

Batford Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117068
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338939
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Emma Bresslaw
Headteacher	Ms Madelaine Lee
Date of previous school inspection	0 June 2007
School address	Holcroft Road Harpenden Hertfordshire
Telephone number	01582 713872
Fax number	01582 713118
Email address	head@batfordnursery.herts.sch.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. More than one third of the time was spent looking at learning. Inspectors visited 13 learning activities and observed the work of all four teachers and also nursery practitioners. They also held meetings with governors and staff of both the school and the children's centre and had discussions with parents and carers. Inspectors observed the nursery and the children's centre's work and looked at a range of documentation including the nursery improvement plan, assessment information, safeguarding documentation, curricular planning and photographic evidence provided by the school. In addition, the responses of 56 parents' and carers' questionnaires were analysed and their comments taken into account.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the rate of children's progress in children's mathematical and calculation skills
- the particular strengths and features that make teaching and learning effective
- the children's centre's impact on the children's learning and welfare
- how well practitioners contribute to the school's monitoring and evaluation processes.

Information about the school

Batford Nursery School provides part-time provision for children aged three and four. Children generally spend two or three terms at the nursery according to their age. Since the previous inspection a children's centre, Harpenden Batford, which is based within the school, has been established. In addition, a further children's centre, Harpenden Southdown is currently in the process of being built in the Southdown part of the town. Both children's centres are managed by the governors of the school and they provide a range of integrated services to support children and their families. The school also houses 'Skylarks' day care which provides for children all the year round. These children are fully integrated with the nursery children though Skylarks is separately managed and is inspected separately.

The school provides for children living in the Batford area of Harpenden, though a number of children come from the surrounding area. Almost all the children are of White British background and there are a few children who are at an early stage of learning English. The number of children who are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is low. The school has gained the Healthy Schools award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Batford continues to provide an outstanding education for its children. It plays a central part within the community and is highly valued by parents and carers. Children achieve exceptionally well from starting points that are generally above expected levels. By the time that they leave to join their Reception classes, they are confident and independent learners with attainment much higher than typical for their age. The nursery has an overwhelming atmosphere of care, nurture and support in which all the children thrive in their personal development. Each child is fully included in what is offered and they, and their parents and carers, are cared for as individuals.

Children love the nursery; in fact one parent commented that her son who has started secondary school would, 'return tomorrow' if given the chance! They have highly positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is excellent. Because their welfare is exceptionally well provided for, they flourish in the very secure and safe environment. There are high-quality partnerships with parents and carers, who are unanimous in saying that they are happy with their children's experience at the school and that their children enjoy school. Although the staff encourage parents to become further involved by recording their children's achievements in the children's 'learning journey' documents, few do so. This lessens the usefulness of these records of achievements because the learning that takes place at home is not always recorded.

Children thoroughly enjoy a highly varied and wide range of exciting and carefully planned activities each day. These encourage the children to learn and develop exceptionally well. The staff are always at hand to promote learning further by showing how to draw the very best from the exciting activities.

The headteacher's inspirational, thoughtful and wise leadership and management continue to underpin the success of the nursery. There is rigorous and accurate evaluation of all aspects of the school's provision and performance. This leads to actions that are well considered and effective in seeking to refine provision. She is supported exceptionally well by the teachers and practitioners. There is strong teamwork from a highly experienced staff, all of whom contribute well to the school's evaluation, and each adult makes a valuable contribution to the development of the school. Staff share their expertise by regularly welcoming visitors from other settings within the county and beyond. Major changes, such as the development of the children's centre, are taken in the school's stride and the whole complex organisation runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The school's track record in maintaining outstanding effectiveness since its last inspection demonstrates the school has excellent capacity to improve further.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the number of parents and carers who contribute to their children's assessments of learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

Observations of learning during the inspection and the school's own data show that all groups of children achieve exceptionally well. Those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make rapid progress because their needs are quickly identified, and carefully considered individual programmes are developed. These children's progress is boosted by the specialist practitioners who give closely tailored support ensuring that their progress is as strong as that of their classmates. The nursery's belief in the primacy of the development of the children's personal, social and emotional skills results in exceptionally strong achievement in this area of learning. A minority of children achieve the expected goals for children at the end of the Reception year before they leave the nursery. Children's speaking and listening skills are particularly well developed because staff constantly probe and question children exceptionally well and expect extended answers from them. In addition, because children feel secure, their self-esteem and confidence are high and, as a result, they collaborate very well together in small groups and pairs and this too aids speaking and listening skills. Children relish the wide range of opportunities to tackle challenging tasks. In one outstanding session a practitioner was supporting children who were thoroughly engaged in trying to balance canned goods. They quickly realised that they needed to complement the lighter tin with counters in order to make it balance the heavier tin. Excellent interventions from the practitioner, in which she targeted the mathematical language to be learned very well, resulted in the children using words such as 'heavier', 'lighter', 'balance', 'weight', 'more' and 'less' constantly in the session. In addition, children were able to count accurately how many counters they needed to balance the weights. This session, along with most others seen, involved children who were totally engaged, who concentrated for long periods, who talked through their findings with adults and other children, and helped and shared together.

On arrival, children settle very quickly into the daily routine because the support and care is of high quality. The welcome that they and their parents and carers receive on a daily basis is warm and encouraging and relationships are excellent. Although children develop a close bond with their key worker, all adults provide excellent support and role models which leads to children who are considerate and confident. They thoroughly enjoy taking responsibility such as being leader of the group for the day or tidying and clearing up or helping the adults. In addition, they show respect for each other. They know the significance of caring for the environment, have an exceptionally strong appreciation of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and say that they feel very safe in school.

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

1

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate	
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Children's attainment ¹	1
The quality of children's learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
Children's behaviour	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Children's attendance ¹	1
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

All the children show obvious enjoyment in learning whether indoors or outdoors, in small group time, independent learning or when taking part in a 'Name that Tune' session in the hall space. This is the result of consistently high-quality teaching, an exciting and well-planned curriculum and outstanding care, guidance and support. Learning opportunities are outstanding because planning takes account of the children's interests and individual needs. Children are consistently challenged to experiment, collaborate and explore from the rich range of activities. This leads to extended discussions and problem solving, such as how to transfer paper 'noodles' from one bowl to another using chopsticks! Teachers are skilled at knowing when to intervene and when to stand back to enable the children to explore. They assess children's developments carefully with comprehensive notes about what they are able to understand and do, and these notes help to develop a detailed picture of the children's growing skills and development. These notes are complemented by a wide range of photographs, though parents' and carers' contributions are limited. Because the staff have a good and detailed understanding of how young children learn, they immediately know what the next steps are for each child. These, too, are noted along with the child's achievements and used exceptionally well to support each child's future learning needs. Each session includes an excellent balance between adult-directed activities and indoor and outdoor learning. There are exciting displays and high-quality resources, which

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

together stimulate children's interest and inspire them to explore and investigate. Care, guidance and support for families as well as for children are excellent. The children's centre provides an excellent contribution to the school's provision. Regular sessions for parents are held and operated by specialist staff. This enables those who are most vulnerable to be supported and cared for well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

In the previous inspection, leadership and management were outstanding across the board. This remains the case. There is a close partnership with parents and carers who are rightly effusive in their comments about how they are encouraged to be involved in their children's learning even though too few contribute to their children's learning journals. Teamwork is strong and the sophisticated monitoring and evaluation procedures, involving staff and governors together, successfully drive improvement. Many of the staff, including the headteacher, have served the school for a number of years but they maintain a tireless commitment to the needs of children, parents and carers.

All children are welcomed and included. Staff are very effective in tackling discrimination and ensuring equality for all. Links with a wide range of agencies are strong and are enhanced through the children's centre provision. Child protection procedures are very robust and all arrangements to ensure that children are safeguarded from harm are highly effective.

The school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well through its many partnerships with parents, extensive community links and through the activities of both 'Skylarks' and the two children's centres. Many opportunities are taken to celebrate festivals of many ethnic communities.

Governors are very active in the school and are led by a very experienced and highly effective chair. Governors take on many additional responsibilities such as being directors of 'Skylarks' and, because they too are deeply committed to both the children and their families, they have relished the school becoming a hub for children's services within the town. There is a very clear vision of how to develop the nursery and children's centres further.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers who returned questionnaires and those who spoke to inspectors are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Many wrote highly positive comments about how their children love attending, settle exceptionally quickly and flourish in both their personal and academic development. They thoroughly appreciate the high standard of education provided by the committed and talented staff. Inspection findings wholeheartedly support these views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Batford Nursery School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspector received 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 119 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	73	15	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	71	14	25	2	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	59	20	36	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	55	19	34	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	35	63	16	29	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	50	23	41	3	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	66	18	32	1	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	30	54	15	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	68	18	32	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	63	13	23	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	34	61	11	20	2	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	31	67	11	24	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	42	75	14	25	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of children.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 February 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Batford Nursery School, Hertfordshire, AL5 5BQ

We really enjoyed coming to your nursery and finding out about all the exciting things that you do and how well you all learn together. I particularly enjoyed listening to you sing so beautifully when Diane played the piano and I was amazed how quickly you spotted the tune, sometimes when Diane had only played two notes! We saw you busily working, playing and learning lots of exciting new things.

All the adults do an excellent job to help you to feel happy and to learn so very well. Even though some of you have only been at school for a few weeks you have quickly learned from the other children about helping each other, sharing and taking turns. Your behaviour is excellent and you get on very well together. Your headteacher is outstanding and she has managed to make sure that your school continues to be an excellent one. She is helped by all the staff in this and she has made sure that the children's centre works very smoothly and well.

Even when a school is outstanding as yours is, there is always a way to make it even better. We have asked your parents and carers to make sure that they use the slips in the pigeon holes to write down for the staff some of the learning that you do at home.

We hope that you continue to enjoy your learning.

Yours sincerely,

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.