

INSPECTION REPORT

PERRY BEECHES NURSERY SCHOOL

Great Barr, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103123

Headteacher: Mrs Jackie Lewis

Reporting inspector: Mrs J. Ann Sharpe
18101

Dates of inspection: 29th April – 1st May 2002

Inspection number: 198056

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:	Maintained Nursery School
Age range of children	3 to 4
Gender of children	Mixed
School address:	256 Beeches Road Great Barr Birmingham
Postcode:	B42 2PX
Telephone number:	0121 360 2199
Fax number:	0121 360 4467
Appropriate authority:	The local education authority
Date of previous inspection:	13 th October 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Area of learning responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
18101	J. Ann Sharpe	Registered inspector	Personal, social and emotional development Communication, language and literacy Creative development English as an additional language	What the school should do to improve How high standards are How well children are taught How well the school cared for its children How well the school is led and managed
19365	Gordon Stockley	Lay inspector		Children's attitudes, values and personal development How well the school works in partnership with parents and carers
21678	Sue Walker	Team inspector	Mathematical development Knowledge and understanding of the world Physical development Equality of opportunity Special educational needs	How good the curricular and other opportunities are

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The 42 girls and 55 boys on the registers attend part-time, usually for the three terms before they transfer to several different primary schools in the area. Children come from privately owned and rented homes in the locality or often further afield. All the places are taken up, but children move to and from other schools fairly frequently. Children come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and about three-quarters are white. Twelve children speak English as an additional language, although most of these children can already understand and speak some English. There are no children with statements of special educational need, but 18 children are on the special needs register. The attainment of three year olds when entering nursery is typical for their age. The nursery building opened in September 2001, following a period of disruption created by having to move premises twice in a fairly short time. The school is the first nursery in Birmingham to be built as part of a Private Public Partnership (PPP), and it shares the site with a primary and a secondary school. The campus has recently been designated as an Arts Council 'Art Site'. The Excellence in Cities project gives the nursery a small amount of extra funding.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The nursery gives its children a good quality of early education. Its main strength is that staff ensure that children are happy and settled in their learning, and that they make a positive start to their school lives. Good teaching means that children do well in many areas of their work, especially in starting to learn about reading and writing. The strong leadership of the headteacher ensures that children continue to learn and that the nursery keeps on improving. The school gives good value for the funding and various kinds of support that it receives.

What the school does well

- Children enjoy nursery because it is a happy, friendly and welcoming place where they feel secure.
- Children achieve well overall because much of the teaching is good.
- Children's very good attitudes and relationships and their good behaviour help them to learn successfully.
- Children make a good start with learning early reading and writing skills.
- The good leadership of the headteacher encourages everyone to do their best for the children.
- Very good links with other schools and good links with the community support children's learning well.
- The new accommodation provides an excellent setting for children to learn.

What could be improved

- Curriculum and lesson planning needs further updating to match the national guidance.
- Staff need to link their assessments of children more closely to the activities they plan for them.
- Staff miss a lot of good opportunities to take children's learning forward when they play outside.
- The headteacher and staff need to do more to find out how good the nursery is and to pinpoint what they should improve next.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When taking into account the disruption caused by moving premises, the nursery has made good progress since the last inspection in October 1997. Staff have tackled the two key issues in the report soundly and have responded positively to national changes in the curriculum for nursery age children. Children's attendance has improved, as has provision for their personal development and parents' views of the nursery. The new building is a significant improvement, and staff have done well to get it so carefully presented and organised in such a short time. The nursery is now in a good position to be able to improve in the future.

STANDARDS

All girls and boys achieve well, and when they leave nursery to start full-time school, the standard of their work overall is above what is typical for their age. Children's personal, social and emotional development is good and this often helps them to do well in other areas of learning. In communication, language and literacy, for example, children make a good start with learning to listen carefully and to talk about what they are doing. Their early reading and writing skills develop well and most children understand how people use marks, letters and words to pass on ideas to others. In mathematics, children's satisfactory achievement helps them to reach a standard that is typical for their age, although brighter children could sometimes learn more than they do. Children increase their knowledge and understanding of the world at a good pace, and show a growing interest in activities and equipment that allows them to find things out for themselves. In creative and physical development, as well as in all other areas of learning, children make better progress when they work directly with staff inside the nursery than they do when they play outside. Children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language have the help they need and make good progress from their starting points.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Children are eager to come to nursery, show interest and enjoy what they are doing.
Behaviour	Good. Children quickly learn how to behave towards other children and adults.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Girls and boys from all backgrounds play happily together with no sign of tensions.
Attendance	Satisfactory. A few children are regularly late because parents have to get their other children to different schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of children:	
Quality of teaching	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.

Good teaching in personal, social and emotional development, in communication, language and literacy and in knowledge and understanding of the world helps children to achieve well from their starting points. Staff have high expectations of children's behaviour and are very good at making sure that they settle well to learning. Satisfactory teaching in mathematical development helps most children to attain as expected for their age, but staff do not always take the brighter children on far enough. Staff are good at encouraging children to listen and to use new words in all areas of learning, and they teach early reading and writing skills well. Teaching in physical and creative development is satisfactory, but as in all areas of learning, staff do not make formal plans or use their time well enough when children play outside. Good teaching of children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language helps them to achieve well. Staff work well together as a team, show care and concern for the children, encourage positive relationships with parents and carers and make the nursery an attractive and interesting place for the children to learn.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall, with good provision for children to learn to talk and to begin reading and writing. Links with other schools and the community are very strong. Staff sometimes miss good opportunities for children to learn in all areas of their work, especially when they play outside. Planning needs to take more account of the steps that children should take to attain the national goals set for them by the time they leave the nursery.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Good. Staff quickly notice when children need extra help, and the children do well when they work directly with adults.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	Good. The strong focus on talking and learning new words all the time is an advantage for the children. The specialist bi-lingual teaching extends day-to-day provision well.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good. Staff put a lot of emphasis on encouraging children's personal development, and make very good provision for their moral and social learning. This gives children a successful start to their education.
How well the school cares for its children	Staff keep children happy, safe and secure. They watch over children's personal development and their behaviour carefully and provide the right kind of help when necessary. Staff know children well as individuals, but they do not always plan the best work to build upon what they can already do.

Staff are successful in encouraging positive and helpful relationships with parents and carers. The school's partnership with parents has a sound effect on children's learning, and staff have good plans to improve this further in the near future.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher gives a good lead to other staff and makes sure that the nursery runs smoothly and continues to improve. She has managed the move to the new building very successfully, ensuring that children have not been disadvantaged by the disruption. There is no deputy headteacher and, although other staff have a few extra responsibilities, most of the work of the nursery is managed by the headteacher.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The nursery does not have a governing body and the local education authority watches over the school's finances and its progress.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The headteacher has recently started to look for ways to show how successful the nursery is in raising children's attainment. Staff know what they do well, but are not as clear about what needs to improve.
The strategic use of resources	Mainly good. The headteacher works hard to get grants and extra resources to benefit the children's education. There are enough suitably qualified staff and plenty of learning resources that are usually put to good use. The new accommodation is excellent. The school's approach to getting best value from the funding scheme of the local education authority is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children like coming to nursery and make good progress, especially in their personal and social development. Teaching is good and staff expect children to do their best. Staff help children to mature and their behaviour is good. The nursery is well led and managed by the headteacher. Parents are comfortable coming to school and talking to staff. Parents like the new building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few parents do not feel well informed about how their children are getting on. Some would like an earlier opportunity to talk to staff out of school hours.

Not all parents know that they will have a written report and a chance to talk to staff without their children present towards the end of the school year. Inspectors agree with parents that this one formal talk with staff is too late in the year to find out how their children could do better. Also, not all parents can attend meetings held during the day. Inspectors largely agree with parents' positive views of the nursery.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and children's achievements

1. It was not possible to make direct comparisons with standards at the time of last inspection report because government guidelines about provision have changed significantly since 1997.

2. Children of nursery school age do not have national tests or results that staff can compare with other schools. The assessments of children when they first come to nursery suggest that, although there is a range of attainment and year groups vary, their attainment overall is typical for their age. Staff assess children again at the end of their nursery year in order to be able to measure the progress they have made. The headteacher has very recently prepared graphs that enable staff to see how well the children achieve as a year group, and she plans to use these in the future to set targets for improvement. Although the nursery has set itself targets for improvement for the current year, these are not directly related to raising the standard of children's work in any clear and measurable sense. Unusually for a nursery school, however, the headteacher's very good links with another nursery provide a starting point for beginning to be able to compare children's achievement with that of other children in the locality.

3. Overall, girls and boys, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well from their starting points due to mainly good teaching. Children achieve well in the most important area of their learning – their personal, social and emotional development. This gives them a head start in all other areas of their work and prepares them very well for beginning full-time school. Most children attain beyond what is expected for their age, and they progress along the stepping stones of the Foundation Curriculum at a good or very good pace. When they leave the nursery, they are happy, confident, well-behaved children who show an interest in their activities and want to please adults.

4. Another significant strength of children's achievement is their good progress in communication, language and literacy. Staff understand the importance of this area of learning and give a lot of time and attention to helping children to learn to express their ideas during work in all the other areas of learning. Children's attainment when they leave the nursery is above what is typical for their age. They listen carefully to staff and visitors, talk about their activities and answer questions using a good range of words. They enjoy stories, talk about books and are beginning to understand how print has meaning in both reading and writing.

5. Children's achievement in mathematics is satisfactory, and when they leave the nursery their attainment is typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress when learning to count and to recognise and write numbers. Brighter children sometimes mark time because staff do not always give them enough new challenges both in group times and when children select activities for themselves. This is sometimes the case in other areas of learning, too. Although children are confident to try to write both letters and numbers by themselves, many find it hard to write them correctly and some get into bad habits that are difficult to correct later.

6. In physical and creative development, children's satisfactory achievement enables them to reach the standard that is typical for their age. Children enjoy making things and working with creative materials, but do not have enough chances to try out their own creative

ideas on a day-to-day basis. As in all areas of learning, children's progress when working outside is restricted by the fact that staff do not plan for their learning well enough and because there are too few staff outside to be able to use all the teaching time to best effect. In knowledge and understanding of the world, children achieve well, overall. By the time they leave the nursery, their attainment is above what is typical for their age, especially in activities with a scientific focus. Good teaching in this area of learning indoors helps children to learn a lot about the world and people around them. It also improves children's talking and listening skills and makes a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Children's attitudes, values and personal development

7. The school has maintained the positive picture found at the time of the last inspection. All girls and boys have very good attitudes and enjoy coming to the nursery. They wait enthusiastically for the main doors to open, then move quickly into their classrooms where they are keen to start their activities. Children settle quickly and, because of the warm and friendly welcome they receive from the headteacher and staff, there are no tears when it is time for parents and carers to leave them. The children show interest in the activities that are set out for them, and most concentrate on one activity for a good length of time. They enjoy their play, such as when making up stories about the three bears and when making models with construction sets. Children are happy to talk to adults about what they are doing, and they sometimes start conversations with staff or visitors.

8. There have been no exclusions for unacceptable behaviour in the last school year. Children's behaviour is good overall, both in planned group lessons and around the nursery building and the outside play area. The school's positive approach to managing children's behaviour works well. Children are polite to one another and to adults. They share toys and materials and wait patiently for their turn, such as on tricycles at playtimes or playing a drum in music lessons. During one play time outside, a child leading a convoy of tricycles making its way around the 'pretend' road stopped for a long time at a pedestrian crossing. The children behind the leader waited patiently, with no sign of anger, until the leader decided to move on. When children were playing with a trough of a mixture of corn flour and water, called 'Gloop' by staff and children, children behaved impeccably, even when the teacher was in another part of the room. They kneaded and squeezed the mixture and rinsed their hands afterwards sensibly in a large bucket of water. During group times, children sit quietly waiting for their turn. They know that they should not speak until it is their time to hold the toy bear.

9. Children's personal development and their relationships are very good. They follow the good role models set by staff, and children from all cultural and social backgrounds work and play together happily. They sometimes enjoy doing jobs, such as helping to care for the rabbit and the guinea pig and watering plants.

10. Attendance is satisfactory. The current rate of 89 per cent is higher than at the time of the last inspection. There is no legal requirement for children of nursery age to attend, and there are no published figures to compare figures for this nursery with other nurseries. A few children go on extended holidays abroad. Some children are regularly late for morning nursery because parents and carers have to take their older children to other schools first. This means that these children regularly miss the first 15 minutes or more of the session, including opportunities to talk about the weather or the calendar.

HOW WELL ARE CHILDREN TAUGHT?

11. Teaching and learning are good, overall. As at the time of the last inspection, all of the teaching seen was satisfactory or better, and a fairly large proportion was good. All staff work well together as a team. They plan together and meet at the end of every session to discuss how well children responded to their activities. Staff manage children very well by setting equally high standards of children's behaviour and personal development. This helps children to learn what is expected of them and to want to please staff. The established routines and very good preparation for sessions give children a sense of security and purpose. Staff interact very positively with the children and this helps children to learn how to get along amicably with other children and with visiting staff.

12. A consistently good feature of teaching in all areas of learning is that staff introduce children to new words all the time and question them carefully to extend their talking skills. They are good role models of clear speech and this encourages children to express their ideas more clearly. It furthers children's learning right across the curriculum, and is a major factor in the good teaching and above average attainment of children in communication, language and literacy. There has clearly been an improvement in the teaching of early literacy skills since the last inspection report, although staff do not always make sure that children learn to write their letters correctly, especially when they write their names at the start of every session.

13. Staff, rightly, give a lot of time and attention to encouraging children's personal, social and emotional development, and teaching and learning are good. Although they sometimes plan special activities, they are also constantly alert and watch out for opportunities, for example to remind children to tidy up and to learn to take turns when working in groups. The happy and relaxed atmosphere of the nursery and the careful presentation of classrooms and resources do much to help children to understand that their learning is important. Consequently, children try hard, show interest and concentrate, sometimes for long periods of time. Staff vary their teaching methods to give children a broad experience. They often use direct teaching well to take children's learning forward. This is especially effective in helping children to learn some of the early reading and writing skills. Staff show good understanding of how to do this in ways that are most likely to help children to learn that print can be read and has meaning.

14. Teaching and learning in mathematical development are satisfactory, overall. Teachers know how important it is for children to begin to learn to work with numbers and mathematical ideas and they give time and attention to helping them to do so, as opportunities arise. Direct teaching in mathematics is not always as helpful as it is in communication, language and literacy because the work is not matched closely to what children already know, understand and can do. There are times when staff do not challenge the brighter children sufficiently. Staff help children to learn to recognise and write numbers, but some children get into poor habits when writing numbers and staff do not give the matter close enough attention. While the physical surroundings of the nursery encourage literacy skills quite well, there are fewer displays, objects and toys to stimulate children's curiosity and enthusiasm for mathematics.

15. Teaching and learning in knowledge and understanding of the world are good. Staff provide many chances for children to explore and investigate as part of their play and to talk about what they are doing. Staff promote information and communication technology positively to children, and children become confident using computers and enthusiastic about the world of technology, such as sending a fax to another child. Teaching and learning overall in creative and physical development are satisfactory, although photographs of previous activities show some good provision at times. As with all other areas of learning, however, staff do not use the time when children are outside well enough to take children's learning forward by giving them practical problems to solve, greater physical challenges and chances

to work creatively outdoors. The school development plan indicates that this matter is an area for future improvement now that the outdoor premises are suitable for use.

16. Lesson planning in each area of learning is satisfactory. Staff have revised and improved this aspect of their work since the last inspection report, when a key issue was to provide more guidance about how to teach early reading and number skills. The headteacher knows that further work is necessary in order to align planning even more closely with the stepping stones that lead children towards attaining the early learning goals. Part of the expected improvements include making better use of assessment information to set targets for children, depending on what staff know that children need to learn next.

17. Teaching helps children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language to learn at a good pace, although this is most evident at those times of the week when they benefit from the good teaching of the staff who work directly with them. Daily and weekly planning often shows that staff give special consideration to these children. Their learning slows down, as it does for all children, however, when they work away from the direct involvement of staff, with no planning to make sure that they continue to learn.

18. The few parents who attended the inspection meeting and those who returned the questionnaire were pleased with the teaching in the nursery. They especially praised teaching and learning in personal, social and emotional development, and inspectors agree that this is a significantly important strength of the work of all staff.

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

19. The satisfactory programme of work is broad and balanced, and gives equality of opportunity for boys and girls. This is a similar picture to the last inspection report. Since that time, however, staff have revised their lesson planning to address a key issue in the report, and now have adequate guidance about teaching reading and number skills. Although staff have adjusted the curriculum several times to take account of revised national guidance, the well-established cycle of topics has not changed much. The topics often provide a useful starting point for children's learning, but there are times when staff plan what children are going to do to fit the themes within the topic titles, rather than planning activities to match the skills that children need to learn next. The current topic about stories, for example, means that most activities from art to mathematics are related to bears. As a few children now attend for longer than for one full year, this method of planning can mean that they repeat this strong focus on one topic.

20. Staff plan the curriculum to match the national early learning goals and focus on each area of learning every week. They discuss together how successful each session has been in meeting the objectives in their lesson plans and take some account of this when planning future lessons. Useful policies give guidance in each area of learning and other aspects of school life. While planning lists learning objectives, often taken directly from the Foundation Curriculum document, it does not take enough account of the stepping stones that lead children towards attaining the early learning goals. Staff plan for communication, language and literacy and for mathematical development at three levels, showing that they have different expectations of the children according to how bright they are. In many lessons, however, there is actually little difference in what staff plan for children to learn, and brighter children sometimes mark time. The headteacher already has suitable plans to improve curriculum planning in a way that is likely to put this right, although such plans do not yet form part of the written school development plan.

21. Provision for children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language is good. Staff are quick to notice when children need extra help and they prepare individual education plans or seek specialist help to make sure that the children continue to learn. Staff often know which children are the brighter ones and sometimes give them harder work. They are not yet as skilled at matching children's work precisely to what they already know, understand and can do.

22. The main weakness of the curriculum is the lack of specific planning for learning outside. The daily timetabled sessions are known by staff and children as 'play times', and staff do not use these fairly long blocks of time sufficiently well to further children's learning. Children's learning is held back by this weakness. The headteacher already has plans to improve provision now that the external premises are suitable for regular use.

23. A considerable strength of the curriculum is the partnership with other schools on the campus and with other educational institutions and agencies in the local education authority. These links extend children's learning very well, as when pupils from the local secondary school went pond dipping with the nursery children. The headteacher's written vision for the school and the school development plan include continuing to further links with the community. All these links provide opportunities for children to extend their knowledge and understanding of being part of a community and give them a chance to play an active part themselves.

24. The nursery has developed a climate in which all children can grow and flourish. Provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, and provision for their moral and social development is very good. This represents an improvement since the last inspection report in children's spiritual, moral and cultural development. As a result of this provision, children have very good attitudes to learning and relationships with others, and their behaviour is good.

25. Sessions get off to a happy start, and the range of music played in the entrance goes a long way to setting the pleasant, welcoming and thoughtful atmosphere that helps children to feel relaxed. Both children and their parents enjoy the repertoire of music played. Staff encourage children to respect the feelings of one another as well as those of other living things, as when they care for the nursery pets. Children learn to think about the natural world when they grow plants, observe and paint flowers and watch chicks hatch and grow.

26. Staff make good use of times when children come together in groups to encourage children to learn about the differences between right and wrong. Children learn to take turns and to understand that there are times when they need to listen to other children rather than talking themselves. They learn to understand how their own actions impact on other people, as when they discuss and write about how Goldilocks might say sorry to the three bears. In many activities children gradually begin to understand that, even if they want to take part they cannot, for instance, take more than their fair share of the dough because that means that other children cannot play. Parents appreciate the calm and relaxed atmosphere of the nursery because it helps their children to settle easily at the beginning of sessions. The well-established routines and the very good role models that staff provide make a considerable contribution to children's personal development.

27. Staff plan good opportunities for children to celebrate festivals, such as Christmas, Eid and Diwali. Children do this in different ways, including by singing, dancing and decorating things. A range of lively musical experiences helps children to appreciate and value the creative expressions of others. They recently experimented with Indian musical instruments and listened to an Irish musician. An African storyteller enthralled them with

traditional tales. In their role-play, children have access to traditional dress and to artefacts and dolls from different cultures. This aids their understanding of the similarities and differences between people. Children begin to understand that words can be written in a variety of languages when they see the notices displayed around the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS CHILDREN?

28. Staff ensure that these very young children settle into nursery quickly and happily and are eager to come every day. They put a lot of emphasis upon warm and friendly relationships with children, parents and carers, and this helps children to feel secure, valued and welcome. The arrangements for child protection and for ensuring children's educational and social welfare mean that any problems that are likely to hinder children's learning are quickly attended to. Security to the building is very good and staff are careful to maintain this at all times. Staff who work with children during playtimes are vigilant, but there are too few staff for the number of children outdoors to be certain that health and safety issues will not arise. Due to the current complex changeover of responsibility for managing the premises as part of the PPP, there is a lack of clarity about some health and safety matters. All staff follow the very good procedures for watching over children's behaviour and they give positive support to individual children if difficulties occur. There is no sign of any bullying of individual children or any particular groups of children. Procedures for keeping a watchful eye on children's attendance and improving it when necessary are sound.

29. Staff keep detailed records of children's academic and personal progress, and provide the right kind of extra help when children exhibit difficulties. This is an improvement since the last inspection. A bi-lingual assistant, for example, visits twice weekly and works with children who are still learning to speak English, and children with special educational needs have good quality support. The headteacher has secured extra help for the children concerned only by her determination to do so.

30. Staff are aware that children have differing educational needs and sometimes plan work for them that is a little easier or harder. Although they have access to a lot of recorded information about the attainment of individual children, they do not always use this well to plan what children need to learn next. This means that brighter children sometimes mark time because their activities provide too few new challenges. Since the last inspection, staff have put right the key issue that asked for children to be assessed soon after they start nursery, and they have improved arrangements for charting children's progress.

31. Children's reports at the end of the year include useful information about what children know, understand and can do, but do not show that staff have identified what they need to learn next. Staff plan to improve arrangements for assessing children and to align their procedures more closely to the stepping stones that lead children towards attaining the early learning goals. The headteacher knows that the next step forward is to analyse the new data she is collecting to be able to spot the strengths and areas for improvement in the curriculum, teaching and children's attainment.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

32. Those parents who returned the inspection questionnaires and attended the meetings think highly of the nursery. They think that the school gives their children a very good start to their education. A few parents, however, would like more information about how well their children are getting on. Staff provide only one formal opportunity for parents to talk about their child's progress with a teacher, and this is towards the end of the school year and during the day. Some parents think that this is too late and working parents are unable to attend. Although parents know that staff are available to talk to them every day at the start and end of sessions, some do not find it appropriate to initiate a discussion about children's progress at these busy times of the day with children present.

33. The involvement of parents in the work of the school is satisfactory. Staff encourage parents to take an active part in their child's learning by displaying teaching plans for the week in each classroom and by giving parents a useful sheet of information about how to help their child at home. From time to time, parents receive brief information about forthcoming events and sometimes information about the forthcoming topic. A small number of parents give valuable support by helping children to change library books each week. Some parents and grandparents help with taking children swimming at the local pool. At the start of every session, staff ask parents or carers to help their children to learn how to write their own names, and they do so willingly. Several parents, however, said that they would like more help with this from staff because they are unsure whether or not their children are writing the letters correctly – often they are not. Staff sometimes provide such help, but there are too many children and parents all writing names at the same time to enable staff to provide the amount of help needed. Staff plan a number of events for parents during the year, ranging from informal coffee sessions to the popular annual day out at the seaside for staff, children and their families. The school plans to improve its links with parents further and staff have recently started training to enable them to lead workshops for those parents who want to find out more about working with children in nursery.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

34. Since the last inspection, the headteacher has continued to be a good leader. She has the confidence of other staff, parents and carers and the local education authority in her ability to manage the nursery successfully. Parents and carers at the inspection meeting and those who returned the questionnaire believe, rightly, that the headteacher strives to improve the school continually and that she plays a major role in their children's education and happiness at nursery. There is no governing body and the local education authority watches over the school and its progress. In recent times, the headteacher has steered the school and its staff through a period of considerable upheaval owing to the two physical moves involved in opening the new nursery premises. She has managed the situation very successfully, making sure that children's education has not been disrupted along the way, and that staff have continued to work closely together as a team. Considering that the new building only opened in September 2001 and that the administrative assistant is fairly new to the school, everything is well organised and the nursery runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The headteacher gives a positive and clear lead to staff and communicates a strong sense of commitment to the children, their parents and carers, and to the ongoing success of the school.

35. There is no deputy headteacher or senior staff, and headteacher has a lot of responsibilities. Although she sometimes delegates to other staff, she carries out most leadership and management duties herself, especially those relating to checking the quality and effectiveness of the school. Owing to the new arrangements for managing schools that are part of the PPP, there are still some uncertainties to resolve about who is responsible for aspects of the management of the nursery and what role the local education authority will

play in the future. Arrangements for managing the performance of staff are in place, although these are in the early stages, and there has not been enough time to be able to see the full benefits to children's achievement over time.

36. The school development plan is for one year only and sets targets for each area of learning as well as for links with the community and for assessing children. The plan, which is due to be revised shortly, is not explicit about how the work will lead to improved teaching and higher standards and how everyone will find out if staff have been successful in their efforts. Although the headteacher knows in broad terms what needs to improve, in recent times her strongest focus has been, understandably, on getting the nursery established in the new building. She knows that monitoring and evaluating the success of the provision are the next steps for the school, and has already arranged to attend a course. Staff with responsibilities for curriculum areas pinpoint the strengths of the provision, as they see them. They are not yet as skilled at finding out about where the standard of children's work needs to be higher and which aspects of teaching and learning could improve. The key issues from the last inspection report have been tackled appropriately, and the school has moved forward as much as could reasonably be expected considering the major building works and upheavals taking place.

37. One of the strengths of the management of the nursery is the success of the headteacher in securing and using extra funding from various grants and sources. All grants and funds to support particular groups of children are used to good effect, for example funds to support children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. The school has an unusually large carry-forward budget that has arisen due to changes in the way that the school is funded and to the recent moves to different buildings. The headteacher, with the approval of the local education authority, has clear plans to use this money in the future as part of her vision for a unit on the same site for younger children, including facilities for children who are partially sighted. Although the school does not have a full delegated budget, the headteacher has made a sound start with applying the principles of best value. A simple questionnaire to parents and carers, for example, confirmed that they like the new building and have no significant concerns. The headteacher has started to seek ways to compare children's progress with that of children in another local nursery, but it is too early to draw any significant conclusions from this.

38. The school is generously staffed with two teachers, a headteacher who has no class teaching responsibilities and three nursery nurses. Staff work well together as a team and the induction programme for new staff is good. Staff have opportunities to improve their teaching skills through a suitable range of courses. Not all the time available for teaching and learning is used to very best advantage, however, for example when several staff are indoors clearing up and preparing for the next session while children play outside with too few staff to enable them to learn as much as they could. When a teacher spends a significant amount of time watching children and tracking which activities they choose, this sometimes provides helpful information that the headteacher acts upon. It is, nevertheless, not a very efficient method of using important teaching time that would be more usefully spent assessing what children know, understand and can do.

39. There are plenty of good quality and mainly easily accessible and used resources. The new accommodation is excellent, and it allows children to explore the space freely and to learn. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The new purpose-built unit comprises two classrooms and a library for the children's use. Staff sometimes use the separate gym for physical development, especially when the weather does not permit playing outside. A generous amount of space outdoors contains a sheltered veranda, hard surfaces and large grassed areas. Staff present the building attractively to children and set high standards of cleanliness and organisation. The outdoor premises have only recently become

suitable for regular use by children, and the headteacher already has plans to make it a more important focus for children's learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

40. The headteacher and staff should now:

- (1) Review curriculum and lesson planning to make sure that it always takes full account of the stepping stones that lead children towards attaining the early learning goals.
See paragraphs 16,20,49,51,63,65.
- (2) Improve arrangements for assessing children's attainment so that staff can use information to plan what children of all levels of attainment should learn next.
See paragraphs 5,14,16,19,20,30,31,47,48,50,51,55,57,65.
- (3) Plan a curriculum in all areas of learning for when children play outside, and make sure that there are enough staff to enable children to achieve as much as they can.
See paragraphs 6,15,22,38,43,48,51,57,58,64.
- (4) Extend the arrangements for finding out how high standards are and for pinpointing where the nursery needs to improve next.
See paragraphs 2,35,36.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of sessions observed	22
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	11

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	0	13	9	0	0	0
Percentage	0	0	59	41	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of sessions observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each session represents more than four percentage points.

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)	49
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	1

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	18

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	12

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1

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	16

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	105

Number of pupils per FTE adult	13
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	29,552
Total expenditure	18,276
Expenditure per pupil	351
Balance brought forward from previous year	9,006
Balance carried forward to next year	20,282

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	1

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

24.5%

Number of questionnaires sent out

94

Number of questionnaires returned

23

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	100	0	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	96	4	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	78	22	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	57	4	4	0	35
The teaching is good.	91	9	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	70	22	9	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	96	4	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	78	17	0	0	4
The school works closely with parents.	74	26	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	91	9	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	87	13	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	61	17	0	0	22

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Personal, social and emotional development

41. Staff, rightly, focus a lot of their time and attention on children's personal, social and emotional development, and this area remains the strength reported in the last inspection. Staff want children to feel comfortable with themselves and to enjoy taking part in many different activities. Good teaching and learning provide a firm foundation for children's learning, and by the time children leave the nursery, their attainment overall is above what is typical for their age. Children achieve well from their starting points, and parents are pleased that their children enjoy coming. The friendly, caring, but firm approach of staff helps children to feel happy and secure and they settle quickly into nursery routines. The fact that staff get along well with parents and carers also helps children to feel valued and important. Staff have high expectations of children's behaviour and encourage and help them on the few occasions when unacceptable behaviour occurs. As a result, children learn how to behave towards adults and other children, and to treat one another and equipment properly.

42. Children are confident to work with different adults in a variety of situations, as when they work happily away from regular staff with a visiting music teacher. They usually sit still and listen well to adults, whether working in large or small groups of children. Children with special educational needs make good progress because staff know them well and find the best ways to help them. Staff are aware when children who speak English as an additional language need extra help to understand what they have to do, and they are quick to step in when children need more confidence to join in with activities.

43. Staff help children to become independent and some children clearly enjoy helping to tidy up, although others still need more encouragement to do so. The well-organised classrooms help children to learn where to put things, such as where to hang their aprons and where toys should be put away. Most children can put on and take off their own coats and use the toilet by themselves. Staff give children a few choices about where to work, what to do and who to play with, and this helps them to learn to take initiative and some responsibility for their own learning. When playing outside, for example, children select and share toys and move around the large spaces happily and confidently together. During outside playtimes, however, there are too few staff to make sure that all the children have regular opportunities to enjoy responding to new and increasing challenges. Also, staff are unable to assess thoroughly how well the children are doing because there are too many children for the number of staff present. When working indoors, staff could expect even more of some children, especially the brighter ones, by setting them learning targets and involving the children and their parents or carers. Nevertheless, children make good progress overall, because of the positive, friendly, caring and attractive surroundings of the nursery.

Communication, language and literacy

44. Good teaching and learning help girls and boys to achieve well from their starting points, and when they leave the nursery, their attainment is above what is typical for their age. A particularly strong feature of teaching in every area of learning is that staff always set a good example of clear speech and they regularly ask children questions that encourage them to talk and to use new words. When working with clay, for example, a nursery nurse asked children, 'What does it feel like?' and 'What sort of tools could we use?'. Staff plan the specific words that children who are learning to speak English will need in order to be able to

talk about working with clay, such as *pinch*, *squeeze* and *roll*. In addition, a visiting bi-lingual assistant works closely with a small number of children who find talking in English difficult because they do not have enough experience of English vocabulary. These children make good progress during sessions when they benefit from this extra support. The visiting support assistant adopts the same approach as other staff and asks questions to make sure that children understand and use new words. Staff plan a lot of opportunities for all children to increase their listening skills. They ask children to listen to adults individually as well as in small and larger groups. At group time, for example, staff expect children to listen to directions and guidance, take turns when talking and listen to other children. As a result, most children can listen fairly carefully to questions, guidance, stories and each other during play. Their speech is usually clear, often grammatically correct and includes interesting words and phrases. Children's good listening and talking give them a head start with their future education.

45. Staff sometimes use direct teaching methods well to further children's learning. In reading, for example, children make good progress when they read stories together during group time. Staff help children to understand that print on the pages of books has meaning. They do this by reading interesting storybooks aloud and discussing the pictures and the words with the children. In one group time, a nursery nurse did this successfully and children enjoyed listening carefully to a story, expressed their ideas about it and predicted what might be going to happen next. They were familiar with the terms *author* and *illustrator*, and took delight in remembering these words from previous story times. During other group times, staff discuss letters and the sounds they represent, and many children recognise at least some letters and can relate them to the first letter of words. There is a lot of print around the nursery and children quickly learn to recognise their own names.

46. Although children have access to a few books all the time, they rarely look at the books in the library except when changing the books that they can take home weekly. During the inspection, there were very few other occasions when children talked about books with adults or other children during times when they could choose their own activities. The current topic theme of 'Stories' is helping children to learn about traditional tales as well as increasing their interest in other books. Teachers' understanding of how to teach early reading skills was insecure at the last inspection, but there has clearly been some improvement.

47. Another example of good direct teaching was seen when groups of children wrote an imaginary letter to Goldilocks. An adult scribed this for them following a discussion about what Goldilocks might want to say to the bears in their story. Afterwards, children attempted to write their own letters; most made marks on paper and some were able to say what they wanted their letters to say. One or two children wrote some recognisable individual letters and the brightest children attempted to write words by themselves. All children try to write their own names every day by copying, although some are more capable than others. They do this with their parents or carers at the start of each nursery session. Parents and carers are willing to help the children, but many do not know how best to do so. Staff are often close by and provide help when possible, but too many children get into incorrect habits when forming their letters, and very few yet do this task well. Similarly, when writing at other times, staff do not always correct children's pencil grips or poor letter formation. Children can choose to write in the writing corners at other times, although few did so as a natural part of their imaginative play during the inspection. Nevertheless, most children are confident to try to write things down by themselves.

48. Staff show that they understand the importance of communication, language and literacy as a vital part of children's early education. They plan what they want children to learn in some of their activities, but they are not always specific enough about this. Staff sometimes set the same curriculum and lesson objectives for all children, when some,

particularly the brighter children, need more demanding work. The school's arrangements for assessing children are not yet linked closely enough on a day-to-day basis with finding out what children can already do so that staff can plan what they need to learn to take them forward to the next stage of their learning. Staff do not plan formally for the outdoor curriculum and miss a lot of opportunities to improve children's listening and talking skills. When some staff are getting ready for the next session rather than working outside with the children, there is inefficient use of teaching and learning time.

Mathematical development

49. The satisfactory achievement of girls and boys means that standards are typical for children of their age. Children progress towards reaching the early learning goals at a satisfactory pace. When the vast majority of planned lessons are based on the topic themes, this sometimes limits children's learning because higher attaining children are unable to show what they know, understand and can do. Rhymes about taking away from five bears, for example, do not allow those children in the higher attaining group who already work confidently with much larger numbers and more complex mathematical ideas to make the progress they could. Children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language learn at the same pace as other children in their classes.

50. Staff work hard, and when they interact directly with children, teaching and learning are satisfactory, overall. They manage children very well by setting high expectations of their behaviour and by providing positive guidance when necessary. Staff are very aware of the need to teach mathematical vocabulary consistently and plan regular opportunities for children to learn and understand new words. They are very good at asking questions that encourage children to talk about mathematics. When children work away from the direct teaching of staff, however, for example when playing in the water or playing games with numbers, staff miss some opportunities to further and to challenge children's mathematical learning.

51. Weekly planning shows that staff plan activities at three progressively more difficult levels and make broad assessments of how well the children have done. In practice, however, this system does not always result in work that is closely matched to what children need to learn next. Records of what children have already attained within the stepping stones of the Foundation Curriculum do not yet provide the starting point for their continued progress. A key issue in the previous report was to provide guidance to teachers about developing children's early number skills. The school has provided further guidance, but there is more work needed now to match this closely to the current Foundation Curriculum and to make sure that children build up their skills small step by small step. Staff do not plan formally for learning outside at playtimes, and when they spend this valuable teaching time indoors preparing for the next session, children's learning is held back. A priority for school improvement in mathematical development includes developing learning in the new outside environment.

52. The equipment currently used for teaching mathematical development is fairly limited and does not always provide as much interest and enjoyment of mental challenges as it could. The 'bear trail' provided opportunities to develop children's physical and mathematical skills together, but staff missed opportunities to further their mathematical language. In one class, a member of staff gave children the opportunity to match numbers from 0 – 10 and set the numbers out for them correctly oriented. Most of the children immediately turned the numbers around, making matching them more difficult. The majority of children managed to match the numbers after some thought, but a few needed help to do so. Many children can name simple flat geometric shapes correctly. A boy who had concentrated for a long time fitting wooden shapes together carefully to make a boat also recognised and named a

diamond shape. Children are beginning to use the language of size, such as *big* and *small*, in relation to the story of the three bears. They can sort variously sized objects to match the sizes of the bears, and the higher attaining children use terms of comparison, such as *bigger* and *smallest*. Some children can sort toy bears into sets of those that have ribbons and those that do not.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

53. Girls and boys, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well and attain standards that are above what is typical for their age. When adults interact with the children, good teaching enables them to make good progress towards the early learning goals. The generally good provision and resources for activities encourage children to want to try things out for themselves and they become confident investigators. They are fascinated by such things as magnets and iron filings and sustain their concentration and curiosity well. Similarly, children are enthusiastic and enjoy opportunities to investigate kaleidoscopes and sheets of coloured plastic. They talk about what they are doing, as when a girl declared, 'Its really dark', when looking at the classroom through purple plastic. During the inspection, a nursery nurse intervened well to show children how to use the kaleidoscopes correctly and to get the most from their play.

54. Children plant seeds and know that they need to keep the seeds watered and warm if they are to grow. A few children use playtimes outside to water the plants. Children's understanding of growth was seen when a child placed his finger on a sequence of five differently sized penguins in a jigsaw and chanted, 'they growed and they growed and they growed'. Photographs show that children observed chicks hatching and they painted what they saw. They recorded their observations by copying writing, for example 'my chick is running around'. As part of their work about the story of the three bears, children tasted porridge flavoured by salt, sugar or honey, and said whether it was horrible or nice. All children enjoy exploring things, such as the mixture of corn flour and water, although staff do not always seize opportunities of this kind to further children's scientific language or to ask them questions that challenge thinking further.

55. Staff use modern technology well to aid children's learning. Children send a fax of their own drawing and writing to children who attend another nursery close by. They use a digital camera to take pictures of one another, for instance when working with clay, and this helps them to take a pride in their achievements. Children use computers and other equipment with confidence, often working together amicably on one computer. An animated computer program that helps children to increase their number skills and uses a song about an alligator king fascinated a group of children in one class. They remained gathered around the screen together for some time, often commenting on the program. Many children use the computer mouse competently to move around the screen and to 'drag' objects to match numbers or letters. The occasional interventions by staff are effective, as when a nursery nurse explained how to avoid unintentionally exiting a program and which icon to press in order to continue. Staff teach the correct technical language, as when explaining how to load or exit a program. The programs on offer to children, however, are too easy for the brighter children, who sometimes flit from program to program trying to find a new challenge.

56. Staff provide regular opportunities for children to talk about the weather, and children help to change the weather board every day. Children describe the weather using terms such as *cold* and *sunny*, and they remember work from a previous topic about the weather. They discuss which day of the week it is, and although many are confused, several children can name the correct day. Children are beginning to be able to use the language of time correctly as they discuss how long it is to the planned teddy bears' picnic.

57. One of the school's main priorities for improvement is to develop an outdoor classroom. The plan is mainly related to the provision of resources and links with the local community. Staff have yet to include in the plans consideration of how best to improve teaching outside. A lot of valuable teaching and learning time is currently wasted when all the children work outdoors with too few staff to teach them well. Staff assess children regularly, although lesson planning does not yet always result in work that is matched closely to what all the children need to learn next.

Physical development

58. Satisfactory teaching and learning enable girls and boys, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, to attain the standards overall that are typical for their age. They achieve soundly and make satisfactory progress towards the early learning goals. A weakness in children's progress arises, however, because staff do not plan formally for an outdoor curriculum, although children do have a playtime outside every day when the weather permits. The children all go outside together, usually with only two or three staff, and this means that they have few chances to learn to respond to new and increasingly difficult physical challenges. When staff interact with children, for example when the headteacher challenged a boy to throw his ball through a small hoop, their learning moves forward well. Such events are too infrequent, however, and children's achievement is limited by the equipment set out for them and by lack of time working directly with staff. The school development plan shows that staff want to improve children's confidence and climbing skills outdoors as well as the arrangements for assessing children and planning for their future learning.

59. Most children move around indoors and outside confidently. The majority riding tricycles and scooters do so with assurance, as they negotiate the circular track in the right direction. Few children use the climbing frame, but those who do, usually girls, climb the steps, balance on the bridge and come down the slide with skill. In one class, a group of children showed that they understood the effects that exercise has on their bodies when they puffed out after jumping around and playing singing games such as 'Peter Hammers'. Photographs suggest that children enjoy using the apparatus in the gym. Each week, a small group of children have an opportunity to go swimming with the headteacher, parents and carers. They gain confidence in the water, as shown by the swimming awards they have already received.

60. Staff take good care to use correct technical terms when talking to children about their work. When they demonstrate how children can improve, for example their cutting out with scissors, children's learning moves forward. Many children use a variety of tools and equipment correctly, such as rolling pins and glue brushes. They use their hands to squeeze, roll, cut and mark clay or dough. Most children hold paintbrushes and pencils correctly, although staff do not always notice when children need more help to do so.

61. Staff provide regular chances for children to work with equipment that improves their physical dexterity, such as construction sets and jigsaws. Children fit pieces together carefully and show enjoyment of what they have made. They mostly work alongside other children, but they sometimes work co-operatively, as seen in a photograph of when they used large bricks and shapes to construct a house of sticks for the second little pig in their story. Children use small bricks to construct models of buildings. The brighter children carefully and skilfully balance bricks longways and crossways, while other children merely pile them up. One boy made a radio from his construction set and said, 'Press the button and the man inside talks. Put batteries in and it works'. Children manipulate coloured buttons, pressing them carefully into place and threading links together to make ladders. Such activities assist their physical development, but also provide good opportunities for talking.

Creative development

62. Satisfactory teaching and learning enable girls and boys to achieve as well as most other children nationally and to attain standards that are typical for their age. Children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as all the other children in their classes. Photographs of children's previous activities suggest that the school's provision for creative development is good at certain times of the year when there are special events planned. A range of visiting artists, musicians and story tellers from a variety of cultures, for example, have visited and worked with children both indoors and outside. This kind of work makes a good contribution to children's social and cultural development and increases their knowledge and understanding of the world, as well as helping them to enjoy the creative ideas expressed by other people.

63. Staff encourage children's musical learning when a visiting specialist musician works with groups of children. Her strong musical expertise helps to prepare children for the more formal work of the National Curriculum. Children listen very well in these lessons and try hard when the teacher asks them to respond to rhythms and to associate pictures with different sounds. School staff also work with groups of children following similar musical themes. In two such lessons, a teacher questioned children carefully to encourage them to practise using musical terms, such as *loud sounds* and *soft sounds*. One group of children listened more attentively than another group did, but the teacher was careful to manage some potentially difficult behaviour positively and sensitively. In all these musical activities, a major purpose of the lessons was to help children to 'explore' music, but children had hardly any chances to do this by themselves. The school has a very good supply of high quality musical instruments stored in the library, but during the inspection none were easily accessible to children, and staff did not encourage them to experiment with musical ideas by themselves in other ways.

64. Staff encourage children's creative development in a variety of suitable ways. Familiar stories and situations provide starting points for children's imaginative play. During the inspection, children enjoyed acting out parts of the story of the three bears with other children in the pretend cottage. This story also provided a focus for children's work with clay, and the teacher questioned children well and helped them to express their own ideas and feelings. This good direct teaching enabled children to learn the skills they need to model with clay. Similarly, when children played with a mixture of corn flour and water, the unusual tactile experience gave them lots to talk about. Outside, however, children had few opportunities to work creatively. This was partly because staff do not plan the outdoor curriculum properly, and partly because there are too few staff outside to take opportunities forward when they arise naturally from children's play.

65. Children enjoy working with the creative materials that are regularly available and accessible to them, such as construction sets, drawing materials and pre-mixed paints. They concentrate, persevere and show interest, as when a boy made a helicopter with a rotator blade on top. During the inspection, however, children did not have access to a wide variety of materials to stimulate their own sense of creativity. Teachers often plan creative work based on the current topic. Although this is sometimes successful, it limits children's learning when staff tell them what to make and what to use. Staff assess children's attainment, but their knowledge of what children already know, understand and can do does not always lead to closely matched work. In music lessons, for example, some children already understand the idea of *loud sounds* and *soft sounds* and some higher attaining children have a very well developed sense of rhythm that is not built upon.