well the information gained in deciding the right moment to move each child to the next stage in developing their writing skills. Most children are at the stage of attempting to write their name unaided. A few parents help their children to learn to write before they enter the nursery. However, some children are taught to write in upper case letters and their progress slows when they have to learn to use lower case letters before moving on. The weakness in the level of challenge for older and more able children identified in the previous inspection report has been remedied. The older and more able children are taught basic literacy skills each week, with further opportunities for them to practise these skills in other activities. This teaching is of good quality because teachers are secure in their understanding of how to teach phonics. However, the written task of writing addresses was not appropriate for some children in the 'owl group'. They gave up because several needed adult help at the same time and had to wait too long. There are also missed opportunities to draw the children's attention to written language by writing labels for different activities, and to spoken language by emphasising words with the same initial sound.

47. Communication, language and literacy is very well co-ordinated. The policy has been updated recently to take full account of the most recent national guidelines. The strategies for teaching prepare the children well for entry to a reception class. The extensive range of books is used well to foster a love of literature among the children.

### **Mathematical development**

48. Standards are well above average and have improved since the previous inspection as higher attaining children are now achieving their potential. Most children are on course to attain the early learning goals at the end of the Foundation Stage of their education, and a significant number will have attained them by the time they leave the nursery. Children's good progress and achievement is the result of the consistently good and often very good teaching that they receive. In addition to a short, focused teaching session each day, teachers also withdraw small groups and seize every opportunity to question and challenge the children during activity sessions. This is made easier because, for example, the mathematical opportunities of all aspects of outdoor play have been identified and recorded in order that no opportunity is lost to teach, repeat and consolidate mathematical concepts in a variety of situations.

49. Children, including those with special educational needs, are developing mathematical language. They are introduced to the word 'segment' and are soon using it naturally, 'I can count nine segments in that caterpillar.' They draw their routes to school and describe going '*under*' the bridge, '*behind*' the station and '*past*' the post box. They are encouraged to sort, measure and compare objects regularly. Staff ensure that appropriate resources are available, for example by providing a tape measure for the 'builders' on the playground, which was well used as the children pretended to measure the building under construction. The majority can identify a circle, rectangle, square and triangle. They consolidate their learning by drawing round, cutting out and displaying their work, either for others to see or by sticking it in their own Record of Achievement book. There are good cross-curricular links as one group clap and play patterns of notes in music. Their attention is then drawn to the order in which the instruments are played and, finally, they go to the computer and generate their own sequencing or symmetrical patterns on the screen.
50. They all receive regular oral practice in the recall of numbers, working on numbers to ten. The older children often work on numbers to 20. They count each of the different foods eaten by the 'Hungry Caterpillar' and then work out an overall total, the teacher only joining in when the group reach 15 and need support. This leads to a discussion of favourite foods with the result that the oldest children embark on a food survey. One commented, "alright, cheese is your favourite food but what is your second favourite?" The teacher discusses each set of results with every child individually and then, with an evaluative comment attached, it is stuck into the child's Record of Achievement book. This is very good on-going assessment, which helps ensure that the mathematical needs of individual children are planned for and met.
51. The quality of teaching is very good overall. The planning process, on which all the activities are based, is thorough and comprehensive. Long term planning is reflected in the medium-term plans that cover half a term. The weekly plan that is then drawn up is discussed in detail with the nursery nurses, and the learning objectives are identified and made a focus. This results in a unity of purpose where everybody is complementing each other as they work with all the children, repeating and consolidating the agreed objectives. For example, throughout the week the focus was on journeys. This was reflected in displays and activities such as the 'estate agents' where pupils described the location of their house in relation to the school. They then drew a route map from one to the other and in outdoor activities, a track was drawn on the playground around which wheeled vehicles were pedalled and pushed following the direction of the arrows.
52. The co-ordinator leads this subject well. She has written an effective policy that clearly reflects national guidance. She also arranged for an educational consultant to give demonstration lessons that had a positive influence on the thinking of staff at a critical time during the recent curriculum review. The outcome is an imaginative curriculum offered in an environment rich in appropriate resources and where children make good progress in developing their mathematical skills and competencies. The weakness in the lack of challenge for older and more able children identified in the previous report has been remedied.

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

53. Standards are well above average and have improved since the previous inspection. The broad curriculum provided and the very good teaching enable the large majority

of children to achieve well and attain the stepping stones expected for their age when they transfer to a reception class. A few are attaining the early learning goals set for the end of their time in reception. Many of the children bring a variety of experiences with them when they enter the nursery. They talk freely about the places they have visited and the things they have seen. Through a wide range of carefully planned activities, these previous experiences are supplemented and good progress is made.

54. Children have open access to computers that they use independently, with confidence, and for a variety of purposes. For example, two boys were engrossed as they listened to and watched the story of Jack and the Beanstalk and predicted what would happen next. Another used a program designed to aid the recognition of numbers and successfully counted to 10, identifying the numbers correctly. A group watched, fascinated, as the nursery nurse drew perfectly symmetrical shapes and then printed off the picture. Within minutes the children were drawing and printing their own. Higher attaining and potentially gifted children used a dictionary program to find information about insects to help them in making their own book. The improvement in the children's skills in information and communication technology since the previous inspection is due to the training undertaken by members of staff and their improved knowledge and confidence in using different computer programs.
55. There are few educational visits to enrich the curriculum. However, the current theme of 'Our Environment' makes provision for visits into the local area to identify shops, the church, factories and the mill. Inside the nursery an estate agency has been set up and the children working with an adult talk about their journeys to school using the terms 'left' and 'right' in response to questions. They draw route maps, and talk about local features and how long the journey takes. There are photographs of houses for sale and the 'customers' are encouraged to describe them and explain why they would like to buy one. They are encouraged to write down their telephone numbers 'in case we need to get in touch!'
56. The outdoor areas are used very well to extend and challenge children's thinking about their environment. A wide variety of resources support learning well. The children move from one activity to the next guided well by staff, who seize every opportunity to encourage learning. 'Builders' construct a tower from a large cardboard box. They are equipped with safety helmets, measuring tapes, safety masks and a variety of tools, and the staff ensure that they know why they might need this equipment. The group searching for mini-beasts is equipped with a collection tank, cardboard tubes, magnifying glasses, 'explorers notebooks' and trowels. One says, "they like dark, damp places and I'm in charge of the tank." On the playground children ride around a track and learn about road safety, one saying, "it's dangerous here but you're safe if you stand still on the middle of the roundabout!" The children build shelters and invite their friends to stay. They construct a camp and collect wood for a fire, plus the tools needed for the barbeque, and then arrange chairs around the fire for their guests. They ride a variety of wheeled vehicles and periodically return inside for focused learning sessions or to use other equipment.
57. The emphasis on practical and 'hands on' learning is maintained in the classroom, with a very good range of well-resourced activities always available. Stick insects are shown to an excited group, who quickly learn to respond gently and quietly if they want to hold them. They are asked why the insects cannot move easily on the carpet and the children feel the carpet and conclude that 'it's too rough.' Other children build houses using different glues, tapes and fastenings or thread beads trying to make regular patterns. They co-operate in the well-equipped home corner and become so

engrossed in their role-play that none hear the request to put the equipment away. They play with the contents of a story sack, put on display after the story has been read, and they try and act out the story recalled from the previous day. All these activities and others ensure that the children's natural curiosity is harnessed and used to enable them to learn more about their world. In addition, adults stress the importance of tolerance, co-operation and understanding if the children are to succeed in learning from the opportunities offered to them.

58. The quality of teaching is very good overall and has a clear impact on the quality of the children's responses. The activities are well planned as part of an overall theme. Individual's progress is continually assessed and recorded in the light of the 'stepping stones' that lead ultimately to the early learning goals (which are clearly explained to parents at meetings and also displayed in the entrance lobby).

### **Physical development**

59. Standards are well above average and the children achieve well in this area of learning. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when standards were average. The weakness in indoor activities has been remedied through an updated policy and programme of work. Most children are already attaining the targets expected for their age on leaving the nursery. Many are exceeding these and due to the very good teaching are well on the way to reaching the targets set for the end of the reception year. The outdoor accommodation provides rich and diverse experiences and is used most effectively to promote learning as well as physical development. The activities vary from day to day to provide new challenges. There are shaded areas and tables and benches for quieter activities.
60. The children move around the spacious outdoor area with confidence, showing good imagination and an awareness of safety. When they were investigating minibeasts they dressed as explorers and collected magnifying glasses and hats before disappearing into the long grass in the wild life area. They decided it would be better to have notepads to be able to record the creatures they found and where they found them. When using bikes and cars on the roadway they usually keep a safe distance from each other and follow the arrows to avoid collisions. They organise themselves extremely well with no queuing waiting for turns, but change over when the sand timer shows their time is up. When creating a dance in the hall the children demonstrate their good awareness of each other as they work close together. They show some agility and quality in their movements, for example when stretching their arms and legs as part of a 'waking up' movement. They showed a good sense of space when deciding how many children could fit into the tower they had made and when using plastic crates to make a tent as part of the campsite.
61. Most children recognise the importance of good practices with regard to hygiene, washing their hands after activities or going to the toilet, with little need for reminders from staff. They also have drinks when they choose during sessions, with some asking for water on hot days. Most children put on sun hats before going outside on sunny days and adults are quick to remind those not doing so, checking if they have a hat in school and providing one if not. Those children spoken to understand the dangers of prolonged exposure to the sun. They enjoy outdoor activities but are not yet at the stage of recognising the changes that happen to their bodies when they are active.

62. There is an excellent range of large and small equipment available that is used well to interest and motivate the children. The fixed apparatus with a ramp up to a bridge provides good physical challenges that most children rise to and persevere until completed. They balance on the wooden stepping stones and climb up onto the wooden bridges, although some are not so confident in using the larger apparatus where the bridge is higher above the ground. They kick balls well when aiming into goalposts and attempt to throw them into basketball nets with some success. The children handle tools, objects, construction toys and malleable materials safely and with increasing control. For example, they used handsaws to cut out windows and the door when making the tower, and built a roadway using wooden blocks. They threaded beads onto laces when making sequencing patterns. When painting and writing they grip pencils and brushes firmly, showing good control. They decided to fasten the cardboard box together with sticky tape to build the tower and showed good control when cutting pieces off the roll. The small majority can cut out without help, making good attempts at following the outline of the shape. Others find this more difficult and are still mastering the use of scissors. Through observing and interacting with the children as they work, the adults assess what the children can do and so encourage them to move onto the next stage in their physical development. The very good organisation, planning and preparation of the outdoor area each day are the key features that lead to the interesting and exciting outdoor activities that promote physical development. All staff promote a positive attitude towards exercise and encourage children to learn more about the world around them at the same time. The first family group to go outside rotates on a daily basis and this ensures all children have the first choice of equipment. The first group of children is involved in setting up some of the activities and so they learn how to move larger items of equipment safely.
63. The co-ordination of this area of learning is good. A new co-ordinator has taken over the role recently and has updated the policy and programme of work. It is too early to review the success of the updated policy, but there are already plans for further development of the outdoor provision to include a tactile and sensory garden. The assessment of each child's physical development is very good and recorded in a way that is easy to follow and links to the stepping stones and early learning goals.

### **Creative development**

64. Creative development is very good and the children achieve well. Standards are well above average and have been sustained since the previous inspection. All children, including those with special educational needs, make good progress along the stepping-stones. Many are exceeding the targets expected for their age and most are on course to attain the early learning goals before the end of the Foundation Stage.
65. Very good teaching based on thorough planning ensures that a wide variety of opportunities are provided for children to explore different media. They are enthusiastic and interested as they paint, draw, and construct models in a variety of media. All their efforts are valued by staff, who celebrate the work by constructing colourful displays, by asking questions that reflect an interest and also in encouraging children to explain their work and the thinking behind it. Most children successfully select the materials they require when making their models. For example, outside they build a house out of crates, fetching and carrying the crates, boxes and blankets that they need for its' construction. Sensitive questioning then makes them think about the need for windows and a door, and this in turn leads to another period of intense activity. This theme is reflected inside, as children are encouraged to make

houses out of a variety of cardboard boxes. The nursery nurse models well as she explores with a group the properties of different adhesives, preparing children to make appropriate choices when they make their own houses.

66. Children make their own modelling material from flour and water and colour it to match the colours of the Very Hungry Caterpillar, which they then model, linking one activity very well to another. One child copies the picture exactly and searches for cocktail sticks, which she breaks and places on the model's back exclaiming "there, that's the caterpillar's prickles!" The next day a contrasting activity is organised and the children are encouraged to compare the feel of clay with the flour dough made the day before. They notice that it is colder, hard and sticky. They then use a variety of tools to make patterns, which they feel and compare, and that ultimately will form a collage. They paint using a variety of brushes. In a range of situations they add continually to their experiences with regard to the effects they can create. A favourite activity outside is decorating the building, using very large brushes and a pail of water! Inside, working with a teacher, they look at and discuss several modern paintings. They then work together to paint a mural in the style of Kandinsky, mixing colours on 'cardboard palettes' and liberally creating a variety of shapes, whilst constantly referring to the book for inspiration. They are proud of their results and the pictures are highly valued and given immediate pride of place on the hall wall.
67. Children listen, play and move well to a range of music and musical instruments. They sway to the rhythm of the music as it plays in the home corner and sing along to the tunes when they feature in stories replayed on the computer. A good range of untuned instruments such as wood blocks, cymbals, drums, tambourines and scrapers are kept in the hall. Children are keen to play them, which many do successfully as they try to keep in time to simple songs sung by the group. Most of the children are developing a good sense of rhythm and are able to clap in time to popular songs, encouraged and led by staff. By the time they leave the nursery the children know an extensive repertoire of songs and nursery rhymes that they enjoy singing.
68. The extensive accommodation is used very well. An entire room is devoted to creating an area where the children can learn to exercise their imagination, take part in role-play, and learn to co-operate and relate well with each other. The estate agency, the Three Bears' house, the home corner, the Batford (double-decker) bus, dressing up clothes and a full-length mirror are all available to the children. They make the most of all on offer, playing sensibly and responding confidently to the adults available to support them in their activities.