

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **STRONG CLOSE NURSERY SCHOOL**

Keighley

LEA area: Bradford

Unique reference number: 107185

Headteacher: Ms Kath Williams

Lead inspector: Mr Michael Hewlett

Dates of inspection: 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> June 2004

Inspection number: 258054

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Type of school:              | Nursery                                     |
| School category:             | Maintained                                  |
| Age range of pupils:         | 3 to 5 years                                |
| Gender of pupils:            | Mixed                                       |
| Number on roll:              | 129   |
| School address:              | Airedale Road<br>Keighley<br>West Yorkshire |
| Postcode:                    | BD21 4LW                                    |
| Telephone number:            | 01535 605272                                |
| Fax number:                  | 01535 692556                                |
| Appropriate authority:       | Bradford LEA                                |
| Name of chair of governors:  | Mrs Rachel Jacobs<br>(temporary)            |
| Date of previous inspection: | November 1998                               |

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Strong Close is a large nursery school offering part-time places for 132 young children, as well as a range of other services for families and early years staff throughout the area. It is situated close to Keighley town centre and serves an area of social deprivation and high unemployment. Some of the children are referred to the nursery because they have additional needs. Eighteen children are identified as requiring additional support but none of these have a statement of special educational need. Of those children with special needs, the majority have speech or communication difficulties, whilst the remainder represent the full range of additional needs including physical difficulties and autism. Most of the children, 76 per cent, are of white British heritage. A further 24 per cent come from Asian heritage families, with the majority of children having limited English skills as they arrive in nursery. The full range of ability is represented overall and when children start nursery their skills and knowledge in most areas of learning are typical for their age. The nursery has undergone major changes since the last inspection, including improved facilities for outdoor play and being designated as a 'Beacon School'. This has involved the nursery in offering training for colleagues from other Early Years settings, supporting other schools and sharing good practice. In 2001, the school received a 'School Achievement' award.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team |                 |                | Subject responsibilities                                  |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| 1569                           | Michael Hewlett | Lead inspector | The Foundation Stage<br>English as an additional language |
| 11084                          | Jane Hughes     | Lay inspector  |   |
| 12394                          | Carole May      | Team inspector | The Foundation Stage<br>Special educational needs         |
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **OVERALL EVALUATION**

**This is a good school where children achieve well.** They make good progress at Strong Close because the majority of teaching is good and staff provide an extensive range of interesting activities. Standards of care are very good, whilst links with parents are good. The leadership of the headteacher is good and management is satisfactory.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching standards are good;
- An uplifting ethos promotes high standards of behaviour and very positive attitudes to learning;
- Adult relationships with children are excellent and the quality of care is very high;
- Tracking children's progress and use of assessment data to plan the next stage of work does not happen consistently enough;
- Monitoring of teaching and learning needs to be more rigorous;
- Organisation of the curriculum is not as sharp as it should be;
- Providing very good support and training for staff from other schools.

The school was last inspected in 1998 and only a small number of issues for improvement were identified. The school has made satisfactory progress in the intervening years, successfully tackling the attendance problems that were identified. A great deal has changed since 1998, including designation as a 'Beacon School', with staff offering regular training to Early Years staff as well as supporting other schools.

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED**

**Children achieve well.** They are on course to exceed the goals they are expected to reach by the end of their reception year in all the areas of learning. This represents good progress in these areas, because children arrive at the nursery with skill levels similar to those found in most children of a similar age. They are taught well overall and make best progress when adults are working alongside them, challenging them to do their best. Children experience an exciting range of interesting activities to pursue. Similar levels of achievement apply to the many different groups within the school, such as those with special needs, children new to English and those who are higher attainers.

**Children's personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good.** The atmosphere is vibrant within the school. Children respond to this with very good behaviour and a keenness to learn. They get on very well with one another and enjoy excellent relationships with staff. Attendance levels are satisfactory.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good overall** and all staff have a good understanding of how young children learn. Numerous opportunities are planned to extend children's learning and help them to become independent by making choices about the tasks they will pursue. However, the organisation of the curriculum can mean

that during some of the sessions children do not meet up with an adult for an extended period. This limits their learning and slows the progress they make. It also makes it difficult for adults to accurately assess how well they are doing. Partnerships with parents and the community are good; links with other schools and agencies are very good. Parents receive good quality information and are encouraged to become actively involved in their children's education. Care for children is very good. They feel secure, safe and are happy to come to school.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**The leadership of the headteacher is good. Management of the school is satisfactory.** In the short time that the headteacher has been in the post, the right priorities have been identified and sensible plans have been put in place to make the necessary changes. Working closely with colleagues and local education authority officers, she has set out a clear vision and direction for the school by building on its strengths. She has a strongly stated commitment to raising standards. Systems for tracking and measuring children's progress have been introduced but their full value is yet to be achieved. Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are newly established and there are still some gaps that have to be remedied, such as ironing out inconsistencies in some of the teaching and improving the way the sessions are organised. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body was established only recently and it has just received its delegated budget. It is too soon for governors to have had a major impact on how the school should grow in the future. Nevertheless, they already demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of its priorities, have started to organise their committee structure and meet regularly with parents. They fulfil all their statutory responsibilities.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents and pupils are proud of their school and the inspection is able to confirm their views are justified. Children enjoy coming to school and parents are confident they will be well looked after. Parents are very complimentary about the way all staff work with them.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

In the context of an effective school, the most important steps Strong Close should take to improve are:

- Check on teaching and learning more rigorously;
- Improve systems for assessment and use the information gathered when planning future work;
- Review the organisation of the school day.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in areas of learning**

Children achieve consistently well at Strong Close. The majority are on course to exceed the standards expected by the end of the Foundation Stage in the six areas of learning. Particular strengths are found in children's personal development, their oral and observational skills and in their ability to act independently.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children's overall achievement is good;
- Children with additional needs make particularly good progress.

#### **Commentary**

1. Children's skills are similar to those usually found in children of the same age when they start nursery. During their time at Strong Close they make good progress along the 'stepping stones' towards the standards they should reach by the end of their reception year, when they complete the Foundation Stage. The majority are on course to exceed the expected standard in all the areas of learning. This represents good progress and is a result of good teaching and the exciting curriculum that they experience.
2. The school's organisation places a strong emphasis on encouraging children to be independent, confident and to enjoy making choices. As a result, they make good progress in personal, social and emotional development. They achieve well and establish excellent relationships. Children thrive on the tasks they are set and have very positive attitudes to school. They persevere and stayed focused, particularly when they are working closely with an adult.
3. Children are immersed in a rich and exciting learning environment and are encouraged to express themselves clearly and confidently. A significant minority of children arrive in school with limited English skills or with additional needs, and staff home in on these, offering good support and making sure they are able to experience all that the school offers. As a result, progress in speaking and listening is particularly good, often from a low starting point.
4. Children achieve well in their mathematical development. They are particularly successful at improving their number skills and most are able to apply what they have learnt in other areas of learning. They demonstrate this in the way they can work out simple sums and recognise numbers as, for example, when they follow a trail through the school grounds. They have a good understanding of shape, space and measure and are given plenty of opportunities to practise these skills.
5. Similarly, good progress is made in extending children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them. They achieve well and are particularly good at making observations, spotting similarities and differences and explaining what they have found. Their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are of a good standard.

Children take full advantage of the very good resources they have at their disposal and the skilled support they receive from the adults who work with them.

6. In both physical and creative development, children achieve well and make good progress. The majority are on course to exceed the goals they are expected to reach by the end of the Foundation Stage. They make full use of the attractive learning environment, the many opportunities to take part in imaginative play and the extensive outdoor area that is available.
7. Although assessment systems need to be improved still further, the school is committed to meeting the needs of individual children. Those new to English, as well as those with additional needs such as higher attainers and those who find learning difficult, do well and receive good support because they know children well. The inspection also confirmed that there are no significant differences in the rates of progress made by children of different gender or from different backgrounds.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Children's attitudes to learning are very good and they behave very well. Their personal development, including all aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Attendance rates are average for children of this age and most children are brought to school on time by their parents.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children show wholehearted enjoyment in the varied, daily activities;
- Children play and learn very happily together;
- Adults nurture excellent relationships with the children;
- The uplifting ethos stimulates a love of nature and the wider world among children.

### **Commentary**

8. Children flood the school with excitement as they anticipate sessions redolent with new opportunities each day. They are not disappointed, as staff organise a huge variety of activities for them to explore. The very best responses come when children work directly with adults as they persevere with a task until it is finished. They consider questions carefully and make sensible suggestions. Children take pride in their work and are quick to show it to others. They offer their home baked jam tarts around generously and follow the growing chicks' progress with great interest.
9. Behaviour in all areas of the school is very good. Children have a clear understanding of the expectations of adults and know what is acceptable. All adults are very consistent in their approach to children and establish excellent relationships with them. This fills children with a deep sense of trust in the staff, which is only too apparent as those with physical problems allow themselves to be supported as they move slowly around the building. There have been no exclusions from school.
10. Children's personal development is very good and is a significant strength. Staff encourage them to take responsibility for keeping the school tidy. They respond by tidying away equipment when asked and automatically hanging up aprons and throwing away their milk cartons at snack time. They learn to treat equipment with respect and know that everything has a place.

11. An uplifting ethos guides the work of the school and children make significant gains in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development because of this. Adults take time to create a breathtaking vista of displays in each part of the school. The same degree of care extends to the external environment, which offers so much as a natural learning resource. Children are confronted daily with the wonders displayed by nature, for example chicks hatching and growing in the hall and the textured collages of leaves and grasses. Strong moral and social messages are reflected by the staff every minute of the day and this helps children to mature and learn to live in harmony alongside others. Cultural diversity is celebrated throughout the community and parents help to provide additional colour with resources and photographs from home. This supports the very effective policy that the school has to promote good race relations. Much is made of any personal experiences to bring other cultures to life in the eyes of the children. Photographic displays of one of the children during a visit to his cultural home shows him enjoying a wash outdoors in a tin bath, not something the children would see often at home. Such resources capture their imaginations well and help them to realise that people across the world live in a variety of circumstances.

## Attendance

### *Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)*

| Authorised absence |      | Unauthorised absence |    |
|--------------------|------|----------------------|----|
| School data        | 6.8% | School data          | 0% |

*The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.*

12. Attendance levels are average for this age group and most parents understand that it is important for them to bring their children to school regularly and on time; they learn good habits for when they begin full-time education. The school monitors attendance regularly and the administrator produces statistics for the headteacher to follow up.

## Exclusions

There have been no exclusions.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of the education provided is good. Children receive a wide range of interesting and practical activities that meet their needs. Most of the teaching is good. Resources and accommodation are used very well to support it. Care, guidance and support for pupils are very good and there is an effective partnership with parents.

## Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are good.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning is good overall with some very good teaching;
- Relationships between adults and children are excellent;

- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good; this produces an atmosphere that is conducive to learning;
- Adults provide children with interesting and stimulating activities;
- Some learning opportunities are missed and assessment procedures are not rigorous enough.

## Commentary

13. The quality of teaching is good overall, with some very good teaching observed. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Children achieve well in all the areas of learning during their time at Strong Close, because of the interesting activities that are planned and the effective teaching they receive. Tasks set are generally matched to the children's individual needs and the adults carefully guide, support and challenge the small groups of children as they work with them.
14. Relationships between all adults in the nursery and the children are excellent and this makes a valuable contribution to the quality of teaching and learning. Staff manage the children very well and this results in a consistency of approach and well behaved children. Teachers ensure that all children are fully involved in the activities when they are working with them. This makes them feel valued and successful and helps to build up their confidence and self-esteem.
15. Although the teaching is always satisfactory or better, there are some occasions where learning opportunities are missed. Staff undertake detailed and comprehensive observations of individual children at work and these are used well to build up a picture of what they can do. However, current assessment systems for checking on what children do are not rigorous enough to ensure they are actively engaged during these periods. It can mean that some have little interaction with an adult and they also miss out on the chance to review their work at the end of the morning or afternoon sessions. Information that is gathered is not always used well enough to plan the next stage of work.
16. The teaching of communication, language and literacy is good, with staff providing an exciting range of activities for children to experience. New words are skilfully introduced to the children and these are picked up quickly. Children practise the words they know, using them in different situations and building up a bank of new words that have been shared with them by the adult support. Good reading habits are established when teachers engage the children actively by sharing their thoughts about stories they were listening to. In a very good lesson when the children were sharing the story and music of Peter and the Wolf, the teacher used very good open-ended questions to encourage the children to share their thoughts and feelings about the story.
17. Mathematical development is similarly well taught. Many interesting and practical experiences are set up and children are given opportunities to reinforce their mathematical knowledge in other areas. In the best lessons, staff pitch their activities at exactly the right level so that all children achieve well. Challenging activities are planned for higher attaining children. For example, a small group were working on number patterns in a one hundred square, a task much harder than would normally be expected for children of this age. Despite the level of difficulty the group coped admirably with the task.

18. Activities in all other areas of learning are carefully planned and children are encouraged to explore and investigate for themselves. All the adults have a very good understanding of the specific needs of children within this age group. All children, including higher attainers, those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, make good progress in relation to their abilities. Staff working with those children new to English are very skilled at setting up opportunities for them to practise and consolidate new words they have learnt. They often use imaginative play to engage children's interest and then join them, making sure it remains purposeful and concentrates on improving language skills. Parents recognise how well the staff cope with the specific needs of the different groups of children and they feel confident as they leave their children in the classrooms at the start of the sessions.
  
19. Very good use is made of the high quality accommodation and excellent resources to support teaching and help the children learn. The outdoor accommodation is an excellent resource that has been carefully planned, so it can have the maximum impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 31 lessons

| Excellent | Very good | Good    | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| 0 (0)     | 3 (10)    | 22 (71) | 6 (19)       | 0              | 0    | 0         |

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

## The curriculum

The school provides a stimulating and exciting curriculum supported by some excellent resources.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Resources are excellent and deployed in a way that stimulates children's imagination;
- Space is used very well to set up a wide variety of interesting activities that most children find irresistible;
- The organisation of the sessions makes it difficult to track what children have learned or the progress made;
- The curriculum meets the needs of children with special educational needs well.

### Commentary

20. The school makes very good use of the space available both inside and out to provide a rich and exciting curriculum. The excellent resources are used in creative ways to support the activities planned. Classrooms are organised imaginatively by staff to ensure all areas of the new curriculum for the Foundation Stage are addressed very well. As a result, children receive a broad and balanced curriculum that grabs their interest and keeps them involved for most of the time.
21. The staff are knowledgeable about the value of a play-based curriculum and plan activities that most children find irresistible. Planning addresses all areas of the curriculum in a balanced way. For most of the session, children are free to go to any activity they wish. Some activities are led by adults who know all children well and on these occasions, children make very good progress. However, others are designed for children to use independently and they are not given a specific task to do. Sometimes this works well but at other times the quality of play deteriorates and children gain little from the activities. Examples of this were seen most frequently when children were outside. The organisation of the day in this area makes it difficult to track what children have done or the progress they have made. Children can spend much of a session with little adult input. Children with special educational needs do well because they usually have a support worker attached who influences their choice of activity and works with them on different tasks at levels appropriate to them. Similarly, children who are learning English receive a curriculum that caters very well for their needs. Staff working with them make detailed notes, explaining where improvements are needed for each child and then planning the work accordingly. Such a personalised approach helps to explain why this group of children make such good progress.
22. Visitors to school and visits out are planned to enhance the curriculum. Visitors include a musician, who led musical workshops to provide an accompaniment to enhance one of the children's favourite stories. In addition, a 'Zoo Man' brought in some small animals and helped the children to use the garden to search for minibeasts. This had a lasting effect on some children, who were later observed searching under wood and stones 'looking for more specimens'. Parents also help to enrich the curriculum by bringing in souvenirs from their holidays to help children learn about other places in Britain and about countries overseas.

This is particularly helpful in encouraging the children to value their own culture and that of others.

### **Care, guidance and support**

There are very good procedures to ensure children's care, welfare, health and safety. Staff give good levels of support and guidance to children. They involve children well in the life and work of the school by listening carefully to their views.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Staff take great care as they look after children very well;
- Children are celebrated as individuals and every effort is made to act in each child's best interest;
- Adults constantly talk with, and listen to, children and value their thoughts.

### **Commentary**

23. The headteacher ensures that children are safe and feel secure in school. Finely honed procedures ensure that children are well cared for and that they lack for nothing. Clear systems are in place to ensure prompt medical care; dietary needs are known to staff. Health and safety procedures are very well embedded as part of normal school routines. All adults, including the administrator and site supervisor, work very well together as a team to create a very welcoming learning environment for children. The headteacher is conscientious in her duty of care as the designated adult responsible for child protection. Staff members are familiar with the local guidance. There are strong working relationships with the local authority support teams and this ensures effective help is always available to the school.
24. Adults spend so much time talking to, and working with, children that they know their strengths and needs well. Children with additional needs receive good support and this extends to their families, so that everyone is working from a position of knowledge and strength for the good of each child. Teachers are very keen to adopt an holistic approach to children's development and they achieve this effectively. Careful diary notes are recorded for parents of children with special needs and they value these highly. Staff are conscientious about noting down milestones in children's achievements and compile large volumes of information about what children can do. The detail of this information is not always easily accessible as it is written in longhand notes. Some of the finer detail gets lost and, as a result, formal reporting to parents lacks focus. A bilingual staff member is available to interpret and translate as needed and this too helps parents and children to achieve well.
25. The school is quick to talk to and listen to the views of the children. There are daily opportunities for children to chat to staff throughout sessions. Adults take a very flexible approach and take note of what children say to them.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school establishes good links with parents and the local community. There are very good links with other schools.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Long-term links with other schools and Early Years settings provide expertise to raise practitioners' skills locally;
- Parents really like the school and appreciate its many strengths;
- Community liaison plays an important part in the life of the school.

## Commentary

26. Good relationships between staff and parents are central to the school's success. Parents are very happy that their children enjoy school so much and feel that the quality of teaching, leadership and the programme for settling children into school are all particularly strong features of the school's provision.
27. Communication between school and home is effective. In particular, parents are very appreciative of the daily accessibility of all staff, including the headteacher. Letters and official publications are informative and keep parents up to date with everything that is happening in school and the expectations of staff. Discussions with parents take place every day, with dropping off and home times becoming quite a social event. Parents linger to look at displays, talk to staff and share children's work; this creates a purposeful hum around the school and encourages parents to play an active role in their children's learning.
28. Written reports on children's progress are sent to parents at the end of the school year. Although staff know children's individual needs well, the reports do not provide enough direction for parents on what children should focus on next to improve. Some parents expressed disappointment at the amount of information they receive during the year in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. However, staff make a point of sharing their thoughts with parents verbally, both during the year and more formally at parents' meetings, which are well attended. Parents can look at children's work folders at any time and the children really enjoy sharing this past work with their parents. Parents are loyal supporters of school events and help to provide more learning resources for school.
29. Visitors from the wider community are welcomed into the school. Children experience the joys of musical and theatrical productions and also go out into the community to visit places of special interest. The school is very proactive in supporting the needs of the less fortunate and children have helped to collect toys to send to the Ukraine. Staff from the school deliver the toys personally and video their trip so that children can see the results of their efforts. This is greeted with much enthusiasm and interest.
30. Highly effective liaison takes place with other schools and Early Years providers. This ensures that children transfer to primary education with little anxiety. Staff are given feedback from the schools on the effectiveness of their provision and this helps the school to plan for the future. The headteacher is heavily involved in the mentoring of trainee teachers on site and the school also offers various work placements for high school pupils during the year. Staff show huge commitment to passing on their Early Years expertise and this was rewarded with 'Beacon' status some years ago. They run regular courses after work for colleagues throughout the area, focusing on the Foundation Stage curriculum, partnership with a local primary school and use of ICT in school. This takes great dedication and they are justly proud of this aspect of their work.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership is good. Management and governance are satisfactory. The headteacher, receiving sound support from her senior colleagues, has made good progress in a short time. The governing body was only established at the beginning of the school year but is well organised and efficient.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides good leadership;
- The school has identified the right priorities and planned sensible ways to achieve them;
- There is a strong commitment to the professional development of all staff;
- Monitoring and assessment systems, as well as subject leadership, are not rigorous enough.

## Commentary

31. The recently established governing body received its fully delegated powers only in April 2004. This means it has had little opportunity to influence the direction of the school or work with the headteacher in setting priorities via the school improvement plan. Despite only holding its first meeting in December 2003, an efficient committee structure is in place and governors have already taken on specific roles and responsibilities. They are able to articulate what they feel are the school's strengths, as well as where it needs to improve. A very successful working relationship has been established with the headteacher and individual governors meet with her regularly. Already there is some evidence of the impact they are having. For example, links have been made with local arts projects, minor health and safety issues have been addressed and the special educational needs governors meet regularly with parents.
32. The headteacher is new to the post, appointed less than a year ago, but is already demonstrating good leadership as she seeks to move the school forward. A feature of her work has been the measured, analytical way in which she has identified priorities for improvement and then set out the changes that need to be made within a realistic timescale. She has been well supported in her review of the school by her local education authority adviser, who has worked closely with the school over a number of years. The headteacher's clear vision and sense of direction helps to ensure that all staff working within this successful school understand what needs to be done to improve things still further. She is soundly supported in this work by her senior colleagues, who have all been able to contribute to the debate and share their views and opinions.
33. The school improvement plan is made up of a series of action plans linked to an autumn term school review carried out by the local education authority adviser. It is a very effective document, charting the key issues the school needs to address within the short term. Important priorities flagged up during this process include monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, maximising children's learning time and enhancing the role of subject leaders. Each plan sets out a description of the actions to be taken and what the measurable outcomes of each objective will be. It is too soon to measure the impact of most of these priorities because they have not had long enough to work their way through. Nevertheless, evidence from the inspection indicates that the headteacher has identified the right priorities and her plans are already moving the school in the right direction. A real feature of her work is the recognition that whilst some changes are needed, staff involvement and commitment is crucial if they are to become embedded.
34. Management of the school is satisfactory overall. The headteacher has begun to check on the quality of teaching and learning in a systematic way but this needs to be more rigorous, so that the inconsistencies in some of the teaching are addressed. Similarly,

subject leaders have limited knowledge of how well their subject is delivered throughout the nursery. The school has made a good start in analysing the data it collects on children's progress. The processes are not yet sufficiently long-term to measure the progress of complete year groups or to influence the way the curriculum is organised.

35. Effective use is made of performance management to ensure that school priorities are addressed and that the system has benefits for the individual staff as well as the school. There is a tremendous commitment within the school to staff development, both in course attendance and in delivering courses to other Early Years providers. This has resulted in individual staff members contributing to courses based at the school throughout the period of the school's 'Beacon' status.
36. Parents are very happy with the way the school is led. At their meeting with inspectors and in the returned questionnaires, they commented strongly about the quality found in this area. Their views are confirmed by inspectors who found leadership to be good.
37. The school has only just received its first delegated budget and has had no previous experience in managing one. Nevertheless, day-to-day finances are well managed and the school continues to work closely with the local authority. Funds are sensibly allocated and audit reports indicate that systems are efficient. The school has worked successfully to identify and overcome potential barriers to learning. For example, it makes sure the children with special educational needs receive high quality support that enables them to access the full range of activities that are planned for them.

## Financial information

### *Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004*

| Income and expenditure (£)                   |       | Balances (£)  |       |
|--|-------|---|-------|
| Total income                                 | 56269 | Balance from previous year  | 8760  |
| Total expenditure                            | 36714 | Balance carried forward to the next   | 28315 |
| Expenditure per pupil (Full-time equivalent) | 556   | <i>The high balance carried forward is planned for because funding for Beacon schools is about to end</i> |       |

## **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING**

### **AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE**

38. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good. A strong emphasis is placed on developing children's personal and social skills. As a result, they are happy to come to school, settle quickly and get on very well with their classmates. Children achieve well in all areas of learning and this illustrates the good progress they make. Teaching is good overall, with some particularly good examples seen in areas such as mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world. Activities organised for the children are interesting and exciting. Assessment systems are not yet rigorous enough to check on how well they are doing in some areas, particularly when they are playing outside. Resources are excellent and they make a significant contribution to the quality of children's experiences. Subject leaders are in place for each area of learning but their roles in checking on their subjects are still new and have limited influence.

### **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in personal, social and emotional development is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children achieve well because the school provides plenty of opportunities for them to become independent learners;
- Relationships between staff and children are excellent and relationships between the children themselves are good;
- Children behave very well and have very positive attitudes to learning;
- Assessment is not used well enough to plan for individual children's needs.

#### **Commentary**

38. Standards and achievement in this area of learning are good and the majority of children are likely to exceed the expected standard by the end of their first year in school. Teaching is good with a small amount even better than this. There is a very good induction programme for new children that helps them to settle in quickly. The teachers and their assistants ensure that children quickly understand what is required of them and their high expectations are met well because of the consistent approach set by adults. Adults encourage the development of good social skills by use of praise and encouragement.
39. Children find the exciting activities provided by staff irresistible. This helps to foster very positive attitudes to learning and motivates children to become independent learners. Children behave very well because they have sufficient space and freedom to engage in active learning through play. Opportunities are routinely provided for them to select what they want to do and they can choose to work independently, with their friends or with an adult. They are expected to get out the things they need and to tidy up after themselves. When an adult is working with children on a task, they are shown how to work together co-operatively. Children with special educational needs are well integrated and receive good support because they almost always have an adult working with them. For most children, however, the involvement of an adult in their learning depends upon the task they select and can result in an imbalance of adult support. It can mean some children

have little contact with an adult during a session. Inevitably, this makes it harder for staff to assess how well children are doing and to track their progress.

40. The positive relationship that staff have with parents means they are very welcome in the nursery. Parents take an interest in what their children are doing and often bring things from home to enhance the curriculum. This helps children to know that there are different styles of family life and fosters respect for both their own and each others' customs and cultures. This is reinforced by the celebration of festivals from a variety of religions and cultures and contributes very well to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children.

## **COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

Provision in communication, language and literacy is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good opportunities are provided for speaking and listening when children are working in small groups;
- Planning and assessment are not used consistently enough;
- The school promotes a love of books;
- Parents reinforce children's learning well;

### **Commentary**

41. Children enter school with average standards in this area. They make good progress and almost all children are on course to reach the goals expected in all aspects of communication, language and literacy by the end of the reception year. Children are given good opportunities to share news and contribute to question and answer sessions when being taught in small groups. An example of this good practice was seen when children were discussing a collection of shells under the guidance of a teacher. She made skilled use of questioning to draw out what children knew and to make them think hard whilst helping them to increase their knowledge and vocabulary. Children remained interested and engrossed in this activity for a long time. Some discussions at large group times are less successful, because the groups are too big for each pupil to be given the attention they need. The organisation of this part of the session needs to be sharper.
42. A love of books is fostered very well. There is a large, attractive book area that is used well by both children and staff, who are often to be seen sharing books. Children handle these with care. Each area of learning is supported by a display that includes carefully selected books. These may be either stories or non-fiction and demonstrate clearly to children that books can be used both for enjoyment and to find things out. As a result, many are able to search out books that interest them or contain information they are looking for.
43. Parents and carers also help promote a love of books and many were seen helping their children choose books to take home from the display set up especially to encourage this. The school has a wide range of attractive resources to promote early reading skills. Dual language books are used skilfully so that children whose first language is not English can hear stories in both their own language and English. The skilled support they receive means they make really good progress during their time in nursery. Adults working with them identify just what skills the children need and then provide

opportunities, often through imaginative play, where they can practise the new word or phrases they have learnt. Adults 'model' the language and ask them questions at just the right level. The school also provides many attractive games and puzzles to promote early language skills, which the children use on their own, with their friends or in small groups with an adult.

44. The development of early writing skills is promoted well through the many opportunities provided to practise writing and drawing. There are opportunities to write when playing in the role play areas, for example when taking telephone messages, writing shopping lists and putting captions under their pictures. Children are expected to write their own name on their work, or at least to 'have a go'. Staff are knowledgeable about the way in which early writing skills develop and when working with groups of children they do this well. However, most of the activities provided are open to any children who choose to use them and few tasks are specifically matched to the needs of individuals or groups. This means that the progress of children is not systematic and although detailed records of children's progress are kept, these are seldom used to plan specific tasks for different groups of children.
45. The management of activities and resources is generally good and the leadership of this area of learning is satisfactory overall. Whilst the co-ordinator is a very knowledgeable and experienced teacher, she is new to the co-ordination of this area of learning. A new locally agreed system of record keeping has recently been introduced but this has had too little time to become securely embedded into the practice of the school. The co-ordinator has not had the opportunity to monitor teaching and learning.

## **MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children achieve well;
- They have good number skills;
- Very good use is made of the outside area to extend mathematical skills;
- Some learning opportunities are missed.

### **Commentary**

46. Children achieve well and make good progress in their mathematical development. By the time they reach the end of the Foundation Stage most are likely to exceed the expected goals. The rich curriculum opportunities on offer and good links with other subjects mean that children are forever practising and consolidating their numeracy skills. From the moment they arrive, staff encourage them to count how many of their group are present and how many have still to arrive. Most can count to ten and beyond with some higher attainers working on number activities that are more usually seen at the beginning of Key Stage 1. One group was able to work on a number square with numbers up to one hundred. An exceptional group member was able to pick out patterns in the square. 'Those numbers there go up in tens. Can you see how they go?' Others in the group did not have the same mathematical skills but were still able to talk about numbers they recognised in the square. The adult working with the group showed

very good teaching skills in the way she included all group members in the discussion, making sure that the tasks set for each of them were sufficiently challenging but still manageable. She also made sure that one group member who was new to English was still able demonstrate his mathematical skills and take part in the activity.

47. Through a wide range of practical, well organised activities children develop a good understanding of shape, space and measures. Most are able to recognise simple shapes, such as square, triangle or rectangle, and because playing with shapes is an integral part of their school day, they are able to apply this knowledge in practical situations. For example, one group spent time sorting carpet shapes and deciding how they could fit together. 'Don't put that rectangle down there, those sides are too long to fit on that square.' said one of the group, who was clearly understanding some of the properties of shapes and patterns.
48. Teaching is good overall with some of it very good. A feature of the best teaching in this area is the innovative way staff plan work that keeps children engrossed and involved. A game of hopscotch organised in the outside area illustrated this point really well. Children threw two dice to decide how far along the number shape they needed to throw their beanbag. Inevitably children's skills in working out number bonds, calculating distance and counting in two's improved as they played the game. The group included children who had additional needs, including some who had physical disabilities but, because of the skilful way the adult organised the game and arranged the tasks at just the right level, no one was excluded. Indeed, the whole group celebrated when one of its members, a boy who found difficulty communicating, successfully managed to reach the end of the activity.
49. Not all the teaching reaches these high standards and, as a result, learning opportunities are missed. This generally occurs during 'free flow' activities, especially outside, where the size of the area makes it difficult for adults to track and assess how successful children have been when they undertake the huge range of planned activities. Staff are spread too thinly, making sure children are safe instead of extending their learning or becoming involved in their play. In addition, opportunities are missed for children to share their experiences and review what they have done when they meet up again at group time. Staff have already recognised that improvements are needed to ensure learning experiences are more consistent and that assessments are more directly linked to the next stage of planning.
50. The school provides children with an excellent range of resources that help to support their learning well. The limited space inside the classrooms is used well to provide interesting mathematical experiences.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD**

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children are very confident and are happy to take responsibility for their own learning;
- Good teaching helps children to achieve well;

- There are lots of practical activities that encourage children's observational and investigative skills.

## Commentary

51. Children are on course to exceed the goals expected at the end of the Foundation Stage. Achievement is good and this represents good progress because their skills and understanding are average when they arrive in school. Achievement and progress are best in children's ability to investigate, observe and find out. This is because the excellent resources are put to such good use by staff to extend children's learning. They provide an exciting and varied range of activities which require children to think for themselves and the work grabs their interest. An investigation into minibeasts and plants exemplified the quality of the work in this area. Children carefully collected leaves and plants from the outside area, working as a team, and then used magnifying glasses and light boxes to find out what each of their samples contained. They were able to describe in detail what they saw, comparing and contrasting the different leaves they were using and beginning to understand what each needed to survive. 'If we don't water these they will die and that's not fair', said one of the budding scientists.
52. The teaching in this area is good overall, with some of it very good. The best lessons are practically based, where all group members are given a chance to contribute at their own level, share ideas and value the contributions made by each other. In these very effective lessons the adults take on the role of facilitators, making sure everyone has a chance to contribute and asking questions at just the right level. This results in children talking about and discussing their ideas. A good example of this was seen during a group time where some chicks that had been hatched in the nursery were the focus of attention. Children talked animatedly about where the chicks would be most comfortable and how they had changed since they first saw them. The adult supporting the group knew just when to ask them about what they could see and to speculate how their environment would need to change as the chicks grew too big to stay in the classroom. She knew the children really well, so it meant the questions she set were spot on. As a result, higher attainers could be stretched, whilst children who were new to English were still able to make valued contributions, feel confident to share their thoughts and improve their language skills.
53. Where the teaching is more ordinary, there are some gaps and inconsistencies that need to be put right. Learning opportunities are sometimes missed because links are not made across different areas of the curriculum. For example, a sandwich making activity focused on the personal skills of sharing and teamwork but missed the chance to talk about the texture and feel of the ingredients or how they changed as they were put together. On another occasion, a baking session had too much adult input and this slowed the rate of children's learning.
54. Children have a good understanding of events in their own lives and how they have changed since they were babies. Staff are very successful at making links with the children's own experiences. For example, they talked about younger brothers or sisters and encouraged them to paint pictures showing where they live. Very good resources, such as books, clothes and artefacts, are available that help children appreciate the richness and diversity of the cultures around them and the school organises events that allow children to understand and celebrate major festivals.

55. Children's skills in ICT are well advanced. The children make good independent use of the computers and can select what they want to do using icons on the screen. A strength of the provision in this area is the way that computers are grouped into a small computer suite. This maximises their use and allows an adult, skilled in supporting children in this area, to manage a number of children, intervening only where necessary.

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in physical development is **good** overall.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The teaching is good overall;
- Children develop their manipulative skills well;
- The outside play area is very well resourced and children have continuous access to it.

### **Commentary**

56. Children start nursery with skill levels that are similar to those found in children of their age. They achieve well in their physical development and most are on course to exceed the goals they are expected to meet at the end of the reception year. Children are taught well and staff provide an exciting range of activities that help them improve their fine and large movements. Hand control is developed very well through the use of chalks, pencils, crayons, scissors, small toys and construction kits. Many pupils choose these activities with obvious enjoyment.
57. The outside play area is an excellent resource that is used daily, whatever the weather. The large number of good quality peddled vehicles is an obvious delight for the children. They play energetically and enthusiastically, individually and collaboratively manoeuvring these with skill, without bumping into each other. They enjoy climbing up the grass embankment using the rope ladder and ropes, then sliding down on the 'sledges'. They learn successfully to travel over, under and through equipment, for example, when they use the obstacle course set up for them. They are confident as they climb up and over the large climbing frame set up in the hall, developing their skills of balancing, swinging and gripping. They constantly try hard to improve their skills; for example, one boy who was having difficulty swinging across the ladder was heard to say 'I am going to do this before I go outside.'

## **CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in creative development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good;
- There is a rich variety of media tools for children to use;
- Children's imagination and creativity are developed through the wide range of aesthetic and interesting activities provided for them;
- Role play activities give children opportunities for imaginative play.

## Commentary

58. Children achieve well in this area of learning. The majority are on course to exceed the goals expected of them by the time they leave reception. Numerous opportunities are provided for the children to develop their skills effectively in painting, drawing, modelling and using materials. Staff make good use of the excellent resources available to support their teaching as, for example, when children were designing a collage depicting a vase of flowers. The teacher provided the children with an outstanding selection of resources that encouraged the children to think for themselves and choose independently. Good opportunities are provided for the children to experiment with making models from junk, cutting and sticking with a variety of materials and tools. They enjoy painting and exploring different media and many of their drawings show recognisable features. The children are given opportunities for imaginative role play, both inside and outside. The 'jungle scene' set up in the role play area in the hall linked very well to the work the children had been doing about animals. Outside, the 'hospital area' was used effectively and imaginatively to accept 'patients' that children brought there on their peddled vehicles. Timely interventions by teachers, in both activities, reflected the good teaching methods and thorough preparation that helped to take children's learning forward.
59. Good opportunities are provided for the children to develop an interest in music. Children are able to listen to music and are encouraged to talk about what they hear, for example when they were listening to the story of Peter and the Wolf. There is a very wide range of percussion instruments available so that children can experiment with these throughout the day.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

| <i>Inspection judgement</i>  | <i>Grade</i> |
|--|--------------|
| <b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>                               | <b>3</b>     |
| How inclusive the school is  | 2            |
| How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection         | 4            |
| Value for money provided by the school. <i>(The budget is not delegated)</i> | n/a          |
| <b>Overall standards achieved</b>  | <b>3</b>     |
| Pupils' achievement  | 3            |
| <b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>                | <b>2</b>     |
| Attendance   | 4            |
| Attitudes  | 2            |
| Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions                                | 2            |
| Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                    | 2            |
| <b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>                       | <b>3</b>     |
| The quality of teaching  | 3            |
| How well pupils learn  | 3            |
| The quality of assessment  | 4            |
| How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs                                  | 2            |
| Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities             | 3            |
| Accommodation and resources  | 2            |
| Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety                                     | 2            |
| Support, advice and guidance for pupils                                      | 3            |
| How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views                          | 3            |
| The effectiveness of the school's links with parents                         | 3            |
| The quality of the school's links with the community                         | 3            |
| The school's links with other schools and colleges                           | 2            |
| <b>The leadership and management of the school</b>                           | <b>4</b>     |
| The governance of the school   | 4            |
| The leadership of the headteacher  | 3            |
| The leadership of other key staff  | 4            |
| The effectiveness of management  | 4            |

*Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).*