

INSPECTION REPORT

GRACE OWEN NURSERY SCHOOL

Park Hill

Sheffield

LEA area: Sheffield

Unique reference number: 106975

Headteacher: Mrs Jean Jones

Reporting inspector: Mrs Judith Hicks
2063

Date of inspection: 13th January 2000

Inspection number: 66903

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:	County
Age range of pupils:	3 - 4
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Hague Row Park Hill Sheffield
Postcode:	S2 5SB
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Appropriate authority:	Sheffield LEA
Name of responsible officer:	Mrs Jean Gibson Sheffield Young Children's Service
Date of previous inspection:	January 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Grace Owen Nursery provides up to 78 full-time equivalent places for three and four-year olds. The school was not completely full at the time of the inspection because a number had just transferred to primary school. Younger children usually attend on a part-time basis, but most four-year olds are full-timers. The nursery is in a highly disadvantaged area in the centre of Sheffield, forming part of a high-rise housing complex. It is currently part of an Education Action Zone (EAZ) covering South-east Sheffield, which is designed to raise educational standards in the area. The nursery includes a mixture of ethnic groups, including a significant minority (around 25%) of children of African-Caribbean heritage. A few children speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry varies considerably, but is well below average overall. A relatively high proportion of the children – up to one third - have special educational needs (SEN), including two with statements of SEN at the time of the inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school providing high quality education and care for its children. Teaching and learning are of a good standard, and sessions are well organised to ensure that all the children make good progress in basic skills. The nursery does not have a delegated budget, and hence no judgement is made about value for money.

What the school does well

- From a low starting point, the children make good progress to a point where they match, and occasionally exceed, average standards for the age-group in some areas of learning.
- Provision for the children's personal, social and moral development is very good, and the quality of relationships between the children and with adults is a strength.
- The children are well taught by staff who demonstrate a high level of professional skill.
- Sessions are very well organised and structured to ensure that all the children receive teaching closely matched to their stage of development and learning needs.
- Staff are committed to the wellbeing of the children, their families and the whole community. The school has established strong links with a range of professional services, enabling it to contribute effectively to the support of families with young children in the neighbourhood.

What could be improved

- Despite good progress, the children's spoken language remains below average for the age-group, and this is limiting attainment, especially in literacy and mathematics.
- With a strong focus on basic skills, the curriculum is sometimes unimaginative, and more could be done to give children exciting new experiences from time to time.
- Although staff get things done, the school development plan does not provide an effective tool for mapping out the best use of time, training and the limited funds available to the school. Governors do not play an active enough part in the planning process.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory.

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

The school's significant strengths more than outweigh the shortcomings identified.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Following the previous inspection, in January 1996, an action plan was drawn up which addressed the key issues satisfactorily. Since then, the school has sustained a high standard of teaching and learning, with the result that the children are continuing to make good progress. It is not possible to compare levels of attainment directly because of changes in national learning targets for five-year olds, but the indications are that standards have been well maintained. Worthwhile changes have

been made to the way in which the curriculum is planned and organised. The system of 'plan, do and review', newly introduced at the time of the last inspection, has been successfully implemented, and is contributing to children's confidence and independence. As part of a city-wide initiative, the curriculum now includes French. For the past year the children have been working in two separate bases according to their age and maturity, helping to ensure that teaching is well matched to individual needs. Inter-agency and community links to support families in the neighbourhood are developing fast. Improvement has been good overall, but the role of governors and school development planning have not kept pace with other changes.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about the achievements of children in relation to national early learning goals by the time they leave the school.

Performance in:		Key	
Language and literacy	D	Well above average	A
Mathematics	D	Above average	B
Personal and social development	C	Average	C
Other areas of the curriculum	C	Below average	D
		Well below average	E

Although progress is good, most children have a great deal of ground to make up in a few terms. As a result, only a few are reaching or approaching national targets for learning in language, literacy and mathematics by the time they transfer to their primary schools. Lack of fluency in spoken English and a relatively limited vocabulary sometimes hold back learning in other areas, too. The children's achievements are, however, well in line with averages for the age-group in physical and creative development, with high standards sometimes achieved in these areas. The children use secure computer skills to support their learning, and handle a range of tools competently. Staff have generally high expectations of the children, but as yet the school sets no formal attainment targets.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The children come to nursery happily and most settle very readily. They make confident and independent choices of activity, and engage in purposeful play and group work with good levels of concentration.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good, both in general activity sessions and when playing outside. The children adapt happily to school routines and live up to the expectations of staff.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is very good, and the quality of relationships is a strength. The children collaborate well with one another and are starting to appreciate the needs of others. Relationships with adults are friendly and co-operative.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory: slightly below 80% for both part- and full-timers.

Personal and social development are areas of strength promoted very effectively by the school. Arrangements for children to 'plan, do and review' help develop independence and a sense of purpose.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of children:	
Lessons seen overall	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.

All the teaching observed during the inspection was at least satisfactory, and most (76%) was good or better. In 18% of the sessions seen, teaching was judged to be very good. Strengths of the teaching include the effective way in which basic skills are taught and learned; the consistent attention given by all staff to the children's personal and social development; and the very good use made of time and resources. Staff support vocabulary development very effectively. Literacy teaching is good, helping to develop the children's interest in books and writing, and there is an appropriate focus on mathematical language and counting. There are high expectations of the children's behaviour and progress, to which the children respond very positively. Learning is well supported by a warm, encouraging atmosphere and the sensible, business-like approach of staff. No general weaknesses in either teaching or learning emerged during the inspection. The school meets the needs of all its pupils, including those with special educational needs, with a sound use of assessment to make sure that teaching is pitched at the right level. Effective support is provided on a planned basis for children from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language, and these children make good progress like the rest.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Generally good. Tight planning means that each area of learning is well covered, and the children's uptake of opportunities is monitored very effectively to ensure equality of access. French was not observed during the inspection, but parents feel that it is a bonus.
Provision for children with special educational needs	Good, with well-managed provision for the school's significant numbers of children with SEN. As a result these children make good progress.
Provision for children with English as an additional language	Good overall for children of all minority ethnic groups. Extra support for children of African-Caribbean heritage and for those from Chinese families is particularly effective.
Provision for children's personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good provision has been sustained from the previous inspection, with very good provision for the children's social development and good moral education. The school celebrates a range of festivals each year, representing many traditions. Spiritual and cultural development are both satisfactory, but planning for these areas is not explicit enough.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good systems for child protection and welfare. Arrangements for monitoring individual progress and personal development are very good.

With a strong emphasis on 'the basics', the curriculum meets the needs of all the children well, but there is a tendency for this provision to lack imagination. Not enough use is made of visits and visitors. There are highly effective arrangements to meet the needs of children at different ages and stages of development in two bases, with a carefully structured system of grouping to match individual maturity.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Sound overall. The headteacher and deputy have well defined responsibilities, with complementary strengths. Teamwork and staff relationships are good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have no statutory responsibilities, as the nursery does not have a delegated budget. Governors are supportive and well-informed by the headteacher, but are not yet fulfilling the role of 'critical friend' satisfactorily. They have little input into the school development plan.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Only just satisfactory. The school has identified and acted upon some identified needs, for example improving organisation and management of the curriculum. Not enough is done to analyse children's attainment and progress or to review the school's performance. There is no established system of target-setting to help secure improvement year on year.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory, although the school has very limited control of funds. Its small budget is spent appropriately, with grants used for the intended purposes. The school development plan does not contain sufficient in-depth analysis or detailed forward planning to make it a useful tool in ensuring the most effective use of time and other resources.

The strengths of leadership and management are best seen in the organisation of the curriculum, including management of special educational needs and equality of opportunity, and in the development of community partnerships. There are relative shortcomings in the school development plan, and a need to strengthen the role of governors.

All significant responsibility for financial management and control lies with the local education authority (LEA) rather than with the staff and governors of this school. The extent of delegation has diminished in recent years, against national trends. Where the school itself is responsible for spending, good value is sought, but there is scope for further monitoring of the impact of spending decisions.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most children greatly enjoy coming to nursery. • Staff are welcoming and approachable. • Teaching is good, and the children are making good progress. • The school is well organised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with parents could be more effective.

Inspectors agree with all the positive views of parents.

Communication with parents is highly effective in many respects: the prospectus is well written and informative, and there are good opportunities to discuss children's records when they move between bases and on transfer to primary school. Informal and personal contacts between staff and families are strong, and are managed appropriately to meet the needs of the majority of parents and carers.

In view of the dissatisfaction expressed by a small minority of working parents, it would be helpful for the school to review its arrangements for keeping these families regularly informed.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

From a low starting point, the children make good progress to a point where they match, and occasionally exceed, average standards for the age-group in some areas of learning.

1 When children start nursery at the age of three, a few show levels of achievement and maturity which are close to the average for the age-group. The great majority, however, are well below average, especially in their social experience and language development. Newly-admitted three-year olds play with intense interest, as when they work with the clay, but they are unable at this early stage to say anything about what they are doing or what they plan to make. The school's system of 'plan, do and review' very effectively encourages the children to become aware of a range of possible activities and to begin to talk, make plans and describe what they have done at a simple level. They are taught to associate different activities with pictures and photographs, thus helping them to organise their ideas. By the time the children are four, most are able to make confident choices about where they will play, with clearly defined purposes which they are starting to articulate. When working in the construction area, for example, one child had decided to make a seesaw with a roof, and, with adult prompting, talked her way through the process: 'This one's going on flat. Now I'm going to add summat else'.

2 With clearly structured teaching, the children's learning develops rapidly to the point where attainment in physical skills and creative development reach, and are sometimes better than, the expected level of achievement for the age-group. Their attainment in some aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world also match the average by the time the children are ready for transfer to their primary schools, especially in computer skills, construction and design and technology.

3 Progress is clearly demonstrated in creative activities, where the children collaborate very well with one another. They often become deeply involved in imaginative play. During the inspection, for example, a selection of keys provided a simple stimulus which was enough to trigger the children's imagination as they acted out various scenarios. Outside many chose role-play in preference to the physical activities available. A group used model vehicles to transport sand across a ramp between two sand trays, becoming involved in the construction of pretended roads. As others took dolls for a walk round the site in pushchairs, one child called the doctor on an invisible mobile telephone about her baby's cough. The children's spontaneous engagement in role-play transfers readily to an enjoyment of stories and narrative, as demonstrated when a group participated with great enjoyment in a rendering of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. This helped to extend the children's generally limited use of language, as when one boy observed at the end: 'What a kick....the troll's going to the moon!' Afterwards some of the children painted detailed representations of the troll, mixing the colours themselves and using fine brushes with care and precision.

4 The children's skills in handling tools, including writing implements, are average for their age-group and co-ordination is sometimes good, as when they control the computer mouse or quickly assemble a track from a construction kit. Outdoors the children use the fixed play equipment confidently to climb to a height, balance and swing. Particularly good progress is made and high standards are sometimes achieved as a result of skilled teaching. In one formal session outdoors, for example, the children practised stopping and starting under strict control, moving at different speeds and in various directions and developing difficult skills such as hopping and skipping. Music and movement sessions, although held in a cramped space, effectively reinforce the children's ability to follow instructions and to respond to the mood of music.

5 There is a strong focus on the development of early literacy and numeracy skills, with even the youngest children helped to recognise their names and encouraged to count small sets of objects from the first. All the children are introduced to a wide repertoire of stories, songs and rhymes. Older children are actively encouraged to work at the writing table, and progress from simple mark-making to early attempts at writing containing some recognisable letters. Many of the older children try to write their names, in some cases legibly, and most can identify their own name and that of some others. In mathematics the children are learning to count accurately in everyday situations, for example when they are asked to help themselves to three crisps at snack time. Although the attainment of the majority of the children remains below average in language, literacy and

mathematics by five, this is not to deny the very real progress that they make in these, as in other, areas of learning. This progress has been well sustained since the time of the last inspection.

Provision for the children's personal, social and moral development is very good, and the quality of relationships between the children and with adults is a strength.

6 There are high expectations that the children can be trusted to behave well, and they are encouraged at all times to think about the needs of others. The nursery's ground rules are made clear from the first, as the children are introduced to activities systematically, shown where equipment is kept and taught how it should be put away. The basic courtesies of 'please' and 'thank-you' are patiently reinforced, especially during regular group times. The children learn to deal with their personal needs independently, for example putting on coats before going outside. They know that aprons must be worn for messy activities, and help one another with fasteners as a matter of course. For the older children, lunchtime contributes very effectively to social development. The meal is served in a civilised way, with children and adults seated around a table, complete with table-cloth and well-laid cutlery. Adults provide a good personal model as well as practical help, and the children learn to handle eating implements competently. Mealtimes are sociable occasions, with the room full of cheerful conversation.

7 One of the strengths of the school is the way in which staff encourage development of an extended range of personal skills which underpin learning. These include expressing needs confidently, listening to others, handling books with respect and using equipment and materials properly. The system of 'plan, do and review' is central to the nursery's programme of personal and social development. The children are encouraged to think ahead about what they intend, and as a result they act independently, often showing sustained concentration and involvement in what they are doing. Older children sometimes plan more than one activity at a time, or make plans involving several participants. When the time comes to recall and review what they have done, the children take pleasure in what they have achieved. In one group session, for example, some of the younger children showed interest and excitement when they looked at photographs of activities undertaken in the previous week. One three-year old from a Punjabi-speaking family communicated with the teacher for the first time during this session: looking at the photograph of himself he said 'books.' An important outcome of the review times held each session is that the children are very aware of what they have achieved and what they have learned. This makes an important contribution to the progress they make.

8 Behaviour is usually good, with occasional squabbles managed quietly and effectively. Staff are alert to any developing problems and are quick to intervene with a reasoned explanation. The children are encouraged to think about their behaviour and to say sorry if they have been unkind. They listen to adults and absorb well what they are told. For example, in one physical education session a group of children were practising stopping quickly on a given instruction. One child volunteered that this could be important in real life emergencies, such as situations involving road safety.

9 Relationships between adults and children are warm and affectionate, but without a trace of sentimentality. All the staff have a 'no-nonsense' approach and treat the children as sensible human beings, making no unnecessary concessions. The children flourish in this climate, and they too form very good relationships with one another, irrespective of ethnicity or social background, as at the time of the last inspection.

The children are well taught by staff who demonstrate a high level of professional skill.

10 All the teaching observed during the inspection was at least satisfactory, and about three-quarters was good or better, with some sessions very well taught. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The good opinion of the parents, the children's positive attitudes to learning and the solid evidence of good progress indicate that this is typical of the nursery. The quality of teaching has been well sustained since the last inspection.

11 There are high expectations that the children, however immature, will learn fast and make good progress, especially in basic skills. The children respond well to these expectations, and their

learning progresses at a good pace. Staff work hard and use their time very well, engaging actively with the children throughout each session. Some very effective interventions were seen in imaginative play: for example, when a three-year old for whom English is a second language brought a staff member a 'cup of tea' the adult extended the spoken language being used by asking for 'a big mug instead of this little cup'. Good understanding of the learning of under-fives and highly developed professional skills, especially sensitive prompting, enable staff to support the children's spoken language and increase the range of their vocabulary. Adults are often alongside the children, encouraging them to talk about what they are doing as they work. In review sessions, open-ended questions such as 'Tell me why you chose this' gradually elicit explanations from children who do not express themselves readily. Literacy teaching is well planned by a knowledgeable teacher, and is particularly successful in encouraging enjoyment of a wide variety of stories and poetry. Mathematics is also competently planned, with an appropriate focus on counting, pattern and shape in the work seen. No general weaknesses in either teaching or learning emerged during the inspection, although progress was sometimes limited by the children's restricted vocabulary. Where some sessions showed rather less flair than others, this was generally connected with external factors, such as the unexpected absence of a member of staff.

12 At best teaching is very thoroughly prepared, with good use of resources to capture the imagination of the children. In a successful group session, for example, the nursery nurse introduced a 'magic box' and described an object inside which she could feel. The children attempted to guess what the object might be before taking turns of their own, using their sense of touch to explore a range of materials. With well-chosen resources, for example bubble wrap which the children could 'pop', all the children were fully involved and sustained attention for a lengthy period.

13 The school meets the needs of all the children effectively, with a secure use of assessment to make sure that teaching is pitched at the right level. Sometimes there is skilled use of demonstration so that children understand clearly what they are to do in order to make progress. Very effective teaching was seen when a member of staff showed the children how handle clay, for example, and when another wrote down words suggested by the children, talking about the process all the time. Extra support is planned for those with special educational needs and is provided on a planned basis by all staff. Ethnic minority children and those who speak English as an additional language are particularly well supported by specialist staff and progress at least as well as other children.

Sessions are very well organised and structured, with innovative approaches to ensure that children receive teaching closely matched to their stage of development and learning needs.

14 Management and organisation of the curriculum to meet the needs of all the children and to ensure their equal access to a balanced range of activities is a strength of the nursery. This is an area of significant improvement since the last inspection. Four years ago the school introduced a modified version of the High/Scope curriculum, a well respected and tested approach to learning in the early years which aims to develop children's independent learning and self-reliance. This has resulted in group planning times, which provide each nursery session with a purposeful start, and review periods which enable the children to reflect on their learning and to share their experiences with others. Although the children can choose freely from the available activities each day, individual uptake is carefully monitored and there is intervention, if needed, to ensure that no child's experiences are too narrow.

15 Since last year the nursery has been divided into two bases catering respectively for older, mainly full-time, children and younger children, most of whom are part-timers. Staff and parents are convinced of the effectiveness of this approach, which enables them to plan the learning environment effectively to cater for children at different stages of development. The inspection team agrees. Within each base, children are further divided according to age and maturity for group teaching sessions, so that they can be challenged at their own level. Highly structured organisation ensures that members of staff develop and use expertise in a particular area of the curriculum, and that the children are brought into contact with each adult in turn during group sessions. This introduces variety into the teaching experienced by the children and puts the specialist knowledge of staff to very good use. There is a smooth changeover of personnel for group work, with minimal loss of time even though adults sometimes have to move between bases.

16 The nursery has considerable numbers of children with special educational needs (SEN), for whom good provision is made. Brief individual education plans are produced for each child on the SEN register, however minor the concern. These contain a range of targets, together with simple strategies which are circulated to all staff. The children's needs are regularly reviewed and discussed amongst the staff, with parents fully involved in the case of any serious concern. These children develop confidence and make good progress.

17 Children of African-Caribbean heritage are well supported by all staff. A specialist worker at present permanently based in the nursery makes a very strong contribution to the nursery's work with these children. Children from Chinese families also receive excellent support from a bilingual peripatetic worker who visits regularly. The cultural and linguistic needs of a small number of children of Pakistani or Middle-Eastern origin are similarly well understood and catered for by all staff, even though there is no specific bilingual support for these pupils. All of these individuals are enabled to learn effectively, and their progress is at least as good as that of other children.

Staff are committed to the wellbeing of the children, their families and the whole community. As a result the school has established strong links with other professions and services, enabling it to contribute to a valuable all-round provision for children in the neighbourhood.

18 Grace Owen has been at the forefront of developing inter-agency services for families with young children in the neighbourhood. There are very good links with a range of health professionals, one of whom is represented on the school's governing body. An extended family provision is already based on the nursery. Services provided include a 'play and progress' group for two-year olds and various training and advisory services for parents and carers. The headteacher is closely involved in ambitious plans for the expansion of these schemes, with the setting up of a limited company to establish a child-care centre next door to the nursery school. All of these initiatives are designed to benefit families and children in the neighbourhood and, ultimately, to raise aspirations and achievement in the community. These efforts are about to be reinforced by the school's involvement with other local schools in an Education Action Zone covering South-east Sheffield.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Despite good progress, the children's spoken language remains below average for the age-group, and this is limiting attainment, especially in language, literacy and mathematics.

19 Many children have poorly developed language skills on admission, as described in paragraph 1. From this low starting point, effective teaching ensures that good progress is made, especially in listening, which is broadly average by the time the children leave nursery. Speaking also improves. In particular the older children learn to answer questions confidently, talk about what they are doing and engage in short conversational exchanges in the course of imaginative play. Despite marked improvement, spoken English skills do not reach an average level. The children move on rapidly from the monosyllabic utterances typical of many new entrants, but even the older four-year olds seldom express themselves in more than a short phrase or two. In many cases, their speech remains reliant on adults to question, prompt and support, and vocabulary is still relatively limited, despite the conscious efforts of staff to introduce and reinforce unfamiliar words. No child was heard asking questions to gain information or to seek an explanation during the inspection.

20 The children's limited spoken language has implications for other areas of learning, and tends in particular to restrict achievement in literacy and mathematics, with only the high attainers on course to match national standards by five. The children are interested in books and greatly enjoy stories and rhymes, but they are not good at predicting what will come next on the basis of illustrations or repetitions in the text. They find it difficult to retell a familiar narrative, and most do not use 'story language' when trying to do so. Older children can distinguish print from pictures, but few realise that the text consists of separate words. The children are starting to develop some appreciation of the sounds in words and a sense of rhyme. Most learn to recognise and write their names, and one or two high attaining children are beginning to understand the relationships between letters and sounds in the written language, but not in printed texts. One child made an excellent attempt at writing the name of her teacher, 'Myeri' for 'Mary', for example; but this was very much the exception. Most children can suggest single words, but not extended phrases, when dictating for an adult to scribe.

21 Mathematical language is similarly limited. The children are taught to count, both by rote and with real objects, and in this respect their attainment matches national expectations for the age-group. With sound listening skills, they are able to interpret instructions in physical education and movement sessions, showing an average understanding of the language of space and position, for example when asked to stand in a straight line or sit in a circle. In other respects, the children show an insecure and partial recollection of mathematical terms. As part of one activity, for example, some four-year olds were creating images from various ready-cut shapes. One child identified and named a hexagon and, when asked, said that it had six 'sides' (which the children were confusing with corners). All in the group had forgotten the term 'rectangle'. With limited mathematical language, most children are in no position to develop their powers of reasoning or to apply their mathematical understanding to solve practical problems.

22 Staff already make good efforts to extend the children's spoken language and vocabulary. This provision is at its most successful when the children are provided with experiences which particularly excite them and are encouraged to express their responses. Such occasions were, during the inspection, mainly seen in the creative area of learning. The nursery's already good provision for language development would be improved further by increasing the breadth of the children's experience and thus providing a further basis for talk about shared events. There is scope for more extensive targeting of the language skills and vocabulary which help to shape and reinforce learning in key areas of the curriculum, especially literacy and numeracy. These skills and are not at present reflected in sufficient detail in the children's records.

With a strong focus on basic learning, the curriculum is sometimes unimaginative. More could be done to give children exciting new experiences from time to time.

23 One of the strengths of the curriculum is its strong focus on basic skills within each area of learning. It is argued by the senior staff that in this way the children receive a well-balanced, relevant curriculum with no 'frills'. This reasoning is, in its essentials, accepted by the inspection team. French teaching, which it was unfortunately not possible to observe at the time of the inspection, is an undoubted enrichment, increasing the breadth of the curriculum.

24 Yet there is a certain lack of flair and imagination overall. In recent years the school has worked hard, and to good effect, to develop a tightly organised system of curricular organisation and management. There have been some concomitant losses, however, which senior staff are now seeking to address. In particular, visits beyond the school's boundaries are rare apart from occasional expeditions to the local shops. The school is at the moment making too little use of the skills of visitors, friends and families from the community to extend the children's range of experience and understanding and to raise aspirations. Although spiritual and cultural development are sound, these areas are not given enough explicit attention at the planning stage.

Although staff get things done, the school development plan does not provide an effective tool for mapping out the best use of time, training and the limited funds available to the school. Governors do not play an active enough part in the planning process.

25 Management and leadership present a mixed picture. Management of the curriculum is very effective, with substantial and beneficial development since the last inspection. The school is driven by a clear educational philosophy, well understood by staff and the school community, and this is well reflected in practice. Changes decided upon by the staff are acted on effectively. Good leadership is exercised at various levels in the school, especially to ensure equality of opportunity and to cater for children with special needs. Arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning have tended to be informal in the past, and the school is now in the process of tightening up these arrangements as part of a local initiative. The quality of school development planning is less than satisfactory, and appears to have improved little since the last inspection. The plan contains no mission statement or summary of educational aims and objectives. It is short-term, covering a single year, with no feel for future development, and there is no review of the previous year's achievements. Whilst the priorities identified are generally appropriate, there are no action plans setting out objectives, time-scales and success criteria. In particular, the development plan does not include any analysis of the children's attainment and progress and no targets are set as yet. Plans for allocating funds from the Standards Fund and other ear-marked sources are not set out clearly. Overall, the plan in its present form is not

a useful enough tool to support the school's further development.

26 Governors are committed to the success of the school, represent local community interests very effectively and provide the headteacher and staff with good support. The headteacher keeps them well informed, and, with regular visits, most know the school well. Some governors are themselves aware of the need to develop further the role of 'critical friend' and to monitor the school's successes and areas for development more stringently. At present they do not, as they should, contribute to the school development plan at a formative stage.

Attendance is unsatisfactory

27 Attendance rates are unsatisfactory, tending to fall slightly below 80% for both full and part-time places. This is an improvement on the 74% reported at the time of the last inspection. Although parents have a perception that full-timers attend better than others, this is not borne out by scrutiny of the registers. Some causes for absence are undoubtedly beyond the school's control, including those resulting from above average levels of ill-health in the community. Punctuality is not a significant issue, partly because parents do not want their children to miss the group planning activities at the start of each session.

28 The nursery takes the same steps to encourage regular attendance as many other primary schools, with sound guidelines in the prospectus. When children fail to appear without explanation this is eventually followed up by the school secretary, but only after an absence of a week or two. Because attendance at nursery is not a statutory requirement, there is no support from the LEA's Educational Welfare Service. In recognition of the fact that non-attendance involves a waste of community resources, as well as establishing inappropriate habits for the future, the EAZ is including Grace Owen in a local initiative to improve attendance levels. In this sense improving attendance is already an established priority for the school.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

29 Raising standards of attainment further will be no easy matter for this already successful school. Teaching is good, and the curriculum is well organised to ensure that time is well used and staff effectively deployed. This is reflected in the good progress currently made by the children. Progress will need to be better still if attainment is to be brought up to an average level for the age-group in each area of learning, especially to improve spoken language and to establish the foundations of literacy and numeracy. With this in mind, the school should:

- **Continue to make every effort to improve the children's spoken language and to extend their vocabulary, especially to raise further standards in literacy and mathematics, by**
 - monitoring and analysing the standards achieved more rigorously;
 - setting targets for further improvement;
 - broadening the scope of the curriculum (see also below);
 - sharpening further the focus on language skills which underpin literacy and numeracy.
- **Broaden and enrich the curriculum further by increasing the input of visits and visitors and planning more explicitly for the children's spiritual and cultural development.**

- **Improve the quality of school development planning by**
 - involving governors fully in the planning process;
 - agreeing a written statement of the school's educational aims and objectives;
 - extending the plan to cover more than one year;
 - continuing to develop strategies for monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and the standards achieved by the children;
 - including clear timescales, responsibilities and success criteria within each action plan;
 - linking spending more explicitly with the school's stated priorities.

- **Take steps to improve attendance.**

None of the above areas for improvement appears as a priority within the current school development plan. However, language development in the early years and attendance are both priorities for the South-east Sheffield Education Action Zone of which the nursery is a part.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	4

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	18	59	24	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons (rounded to the nearest whole figure)

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)	64.5
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	15

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	34

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	15

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and support staff**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	174

Number of pupils per FTE adult	7.8
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	235,668
Total expenditure	222,338
Expenditure per pupil	2,341
Balance brought forward from previous year	13,330
Balance carried forward to next year	13,707

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	72
Number of questionnaires returned	25

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	80	20	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	52	44	4	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	52	4	0	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	16	12	4	48
The teaching is good.	56	32	4	0	8
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	40	36	12	8	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	76	20	4	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	40	4	0	8
The school works closely with parents.	32	56	4	0	8
The school is well led and managed.	64	24	4	0	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	36	4	0	16
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	12	8	8	28