

Sandy Lane Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110956
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	288812
Inspection dates	26–27 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Dee Brigstock

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	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr M Banner
Headteacher	Mrs Lindsay Bray
Date of previous school inspection	11 December 2001
School address	Sandy Lane Orford Warrington Cheshire WA2 9HY
Telephone number	01925 623640
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Age group	3–5
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

In April 2006, Sandy Lane Nursery School, Rainbow Nursery Class and Sunshine Assessment Unit joined forces with the Beaches Family Support and extended services provision and became a designated Children's Centre. All elements of the children's centre work in close partnership with a private nursery on site called 'The Lakes.' At the same time a new head of centre was appointed. The head of centre is also the headteacher of the Nursery, and Early Years advisor to the Local Authority, managing its team of Early Years consultants. The focus of the inspection was on Sandy Lane Nursery School, including the Sunshine and Rainbow classes. The nursery school provides part-time nursery education for 110 children. This includes up to five children, from the age of two, in the Sunshine Assessment class. These children are identified as having a range of developmental delays or sensory and physical impairments. Some of these children go on to attend the Rainbow nursery class, which caters for up to five children with profound and complex learning needs in each session. As a result of this additional provision, the proportion of children in the nursery school with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than usual. The school serves an urban population at considerable socio-economic disadvantage. Nearly all children are of White British heritage with few from other cultural backgrounds. A very small number of children are at an early stage of learning English.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sandy Lane is a good nursery. It provides good value for money. Parents wholeheartedly agree and are exceptionally pleased with how well their children achieve and how much they enjoy attending school. The school provides excellent care, guidance and support for children. This includes first rate partnerships with external agencies to safeguard children's welfare. Because of this high level of guidance and support, children's personal, social and emotional development is outstanding. As a consequence, in this aspect of learning, from a low base they reach the nationally expected level for their age by the time they leave and their achievement is excellent. Children's behaviour and enjoyment of learning are outstanding. At the beginning of each session, children skip merrily into the classroom, select an activity of their choice and become completely engaged in experimenting and learning through play. Despite children's keen interest in their chosen activities, they obediently follow adults' requests to tidy away resources and meet together in groups to, for example, share books, learn about minibeasts, or use the interactive whiteboards.

Children's good achievement has been promoted in a relatively short space of time, reflecting the determination of leaders and staff to develop the nursery to an excellent standard. Most children enter the nursery at three, with low standards in all aspects of their development. Despite good progress in most areas of learning, few meet the national standards expected for their age by the time they leave because their vocabulary is very limited and their use of language is immature. Teaching and learning are good. Staff have excellent relationships with children and plan well to cater for their interests and needs, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They use accurate assessments to record what children already know and what they need to learn next. Activities join different aspects of the curriculum together well, such as when children mixed the ingredients for cakes which they then took home to eat. They learned new words and mathematical skills at the same time. The school's overall picture of children's progress is accurate but does not include how well each year group of children are doing in the nursery. This limits leaders' informed views on where teaching is most effective and where more emphasis needs to be placed when planning the curriculum. Within the Sunshine and Rainbow classes, staff make detailed assessments of children's learning using a national recording system. The children here make good progress because all the activities prepared for them directly meet their individual needs. Staff are very well trained and have detailed knowledge of individual children's medical and physical conditions. They deal with any emergencies promptly, calmly and professionally.

Leaders are creating a good, innovative and varied curriculum which is still evolving. It is enriched well by regular visits to places, such as a farm. One exciting aspect of the school's provision is its outdoor classroom. Already good, leaders are working in a very productive partnership with students from a local college to improve this learning resource further.

Leadership and management are good. The outstanding vision and knowledge of the headteacher fuels her determination to provide the best quality provision for children and their families in the local community. There is an excellent level of professional cooperation between the nursery and the extended provision of the children's centre which the headteacher also leads. Children's care, guidance and support and their personal development are outstanding rather than good but, apart from this, leaders' evaluations of the school's work are accurate. The governors' work is good. They are very supportive and involved well in future plans for the site. Currently, teachers' work is evaluated and improved well through the school's system of performance

management. This formal system has not been extended to include teaching assistants, some of whom are very well qualified, limiting measurements of their professional development. Taking into account that the nursery is relatively new, a lot of development has been done in a short space of time, illustrating the school's excellent capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Construct a tracking system that measures how well individual children achieve in each area of learning.
- Include teaching assistants in the performance management process to increase their professional development and expertise.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In most areas of learning, standards remain below national expectations despite children making good progress, because they start from such a low base. The match of learning activities to children's individual needs brings success to all children. Children who are learning English as an additional language make good progress because they are starting from the same low base as most other children. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress and achieve well. Within the Sunshine Assessment class and the Rainbow class, children make good and sometimes outstanding progress as their planned learning activities are exactly matched to their targets on individual education plans. Several parents commented very positively about how well they were included in measuring their children's progress and setting new targets. This level of cooperation between home and school is an important element in children's good achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Excellent relationships exist between children and all adults. 'Staff take a personal interest in children, getting to know them as individuals,' reflects the views of many parents. Other extremely positive comments included references to children's great enjoyment of school and how well children were valued. Children are exceptionally well behaved and eager to learn. They enter school cheerfully, quickly 'signing in' before choosing what they want to do. Children get off to a good start in understanding how to stay healthy through having daily fruit and milk and taking part in simple cooking activities. They plant, reap, cook and eat some of their own vegetables. The praise adults give increases children's self-esteem and pride in their accomplishments. Their care of each other and the resources in school are first rate. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are developing a sound awareness of some festivals from other cultures, such as Chinese New Year. The school rigorously promotes good attendance. Despite this, some parents keep their children at home for odd days. The new nursery and children's centre buildings, plus parental reports of how well their children are doing are having a very positive impact within the local community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Adults plan learning activities for different groups of children well. They set a positive example to children who copy their good attitudes and look upon learning new skills as a delight. Staff are becoming good at talking to children, asking them questions and helping them with their replies. This has been a focus for recent training but is in need of further development, particularly amongst new staff. Those members of staff with expertise in teaching children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities use and share their expertise willingly with other staff providing them with continuous professional development. Children's learning outdoors is good because they have a lot to do and are well supported in their learning by adults who are not just 'on duty' but actively involved in encouraging children to learn. Children's learning through their senses in the Sunshine and Rainbow rooms is excellent. Staff plan very focused, enjoyable activities, which directly relate to individual children's learning needs. They also take good advantage of 'happy accidents' to advance learning further. For example, when painting a big butterfly, one child put paint on her nose. She laughed with delight when her teacher gave her a mirror to look at. She was very happy to show that she knew where different parts of her face were when she could put paint on them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with significant strengths in personal and social development and in continuous outdoor education. Leaders have adapted the curriculum planning from a more traditional half termly topic style to one led more by children's interests. This is because the traditional curriculum did not meet the needs of children with low standards of speech and maturity on entry to the nursery. This is a relatively new venture and is still being developed and refined. Staff have planned good links between areas of learning. Both indoors and outdoors, children are provided with plentiful opportunities to learn to read and write in ways which capture their interest and imagination, for example, in 'writing' clues to a treasure hunt around the grounds. Enrichment through two annual visits, for example, to visit Father Christmas in his grotto and to a farm is good. These visits effectively broaden children's knowledge and understanding of the world. All children benefit from using the 'Isle of Books,' and librarian in the children's centre twice a week. This is just one example of how the school's productive partnership within the children's centre is having a positive impact on children's learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Procedures for keeping children safe are very rigorous. All children thought to be at any risk are monitored very carefully and vetting procedures for staff are secure. The school has an excellent working relationship with external agencies to protect children. The school includes children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those with social problems, very well in all it has to offer. These children benefit from very skilled care and support from staff. Throughout the nursery, all staff constantly guide children on how to improve their speech, language and early reading, writing, mathematical, social and personal skills; this contributes significantly to children's good achievement. They are excellent role models for children.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher shows excellent leadership and management in inspiring good and rapidly improving provision for children and parents in the local community. In this, she is fully supported by the staff and parents. The headteacher's assessments of the quality of teaching are accurate. These assessments, through direct observations, feed into teachers' future training and development needs. This system is not yet in place for teaching assistants who carry considerable responsibility for teaching small groups of children. Currently, there is no system to celebrate this. Staff collect detailed information on what children know and can do on a daily basis. This information is transferred into an accurate overview of individual children's progress. The middle step, that of tracking each year group of children to measure how much progress they make in each area of learning and pinpoint areas for improvement, is missing. As a result, leaders do not have hard evidence to show how well the whole group of children make progress in each area of their learning. The school does an excellent job in including all children in everything it does. For example, leaders are planning a week when children from all three elements of the nursery can come together to learn and play. This is a completely new venture, which is being very carefully planned to ensure children's health and safety.

The governors appointed the headteacher as head of centre but do not yet manage the children's centre as a whole. This is an anomaly as it results in them being unable to measure the headteacher's progress towards meeting her targets for development. The school has found it difficult to recruit parent governors but have now negotiated to reduce the term of governorship to two years in an effort to persuade more parents to join them.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I really liked being at your nursery school for two days. It was lovely to see you learning and playing with all the grown ups and with each other. You go to a really good nursery.

These are the best bits about your school.

- Your behaviour is excellent.
- There is a lot to do and you really enjoy all the games and activities that your teachers get ready for you.
- The teachers keep you very safe and get other people to help you if they need to.
- You are learning a lot.
- Your teachers really care about you and are always trying to find ways for you to do a little bit better.
- The outside area and garden are good and are going to be even better - especially the vegetables.

I have asked your headteacher to do two things to make your nursery even better.

They are to:

1. show some of the grown ups how to get even better in their work
2. find a way to write down how much you learn from the time you start to the time you leave nursery.