

Appletree Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134991
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	341591
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Colin Smith

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	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Gibson
Headteacher	Mrs Barbara Wignall
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited six lessons and spent 75% of the time looking at learning, involving two teachers and four nursery assistants. Inspectors held meetings with governors, staff and parents and carers. They observed the school's work, and looked at assessments and records of children's attainment and progress, curriculum planning, monitoring records, school improvement plans and questionnaires from staff and 24 parents and carers.

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

- the quality of provision to determine the extent to which more-able children are challenged
- the use of assessment to guide planning in providing for children's individual needs
- the extent to which monitoring of the work of the Nursery informs self-evaluation and determines improvement planning.

Information about the school

The Nursery is average in size. The proportions of children eligible for free school meals and with special educational needs and/or disabilities are above average. The vast majority of children are of White British heritage. Only a very small number speak English as an additional language. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is made for children aged three to four. Children enter the Nursery in September, January or April each year, as they reach the age of three, and almost all children complete a full year. The Nursery is situated within a Children's Centre, which opened in 2007. Although childcare is not provided, the Children's Centre offers a wide range of health and educational services for parents and carers and children. A playbus provides additional support for families who experience difficulties in accessing services.

The Nursery has gained Leading Parent Partnership, Healthy Early Years, Learning Excellence (for best practice in outdoor play and reducing gender gaps), Aawaz (bringing communities together) and Pathfinder (Creative Arts) awards and achieved 'I Can' accreditation.

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

Appletree is an outstanding Nursery. Now fully integrated within the Children's Centre, it provides exemplary care, guidance and support and an excellent curriculum, which positively influence children's welfare, learning and development. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Behaviour is exemplary and children develop an extremely good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. They make an excellent contribution to the Nursery community by acting responsibly. Parents and carers are highly appreciative of the provision made and credit their children's joy in learning to the welcoming atmosphere and dedication of staff. Children's love of school is evident in their good attendance and happy faces.

Nursery provision is outstanding. Excellent teaching ensures that children learn rapidly. Their progress is exceptionally good in gaining knowledge and understanding of the world and developing creativity and personal qualities. Children make good progress in communication and language, mathematical and physical development. Consequently, although children's knowledge and skills are broadly typical on entering Nursery, overall attainment is higher than typically seen when they leave.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership and excellent support from staff and governors lie at the heart of the school's success. Exceptionally good partnerships have been forged with parents and carers and outside agencies. Good safeguarding procedures and first-class support for families of vulnerable children enables those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make excellent progress. The work of the school is meticulously checked, helping the Nursery to build on its previous good inspection. There is no hint of complacency. In fact, the school's self-evaluation, though sharp and accurate, modestly regards its work to be good, rather than outstanding. In the headteacher's view, 'there is always more to do,' evident in the work being done to strengthen the links between assessment and planning. The headteacher recognises correctly that insufficient use is made of personal targets in literacy and numeracy to move children on. The search for excellence, for example, in developing exceptionally good outdoor provision, illustrates the school's outstanding capacity for improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the use of assessment to inform planning by:
 - setting clear targets for individual children in literacy and numeracy
 - using the targets to guide adults when observations are undertaken and judgements of progress are made

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- monitoring children's progress through the targets and using the information to pinpoint the next steps in planning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

Learning is exciting and engaging. Children are invariably absorbed in exploring, experimenting and creating, whether alone, in groups or with an adult. Their capacity to learn independently is very pronounced, for example, by using the writing area to draw treasure maps or devising routes around which to navigate wheeled vehicles outdoors. Learning is active and creative, for example, in making patterns in clay and floating leaves in the stream to see what happens when they reach the drain. Children think critically, for example, about decisions they are required to make using computers and how best to rig the masts and sails on the model pirate ship. Through such activities, children learn to reason and explain, especially when adults play alongside. Such focused learning is the basis for their good progress in literacy and numeracy and outstanding progress in other areas. Over the previous three years, over a third of children have entered school with knowledge and skills below those expected for their age, yet by the end of Nursery almost all children achieve the goals expected, and a significant number exceed them. Boys and girls perform equally well and the progress of more-able children is increasing as their learning needs are now receiving more specific attention.

The warm and welcoming atmosphere ensures that children settle quickly, make new friends and take full advantage of all that the Nursery has to offer. Their wonder in learning and their understanding of how they are similar to or different from others reflect their impressive spiritual and cultural development. Their heightened awareness of safety, danger and hygiene is nurtured, for example, by involving them in cooking food with an adult, at a safe distance from the oven. Their excellent appreciation of healthy lifestyles arises from involvement in food preparation, regular keep fit sessions and extensive outdoor play. Children's exemplary behaviour is evident in their friendliness and a readiness to share. They show a high degree of concern for others and play equally well independently and cooperatively, demonstrating their excellent contribution to the school. Attendance at 95% is good. Good literacy and numeracy skills and willingness to take initiative are indicators of children's good preparation for the next stage of their education.

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

1

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

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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	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attendance ¹	2
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

When children enter Nursery, they experience a myriad of highly stimulating activities, inside and outdoors. Each activity is imaginatively designed and meticulously prepared. They prove irresistible. Children become totally absorbed in them. Adults are well positioned to supervise and intervene but know exactly when to stand back and allow children to explore and when to step in to channel their learning. Within this excellent continuous provision, adults introduce new and novel activities, such as cooking pasta and operating programmable toys. Children are intrigued, gather closer and join in. This is where some of the best teaching takes place. Questioning is precise and encourages children to reflect, predict and observe, for example, how a garlic crusher works or what happens when water is added to clay. Such skilled teaching underpins children's highly successful learning. Children are also taught in groups for short periods. Skilled practitioners ensure that all children are fully involved, for example, by using puppets in storytelling and digging up plants roots for children to examine and discuss.

A very comprehensive assessment system has been established, involving regular observations, using checklists of essential skills and recording children's development in 'learning journey' folders. Much information is gathered about each child and is increasingly being used to provide additional small group teaching for children ready to learn more advanced literacy and numeracy skills. This is helping to boost the progress of more-able children. As assessments are completed, the next learning steps are identified for individual children. However, these are not always made clear in the planning because they are not sufficiently precise to be converted into individual targets that help adults to plan and build on children's skills in literacy and numeracy as they

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engage in various activities.

The curriculum is rich in memorable experiences and the school is at the frontiers of curriculum design, for example, in puppet making and storytelling. Children's experiences are extensively enriched through the partnership with the Children's Centre, for example, through keep fit clubs, creative dance and drama. The curriculum is particularly well adapted to the needs of children with delayed language, to help to develop their speech. Adjustments are now being made to provide specific early reading, writing and number activities for gifted and talented children.

Parents and carers are highly appreciative of the extremely caring and welcoming family atmosphere, particularly those whose children require additional support. Excellent pastoral care, highly effective induction procedures and good transfer arrangements, make for happy, secure children as they move from one stage of education to the next. Children's welfare is paramount. The Nursery, Children's Centre and outside agencies work extremely well together to dismantle barriers to learning and ensure that children, particularly the most vulnerable ones, are protected and supported.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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?

The headteacher is extremely highly regarded by the school community because of her caring disposition, early year's expertise, clear vision and determination to make tomorrow even better than today. Teamwork, high staff morale and excellent communication between the Nursery and Children's Centre ensure that children's welfare and learning needs are fully met and parents and carers receive excellent support.

Monitoring provision, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, setting challenging school targets and evaluating their impact, are key factors in the Nursery's strong development. Outside agencies are invited in to evaluate the school's provision, adding a degree of objectivity. This has resulted in the Nursery developing excellent self-evaluation and achieving numerous awards. Checking and improving the quality of teaching has been good, even during a period of staffing difficulties caused by illness and absences, despite placing a heavy workload on the headteacher. Governors provide excellent support in holding the work of the Nursery to account and using their talents to support future developments, such as marketing the school.

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An excellent partnership with school gives parents and carers a strong voice and extensive involvement in the Nursery. The exemplary partnership between the school, the Children's Centre and outside agencies ensures that family needs are extremely well catered for. Safeguarding procedures are good, even though parents are not given the full details. Equality is successfully promoted. Diversity is celebrated, stereotyping challenged and detailed analysis of children's progress has been a major factor in closing the performance gap between boys and girls. Community cohesion is successfully promoted through clear policies and actions, not least those involving the Asian community in the work of the school and supporting parents and carers in their efforts to return to the workplace. The excellent organisation of extremely high quality resources, sensitive deployment of adults and regular staff training help to ensure that Appletree Nursery provides excellent value for money.

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	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers wholeheartedly agree that their children enjoy school because of good teaching and effective leadership and are happy with their children's experiences in the Nursery. All parents and carers who returned questionnaires feel that the school keeps their child safe and helps them to adopt healthy lifestyles. Parents and carers are also extremely positive about the management of behaviour and the extent to which the school meets their child's needs. The very large majority of parents and carers feel their

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child is making enough progress, which prepares them well for the future. Almost all parents and carers appreciate the help they receive in supporting their child's learning and feel well informed about their child's progress. Above all, parents and carers know their views are listened to and acted upon. Not surprisingly, inspectors fully agree with their extremely positive views and find most aspects of the school's work outstanding.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Appletree 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 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 75 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	79	5	21	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	19	79	5	21	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	67	6	25	2	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	75	5	21	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	75	6	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	79	4	17	1	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	88	3	13	0	0	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)	9	38	9	38	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	75	5	21	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	71	5	21	0	0	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	79	5	21	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	75	6	25	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	88	3	13	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.



23 January 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Appletree Nursery School, Lancaster, LA1 5QB

Do you remember when I came into your Nursery? Thank you for talking to me and looking after me so well. I loved my time in the Nursery and want to tell you what I found out.

Your Nursery is excellent. Grown-ups take very good care of you and keep you safe. I think this is why you are all so happy and kind to each other. Grown-ups work so hard to make your learning interesting and exciting. I could see just how much you enjoyed playing outside in the sand, modelling with clay, using computers and making pasta. What busy days you have and you learn so much. This is because grown-ups talk to you, ask you questions and show you new things. This helps you to learn really well so that when you move to big school you will be able to do all the things you should, and more.

When you started Nursery some of you were very shy and didn't want to leave your parents and carers. Now look at you! You can take care of yourselves, choose your own things to do and even help with the tidying up. That is excellent.

Your parents and carers like the Nursery very much. They say it is very friendly. They like your teachers and they think that people in charge do an excellent job. I agree with them in every way.

Even though your Nursery is excellent, I want to help it to be even better.

I have asked your teachers and helpers to set little targets for you and show you how to reach them. This will help you to learn even more about reading, writing and numbers, as you grow bigger.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Colin Smith

Lead Inspector

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