*Technical Paper 10*

# Intensive Case Studies of Practice across the Foundation Stage

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project

INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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# The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education [EPPE] Project

# A Longitudinal Study funded by the DfES

# (1997 – 2003)

## Technical Paper 10

## Intensive Case Studies of Practice across the Foundation Stage

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# Intensive Case Studies of Practice across the Foundation Stage

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# Effective Provision of Pre-school Education

# "EPPE"

## *Overview of the Project*

This series of 12 reports describes the research on effective pre-school provision funded by the UK Department for Education & Employment (DfEE).   Further details appear in Technical Paper 1 (Sylva, Sammons, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart 1999).  This longitudinal study assesses the attainment and development of children followed longitudinally between the ages of 3 and 7 years.  Three thousand children were recruited to the study over the period January 1997 to April 1999 from 141 pre-school centres.  Initially 114 centres from four types of provision were selected for the study but in September 1998 an extension to the main study was implemented to include innovative forms of provision, including 'combined education and care' (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 1997).

Both qualitative and quantitative methods (including multilevel modelling) have been used to explore the effects of individual pre-school centres on children's attainment and social/behavioural development at entry to school and any continuing effects on such outcomes at the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7). In addition to centre effects, the study investigates the contribution to children's development of individual and family characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, language, parental education and employment. This overview describes the research design and discusses a variety of research issues (methodological and practical) in investigating the impact of pre-school provision on children's developmental progress. A parallel study is being carried out in Northern Ireland.

There have been many initiatives intended to improve educational outcomes for young children.  Will these initiatives work?  Will they enable children to enter school 'more ready' to learn, or achieve more at the end of Key Stage 1?  Which are the most effective ways to educate young children?  The research project described in this paper is part of the new emphasis on ensuring 'a good start' for children.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF EARLY EDUCATION IN THE UK

There has been little large-scale, systematic research on the effects of early childhood education in the UK.  The 'Start Right'  Enquiry  (Ball 1994; Sylva 1994) reviewed the evidence of British research and concluded that small-scale studies suggested a positive impact but that large-scale research was inconclusive.  The Start Right enquiry recommended more rigorous longitudinal studies with baseline measures so that the 'value added' to children's development by pre-school education could be established.

Research evidence elsewhere on the effects of different kinds of pre-school environment on children's development (Melhuish et al. 1990;  Melhuish 1993;  Sylva & Wiltshire 1993;  Schweinhart & Weikart 1997; Borge & Melhuish, 1995; National Institute of Child Health Development 1997) suggests positive outcomes.  Some researchers have examined  the impact of particular characteristics, e.g. gender and attendance on children's adjustment to nursery classes (Davies & Brember 1992), or adopted cross-sectional designs to explore the impact of different types of pre-school provision (Davies & Brember 1997).  Feinstein, Robertson & Symons (1998) attempted to evaluate the effects of pre-schooling on children's subsequent progress but birth cohort designs may not be appropriate for the study of the influence of pre-school education.   The absence of data about children's attainments at entry to pre-school means that neither the British Cohort Study (1970) nor the National Child Development Study (1958) can be used to explore the effects of pre-school education on children's progress.  These studies are also limited by the time lapse and many changes in the nature of pre-school provision which have

occurred.  To date no research using multilevel models (Goldstein 1987) has been used to investigate the impact of both type of provision **and** individual centre effects.  Thus little research in the UK has explored whether some forms of provision have greater benefits than others.  Schagen (1994) attempted multilevel modelling but did not have adequate control at entry to pre-school.

In the UK there is a long tradition of variation in pre-school provision both between types (e.g. playgroup, local authority or private nursery or nursery classes) and in different parts of the country reflecting Local Authority funding and geographical conditions (i.e. urban/rural and local access to centres).  A series of reports (House of Commons Select Committee 1989;  DES Rumbold Report 1990;  Ball 1994) have questioned whether Britain's pre-school education is as effective as it might be and have urged better co-ordination of services and research into the impact of different forms of provision (Siraj-Blatchford 1995).  The EPPE project is thus the first large-scale British study on the effects of different kinds of pre-school provision and the impact of attendance at individual centres.

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODS

The EPPE project is a major study instituted in 1996 to investigate three issues which have important implications for policy and practice:

- the effects on children of different types of pre-school provision,
- the 'structural' (e.g. adult-child ratios) and 'process' characteristics (e.g. interaction styles) of more effective pre-school centres, and
- the interaction between child and family characteristics and the kind of pre-school provision a child experiences.

An educational effectiveness research design was chosen to investigate these topics because this enabled the research team to investigate the progress and development of individual children (including the impact of personal, socio-economic and family characteristics), and the effect of individual pre-school centres on children's outcomes at both entry to school (the start of Reception which children can enter between the ages of 4 and 5 plus) and at the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7 plus).  Such research designs are well suited to social and educational research with an institutional focus (Paterson & Goldstein 1991).   The growing field of school effectiveness research has developed an appropriate methodology for the separation of intake and school influences on children's progress using so called 'value added' multilevel models (Goldstein 1987, 1995).  As yet, however, such techniques have not been applied to the pre-school sector, although recent examples of value added research for younger ages at the primary level have been provided by Tymms et al. 1997;  Sammons & Smees 1998;  Jesson et al. 1997;  Strand 1997; and Yang & Goldstein 1997.  These have examined the relationship between baseline assessment at reception to infant school through to Key Stage 1 (age 7 plus years).

School effectiveness research during the 1970s and 1980s addressed the question "*Does the particular school attended by a child make a difference?*" (Mortimore et al. 1988;  Tizard et al. 1988).   More recently the question of internal variations in effectiveness, teacher/class level variations and stability in effects of particular schools over time have assumed importance (e.g. Luyten 1994; 1995; Hill & Rowe 1996; Sammons 1996).  This is the first research to examine the impact of individual pre-school centres using multilevel approaches.  The EPPE project is designed to examine both the impact of type of pre-school provision as well as allow the identification of particular pre-school characteristics which have longer term effects.   It is also designed to establish whether there are differences in the effects of individual pre-school centres on children's progress and development.  In addition, the project explores the impact of pre-school provision for different groups of children and the extent to which pre-schools are effective in promoting different kinds of outcomes (cognitive and social/behavioural).

## The 8 aims of the EPPE Project

- To produce a detailed description of the 'career paths' of a large sample of children and their families between entry into pre-school education and completion (or near completion) of Key Stage 1.

- To compare and contrast the developmental progress of 3,000+ children from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds who have differing pre-school experiences including early entry to Reception from home.

- To separate out the effects of pre-school experience from the effects of education in the period between Reception and Year 2.

- To establish whether some pre-school centres are more effective than others in promoting children's cognitive and social/emotional development during the pre-school years (ages 3-5) and across Key Stage 1 (5-7 years).

- To discover the individual characteristics (structural and process) of pre-school education in those centres found to be most effective.

- To investigate differences in the progress of different groups of children, e.g. second language learners of English, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and both genders.

- To investigate the medium-term effects of pre-school education on educational performance at Key Stage 1 in a way which will allow the possibility of longitudinal follow-up at later ages to establish long-term effects, if any.

- To relate the use of pre-school provision to parental labour market participation.

## The sample: regions, centres and children

In order to maximise the likelihood of identifying the effects of individual centres and also the effects of various types of provision, the EPPE sample was stratified by type of centre and geographical location.

- Six English Local Authorities (LAs) in five regions were chosen strategically to participate in the research.  These were selected to cover provision in urban, suburban and rural areas and a range of ethnic diversity and social disadvantage.  (Another related project covering Northern Ireland was instituted in April 1998 [Melhuish et al. 1997].  This will enable comparison of findings across different geographical contexts.)

- Six main types of provision are included in the study (the most common forms of current provision; *playgroups*, local authority or voluntary *day nurseries*, *private day nurseries*, *nursery schools, nursery classes*, and centres *combining care and education*.  Centres were selected randomly within each type of provision in each authority.

In order to enable comparison of centre and type of provision effects the project was designed to recruit 500 children, 20 in each of 20-25 centres, from the six types of provision, thus giving a total sample of approximately 3000 children and 140 centres[1].  In some LAs certain forms of provision are less common and others more typical.  Within each LA, centres of each type were selected by stratified random sampling and, due to the small size of some centres in the project (e.g. rural playgroups), more of these centres were recruited than originally proposed, bringing the sample total to 141 centres and over 3000 children.

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[1] The nursery school and combined centre samples were added in 1998 and their cohorts will be assessed somewhat later; results will be reported separately and in combined form.

Children and their families were selected randomly in each centre to participate in the EPPE Project. All parents gave written permission for their children to participate.

In order to examine the impact of no pre-school provision, it was proposed to recruit an additional sample of 500 children pre-school experience from the reception classes which EPPE children entered. However in the five regions selected a sample of only 200+ children was available for this 'home' category.

The progress and development of pre-school children in the EPPE sample is being followed over four years until the end of Key Stage 1. Details about length of sessions, number of sessions normally attended per week and child attendance have been collected to enable the amount of pre-school education experienced to be quantified for each child in the sample. Two complicating factors are that a substantial proportion of children have moved from one form of pre-school provision to another (e.g. from playgroup to nursery class) and some will attend more than one centre in a week. Careful records are necessary in order to examine issues of stability and continuity, and to document the range of pre-school experiences to which individual children can be exposed.

## Child assessments

Around the third birthday, or up to a year later if the child entered pre-school provision after three, each child was assessed by a researcher on four cognitive tasks: verbal comprehension, naming vocabulary, knowledge of similarities seen in pictures, and block building. A profile of the child's social and emotional adjustment was completed by the pre-school educator who knew the child best. If the child changed pre-school before school entry, he or she was assessed again. At school entry, a similar cognitive battery was administered along with knowledge of the alphabet and rhyme/alliteration. The Reception teacher completed the social emotional profile.

Further assessments were made at exit from Reception and at the end of Years 1 and 2. In addition to standardised tests of reading and mathematics, information on National Assessments will be collected along with attendance and special needs. At age 7, children will also be invited to report themselves on their attitudes to school.

## Measuring child/family characteristics known to have an impact on children's development

1) Information on individual 'child factors' such as gender, language, health and birth order was collected at parent interview.

2) Family factors were investigated also. Parent interviews provided detailed information about parent education, occupation and employment history, family structure and attendance history. In addition, details about the child's day care history, parental attitudes and involvement in educational activities (e.g. reading to child, teaching nursery rhymes, television viewing etc) have been collected and analysed.

## Pre-school Characteristics and Processes

Regional researchers liaised in each authority with a Regional Coordinator, a senior local authority officer with responsibility for Early Years who arranged 'introductions' to centres and key staff. Regional researchers interviewed centre managers on: group size, child staff ratio, staff training, aims, policies, curriculum, parental involvement, etc.

'Process' characteristics such as the day-to-day functioning within settings (e.g. child-staff interaction, child-child interaction, and structuring of children's activities) were also studied. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) which has been recently adapted (Harms, Clifford & Cryer 1998) and the Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989) were also administered. The ECERS includes the following sub-scales:

- Space and furnishings
- Personal care routines
- Language reasoning
- Activities
- Interaction
- Programme structure
- Parents and staffing

In order that the more educational aspects of English centres could be assessed, Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart & Colman (unpublished) developed four additional ECERS sub-scales describing educational provision in terms of: Language, Mathematics, Science and the Environment, and Diversity.


## Setting the centres in context

In addition to describing how each centre operated internally, qualitative interviews were conducted with centre managers to find out the links of each setting to local authority policy and training initiatives. Senior local authority officers from both Education and Social Services were also interviewed to find out how each local authority implemented Government early years policy, especially the Early Years Development Plans which were established to promote education and care partnerships across providers in each local authority.


## Case Studies

In addition to the range of quantitative data collected about children, their families and their pre-school centres, detailed qualitative data will be collected using case studies of several "effective" pre-school centres (chosen retrospectively as 'more effective' on the basis of the multilevel analyses of intake and outcome measures covering the period baseline to entry into reception). This will add the fine-grained detail to how processes within centres articulate, establish and maintain good practice.

The methodology of the EPPE project is thus mixed. These detailed case studies will use a variety of methods of data gathering, including documentary analysis, interviews and observations and the results will help to illuminate the characteristics of more successful pre-school centres and assist in the generation of guidance on good practice. Particular attention will be paid to parent involvement, teaching and learning processes, child-adult interaction and social factors in learning. Inevitably there are difficulties associated with the retrospective study of process characteristics of centres identified as more or less effective after children in the EPPE sample have transferred to school and it will be important to examine field notes and pre-school centre histories to establish the extent of change during the study period.


## ANALYTIC STRATEGY

The EPPE research was designed to enable the linking of three sets of data: information about children's attainment and development (at different points in time), information about children's personal, social and family characteristics (e.g. age, gender, SES etc), and information about pre-school experience (type of centre and its characteristics).

## Identifying individual centre effects and type of provision at entry to school

Longitudinal research is essential to enable the impact of child characteristics (personal, social and family) to be disentangled from any influence related to the particular pre-school centre attended. Multilevel models investigate the clustered nature of the child sample, children being nested within centres and centres within regions. The first phase of the analysis adopts these three levels in models which attempt to identify any centre effects at entry to reception class.

Given the disparate nature of children's pre-school experience it is vital to ensure that the influences of age at assessment, amount and length of pre-school experience and pre-school attendance record are accounted for when estimating the effects of pre-school education. This information is also important in its own right to provide a detailed description of the range of pre-school provision experienced by different children and any differences in the patterns of provision used by specific groups of children/parents and their relationship to parents' labour market participation. Predictor variables for attainment at entry to reception will include prior attainment (verbal and non-verbal sub scales), social/emotional profiles, and child characteristics (personal, social and family). The EPPE multilevel analyses will seek to incorporate adjustment for measurement error and to examine differences in the performance of different groups of children at entry to pre-school and again at entry to reception classes. The extent to which any differences increase/decrease over this period will be explored, enabling equity issues to be addressed.

After controlling for intake differences, the estimated impact of individual pre-school centres will be used to select approximately 12 'outlier' centres from the 141 in the project for detailed case studies (see 'Case Studies' above). In addition, multilevel models will be used to test out the relationship between particular process quality characteristics of centres and children's cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes at the end of the pre-school period (entry to school). The extent to which it is possible to explain (statistically) the variation in children's scores on the various measures assessed at entry to reception classes will provide evidence about whether particular forms of provision have greater benefits in promoting such outcomes by the end of the pre-school period. Multilevel analyses will test out the impact of measures of pre-school process characteristics, such as the scores on various ECERS scales and Pre-School Centre structural characteristics such as ratios. This will provide evidence as to which measures are associated with better cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes in children.

## Identifying continuing effects of pre-school centres at KS1

Cross-classified multilevel models have been used to examine the long term effects of primary schools on later secondary performance (Goldstein & Sammons, 1997). In the EPPE research it is planned to use such models to explore the possible mid-term effects of pre-school provision on later progress and attainment at primary school at age 7. The use of cross classified methods explicitly acknowledges that children's educational experiences are complex and that over time different institutions may influence cognitive and social/behavioural development for better or worse. This will allow the relative strength of any continuing effects of individual pre-school centre attendance to be ascertained, in comparison with the primary school influence.

## THE LINKED STUDY IN NORTHERN IRELAND 1998-2003

The Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) is part of EPPE and is under the directorship of Professor Edward Melhuish, Professor Kathy Sylva, Dr. Pam Sammons, and Dr. Iram Siraj-Blatchford. The study explores the characteristics of different kinds of early years provision and examines children's development in pre-school, and influences on their later adjustment and progress at primary school up to age 7 years. It will help to identify the aspects of pre-school provision which have a positive impact on children's attainment, progress, and development, and so provide guidance on good practice. The research involves 70 pre-school centres randomly selected throughout Northern Ireland.

The study investigates all main types of pre-school provision attended by 3 to 4 year olds in Northern Ireland: playgroups, day nurseries, nursery classes, nursery schools and reception groups and classes. The data from England and Northern Ireland offer opportunities for potentially useful comparisons.

## SUMMARY

This "educational effectiveness" design of the EPPE research study enables modelling of the complicated effects of amount and type of pre-school provision (including attendance) experienced by children and their personal, social and family characteristics on subsequent progress and development. Assessment of both cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes has been made. The use of multilevel models for the analysis enables the impact of both type of provision and individual centres on children's pre-school outcomes (at age 5 and later at age 7) to be investigated. Moreover, the relationships between pre-school characteristics and children's development can be explored. The results of these analyses and the findings from the qualitative case studies of selected centres can inform both policy and practice. A series of 12 technical working papers will summarise the findings of the research.

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## EPPE Technical Papers in the Series

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## Executive Summary

**Key messages**

**Good outcomes for children are linked to early years settings that:**

- View cognitive and social development of children as complementary and do not prioritise one over the other.

- Have strong leadership and long-serving staff (three years plus, this applied even in the private daycare settings where the turnover of staff is normally the highest).

- Provide a strong educational focus with trained teachers working alongside and supporting less qualified staff.

- Provide children with a mixture of practitioner initiated group work and learning through freely chosen play.

- Provide adult-child interactions that involve 'sustained shared thinking' and open-ended questioning to extend children's thinking.

- Have practitioners with good curriculum knowledge, and knowledge and understanding of how young children learn.

- Have strong parental involvement, especially in terms of shared educational aims with parents.

- Provide formative feedback to children during activities and provide regular reporting and discussion with parents about their child's progress.

- Ensure behaviour policies in which staff support children in rationalising and talking through their conflicts.

- Provide differentiated learning opportunities that meet the needs of particular individuals and groups of children e.g. bilingual, special needs, girls/boys etc.

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project is a longitudinal national research study that follows the developmental progress of more than 3,000 children across England. Some of the data for the case studies were collected prior to the announcement of a Foundation Stage (FS) in late 1999 and during 2000 and some information from all the centres of the FS during 2001/2 when further funding was made available for the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project. The Foundation Stage covers provision for children aged 3-5 years-old.

Children (and their families) were recruited into the study when they were 3 years old, the age at which many enter their first Foundation Stage group setting. Those children, who were already enrolled in a group setting, entered the *study* at age 3+. Developmental status was assessed regularly, beginning when children enter the study and continuing through school entry, at the end of Year 1 and Year 2. Quantitative analysis (multilevel modelling) assessed the contribution of the pre-school setting to a child's cognitive and social/behavioural development having controlled for child factors (e.g. gender, health etc.) and family background characteristics (e.g. socio-economic status, mother's education etc.). Full details of the research design may be found in EPPE Technical Paper 1 (Sylva et al

1999a) and in the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) Project Report (Siraj-Blatchford et al 2002).

141 Pre-school settings were drawn from a range of providers (local authority day care centres, integrated centres[2], playgroups, private day nurseries, maintained nursery schools and maintained nursery classes).  A sample of 'home' children (who had no or minimal pre-school experience) was recruited to the study at entry to school for comparison with the pre-school group.   In addition to investigating the effects of pre-school provision on young children's development, EPPE explores the characteristics of effective practice (and the pedagogy which underpin them) through twelve (plus 2 reception classes from REPEY) intensive case studies of settings with good to excellent child outcomes. EPPE has demonstrated the positive effects of high quality provision on children's intellectual and social/behavioural developmental gains.  EPPE Technical Papers 8a and 8b describe the gains that were made during the pre-school period in children's cognitive and social and behavioural development (see Sammons et al 2002 and 2003).

Analyses of the quantitative data collected on every child in the study revealed that in some pre-school centres children made progress as expected or better progress than expected given their individual and home characteristics. In order to choose settings for the case study research we compiled a profile of each setting based on their child outcome data. We were therefore able to see the variation of child outcomes between centres and the range of outcomes within centres on the eight cognitive and social development outcomes we had identified (see Appendix 2).  *Appendix 2 shows the child cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes from some of the selected cases. If a centre scored 0 on an outcome the children have made progress 'as expected' given their background characteristics and assessments on entry to pre-school, 1 is a positive outcome and 2 is significantly positive. We have not provided details of all the centres or labelled them by centre number in order to maintain anonymity for the centres concerned.*

The original EPPE design had suggested that the case studies should report on both effective and ineffective settings. However, members of our Consultative and Steering Group as well as our practitioner and policy makers focus groups suggested that the case studies would be most useful to them if they focused on the difference between 'average' and 'excellent' practice, rather than to compare the extremes of poor and excellent practice. The selection of settings was therefore complex.  All of the settings selected for case study demonstrate a range of practices, all of them demonstrate some above average outcome/s. Put another way, settings were chosen from a range identified as good (even if their children only made slightly more developmental progress than expected given a plotted trajectory based on their individual child and home characteristics) to excellent (where children made significant developmental progress above their projected developmental progress). We therefore consistently refer to settings throughout the report as good (slightly above average) or excellent (well above average) based on their child outcome data.  Good and excellent are sometimes used in relation to whole centres or when we are reporting on differences between particular outcomes e.g. the 3 settings which have significantly added to their children's development in number would be contrasted with those where children are making progress as expected (see Appendix 2 for examples).

Data from 12 effective pre-school centres, reflecting good child outcomes, (cognitive and/or social behavioural from our quantitative analysis) have been analysed to reveal a unique 'story' for each centre. The associated REPEY study allowed us to add two reception

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[2] Throughout this report integrated centres (which in some previous EPPE reports have been referred to as combined centres) are those centres which fully combine education and care with the same ratio of teachers as nursery schools for 3-5 year-olds.

classes to our 12 EPPE cases, and we draw on these data in this report too (14 cases in total).

The report provides comprehensive descriptions of one of each *type* of early years, group setting representing the Foundation Stage (local authority day care, private day nursery, playgroup, nursery class, nursery school, integrated provision [in this case an Early Excellence Centre; this type of centre is part of the Government's initiative to provide every region with a one-stop-shop childcare and education service which is responsive to the needs of children, families and local early years staff] and from the REPEY study one reception class). None of the cases reported fully is meant to be typical or representative of its type of provision.

We have not described all 14 case studies in full as there would be a great deal of overlap between the same types of setting e.g. we have 3 nursery classes and 3 private daycare settings in the study, it would also make this report rather cumbersome. These centres vary in their quality of practice but have produced some effective results in their child outcomes, in some cases this is very modest e.g. a positive impact on one outcome out of eight social and cognitive development outcomes for their children. In other cases the centre may have a more robust effectiveness profile demonstrating effectiveness in several areas e.g. number, pre-reading or making children less anti-social/worried/upset in their behaviour (see Appendix 2 for example).

The aim of the intensive case study analyses has been to attempt to tease out the specific pedagogical and other practices that are associated with achieving 'excellent' outcomes compared to those centres with 'good' or more 'average' outcomes. This analysis has been extended significantly in the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) study (Siraj-Blatchford, et al 2002), which added case studies of two reception classes.

The EPPE definition of 'effectiveness' is based on child outcomes, which was understood as a necessary but insufficient component of quality on its own. High quality provision is determined by the quality of child care and pedagogical practices that is offered as well. It was considered at least conceivable that care and pedagogy might be compromised at times to achieve effectiveness and we therefore had to look very closely at all of the practices that were a normal part of centre routine. Our report shows how the actual practices in the settings vary significantly.

In conducting the case studies, trained researchers, who were already familiar with the centres, spent two whole weeks in each centre. Case study data came from multiple sources to allow for assessment by source and the method of data collection. Information from policy documents was triangulated with, manager and parent interviews, extensive naturalistic observations of staff (over 400 hours) and systematic focal child observations of children (254 target child observations).

**Findings**

Every effort was made to collect comparable data across the case studies and to provide a framework for analysis allowing for comparison across centres. Case studies were compared in terms of their key quality characteristics, for example the pedagogy employed, the curriculum on offer, the ethos and the management and organisational strategies.

The term pedagogy in this report refers to the instructional techniques and strategies that enable learning to take place. It refers to the interactive process between teacher/practitioner and learner. It may also include how aspects of the learning environment (e.g. materials provided, organisational techniques, actions of the family and community etc.) are harnessed to promote learning in children.

**Management and staff**

Our data reveal that all the pre-school settings in which we conducted case studies had strong leadership and long serving staff. Most of the managers and staff had been in the settings over 3 years. We know from Technical Paper 5 (Taggart et al 1999) that there is a high turnover of staff in the private sector; the private day nurseries in our sample had stability of staffing with retention between 3-9 years. In the other settings, staff, especially senior management, had been in post even longer and 10 to 20 years was not uncommon.

All the managers took a strong lead, especially in curriculum and planning. In most of the settings the strong leadership was characterised by a strong philosophy for the setting that was shared by everyone working in the setting.

The managers of the excellent centres had a strong educational focus, valued the importance of adult-child interaction, and supported their staff to develop better ways of engaging children.

In excellent centres, the staff were encouraged to attend staff development sessions, although there was a great deal of variation in training offered and what staff were able to access. Recent developments enabling local authorities to offer training that includes personnel from all pre-school sectors would appear to be a positive way forward. However the research indicates that training needs to be more sensitive to the needs of staff from different backgrounds. In our discussions with local authority personnel and staff in the case study centres we learned that there are wide variations in training backgrounds. Where there are trained teachers we found a stronger educational emphasis, with the teachers playing a lead role in curriculum planning and offering positive pedagogical role modelling to less well-qualified staff.

**Ethos and climate of the settings**

Perhaps most significantly, the case studies have shown us how diverse early years settings are. They show that there is no 'level playing field' in terms of the training of staff, staff salaries and conditions of service, adult-child ratios, resources or accommodation.

The case studies reveal great variation in the conditions and the service provided to children and families. For instance opening times and sessions varied greatly from children attending half-day sessions a few times a week to extended daycare and education being provided full time for 48-50 weeks of the year. There was similar variation apparent in the salaries paid to staff. The salary range for the playgroup was under £3,000 to £7,000 per annum, while the maintained sector was £15,000 to 32,000 and the private sector £11,000 to 24,000.

Furthermore, the number of children varies from 20 or so in playgroup and nursery classes to 100–200 in nursery schools, local authority day care and fully integrated centres. The staff numbers reflect the numbers of children and the extent of the services on offer to families and other early years practitioners e.g. training support.

Most nursery classes and playgroups are small with two or three members of staff. Most private day nurseries are medium sized with 3-8 or more staff and nursery schools with up to 12 staff. The more complex fully integrated (combined) centres (and early excellence centres) and local authority day care centres have large numbers of staff due to larger numbers of children on roll, their outreach work to parents, role as trainers and dissemination work. For instance in centre 426, which caters for 200 children and has Early Excellence Centre (EEC) status, the staff total is 55.

It is clear that EPPE has been able to locate moderate to excellent settings from among all our types of providers. However, there were many fewer settings to choose from in the top range for playgroups and local authority day care. Given the variation in staff pay, training

and development this is unsurprising. There is no level playing field. In spite of this we found our case study centres were able to portray some or a good deal of quality characteristics in terms of their ethos:-

a) All case study centres generally presented a warm, caring, safe, secure and supportive approach to their children. All the settings engaged children in a range of different groupings, individual and group play, group focused table top activities, interest areas and class snack and story times.

b) All case study settings had a welcoming appearance. The displays on the whole reflected the children's work. Children were generally treated with respect. The centres were warm and inviting places. Staff appeared calm and engaged well with the children. All these centres had fairly good resources and, although not always ideal, space. However the outdoor play environments varied greatly.

**Analysis of the quantitative findings with the qualitative case studies data**
The case study analysis has gone a long way in providing explanations for the patterns and associations between particular practices (as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales R and E, see Sylva et al 1999, Technical Paper 6) and developmental outcomes (see Technical Papers 8a and 8b). In our preliminary discussion, four patterns of association were identified for special attention and our close analysis of the data from systematic observations suggested that we should investigate each of the following practices further:

- Adult-Child verbal Interactions

- Differentiation and formative assessment

- Discipline and adult support in talking through conflicts

- Parental partnership with settings and the home education environment

**Adult-child interactions**
We found that the 'excellent' settings encouraged 'sustained shared thinking' (See glossary). By this we mean an episode in which two or more individuals "work together" in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc.  Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend thinking. However, we found that this does not happen very frequently. In 'excellent' settings there were significantly more 'sustained shared thinking' interactions occurring between staff and children than in the 'good' settings.  When this did occur, it extended children's thinking. Our investigations of adult-child interaction have led us to view that periods of 'sustained shared thinking' are a necessary pre-requisite for the excellent early years practice, especially where this is also encouraged in the home through parent support.

In 'excellent' case study settings, the importance of staff members extending child-initiated interactions was also clearly identified. In fact, almost half of all of the child-initiated episodes which contained intellectual challenge, included interventions from a staff member to extend the child's thinking. The evidence also suggests that adult 'modelling' (see Appendix 4) is often combined with sustained periods of shared thinking, and that open-ended questioning is also associated with better cognitive achievement. However, open-ended questions made up only 5.1% of the questioning used in even these 'excellent' settings.

In the 'excellent' settings, the balance of who initiated the activities, staff or child, was very equal, revealing that the pedagogy of the excellent settings encourages children to initiate activities as often as the staff.  Also staff regularly extend child initiated activities, but do not dominate them.  The children in reception classes experienced a different balance of

initiation, with a much greater emphasis upon staff initiated episodes. In all of the case study settings we found that the children spent most of their time in small groups. Our observations, however, show that 'sustained shared thinking' was most likely to occur when children were interacting 1:1 with an adult or with a single peer partner. Freely chosen play activities often provided the best opportunities for adults to extend children's thinking. Adults need therefore, to create opportunities to extend child-initiated play as well as teacher-initiated group work, as both have been found to be important vehicles for promoting learning.

We found that level 5 qualified staff (almost all trained teachers) provided children with more experience of academic activities (especially language and mathematics) and they encouraged children to engage in activities with higher cognitive challenge. While we found that the most highly qualified staff also provided the most direct teaching (instruction through demonstration, explanation, questioning, modelling etc) we found that they were the most effective in their interactions with the children, using the most 'sustained shared thinking'. Furthermore, we found that less well qualified staff were significantly better pedagogues when they worked alongside qualified teachers.

**Differentiation and formative assessment**
The analysis of teacher observations suggests a positive association between curriculum differentiation, formative assessment, and the process of selecting activities to provide the optimum cognitive challenge, and 'sustained shared thinking'. The practice of adults 'modelling' (or demonstrating) positive attitudes, behaviours, and appropriate use of language, has also been identified as a valuable pedagogic strategy to be employed in early childhood. The best of our case study settings kept good records and engaged with parents about their child's progress on a weekly or monthly basis. However, we found little evidence of detailed formative feedback to children *during* tasks.

**Discipline and adult support in talking through conflicts**
The excellent settings adopted discipline/behaviour policies that involve staff in supporting children in rationalising and talking through their conflicts. In other words a more problem solving approach was adopted. Three of those setting with very positive social and behavioural outcomes had this practical approach supported by a strong behaviour management policy with which all the staff were conversant.  In settings that were less effective in this respect, our observations showed that there was often no follow up on children's misbehaviour or conflicts and, on many occasions, children were 'distracted' or simply told to stop.

**Parental partnership:**
The case studies indicate that where a special relationship in terms of shared *educational* aims has been developed with parents, and pedagogic efforts are made by parents at home to support children, sound learning can take place even in the absence of consistently good pedagogic practice in the pre-school setting. The excellent settings shared child-related information between parents and staff, and parents were often involved in decision making about their child's learning programme. This level of communication was particularly the case in private day nurseries. While settings providing for the needs of children from the higher socio-economic groups benefited especially from this, the potential benefit of adopting a combined approach (good pedagogic practice within the setting and support for the home learning environment) in settings serving more disadvantaged areas is also clear. In more disadvantaged areas, staff in settings had to be proactive in influencing and supporting the home education environment in order to support children's learning. The evidence suggests that the 'excellent' settings in disadvantaged areas recognise the importance of, and were pro-active in encouraging strong parental involvement in the educational process, by taking the time to share their curriculum, pedagogical strategies and educational aims with parents.

They offered advice on how parents could complement this within the home learning environment and how this impacted on young children's development.

**Pedagogy**
Whilst this report describes the pedagogy in a limited number of Foundation Stage settings, more detailed information on reception class practices, childminders and the Foundation Stage curriculum is reported in the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) Project report (see Siraj-Blatchford et al 2002).

**Knowledge of the curriculum and child development**
The analysis has shown that practitioners' knowledge and understanding of the particular curriculum area that is being addressed are vital. A good grasp of the appropriate 'pedagogical content knowledge' (see Appendix 1 Glossary) is a vital component of pedagogy and is just as important in the early years as at any stage of education. The research found that, even in these 'good' and 'effective' settings, there were examples of inadequate knowledge and understanding of curriculum areas, especially in the teaching of phonological skills. Our study shows that early years staff may need support in developing their 'pedagogical content knowledge' in the domains of the *Early Learning Goals.* Educators who demonstrate good 'pedagogical content knowledge' display a firm knowledge and understanding of their curriculum content but we found, crucially, that the most 'effective' educators also demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of what part of that content was most significant and relevant to the needs of the children that they were teaching. They were also able to draw upon knowledge of the pedagogical strategies found to be most effective in teaching any particular content.

In summary effective pedagogy in the early years involves both the kind of interaction traditionally associated with the term "teaching", and also the provision of instructive learning environments and routines.

The 'excellent' settings provided both teacher-initiated group work and freely chosen, yet potentially instructive play activities. Children's cognitive outcomes appear to be directly related to the quantity and quality of the teacher/adult planned and initiated focused group work for supporting children's learning. The research findings support the general approach taken in *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage (CGFS).* The settings that viewed cognitive and social development as complementary seemed to achieve the best outcomes. Trained teachers were most effective in their interactions with children, using the most 'sustained shared thinking' interactions. Less well-qualified staff were better pedagogues when qualified teachers supported them.

## Section 1 The EPPE project's context and methodology

The Effective Provision for Pre-school Education (EPPE) project is a longitudinal study which assesses the attainment and development of children followed from the age of 3 until the end of Key Stage 1. Over 3000 children were recruited to the study during 1997 and 1999 from 141 pre-school centres. The centres were selected from a random sample of the six main forms of pre-school provision in five regions in England.  We aimed for 20-25 children to be randomly sampled in each pre-school centre when they entered and their progress has been followed through to the end of Key Stage 1. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to explore the effects of the pre-school experience on children's cognitive attainment and social/behavioural development at entry to school and any continuing effects on such outcomes up to 7 years of age.  In addition to the effects of pre-school experience, the study investigates the contribution to children's development of individual child and family characteristics such as gender, family size, parental education and employment.  This contextual overview describes the research design and discusses a variety of research issues (methodological and practical) in investigating the impact of pre-school provision on children's developmental progress.

### 1.1 Previous Research on the Effects of Early Education in the UK
There has been little large-scale, systematic research on the effects of early childhood education in the UK.  The 'Start Right' Enquiry (Ball 1994; Sylva 1994) reviewed the evidence of British research and recommended more rigorous longitudinal studies with baseline measures so that the 'value added' to children's development by pre-school education could be established.

Research evidence elsewhere on the effects of different kinds of pre-school environment on children's development (Schweinhart & Weikart 1997a & b; Borge & Melhuish, 1995; National Institute of Child Health Development, 1997) suggests positive outcomes.  Other researchers e.g. Feinstein, Robertson & Symons (1998) attempted to evaluate the effects of pre-schooling on children's subsequent progress but they failed to collect data on children's attainments at entry to pre-school. Birth cohort designs may not be appropriate for the study of the influence of pre-school education and neither the British Cohort Study (1970) nor the National Child Development Study (1958) provided an adequate study of the effects of pre-school education on children's progress.  These studies are also limited by the time lapse and many changes in the nature of pre-school provision that have occurred.  To date no research using multilevel models (Goldstein, 1995) has been used to investigate the impact of both type of provision and individual centre effects.  Thus little research in the UK has explored whether some forms of provision, and some centres have greater benefits than others.

In the UK there is a long tradition of variation in pre-school provision both between types (e.g. playgroups, local authority day care or private day nurseries and state maintained nursery classes and schools) and in different parts of the country reflecting funding and geographical conditions (i.e. urban/rural and local access to centres).  A series of reports (House of Commons Select Committee 1989; DES Rumbold Report 1990; Ball 1994; House of Commons Select Committee 2001) and previous research (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995), have questioned whether Britain's pre-school education is as effective as it might be and have urged better co-ordination of services and research into the impact of different forms of provision.  The EPPE project is thus the first large-scale study in England to investigate the effects of types of pre-school provision relating quality (and experiences) in particular centres to child development.

The overall EPPE project investigates three issues that have important implications for policy and practice:
• 	the effects on children of different types of pre-school provision,

- the 'structural' (e.g. adult-child ratios) and 'process' characteristics (e.g. interaction styles) of 'good' and more 'effective' pre-school centres, and
- the interaction between child and family characteristics and the kind of pre-school provision a child experiences.

The research design was chosen to enable investigation of the progress and development of individual children (including the impact of personal, socio-economic and family characteristics), and the effect of individual pre-school centres on children's outcomes at entry to school, through to age 7.

## 1.2 The aims of the EPPE Project and the case studies
The aims of the EPPE project are:

- To produce a detailed description of the 'career paths' of a large sample of children (and their families) between entry into pre-school education and the first three years of primary school.

- To compare and contrast the developmental progress of 3000+ children from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds who have differing pre-school experiences.

- To separate out the effects of pre-school experience from the effects of education in the primary school to Key Stage 1.

- To establish whether some pre-schools are more effective than others in promoting children's cognitive and social/behavioural development during the pre-school years (ages 3-4) and the first 3 primary years (4-7 years).

- To discover the individual characteristics (structural and process) of pre-school education in centres found to be excellent.

- To investigate differences in the progress of different groups of children, e.g. children from disadvantaged backgrounds and both genders.

- To investigate the medium-term effects of pre-school education on educational performance at age 7 in a way which will allow the possibility of longitudinal follow-up at later ages to establish long-term effects, if any.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods (including multilevel modelling) have been used to explore the relationship between the quality of individual pre-school settings and children's intellectual attainment and social and behavioural development at entry to school. These multilevel modelling analyses are fully reported in Technical Papers 8a and 8b (Sammons et al 2002; 2003) on children's progress over the pre-school period.

**Figure 1 The EPPE design.**
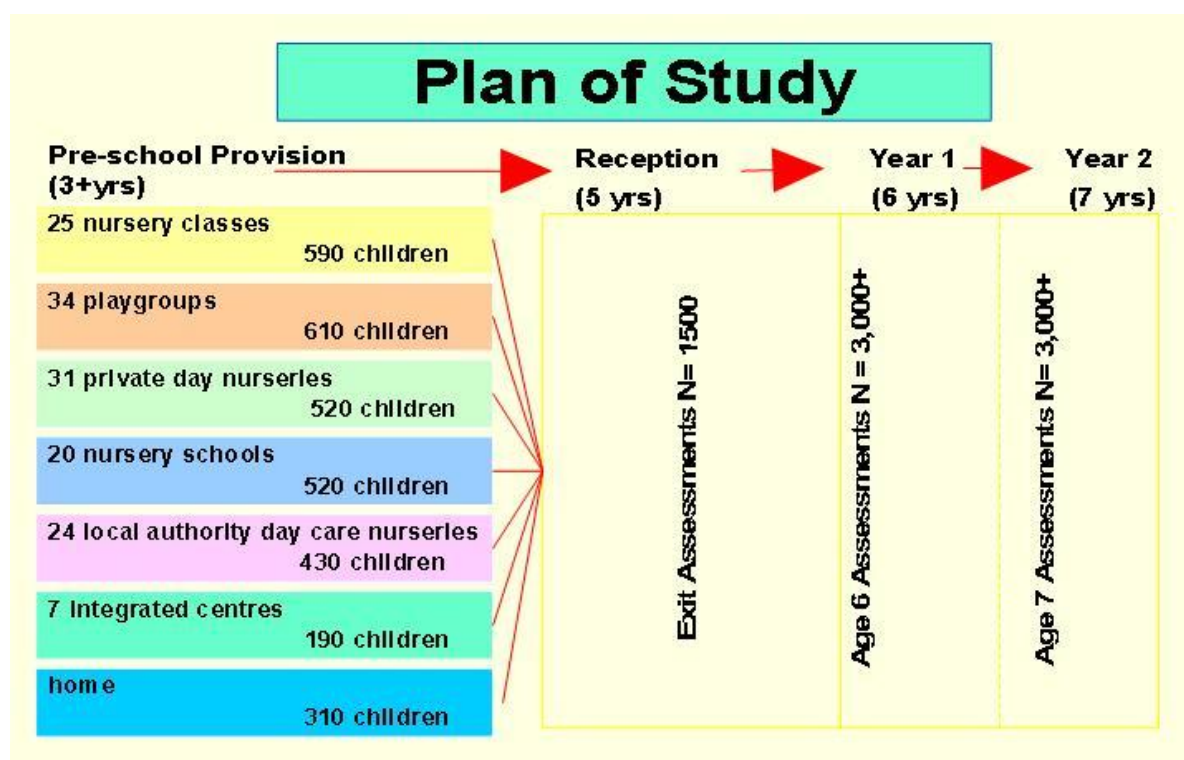


EPPE is a study that identifies the 'value added' to children's developmental progress by the form of Early Childhood provision that they have experienced. In addition to controlling for the child's developmental level at entry to pre-school, EPPE controls for the influence of the family and child characteristics when establishing the 'effectiveness' of each setting in its sample. Thus, one of the main questions in EPPE has been:

***Which are the centres where children make much more developmental progress than would be predicted by their assessments at entry to pre-school?***
(i.e. which are the "excellent" centres).

The school entry data (when the children entered reception class at 4+) have therefore been analysed to identify the 'pre-school centre effects' through multi-level analysis, and a sample of 12 settings ranging from 'good' (children generally making progress as expected with modest positive outcomes, see Appendix 2) to 'excellent' (children making excellent progress in a number of outcomes) was selected for intensive case study analysis. The case study analysis was focused on patterns of good practice across the centres but particularly at what made some centres more successful at achieving better outcomes, in literacy, language, numeracy and social development. The aim of the intensive case study analyses has been to attempt to tease out the specific pedagogical and other practices that are associated with achieving 'excellent' outcomes as compared to those centres with 'good' or 'average' practice. This analysis has been extended significantly in the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) study (Siraj-Blatchford, *et al* 2002), which included case studies of two reception classes; we have included some of this analysis in this report.

**1.3 Measuring child/family characteristics known to have an impact on children's development**

**Parent interview**
Shortly after entering the study, a child was assessed at entry to pre-school (for both cognitive and social/behavioural development) and their parents interviewed (usually the child's mother). Interviews were conducted either in person (at the pre-school centre) or by telephone. The interview followed a semi-structured format with answers to most questions being coded into an established set of categories, and a small number of open-ended questions that were coded post hoc. The interview contained questions about:

a) child information – e.g. gender, language, health, early development and childcare history etc.
b) parental and family characteristics – e.g. number of siblings, parental socio-economic status, employment and education etc. and
c) home learning environment – parental involvement in educational activities such as reading to the child, teaching songs and rhymes etc. (for more details and analyses of these interviews see Technical Papers 2, 4 and 7).

**1.4 Pre-school Characteristics and Processes**
In addition to collecting detailed information about the children, extensive data were also collected from the pre-school centres the children attended. Researchers conducted interviews with centre managers on: group size, child staff ratio, staff training, aims, policies, curriculum, parental involvement, etc. 'Process' characteristics such as the day-to-day functioning within settings (e.g. child-staff interaction, child-child interaction, and structuring of children's activities) were also studied (see Technical Paper 5, Taggart et al, 1999 for analyses of the interviews).

As well as the above qualitative data, a 'centre profile' was constructed for each centre using more quantitative information. The technique used for this was systematic observations using an internationally recognised rating scale. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale: Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms *et al* 1998) was used in drawing up each centre's environmental quality profile. To accompany this, members of the EPPE research team, developed an extension to this scale, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Extension (ECERS-E, see Sylva et al 2003 and Technical Paper 6 and 6a) based on the English Early Learning Goals (QCA, DfEE, 2000), (which was thought to be more sensitive to the English context) and what we know about how children learn.

The ECERS-R rating scale consists of seven sub-scales that provide an overview of the pre-school environment, covering aspects of the setting from furnishing and display to individuality of care and the quality of social interactions. The ECERS-R includes the following sub-scales:
• Space and furnishings
• Personal care routines
• Language reasoning
• Activities
• Interaction
• Programme structure
• Parents and staffing

The English ECERS-E, describes educational provision for 3-5-year-olds in terms of:
• Language
• Mathematics
• Science and the Environment

- Diversity

The ECERS-E describes the *curriculum* within the pre-school and reception class setting, and diversity (issues of gender, multiculturalism and whether staff plan to meet individual/particular needs). Each sub-scale is comprised of a range of items describing 'quality' regardless of the specific type of provision. Each item was rated 1 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent). The ECERS-R and ECERS-E are one approach to describing the 'processes' through which children are cared for and educated (see EPPE Technical paper 6 and 6a Sylva *et al* 1999 for further details.)

Technical Papers 8a and 8b (Sammons *et al*, 2002; 2003) show how the ECERS-R and E ratings of quality relate directly to the children's developmental outcomes over the pre-school period. It should be noted that the ECERS-E was found to be a particularly strong predictor of children's cognitive progress while ECERS-R was a good predictor of social/behavioural progress.

## Section 2 Intensive Case studies: methodology

### 2.1 Sample and data collection

In addition to the quantitative and qualitative data collected about children, their families and their pre-school centres, in-depth studies of centres were conducted using 'case study' methodology. The case studies were chosen retrospectively on the basis of analyses of their child outcome data. In other words, centres were grouped according to how well their children had progressed; given their own characteristics, the backgrounds they come from and their cognitive and social/behavioural assessments at the start of the study. Analyses of the quantitative data collected on every child in the study revealed that in some pre-school centres children made progress as expected or slightly better. These were identified as the 'good' settings. Some centres helped their children to make much better progress than expected given their baseline measures. These centres were identified as 'excellent' centres. The case studies conducted in these 'good' and 'excellent' centres has added the fine-grained detail showing how the processes within the centres articulate, establish and maintain good practice to produce better than expected child outcomes.

Researchers on the EPPE project who had been visiting the pre-school centres for 1-3 years to conduct child assessments and ECERS ratings for EPPE were fully trained in qualitative data collection. They received intensive training to:

- conduct naturalistic observations, followed by discussion with staff
- engage in semi-structured interviewing
- collect and analyse documents such as policies, plans and information booklets.

Each researcher was familiar with the centres under study, as some had made up to 40 visits to their case study centre during the EPPE child assessment period, and each researcher spent two whole weeks in each of their settings collecting qualitative data for the case study. This was supplemented by a further one-week REPEY visit to carry out qualitative observations using a systematic 'target child observation' procedure (See Siraj-Blatchford, *et al,* 2002).

A random selection of 'good' and 'excellent' centres was carried out to ensure as balanced a range of provider 'type' as possible. This selection was carried out by the member of the EPPE central team who was not involved in the fieldwork or analysis. The initial data collection for the case studies was therefore conducted 'blind'. Since the EPPE children had left the centres by the time of the case studies, (they had moved into reception class at school) we needed to ensure the centres that we selected had not changed drastically. In all of the centres selected, the ECERS-E was re-administered and the centres were only

included in the final selection if they achieved a similar or better ECERS-E score than previously recorded. It was also important that centres were only included in the case study analyses if there had been no major management changes (same manager/deputy and senior management team), and that there were no difficult circumstances associated with the Centre around the time of the case study field work (e.g. pending/recent OfSTED within one month).

It was difficult to achieve a balanced range of 'effective' providers. Whilst we found effective and less effective centres in all types of pre-school provision (and for all types of outcomes i.e. pre-reading, numeracy etc), in some pre-school types there were very few centres in the 'excellent' range. Few local authority day care centres and playgroups were found in the 'excellent' range of provision. We therefore had very few to choose from and only one of each was selected as part of our sample of 12 EPPE case study centres (see Sammons *et al* Technical Paper 8a, 2002). The final selection was as follows:

**2.2 Profile of centres selected for in-depth case studies**

| Centre No. | Type of Provision | Area | No on roll | Under 3 | Over 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 017 | NC | East Anglia | 52 | - | 52 PT |
| 106 | NC | Shire County | 42 | - | 42 PT |
| 214 | DC (CC) | Inner London | 60 | 22 | 38 FT |
| 219 | PDN | Inner London | 52 | 15 | 37 F& PT |
| 225 | EEC (CC) | Inner London | 120 | 60 | 60 PT |
| 306 | PDN | North East | 90 | 62 | 28 F& PT |
| 324 | NS | North East | 120 | - | 120 PT |
| 401 | PG | Midlands | 40 | - | 40 PT |
| 413 | PDN | Midlands | 121 | 90 | 31 F& PT |
| 417 | NC | Midlands | 52 | - | 52 PT |
| 421 | NS | Midlands | 104 | - | 104 FT |
| 426 | EEC (CC) | Midlands | 205 | 85 | 120 PT |

Code
PT – Part Time
FT – Full Time

No of centres in study

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| CC* | Also a Combined Centre or integrated centre | |
| EEC | Early Excellence Centre | 2 |
| DC | Local Authority Day Care – also CC | 1 |
| NC | Nursery Class | 3 |
| NS | Nursery School | 2 |
| PG | Playgroup | 1 |
| PDN | Private Day Nursery | 3 |
| **Total** | | **12** |

*A centre that has combined care and education by introducing similar ratios of trained teachers as the nursery schools and classes.  This is quite common for early excellence centres, that is, to provide fully integrated or combined education with care. Our Local Authority Day Care centre is however, unusual in having such a high ratio of teachers it is therefore not typical at all of local authority day care settings.

To these cases we have added the two reception classes selected for the REPEY project and chosen on the basis of 'good practice' as judged by local authority professionals.

The qualitative data that were collected were transcribed, 'cleaned' (i.e. anonymised), and then entered into a qualitative software package (explained below in this report), to aid the coding and data reduction.  Figure 2 provides an account of the final contents of the database.

Details of the documentary analysis are included in the case studies that follow in Section 4. This report details not only the conclusions drawn from the observations undertaken by researchers during their case study visits but also an analyses of documents provided by the centres themselves along with information from interviews undertaken with a range of centre personnel and parents. Our aim has been to provide what Geertz (1973) has called a 'thick description' for all 14 case studies: *'A thick description is one that includes everything needed for the reader to understand what is happening'.*  Without this rich description of the cases it would be difficult for the reader to appreciate the uniqueness, diversity and richness of the data, or indeed, the practice and culture of the settings. All organisations, in this case early years settings, are complex and sometimes contradictory places, illuminating a range of practices that can vary in quality. Only through reading the whole case can we appreciate the fuller picture of a centre's day-to-day life and the balance of quality that the staff create.

**Figure 2 -** *Data entered into –qualitative software analysis*

| Centre Number | Documentary analysis | Staff interviews | Teacher observations | Other observations | Parent interviews | Centre plan |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 017 | 1 | 3 | 8 (22:30) | 11 | 08 | 1 |
| 106 | 1 | 3 | 8 (18:55) | 6 | 08 | 1 |
| 214 | 1 | 4 | 9 (30:45) | 6 | 09 | 1 |
| 219 | 1 | 2 | 10 (27:35) | 6 | 10 | 1 |
| 225 | 1 | 3 | 8 (22:20) | 7 | 07 | 1 |
| 306 | 1 | 2 | 4 (10:20) | 7 | 05 | 1 |
| 324 | 1 | 4 | 8 (17:06) | 4 | 08 | 1 |
| 401 | 1 | 2 | 10 (28:21) | 3 | 06 | 1 |
| 413 | 1 | 3 | 9 (11:44) | 0 | 09 | 1 |
| 417 | 1 | 2 | 8 (25:05) | 6 | 08 | 1 |
| 421 | 1 | 4 | 8 (30:40) | 12 | 09 | 1 |
| 426 | 1 | 4 | 10 (23:28) | 8 | 08 | 1 |
| From Researching Effective Pedagogy Project we added: | | | | | | |
| 501     reception | 1 | 4 | 8 (21:25) | 4 | 06 | 1 |
| 502     reception | 1 | 2 | 8 (20:20) | 8 | 06 | 1 |
| | | | | | | |
| **Total** | **14** | **42** | **116 (300+hrs)** | **88 (100+hrs)** | **107** | **14** |

14 files of documentary analysis, 42 staff and manager interviews, 204 transcribed naturalistic observations of staff (400+hrs), 107 parent interviews and 14 centre plans

**Total   =      381 files       over 1 million word data set**

## 2.3 Managing data reduction using a qualitative software package (QSR NUD*IST – vivo [Nvivo])

In addition to the analysis of each of the individual settings, an across-case analyses has been conducted which has informed the conclusions in Section 5 of the report.

Large, qualitative data sets are difficult to manage especially in a project of this size. Data reduction can become difficult and time-consuming unless it is well organized and structured to allow for ease of coding and theory building/testing. Qualitative software for data indexing, searching and theory building has been widely used by qualitative researchers to manage small and large data sets. Qualitative software packages allow the researcher to develop an advanced system that becomes the main tool for supporting the researcher in organizing and in analyzing the data (Tesch, 1990). Exploring, viewing and coding a large volume of qualitative documents are made much easier using this software technique.

**Figure 3: An early tree node model of engagement**
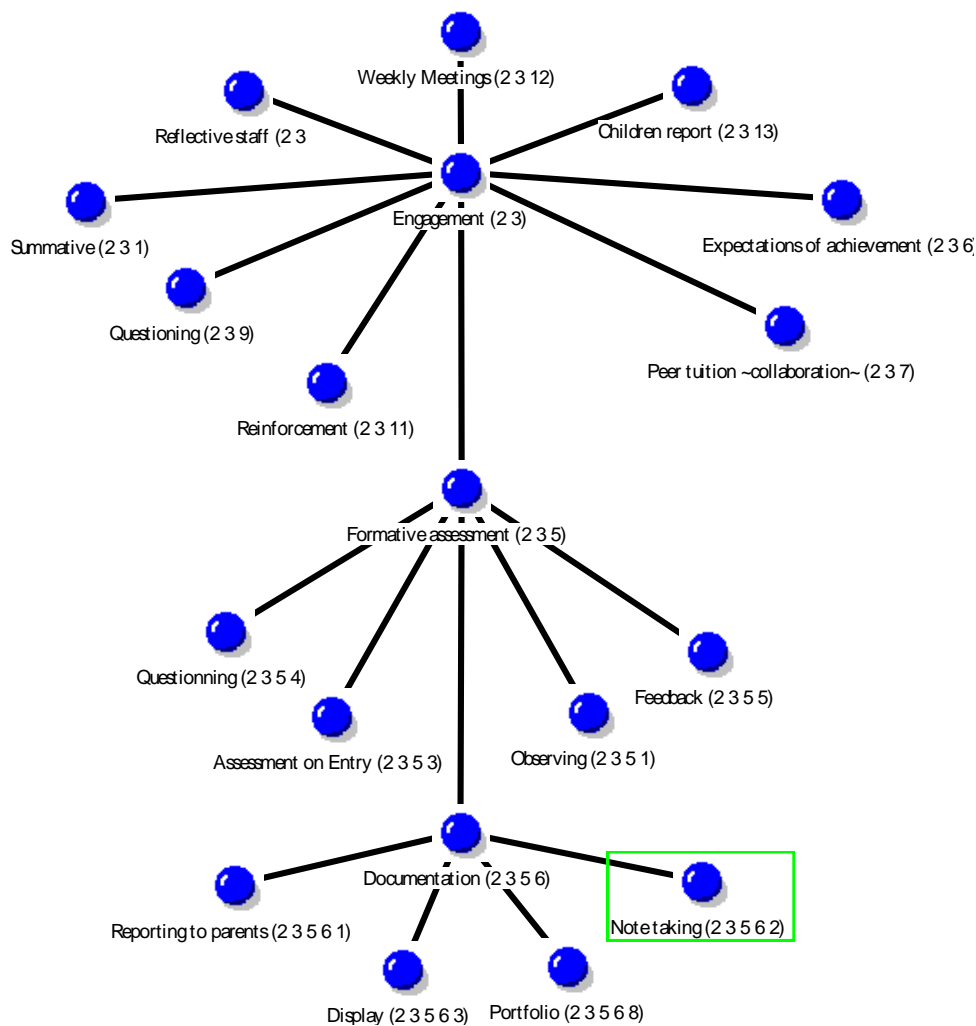


The diagram above illustrates a 'tree node' developed through the use of a qualitative software package. This example is an early node model developed through a preliminary exploration of the notion of 'engagement'. We used the qualitative analysis software to 'model' preliminary ideas. In the EPPE study the models initially emerged as we interrogated the data applying our reading of the literature on effective practice in the early years to interpret the findings (A major literature review was carried out on pedagogy as part of the REPEY project, Siraj-Blatchford, *et al,* 2002). Models were created of 'components' of particular, key indexing categories. For instance, in our analysis of pedagogy we used the modeller to create a rudimentary cognitive *engagement* model

using 'nodes' (see figure 3). From our knowledge of other aspects of pedagogy e.g. instruction, construction etc. we modelled these 'tree nodes' and, from an early stage, we were able to suggest how they might relate to each other. In these initial analyses, through coding the transcripts of observations, we gradually amend our models and the 'tree nodes' using *anticipatory* and procedural *data reduction* techniques (Miles and Huberman 1994) and theory building. This is undertaken through the iterative process of coding the documents and refining the nodes as we sift through the data (back and forth), adding new nodes as well as taking away those that are not evident in the data.

The qualitative analysis software package allows us to create attributes for files e.g. for gender, qualification or type of provider. These attributes together with the nodes support the process of analysis further. For example, in our analysis of the 107 parent interviews we created several nodes to code the text e.g. of how parents choose a centre, what they think made a centre effective and what educational activities were undertaken in the home and who initiated them. Drawing out all of our responses from the 107 parents mentions of 'home education' there appeared to be some fundamental differences between parents of children at private day nurseries (PDN) and the 'others'. Using the software it was simple to separate the PDN parents, and the other 'types', using our attributes and nodes we could create new files to compare the responses. We report on this finding later.

Once the 'nodes', 'trees' and 'sets' are established, further searches can be made to explore the data. For instance, if we developed a particular interest in the relationship between a particular teaching technique; (e.g. demonstration, questioning or modelling) within a particular area of the curriculum (e.g. creativity, language, maths etc.), then we could at any time separate and explore the relevant documents to create new data sets. These new sets then provide a means of exploring any links that exist between these categories further. The permutations of analysis and potential for the modification and creation of data sets is therefore potentially vast. However, the main areas for analysis are ultimately determined by the researcher and not by the software package.

Qualitative analysis is an iterative and constructive process which involves developing 'hunches' or hypotheses and going back to interrogate the data to confirm or contradict them. From the quantitative findings of the EPPE study we wanted to explore the associations between the children's outcomes and the practices that may have led to them (See section 5 of this report).

## 2.4 Individual case study analyses
As part of our analysis a written case study was produced to document each of the 14 (including 2 reception classes from REPEY) of pre-school from our study. In Section 3 of this report we report on only 7 of the 14 cases. Reporting on all 14 would have made the report too unwieldy. The seven Foundation Stage settings highlighted in this report were chosen in order to provide an example of each 'type' but each case is NOT necessarily typical or representative of its type. The addition of the reception class, from the REPEY study, was to ensure that all major types of Foundation Stage group care and educational settings were represented. Before inclusion in this report each of these full case studies was returned to the setting it describes for further validation and to check for accuracy.

## Sources of evidence
The data from each case study has been analysed to reveal a unique 'story' for each case study centre. The data come from multiple sources to allow for triangulation by source and also by the method of data collection. Information from managers and policy documents was triangulated with the quantitative information about child outcomes in the main EPPE study and from observations of staff and children. Trained researchers spent two weeks in each setting. They observed two members of staff for two whole days, interviewed a sample of parents from each setting and kept research diaries to collect vignettes of practice and to document any critical incidents. They also collected and conducted the initial analyses on the documentary evidence from the setting and provided detailed maps and plans of the early years setting which are not reproduced in this report

due to our commitment to protect the anonymity of centres. However we did take into account physical space and resources in our analyses.

It should be noted the extent to which the range of sources of information included in the analyses varied across centres. Below for example, we illustrate this with a nursery school and a playgroup. The sources obtained from the nursery school are more extensive compared to the playgroup, especially in the area of documentation, such as policies and specific documentation:

**Case study evidence to write the story of centre 421 a nursery school**
Researcher's Field notes
Field notes summary
OfSTED report 2000
Manager interviews 1& 2
Adult/Child Interaction Scale
Interviews with parents
Vignettes and Critical episodes
Staff and general observations
Class lists
School Information Booklet for Parents and visitors 2001
Philosophy and aims document
Curriculum policy statement
Planning documents
- long-term
- staff weekly
- weekly
- specific (daily)
Parents daily feedback sheet
Individual Child Tracking Observation Sheet
Interaction Screen document
Activity Evaluation Grid
Curriculum Audit Sheet
Behaviour Environment Checklist
Behaviour Environment Plan
Policy documents with particular reference to
- Behaviour
- Special Needs
- Assessment
- Monitoring and Evaluation
Nursery school plans
Pupil field notes sample

**Case study evidence to write the story of centre 401, a playgroup**
Fieldnotes
Managers' interviews 1 & 2
Parents' interviews
Planning documents
Policies and guidelines
Parent's booklet
Maps drawn by researcher
OfSTED report 2000
Vignettes
Critical episodes
Assessment sheets
Activity sheets and Timetables
Adult/Child Interaction Scale Ratings
Observations

**Analysis**

We made every effort to collect comparable data and to provide a framework for analysis and reporting which was similar, so that centres could be compared in terms of their key quality characteristics, e.g. resources, the pedagogy they employ, the curriculum on offer, the ethos and the management and organisational strategies. As Miles and Huberman (1994) state *'Qualitative analysis is defined as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.'* The analysis of this data from the case study centres was conducted using the following broad framework:

1. CENTRE PROFILE
a) accommodation, people, location
b) funding, intake of children

2. STAFFING
(subheadings)

3. MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP
(subheadings)

4. CLASSROOM ORGANISATION
a) pupil organisation (age mix, grouping arrangements)
b) layout
c) resources

5. PARENT INVOLVEMENT
a) communication to parents to help them understand the centre
b) parents and the day-to-day life of the nursery
c) how parents are made to feel part of their child's education
d) what's expected of parents
e) parent education

6. ETHOS
a) the atmosphere of the place for example:
        (i) the welcome
        (ii) the working climate for children
        (iii) the emotional climate for children (catering for gender,
        ethnicity and SENs/expectations of behaviour)
        (iv) staff co-operation/collegiality
        (v) support for staff
b) the centre's philosophy
c) ethos as portrayed through displays and booklets

7. CURRICULUM
a) curriculum policies
b) balance and breadth (across subjects and including ICT)
c) practitioner emphasis
d) assessment
e) curriculum planning, continuity and progression
f) the role of visits and visitors

8. PEDAGOGY
a) practice
b) the quality of interaction
c) the role of play and direct instruction
d) the role of the teacher

e) identifying children with SENs/equal opportunities
f)  ensuring continuity and progression
g) developing dispositions

9. COMMUNITY OUTREACH
(no subheadings)

This framework has enabled us to provide what Geertz (1973) has called a *'thick description'* for each of the seven case studies. In each case we tell their story through our reading of their policies, their observed actions, their organisation of the environment, their priorities, philosophies and practices. We have intentionally selected one of each type of early years provider in order to reflect the types in the EPPE study. None can be said to be *typical* of its type, nevertheless, the stories are compelling in their diversity. The case studies show that there is no ' level playing field' for providers in terms of type, nor in terms of their intake of children and their families, or even the resources available to them, the training of their staff or even the space that they inhabit. Much of this diversity may account for our analyses in later sections of the report.

Each of the following 'stories' and those of the rest of the 14 centres has been interrogated further in our qualitative data base and cross-analysed with all of the data collected. This has provided us with a means by which the EPPE quantitative findings could be triangulated and has simultaneously provided us with an opportunity to develop and to test a series of hypotheses providing explanations for the quantitative findings. For example, the relatively low score of setting 017 NC in terms of pre-reading skills could thus be explained by the relatively low level of cognitive challenge that we observed to be provided in that area of the curriculum. In another example (421, a Nursery School), the Adult/Child Interaction scale, an instrument used by the EPPE researchers to explore interactions in settings (see ARNETT, 1989) showed a high degree of consistency in staff behaviour with a strong emphasis on positive responses to children and their emotional and learning needs. When we studied the qualitative data we were then able to confirm that the quality of the interaction in that setting was very high. The staff clearly enjoyed being with the children and engaged with them in a respectful and caring way, without criticism or harshness. The processes and outcomes of our systematic interrogation of the quantitative findings with the qualitative data are described in more detail in Section 5.

## Section 3 Seven 'stories' of case study settings

In total there are 12 EPPE case study centres and 2 reception class case studies from the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford *et al* 2002). The following seven case studies are not meant to be generalisable of their type, however they do share many characteristics with their type and help to illuminate how case study analysis can show up degrees of difference e.g. in staffing, ratios, pedagogy etc. We have chosen one of each type of setting in the EPPE study and a reception class in order to provide readers with a flavour of what the majority of children 3-5 years of age may experience during the Foundation Stage. During the case study 'narratives' the source of data is referred to in brackets throughout. Most of the research was conducted in 2000, we returned to the centres in 2001 during the REPEY study to discuss the changes since the implementation of the Foundation Stage.

### 3.1 Early Excellence Centre (Combined or fully integrated education and care)

### A CENTRE PROFILE
### Location, accommodation and intake
This case study focuses on the provision offered to 3-5 year old children within an integrated centre which is also an Early Excellence Centre situated in a multi-ethnic, suburb of a large city. The Centre opened in the 1970s and was nominated by the DfES as an Early Excellence Centre in the late 1990s. It is in an area of high social deprivation and has been described by the local press as *'the toughest area of the city'*. Recent attempts have been made to improve the environment with an increase in public amenities and some property refurbishment. The few local shops satisfy basic needs but access to supermarkets situated further away poses problems for those without transport (Field notes). The centre has always been registered as a Nursery School with the DfES.

The centre is purpose built to provide, under one roof, nursery provision from birth to 5 years for 50 weeks a year. It is designed to provide integrated care and education including extensive parental support and is used by over 220 children each week and their families (information booklet).

Although the centre is open between 8am and 5.00pm most children, including those in the case study, attend between 9am and 3.30pm and even these times are very flexible. It is closed to children during the last week of August and the first week of September to prepare for the new intake and to allow for staff turnover (field notes). The services are designed to respond flexibly to families' needs and include a crèche, parent and toddler groups, toy library, speech therapy, medical support and nursery education (OfSTED 2000).

The children are organised according to age into three separate departments or 'teams' each with their separate accommodation. Other rooms serve to support these teams with administration offices, kitchens, bathrooms, laundry room, staff room, meeting and training rooms. The accommodation for the 3-4+ year old children occupies a large L-shaped room divided by screens into smaller areas with access to a large outdoor space.

The outdoor area is well resourced with a covered area, grass and hard surfaced areas, a grassy hill, a soft area with climbing frame and slide, a wooden train, a vegetable garden and a shed for storing equipment. There are also shrubs and trees and the area is well maintained. The bathroom is shared with younger children from another area (centre plans, observations).

Most of the local community live in rented accommodation on the nearby social housing estates, with the tower blocks providing homes for the more transient population. There are also some families living in privately owned homes (field notes). The unemployment rate of the area is 13.8% which is high compared to the 4% unemployment figure for the City as a whole (Head of Centre interview).

The intake reflects the local community in terms of socio-economic makeup and ethnicity. There are 44 children on roll in the unit. Of these, 17 are from single parent families (38.63%), one child is in care and 25 children have free meals (56.83%)(field notes). Many children have low or very low levels of language skills on entry and a significant proportion have a range of other special needs (OfSTED, 2000).

The multi-ethnic mix of this intake is

| Ethnicity | No. of children | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Indian | 2 | 4.54% |
| Pakistani | 3 | 6.81% |
| African-Caribbean | 4 | 9.09% |
| Bangladeshi | 5 | 11.36% |
| Mixed | 9 | 20.45% |
| White UK | 21 | 47. 72% |

40 of these children (90.90%) have attended the centre previously in one or both of the other two teams for younger children. The centre offers a flexible programme of places according to the needs of individual families (field notes).

Original child placement is obtained by parental request and/or referral by the Health Department, Social Services or Pre-School Services. Decisions about allocation of places are made by a Centre Management committee representing Centre staff, Social Services, Education and Health Departments, parents, the local community, local providers and business links personnel (information booklet). Admission is granted according to applicants' needs in educational and emotional terms, whether they are on the 'at risk' register and the level of involvement with Social Services (field notes).

**Funding**
Funding is complex as monies are not received exclusively from a delegated LEA budget but from a number of sources. At the time of the OfSTED inspection 48% came from the LEA and the rest from eight different grant sources. These include private benefactors, grants from local community resources, Early Excellence Centre support from DfES, European funds e.g. Social Regeneration Budget (induction booklet).

The total budget is '*very well managed*' by the Head (OfSTED, 2000) who receives help from the LEA Finance Team and a Senior Finance Officer who is a member of the Senior Management Team. The LEA is also responsible for administering the Centre (information booklet).

**B STAFFING**
There are 54 members of staff working at the centre, 34 of whom work part-time. All are female. They are appropriately qualified and are drawn from a variety of disciplines, including teachers, nursery officers, a health practitioner, under 3s special needs workers, language support workers, parent home visitors, toy library workers and a portage worker, as well as administrative and support staff (OfSTED, 2000).

The core staff for the 3-5s room is 2 qualified teachers, 4 nursery officers, a 0.5 Ethnic Minority support teacher, a part time bi-lingual assistant and 2 Learning Support Assistants. There are usually a number of other part time and voluntary workers assisting at any one time. Students from a range of disciplines - social workers, NVQ trainees, nurses and teachers may also be present (information booklet) as well as occasional students from overseas (observations). It was observed during the case study that a significant number of staff were engaged to provide cover and ratios were low a lot of the time e.g. 1:5 (field notes summary).

**Responsibilities, retention and relationships**
All the staff working in the Centre are of White UK Heritage except for two nursery officers who are of minority ethnic heritage. The room co-ordinator who is also the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) for the 2-4+ year olds and has worked at the centre for 10 years, is qualified to BA and PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education – qualified teacher) level. She is responsible for the general management of the unit and for facilitating the team into planning the daily/weekly activities. This is done during the planning meetings held between 3.45 and 4.15 pm every day.

The other full time teacher who has been in post for a year is leaving to work in a primary school and will be replaced in the new academic year. She has a BA and PGCE and is also Montessori trained. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) teacher (white, UK) has worked 0.5 in the room for three years although she works full time at the centre on a range of projects. She also has BA and PGCE qualifications.

There are currently 5 nursery workers covering 4 posts (2 job-share). Of these the longest serving member (26 years) is the only one without formal qualifications, all the others have either NVQ level 2 or 3. At the time of the case study the 2 Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) were both graduates (both were leaving at the end of the year to pursue PGCE courses).

The stability in the 2-5s area has recently improved with the appointment of the Centre's SENCO to unit co-ordinator in December 1999. She has worked at the Centre for 10 years and is a keen supporter of the philosophy of the Head and Senior Management Team (SMT). Three of the nursery officers have worked in the Centre for 5, 6 and 8 years. One is on a 1 year contract to cover for maternity leave.

**Key worker responsibilities**
The Centre has a key worker system to achieve the consistency and continuity in day-care and education to which it believes children are entitled (policy doc.). Key worker staff are expected to be fully aware of their responsibilities and understand how personalities and actions influence their effectiveness. The policy states that the centre wants staff who are genuine and sensitive, who enjoy working with children and value their role as 'bridge maker' between child and family (policy doc.). Responsibilities include the day-to-day care of the children in their key groups including sitting and eating with them during lunchtime. Another important aspect to their work is to build relationships with the family and provide support when necessary. Key workers are also responsible for producing the Individual Records of Achievement which are summarised (with the Curriculum Deputy) into Pupil Profiles. Information concerning individuals is fed to other team members to influence planning where necessary (field notes).

**Terms and conditions of employment**
Normal pay and conditions do not apply to most of the teaching staff. Apart from the Bi-lingual assistants and LSAs staff members are expected to work from 8.15am to 4.15pm with holidays taken by arrangement (field notes). Although teachers are entitled to full holiday allocation, in reality they rarely find this is possible. Flexibility of holiday times is offered as some compensation (manager interview 1). Only the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant teacher (EMAG) who is paid from EMAG funding takes the usual 13 weeks holiday per year.

**C MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**
The Centre has no governing body but is steered by a management committee made up of Centre staff, Social Services, Education and Health Departments, parents, the local community, local providers and business links personnel (information booklet). This committee is deemed as 'supportive' (OfSTED, 2000).

The Head of Centre manages the Centre through the SMT consisting of herself and three Deputy Heads who are each responsible for the following areas – Curriculum and Training, Pastoral issues

and Family Support.  The team is supported by three other members - a Senior Finance Officer and 2 part time clerical officers (information booklet).  OfSTED identifies the management of the Centre as a particular strength, grading it as 'excellent' and noting that *'this complex Centre is effectively led and managed by a very good management team'* (OfSTED 2000).

The Head of Centre has been involved with the Centre for 18 years.  Her responsibilities are for the total management of the staff team and the services provided.  The Deputy for Curriculum and Training has been in post since 1994.  She is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the quality of children's learning and access to the curriculum across the whole Centre by supporting adults in their role in this process.  She also takes the lead on providing training programmes for other providers in the LEA.  The Pastoral Deputy has worked at the Centre 12 years with a background in Social Service Day Nurseries and supports the Personal and Social development of all children, families and staff.  This includes outreach support and behaviour management.  She is also involved with the Social Services Child Protection policy and works directly with families to deliver information, training and general support.  She makes weekly links with health visitors and the Community Medical Officer.  The third Deputy has worked at the Centre 24 years and has been in her present post since 1998.  Her responsibility is to support families by working in partnership with parents to raise their self-esteem and parenting skills and liaising with external agencies.  With a background in Social Services she is also involved with the training programme of Social Work students and represents the Centre in the local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (induction booklet).

The number and complexity of the staff has led to a hierarchical structure in the institution directed by the Head of Centre and supported by the SMT.  Although the Centre recognises the importance of individuals within an institution, and the power of teamwork, such a structure may foster diminished opportunities for widespread democratic decision making.  Delegating specific responsibility areas to three deputies sustains this top-down, yet efficient model and seems to work effectively in this setting (induction booklet).

**Staff development and training**
The importance the Centre places upon continued professional development can be seen by the inclusion of the following statement in their information booklet.  '*It is widely acknowledged that the quality of services provided by an establishment are directly related to the quality of staff working in the setting.  This can only be achieved in an establishment that values and empowers all adults and provides continuing professional development for staff'* (information booklet).  This belief drives the Centre's emphasis on the importance of staff development through training, supervision and review (induction booklet).

The Introduction in the Induction Booklet for staff, students and volunteers explicitly welcomes newcomers to opportunities to develop their own particular skills and abilities so that the experience of working in a successful inter-agency Early Years Centre will prove professionally rewarding to them.  Acknowledging that there may have to be some flexibility, the Centre ideally aims for each newcomer to observe their team for the first fortnight in order to understand how the Centre puts its philosophy into practice.  Each newcomer is allocated a mentor during the induction period (induction booklet).

The Centre closes every Wednesday afternoon for staff training and follows a programme of on-going personal and professional development to respond to individual needs and to those of the Centre.  These needs are based on those identified by the SMT.  Sessions are usually in-house with occasional guest speakers (field notes).

Staff also access funding to receive training from further afield.  The Centre is fortunate to have a healthy training budget, some of which comes from the Head of Centre's consultancy and conference fees. Cascade models of training are also used when experienced staff attend courses.  Funding is also available for individual professional development and several members of staff

have studied for training qualifications in order to provide staff training within the Centre (Head of Centre interview).

**Monitoring and appraisal systems**
The rationale behind the monitoring and evaluation policy is a belief that in order to continue to deliver the '*highest quality practices and provision*' a constant process of monitoring and evaluating work done needs to be in place. This policy focuses upon the experiences the staff provide for children and families (monitoring and evaluation policy 1998). Procedures for monitoring and appraising staff are described in a separate supervision policy.

Staff are supervised according to the supervision policy document (drafted 1996) with the belief that supervision is a '*necessary and integral part to maintaining and developing high quality care and education*'. Continued professional development is encouraged by the '*interactive process of Feeling, Thinking and Doing*' in relation to their roles at the Centre. During the induction period Management ensures that newcomers understand the policies and procedures of the Centre and their particular roles and responsibilities; that records are maintained and shown, and agreed action plan aims are met. Supervision sessions that are regular and uninterrupted are guaranteed for individuals for confidential analysis and reflection and opportunities are also provided for groups for briefing, planning and evaluation.

The Head provides individual supervision for the Deputies and other members of the SMT, the Co-ordinators of the units and Senior Nursery Officers. She also appraises all teachers and conducts annual professional reviews for all Centre staff. The Curriculum Deputy supervises all staff working in the two nursery units to track achievement in the children's learning and the co-ordinators in relation to planning and evaluation. The Pastoral Deputy provides individual supervision sessions for Nursery Officers and support for Co-ordinators and staff over Continuous Professional Development (CPD) issues. Co-ordinators provide individual and group supervision in their team regarding practice and team relationships (policy doc.).

**D CLASSROOM ORGANISATION**
**Child organisation**
Although 45 children are on roll in the nursery unit most of the children attend for 2 or 2.5 days with some children attending 4 or 4.5 days.

| No. of days | No. of children | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 13 | 27.65% |
| 2.5 | 16 | 34.04% |
| 4 | 8 | 17.02% |
| 4.5 | 8 | 17.02% |

The number of children attending on any one day varies between 22 and 31 and reflects the wishes/needs of the parent and the needs of the child.

| Days of the week | Total possible attendees | |
|---|---|---|
| Monday | 31 | |
| Tuesday | 29 | |
| Wednesday am. | 22 | |
| Thursday | 30 | |
| Friday | 30 | (field notes) |

**Age mix and ratios**
Although there is a slight variation each day because of the different attendance patterns the age mix is between 3 years 10 months and 4 years 9 months. The adult to child ratio is usually maintained at 1:5, frequently 1:4 and can be as low as 1:3. This high level of staffing allows all areas, inside and out to be fully supervised (field notes).

**Grouping arrangement**

Children congregate as a whole group for registration at the beginning of the mornings and afternoons. They are organised into small mathematics groups according to ability for 30 minutes each morning and in mixed ability groups of 5/6 with their designated key worker for I hour each afternoon (field notes). At other times children have free access and choice to all areas in the unit including outdoors and so 'self' group as they wish or are grouped according to numbers required for adult led activities.

**Room layout**

The room is set out in 5 areas or 'zones' of learning – graphics, creative, sand/water, mathematics and outdoors. There are also areas for role-play, free play writing (office), small construction play, a book corner and a computer. Occasionally there is an interactive display for scientific investigation. A small café area with a table and four chairs is laid out for children to sit and have drinks and/or snacks throughout the day (field notes).

**Resources**

Children have access to a large range of equipment and books which are well looked after and in good order. They have daily access to excellent outdoor facilities which have been recently extended and refurbished (field notes). OfSTED notes that good use is made of resources which are readily accessible and appropriate for the ages of the children (OfSTED 2000).


**E PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

**Communication to parents to help them understand the centre**

The Head of Centre is driven by a deeply held and long-term belief in the crucial role parents play in their children's learning. Since her early teaching days she has thought that working with parents held an important key to the learning dispositions of their children and that if parental confidence and self-esteem were developed this would have enormous benefits; for families, children and the community. She has therefore been determined to ensure that parents have access to the Centre is as many ways as possible and receive the support and education they need through a variety of means and agencies (manager interview 2).

The Centre provides an in-house published booklet to newcomers with some useful information although the style and vocabulary is jargon heavy, appears quite formal and seems more suitable for visiting professionals. It describes the philosophy and management structures rather than the centre. There is, however, one colourful page advertising the many services for parents with children in the youngest unit. This is useful but potentially confusing as there is no other equivalent for the other two units caring for the older children. It would seem more likely that parents receive the information they need from more direct sources - each other or neighbours, the Head of Centre, or from members of staff, especially via home visits and outreach. As the Centre is an important and respected feature in the area occupying links with a variety of health and social services agencies, it is likely that parents would receive the necessary information from any professional agency they might encounter.

The Centre does provide a much more direct way for parents to receive necessary information through its '*getting to know you*' programme for new parents. Here, parents are also told how they may receive information about their child's progress and there are also opportunities for questions and discussion (manager interview 1). The staff prefer to make direct contact with parents with a range of meetings designed for a particular purpose. For example, parents are invited to join their child for a school meal so that they can see first-hand how staff talk to children and how they deal with any problems (OfSTED, 2000).

The Centre advertises coming events with posters displayed around the building. Other news is displayed on the notice boards or at the entrance. Leaflets and pamphlets about other agencies and community services are available. A newsletter system to convey information is not used (parent interviews).

**Parents day-to-day life of the centre**

The Centre plays for many families *'a central part in their lives, sensitively meeting the developing needs of children and adults'* (OfSTED, 2000). The report praises its work with parents as *'a major strength'* and suggests that the *'wide variety of opportunities for meetings and discussions provided forms the core of the Centre's integrated approach'.* Staff have an important role in engaging parents and are expected to work hard to get to know them so that they feel comfortable about coming into the Centre. Staff are also expected to enable parents to be interested in and engage in their children's learning at home. This personal approach is preferred to holding parents evenings or distributing newsletters (manager interview 1). Parents are encouraged to attend any of the many courses and support groups and be involved with their children's welfare and education as closely as possible. As well as workshops and courses, parents have access to the parent and baby group, parent and toddler group, the toy library, crèche support, outreach workers, and extended day care provision. Many meetings, courses and coffee mornings are organised around topical issues where parents are invited to ask questions, raise issues and offer suggestions.

The community medical officer and health visitor hold weekly meetings at the Centre as well as monthly clinics. Parents are able to access these services and discuss health issues, and, according to OfSTED, *'find it most helpful to have concerns dealt with quickly and informally.'* Centre staff will also accompany parents to their GP or provide childcare while parents receive advice from other professionals (OfSTED 2000).

Links with specialist agencies, especially a National Children's Homes Project enables the Centre to access further family support and parent counselling where necessary and OfSTED notes that together, these two institutions provide a *'very comprehensive range of assessment, therapy and support services'.* The Centre currently provides facilities for access visits for parents living apart from their children (OfSTED, 2000). The Centre has a caravan on the coast which parents can book for a nominal rent (note on observation).

**Parents and their child's education**

Led by the convictions of the Head and the ethos of the Centre there is a genuine desire amongst staff to work in close partnership with parents over their children's learning. Besides receiving information informally, on a daily basis if necessary, parents may discuss their child's progress on a one-to-one basis with staff members in individually arranged meetings. At these times the Record of Achievement provides the focus for discussion and parents can have this meeting at the Centre or at home if they prefer (manager interview 1). Parents and key workers are encouraged to talk about their children so that a particular approach taken by a parent over an issue e.g. the death of a family pet, can be responded to similarly by the key worker (parental interview 1).

The Centre encourages joint learning at home by inviting parents to use the toy library (parent interview 4). The library is stocked with high quality educational toys and games that would generally be too expensive for most of the parents (research observations).

**What's expected of parents**

The Centre operates a flexible 'settling in' policy that takes into account individual circumstances and need. There is an expectation for parents to see the need for a relaxed 'settling in' period but the Centre is equally concerned in responding sensitively to individual situations. As many children are familiar with the Centre before they enter the unit the need for a 'settling in' period is not so vital unless the child has a new key-worker (manager interview 1).

On entry to the Centre parents are expected to complete a registration form and examine the Equal Opportunities Policy. Information is given about the various parent groups and crèche facilities. Parents are not expected to have toilet trained their children (parent interview 1).

**Parental attitudes towards the centre**
Parents are highly satisfied with what the Centre provides for them and their children. They appreciate the staff for their approachability and genuine care and interest in their children. The key worker system is praised, not only as an effective way of providing continuity and monitoring progress but also for providing parents with a named person with whom to communicate directly whatever the issue. One parent is impressed by seeing the policies put into practice rather than just written down (parent interview 2). There seems to be a general consensus that the Centre has changed their lives in a variety of positive ways e.g. finding a new job, going to college, having time to oneself. Several parents express particular gratitude for the non-judgmental support received through difficult personal times (parent interviews).

**Parent education**
In addition to meetings and courses organised on a wide range of issues there is a drive to improve the general health of the community. Many sessions are jointly organised and led by a number of agencies and it is evident that health issues (in a holistic sense) have a high profile. These few examples offer a flavour of the range – a 'Keeping Safe' programme, PALS in Pregnancy, dental and oral hygiene and provision of healthy snacks (assessment of integrated work doc.).

OfSTED reports that parents speak highly of the adult education opportunities made available to them and identify confidence building as a key outcome. For some this has led to employment, for others potential work as childminders, and for others entry into further and higher education (OfSTED 2000). This fits in well with the aims of the Governments Early Excellence Programme.

**F ETHOS**
**The atmosphere**
The centre aims to extend to parents, children and visitors a welcome which is accepting and non-judgmental. Parents are free to stay when and for as long as they like. The unit is a happy, busy, safe and secure environment. The surroundings are bright with children's work and photographs displayed. Children appear happy and confident (field notes).

**The working climate for the children**
The children move in and out of the five zones at will and access the activities or initiate their own with the guidance of the adult consigned to that zone. This means they work with a number of adults but may stay with their key worker if they wish. In addition there is a structured sense to the day with well established routines. Children interact as a whole group, in small and larger groups led or supported by an adult, self chosen size groups or work by themselves. Small focused group work is quite common in the Centre. There is a good balance of indoor and outdoor play (in terms of access and activities) and opportunities for snacks and drinks throughout the day. Children are encouraged to be independent with many opportunities for free choice. The high number of adults means that all learning areas, both inside and out, can be fully supervised with plenty of opportunities for interaction. Children who are learning English as an additional language (EAL) also make good progress and the report comments on the positive presence of a bilingual member of staff (OfSTED 2000).

**The emotional climate for the children**
The Centre tries to ensure a high level of security and familiarity by organising the children to work within key worker groups who are responsible for their day-to-day care. This is enhanced further by the policy of moving key workers 'up' from the 2-3+ unit to the 3-4+ unit with their children which provides opportunities for close, uninterrupted attention over two years. This arrangement develops greater intimacy between key workers and parents as well as the children, and key workers are viewed by the majority of parents as supportive friends.

The children work in a climate where they are valued and respected (parent interviews) and where the principles of equal opportunities are upheld. Racial/cultural differences are celebrated and

discrimination is not apparent from either children or adults. Staff also model high personal, social and behavioural standards which are reflected in the behaviour of the majority of the children (field notes).

**Behaviour**
The centre works from the premise that our sociability develops from a good sense of 'self' which comes from being respected and valued by others. Thus the policy and approach to behaviour issues attempts to support this idea by adhering to principles of agreed rules and boundaries which are applied consistently to provide secure and safe emotional and physical environments for the children. There is an emphasis on the need for adults to model appropriate behaviour and be genuinely *'caring, responsive and supportive'* when met with children's strong uncontrolled emotion. Children are encouraged to verbalise their feelings with an adult either individually or in groups by talking one-to-one or by using 'props' in the form of books, drawings, role-play and puppets. Giving praise to individuals is regarded as a powerful tool to reinforce 'good' behaviour and to groups by using peer influence to modify individual behaviour. Adults are expected to respond immediately to inappropriate behaviour with firmness and support each other within the common policy to ensure consistency of approach and provision. Rules should be discussed and children are encouraged to develop their own self-help skills. Children are also taught to empathise by encouraging them to look after living things and the environment (policy doc.).

Very difficult/challenging behaviour is dealt with by working through a system of responses consisting of three stages – challenge, warning and removal from activity for a period of up to two minutes. The process involves employing the stages according to the child's response. The last stage must be closely monitored and any subsequent positive behaviour identified and praised. Details of very difficult/challenging behaviour, possibly posing real risk to other children, are logged and used for SEN identification and evidence. The file records the time of the incident, the antecedents, the behaviour and the consequences and is filled in by any team member involved (not always the key worker) (Special Needs File – ABC Behaviour Record).

As the Centre places a strong emphasis on the adult's role in helping children develop their social skills it may be necessary at times for families with children exhibiting unacceptable behaviour to be contacted and offered support (policy doc.). Children who do pose challenging behaviour (where parents will become involved) are monitored to offer as much supportive provision as possible (critical episode). The Pastoral Deputy would be involved at this stage to set up meetings with other agencies and perhaps use the services of an outreach worker to investigate home circumstances. Help is then offered accordingly from a range of options - referral to the Family and/or Behaviour Support Teams to establishing a programme of Behaviour Management in the home (policy doc.). It is clear from the documentation in the data concerning a particular child that the commitment to support children and parents in need is followed through thoroughly and with integrity (critical episode).

It would seem that staff are guided by the principles of the policy even if not always in the detail. A challenging incident witnessed during the research where one child was hurt by another was dealt with by different staff in the same firm, yet kind and calm way (observation, critical episode).

**Special needs**
OfSTED reports that children with special educational needs (SEN) are very well supported and appropriately included, as are parents and carers. It notes that the children make '*good progress*' and have their individual needs carefully assessed and planned for with work well matched to their needs and capabilities.

The Centre believes that *'children with Special Educational Needs have a right to the same quality educational opportunities as their peers'* and that *'inclusive education from birth enhances the provision for all.'* It aims to achieve these aims and provide multi agency support and early identification and intervention by employing the necessary staff. A full time SENCO deals with the administration and offers support to others in writing and delivering Individual Education Plans

(IEPs).  A full time Nursery Officer is also employed to support the SENCO and two part time LSAs to work with individual children.  A Portage Worker (funded by Social Services to work with families of children with special needs) also works in the homes of individual families as part of an early intervention programme (induction booklet).

The unit benefits from Section 11 (Home Office) funding to support home language and EAL, through the employment of the EMAG teacher and bi-lingual assistants.  Children with speech problems or delay are seen by a speech therapist who attends for two half days each week.

The key worker system and daily team meetings provide a conduit for regular information exchange between all team members and Learning Support Assistants are encouraged to contribute on the progress of their children.

**Equal opportunities**
An aim of the Centre is that its Equal Opportunities Policy should be '*visible in its practice'* (information booklet) and not confined to a policy statement.  It recognises that *'specific and positive attitudes and approaches are needed'* to ensure equality of opportunity and not just passive policy statements.  However, although the policy includes a rationale and statements of values and intent there are no suggestions regarding recommended practice or systems to monitor and evaluate whether equality of opportunity is experienced.

**Staff co-operation**
Co-operation between staff seems to function at a fairly high level.  The Centre is well managed with a clear philosophy, supportive policies and procedures in place and with many opportunities for staff to make themselves heard in regular team and staff meetings.  An ethos of equality and collegiality is likely to be nurtured within the Centre where systems exist to encourage professional development in real terms and where there is an '*unwritten ethos of building on individual strengths'* (manager interview 1).  However the hierarchical structure that manages this complex system may well inhibit levels of collegiality and joint decision making.

From conversations with various unit staff it can be deduced that the unit has had a recent history of identifying and improving collaboration with the current co-ordinator who is a long serving member of staff and well respected together with some organisational changes, e.g. the use of learning zones (field notes).  There are some indications that members of staff who lack qualifications have been identified for extra training and support.

**Staff morale**
A number of factors were taken into consideration when exploring staff morale.  The Centre imposes high standards and long hours upon staff who deal with demanding children and parents.  This may be balanced by low ratios and the job satisfaction felt by the Centre's high profile in the community, latest excellent OfSTED report, Early Excellence Centre status and the value placed by the Head of Centre and the SMT on the staff and their professional development.  There is also affection and respect for the Head of Centre to inspire loyalty and collaboration.  The unit co-ordinator believes that the centre works very well because it has '*a fantastic leader'* from whom she has learnt more than any one else in her life (unit co-ordinator interview).

However, the same factors may present unacceptable pressures. Some members of staff occasionally find the pace too difficult to maintain or the hierarchical management structure restrictive.  There are some indications that the morale in the unit has been fairly low with the new co-ordinator having '*to work hard on team building'* (field notes).  Reasons given seem to be concerned with a lack of realisation from the SMT of the pressures of working in a Centre of Excellence and their frequent absences because of meetings and outside pressures etc. (field notes).

**The centre as a learning community**

Inspired and driven by the Head, the Centre is a learning community acting as an educational vanguard for the local community and professionals further afield. In addition to the personal and educational opportunities it organises for parents, since 1995 it has established within its walls an Early Years Training Centre. This Training Centre offers training to staff in other settings, social services and private and voluntary sector nurseries. A key development in the Early Excellence Centre bid to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) was to develop dissemination of good practice to other providers. This is being done by offering formal training sessions; 'apprenticeship' style training where workers learn alongside staff experienced in integrated provision and planned visits to the Centre to focus on various aspects of provision. Consultancy to LEAs and other agencies and participation in conferences and research projects offer added dimensions to enhance and stimulate further insights when giving advice on integrated provision. In 1999 the Centre gained National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA) Assessment status and provides both day and evening training for students studying NVQ2 and 3. Childminder training accredited by the National Child-minding Association (NCMA) is also offered with support given by the part time childminder network co-ordinator employed in the Family Support Team for the youngest children and babies (information booklet).

The Head of Centre is a member of the Early Years Development and Care Partnership (EYDCP) executive and on a number of sub-groups. The Deputy for Curriculum and Training is a member of the training sub-group. The Centre has been involved in the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project and a DfES research project examining family support. As an EEC it has a role in evaluating the impact of EECs and the Head holds a position on a committee group for this process.

The number of training opportunities for a large number of different groups and agencies seems almost overwhelming organisationally and indeed OfSTED notes that much of the Centre's work is initially developed in an ad hoc way. It recommends that in order to monitor its complexity and capacity for expansion it needs a '*central strategic steer'* to '*bring together its diverse strands without limiting the ability to remain innovative, flexible and responsive.'* (OfSTED 2000).

**Philosophy**

The Centre is committed to providing an integrated inter and multi agency service of quality day care provision for the children and families in the local community and to enhance their educational achievements and extend future opportunities. It believes in acknowledging the key role of parents in the healthy development and learning of their children and aims to involve them in these processes at an early stage. Equal opportunities is given a high priority and is made visible in all aspects of the institution. The Centre staff believe in being sensitive to changing community needs and responding appropriately. Finally, it aims to be an establishment that values and empowers all adults and seeks to do this by encouraging and appreciating contributions made by everyone towards its on-going development, providing continuous professional development for staff and disseminating good practice (information booklet).

**The ethos as demonstrated through displays**

The Centre is a visually rich environment and all walls are used to display news, information, and instructions as well as the results of a wide variety of adult and children's learning in photographs and art work. The entrance foyer is used to give information to parents on health and social issues, courses and careers and local community events. Above the toy library time-table is a display to stimulate ideas of what it means to be a parent. This is designed to offer reassurance and support to parents (field notes). Inside the unit the main notice board carries the following policies – Behaviour, Child Protection and Equal Opportunities with photographs of the staff and the Fire Procedure. All other display reflects the work covered in the unit and is predominantly children's work with adult written text describing the process. Planning for the week is displayed in each area/zone along with a folder containing observation sheets.

**G CURRICULUM**
**Policies**
Policies are developed from the Curriculum Deputy with input from those members of teaching staff with responsibility for curriculum areas.
The following policy documents were supplied:
Language and Literacy
Mathematics
Science
Technology
Physical
Creative
Personal and Social Development
Teaching and Learning
Key Person
Equal Opportunities
Monitoring and Evaluation
Supervision
Administration – Recording Procedures
Child Protection
Behaviour including a system of Responses to the More Difficult and Challenging Aspects of Unacceptable Behaviour
Health and Safety

Curriculum policies begin with a rationale, followed by the purposes of implementation and a set of broad guidelines.  The purposes are directed towards parents as well as children and staff and indicate another layer of the Centre's intent to include parents into the Centre's educational practices and processes.  Ideas and expertise from other LEAs and educational theory are incorporated into many of them and review dates show an intention to consider their effectiveness every two years.  These elements and their appearance suggest their intention to be used as working documents.

**Balance and breadth**
The long term plans, determined by the Curriculum Deputy and underpinned by the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) and the ELGs, guarantee the Centre's intention to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.  The unit staff encourage depth of study by allowing children to spend the time they need on any given or chosen activity and attempt to extend their experiences by the quality of their interactions.  It is possible that balance can be compromised by encouraging free choice unless a monitoring system is employed.  Close monitoring was noted to be inconsistent (observations).

**Practitioner emphasis**
The Centre believes that Personal and Social Education (PSE) and development underpins the ability for children to learn in all other areas.  The teaching and development of these skills therefore is regarded as a high priority and it is an area at which the Centre excels (OfSTED 2000). This is endorsed by the Head of Centre who cites communication skills as an important element within PSE (manager interview).  The unit co-ordinator identifies the development of autonomy and independence as important motivators to learning (nursery teacher interview).

**Assessment**
Progress is assessed by observation with records made on specially formatted sheets.  These were seen to be used inconsistently in the unit with some staff not using them at all and others particularly zealous (observations).  Weekly evaluation sheets were also not consistently used with some workers making few or no contributions (observations).  With such a large and diverse workforce this is not too surprising but it appears that the area requires reviewing.

**Curriculum planning, continuity and progression**
Long-term plans are devised by the Curriculum Deputy to meet the policies and are underpinned by the ELGs. On examination they reveal imaginative and appropriate planning and content. Weekly plans are written and evaluated at team level during daily meetings. Here learning intentions and experiences from the long-term plans are identified for the whole unit and for key worker group work. Plans are also included in the separate curriculum areas for various individual children. Individual members of staff are responsible for devising activities for their key worker groups to meet the intentions and experiences. It was noted however, that some adults have difficulty in adjusting planned activities to children's interests (observations). Continuity and progression are ensured by highlighting those areas of work completed and planning for the others to be carried over to the next week or to an appropriate time. Individual progression is monitored via the various systems in place (field notes).

**Visits and visitors**
The Centre is fortunate to own a mini-bus, so frequent and regular outings are made especially within the locality. Children are taken to local parks, woods and the city farm. They are also taken on local walks to the shops and into town. The Centre is aware that most of their children do not have the opportunity to visit many places and endeavours to invite parents along in order to widen their own awareness of the area and understand how visits encourage learning as well as enjoying the experience.

The Centre welcomes any visitor or group who may offer new and interesting experiences to the children. At the time of the case study a special needs project was underway involving a dancer coming in one afternoon a week to work with a group. Other visitors have been from a Wildlife organisation to build bird and bat boxes with the children and to show them how to plant bulbs. Parents do not contribute in this area much except occasionally to bring in their babies as part of a curriculum programme (manager interview).

Since acquiring the Early Excellence status the Centre receives many visitors from other Early Excellence Centre's to disseminate good practice, and representatives from Local Authorities across the country who are interested in establishing 'integrated services'. The Centre is also visited regularly by representatives of government departments and high profile projects (evaluation doc.).

**H PEDAGOGY**
**Practice**
Children access the curriculum through adult led and adult initiated activities planned according to the Early Learning Goals. These plans are determined from long term plans and children's individual needs identified through on-going observations. Well-established routines are in place catering for individuals, pair and small group work and also for larger groups supported or led by adults (observations). In addition the children are encouraged to determine and pursue their own experiences by choosing the equipment and materials they need which are organised for easy access. Independence and autonomy is encouraged and effort is made to create a 'home' environment where the children feel comfortable and therefore confident enough to pursue their personal interests (nursery teacher interview).

The unit is divided into 5 zones of learning within which activities and/or learning opportunities designed to cover each of the six areas of learning are offered. These zones are headed as Graphics, Creative, Sand and Water, Mathematics and the Outdoors. Members of staff spend a week in each zone on a rota system and are responsible for planning/organising/preparing the activities. Staff view this arrangement as an aid to staff organisation rather than an arrangement designed to provide a balanced curriculum for the children (nursery teacher interview). Adult led activities are voluntary but children may be encouraged to participate to ensure a balance of experiences. It is policy that planned activities can be adjusted in response to individual interests although there is evidence that some adults are more adept at this than others (observations).

Regular observations of adult led activities are made by different staff members to evaluate children's responses (sample evaluation) but none to evaluate or monitor the teaching (profile summary from observations).

**Quality of interaction**
The unit co-ordinator insists that good practice develops from the quality of interactions with the children that are based on a deep level of respect that arises from acknowledging the extent and depth of their emotional state at any one time (nursery teacher interview). The policy states that adults should take every opportunity to extend children's language and literacy and develop a positive attitude to communicating by listening actively and responding accordingly (policy doc.). Observations show that the quality of interactions is good with adults able to extend understanding by skilful use of a variety of questioning techniques. Adults frequently participate and/or intervene to extend imaginative play (observations). The high level of staffing allows for many opportunities for interactions to occur.

**Role of play and direct instruction**
Direct instruction is more likely to occur during structured key worker and mathematics group times although even here adults may be led by how the children decide to tackle an activity (nursery teacher interview). Elsewhere adults oversee or interact with the children within their zones who enter and leave as they wish. Here, within the choices made by the child the emphasis is on aiding learning initiated by the child rather than direct teaching.

**The role of the staff**
The role of staff in relation to the children is, if working in accordance to the philosophy of the co-ordinator, one which responds imaginatively and with full engagement to children, while they pursue their own lines of exploration and investigation. They are also expected to make regular assessments through close observation of the child's activities.

Staff are expected to enable parents to be interested in and engage in their children's learning. They do this by encouraging parents to stay and by making them feel welcome when they do. They are expected to be sensitive to parents needs, both individually and/or collectively and respond accordingly. This can result in referring to other members of staff or particular agencies or identifying areas for future workshops or courses (manager interview, field notes).

**Transitions**
Moving key workers with their groups and employing sensitive 'settling in' procedures ensures that transitions between units are as smooth as possible.

**Differentiation**
Differentiation is provided by staff support and input and by ability grouping within the Mathematics groups. Individual needs are considered from observations and noted in the appropriate learning areas on the weekly plans (field notes).

**Ensuring continuity and progression**
The Centre encourages key workers to remain with their groups as they 'move up' into the unit in order to avoid breaks in assessment and having new evaluations made. This also ensures a level of stability and continuity with parents as well as the children. The Centre acknowledges that this arrangement is not always possible with all key workers but a decision was made to guarantee some continuity by ensuring that a 'core of staff' would always accompany the children. Continuity within children's peer groups is also addressed to ensure that they are maintained (manager interview).

Continuity and progression in learning is ensured by regular observations of children, the results of which are entered into individual Records of Achievement. Information is collected from when the initial home visit is made and through the settling in period. Comments are entered in relation to an area of learning every few days and significant drawings, photos and written pieces of work are

added to form a comprehensive dossier from which the Pupil Profiles are written to be sent on to the Primary classes.  The Records of Achievement are given to the parents when the child leaves.  However, parents are involved in discussions with key workers on a regular basis about their child's progress.

**Developing dispositions**
The unit generally encourages children to pursue their own interests at their own speed, although this policy is not always followed (observations).  However it was noted that children are often able to concentrate and persevere for sustained periods in both directed and self-chosen activities (field notes, researcher's observations).  There are also many opportunities for free choice and the children are encouraged to be independent (observations).  Overall, our observations suggest a good balance of adult and child initiated activities.


**I COMMUNITY OUTREACH OR INVOLVEMENT**
It is a priority aim of the Centre to involve parents closely with their children's learning starting from birth and provides parents with opportunities to develop their understanding of this process and increase their parenting skills.  The Centre has been active in forming an integrated network of local support services for some time and holds a unique position in its ability to offer educational, practical and emotional support to the local community.

Sources of information
Field notes
OfSTED report
Centre Information Booklet
Monitoring and Evaluation Policy
Induction booklet for staff, students and volunteers
Special Needs File - ABC Behaviour Record
Critical episodes
Interviews - Head of Centre 1 and 2
            Nursery Teacher (Unit Co-ordinator)
            Parents
Assessment of the Integrated Work Document
Observations
Summary
Record of Achievement
Centre plans
Evaluation of Centre Document
Behaviour Policy
Curriculum Policies
Curriculum planning sheets – long term and weekly

### 3.2    Nursery class

**A CENTRE PROFILE**
**Location, accommodation, intake**
The focus of this case study is a nursery class in the Infant department of a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic (RC) school.  The school is four miles from the centre of a large city, sits adjacent to a Catholic church and is set back from a busy main arterial road which links with a large motorway complex. The school is split-site, with the junior department located separately.  Dense housing, both privately owned and rented, surrounds the schools.

The nursery class comprises one smallish room; well planned by the nursery teacher and the nursery nurse to make the best use of space (field notes, and plans).  There are doors opening into the Infant hall and on to a playground exclusively for the nursery.  Adjoining the playground is a small area of field/parkland to which the nursery children can have access through their own gate and in which they go for walks with adults (field notes and maps).

Fifty-one children aged between 3 and 4¼ come to this nursery class; twenty-seven of them in the morning and twenty-four in the afternoon. The nursery has a mixed intake, but the majority are children from White Irish Roman Catholic families: overall 76% of children are RC, the others have different backgrounds; 17% are non-white UK (Vietnamese, Pakistani, mixed heritage, African Caribbean, Iranian).  Different family profiles are represented, for example, three children are from single parent families.  One boy appears on the Special Education Needs (SEN) Audit for the year 2000.  He is at Stage 1 on the Code of Practice (DfES, 1998) because delay in his speech development is concerning parents and nursery staff.

The Local Education Authority (LEA) budget for the nursery is £49,400 (which covers teaching and non-teaching staff, rent, bills and equipment costs). Because of the LEA funding, the nursery is designated non-denominational.

**B STAFFING**
The nursery class staffing is one qualified teacher (Cert Ed) and one nursery nurse (NNEB).  The two women have worked together in the nursery for 12 years, almost since the nursery began. The centre does not have any difficulties in retaining staff.

**C MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**
The nursery teacher is manager and leader within the nursery class.  She is responsible for admissions and does almost all the 'forward thinking' for the nursery curriculum, writing the long and medium term plans and working with a budget of £1500 voluntary contributions and £1400 capitation.  The nursery nurse is reluctant to get involved in writing plans (field notes) although she contributes orally to weekly planning and jots down daily plans for herself.  Baseline Assessment, as required by the LEA, is the sole responsibility of the nursery teacher/manager (for the purposes of the nursery class the teacher is also considered the manager), and she is the one who takes part in formal appointments with parents to discuss their children's progress.

In 1999, the nursery was incorporated with the Reception classes to form an Early Years Department within the school, with one of the Reception teachers appointed as co-ordinator.  The nursery manager declined to be considered for this post, feeling she had too little experience of reception aged children (manager's interview).  The amalgamation led to changes in the nursery teacher's managerial role, for example curriculum planning (once her autonomous decision) now has to be vetted by the Early Years (EY) Co-ordinator.  The EY Co-ordinator 'marks' the nursery teacher's planning (with a smiley face stamp).  In addition, appraisal has just started as a whole-school scheme and this means that the nursery teachers will be appraised by the EY Co-ordinator.

## D CLASSROOM ORGANISATION
### Pupil organisation - age mix
The nursery operates a system of part-time places and full-time places. Twenty-seven children attend in the morning and twenty-four in the afternoon. Three of the children are full-time. The age mix is almost identical: the morning group age mix is 3.3 – 4.2 and the afternoon age mix is 3.2 – 4.2 (field notes).

### Room layout
Classroom plans drawn by our researcher show clearly defined and established areas to be: a dedicated book corner, a blackboard and chalks, a mark-making table with assorted pencils and a home corner (which can become hospital or hairdressing salon at times). The staff appear to feel that these are very important provisions, because they make them available every day. Living plants and small animals are also a permanent feature, the latter purposefully used routinely to encourage children to learn about and care for other creatures.

### Resources
OFSTED reported that the resource provision for the under fives is good. Field notes describe the nursery class as being well resourced, both indoors and out with a range of apparatus and equipment to stimulate small world play, construction, and floor play and for promoting learning in literacy, mathematics, science and the world about us. Equipment and books are well looked after and in good order.


## E PARENT INVOLVEMENT
### Communication to parents to help them understand the nursery class provision
To help parents understand the class, there is a 'Nursery Class Handbook' which presents parents with the school's overtly Catholic mission statement, and gives brief information on: the nursery staff and their qualifications, the admissions policy, the daily schedule and term dates, curriculum content and organisation, record keeping and baseline assessment requirements. Parents can also take away a copy of the school prospectus, which includes a précis of the handbook's contents.

The nursery acts as post box for monthly newsletters from the school but there is no evidence to suggest that there are specific communications from the nursery staff about discrete nursery matters. The school has a website, which may be used by some parents of nursery-aged children.

### Parents and the day-to-day life of the nursery
Parent involvement in the day-to-day life of the nursery is generally discouraged, but staff are very approachable if a parent wants to discuss their child. There is no parent volunteer helping in the classroom.

Staff contact with parents is also minimal: parents usually make a pre-visit with their child and there is an open day at the start of the school year when they are invited to spend a short time viewing resources and the work displayed on the walls; they can approach staff informally at the beginning and end of sessions but need to make a special request if they want to discuss their child's life at school (field notes). There are no regular parent/staff meetings where staff and parents could get to know each other and the nursery teacher rated 'staff who share parents' values' as only of 'some' importance to an effective nursery (manager's interview).

### How parents are made to feel part of their child's education
The nursery staff display explanatory notices about the 'play' curriculum, for the parents' benefit. For example, a notice about 'Sand and Water Play' explains that this is '*calming and soothing to a shy, nervous or excited child, prompts the child to question and reason, leads towards scientific and mathematical discovery and encourages concentration' (notice).*

Field notes identify photographs displayed around the room, show children engaged in activities and giving a picture of the work and life of the place (field notes). Children's work is regularly sent home so parents have some idea of what they have been producing. Some children are confident enough to explain their work and play at the nursery to their parents (parent interview 05).

With regard to understanding their children's progress, parents are sometimes involved in ad hoc conversations with nursery staff at the beginning and end of sessions when they are able to chat briefly with staff. This arrangement seems acceptable to parents *'I can always go and speak to the teacher. I've always been able to'* (parent interview 01).

Parents are consulted, as a matter of policy, when there are concerns from the staff that a child may have special needs (manager's interview).

Although records kept on children for sending on to the Reception classes are there for parents to see *'if they want to'*, they are not presented formally for parents' scrutiny and parents do not receive formal written reports on their children's progress (manager's interview). However, parents are shown a portfolio of their children's work that the staff put together. Photographs of their children involved in different activities are included here (possibly to show the child's choices and varied life at school).

In plans of the infant block where the nursery is housed, there is no room designated for the sole use of parents. There is a 'hut' in the playground used by mothers and toddlers, and this has served as a parents' room.

## What's expected of parents?
When children first start at the nursery, parents are expected to give information on the ethnic origin, religion and mother tongue of their children (City Council letter).

School newsletters are given out to parents of nursery children, which implies that what is expected of other parents is also expected of nursery parents. Much of the page space is devoted to advertising parish events and opportunities for parents to come together socially. Parents of some nursery children feel they are expected to take part in these (parent interview 02). The newsletters frequently contain evidence that parents have attended Parent, Friends and Teachers Association (PFTA) functions to raise money for the school. This implies that nursery parents are also expected to assist with or contribute to fund raising.

The nursery staff expect parents to volunteer to accompany children on visits and walks (manager's interview, parents' interview 06). There is no evidence that parents are partners in decision making about the curriculum. Some parents feel that the work children do at home is valued by staff (parent interviews). The sole input parents make to their children's assessment appears to be in the case of consultation over special needs.

## Parent education
Although the school, in liaison with the LEA, offers outreach projects for parents, the nursery offers little or nothing by itself, nor seems to contribute to those projects.

## Handbook
The nursery handbook for parents is generally very clear and the curriculum is explained in accessible language. The only educational jargon used is 'baseline assessment'. Parents seem to find it adequate for their needs: *'They'd given me like a little booklet…all about what they're gonna be doing and how the sessions are all split'* (parent interview 01). Parents clearly understand the admissions criteria (interviews) and this is important, as children with a nursery place are not automatically offered a school place. The handbook suggests that the ethos is quite prescriptive, spelling things out clearly for parents.

**Portfolios**

Parents are given children's portfolios of work to read at the end of the year. It is presumed that nursery staff talk through the portfolio items with parents as if they expect them to understand them, because it is not clear what each item 'is' or what the context for the 'work' was, or how work shows progression. Annotations may be present but they are in the teacher's own code. Parents are not 'in on' the day-to-day assessment.


**F ETHOS**

**The atmosphere**

One aim of the Nursery, as explained in policy documents, is to provide an environment that is welcoming to all. The staff have a planned routine to welcome children (NNEB daily planning sheet), but parents and carers, although greeted on arrival and departure are not encouraged to stay. Indeed the gates are kept locked and opened only to allow children to be dropped off and picked up. Parents are expected to leave their children as quickly as possible because the nursery teacher believes *'if a mum stays, it causes jealousy from others whose mums haven't stopped'.*

Although, non-denominational, this nursery has a distinctive, overt Christian ethos with a bias towards Roman Catholicism: there is a small shrine to St. Mary and the children say prayers before snacks and before leaving at the end of sessions. There are visits from the priest and children visit the church for Mass. Our research field notes indicate that there is very little evidence of the acknowledgement of other cultures and other religions: there seem to be no musical instruments from a range of cultures, or a range of songs from across the world or displays depicting different versions of family life- although 'talking about families' is planned in the Summer scheme of work. 'Trying different foods' is an activity for the summer term and the foods suggested are rice crispy cake, gingerbread men, fruit salad and jelly, pinpointing an omission of the diversity of foods from different cultures, especially as the nursery is part of a wider multicultural conurbation.

The staff promote self-esteem in the children through praise, the displays and through having an inclusive 'birthday celebration' routine. Praise is usually given for completing tasks or work. However, praise for ongoing effort and encouragement is less common. The displays include work done at home that shows a sensitivity and interest in the home education of the children. The staff generally have a good relationship with the children but occasionally (three times in four days of observations) staff are quick to correct children's understandings:

| |
|---|
| TEACHER asks after his baby. |
| TEACHER      "What's her name?" |
| BOY          "Sister." |
| TEACHER      "What's her name?" |
| BOY          "Sister." |
| TEACHER      "You don't call her sister do you?" Laughs. "Lisa. Her name's Lisa." |

A critical episode noted that some children are repeatedly reprimanded and field notes describe how the nursery nurse sometimes stereotypes gender roles, which goes unchallenged by the teacher. The parents appear to be unaware of these limitations and are generally satisfied with the performance of the nursery:

*…….it's a very secure, happy little place. It's the routine that is very useful, particularly for (Child X), she needs routine it's gently persuasive, I think things that she didn't want to do at the beginning, she's now doing. She hasn't been pushed into it, though. She didn't want to paint, and no one said to her, you've got to paint, but she's now doing it. She's been gently cajoled and persuaded and encouraged. She gets a lot of social interaction of course with the other children there and it's a Christian environment, although it's not just Catholic, it's very Christian focused. Mrs. Y takes a very moral approach to things, and that's how they deal with children who maybe need a little gentle reprimand. I mean, the way it's dealt with is exactly as I would like it to be dealt with. It's a busy little nursery, there's lots of resources there, it's well stocked, comparatively, there's lot of environments, there's a library area, there's lots of things that she can get stuck into,*

*places she can go, there's involvement with the larger parish, they can go to the mass in Church, and then there's a bit of involvement that they have with reception, and then, it's a happy little secure environment'* (parent 07).

The ethos appears to be consistent with the expectations most of the parents hold of the nursery class. A Christian ethos is what many of the parents want, to this extent there is consistency between home and nursery class with similar values being promoted.

There is no formal, written policy on behaviour for the nursery and no evidence of a set of classroom rules. However, medium term planning notes show there is a learning objective *'to behave appropriately and relate to other children'*, which involves taking turns, waiting till an adult can attend to you, being polite to adults, listening to and following instructions. Staff constantly reinforce and model this behaviour.

In their everyday interaction with children, nursery staff do appear to see socialising skills as being of great importance and both constantly remind children about good manners, being kind, sharing, listening and not hitting (field notes). At times they also provide good models themselves:

Nursery Nurse: *"Thank you very much BOY 7 (aged 3:5) for giving them out..."*

**Staff communication, co-operation and collegiality**
Within the nursery, the two members of staff have worked together for 12 years and they broadly share the same goals, philosophy and methodology. OfSTED reported that they work well as a team.

The nursery nurse declines from certain aspects of the job (writing plans, baseline assessments) and this could be seen as being uncooperative, especially as our observations and discussions with staff suggest that workload has become a 'bone of contention' for the nursery teacher. However, those feelings remain tacit, as the teacher does not demand more of her colleague. She does not question her own responsibilities as manager, she recognises 'the buck stops' with her and she takes on all the paperwork alone because she feels the NNEB's pay doesn't warrant her having to do work for the nursery at home (manager's interview).

Indeed, the teacher aims to be collegial, making sure the Nursery Nurse (NN) is given a say in what is on offer for the children or what should be said to parents about children (manager's interview). The two have clearly some unspoken arrangement about the way they work, with much mutually agreed.

Although the nursery staff sometimes take their children to join the reception class children when visitors give informative talks, there seems to be little communication with colleagues in the Early Years (EY) department. The nursery teacher is not sure whether the nursery nurses in Reception have the same duties as her own colleague. She feels that job descriptions need reviewing. There is an 'us and them' slant in the manager's interview.

The management structure has clear demarcations because the school prospectus gives a hierarchical frame to staffing in the nursery by citing different posts by status: Vis-à-vis 'teacher' and 'nursery nurse'. Field notes (and parent interviews) point to parents being conscious of status (citing 'proper teacher' versus 'a sort of helper') and preferring to discuss their child's progress with the teacher whenever possible. However, this does leave everyone clear about each other's roles.

**Support for staff**
Both members of the nursery staff have access to the Infant school's in-service training (INSET) provision and to LEA training courses. The nursery teacher has taken part in training (Baseline Assessment) but interviews suggest that neither member has been on many courses recently.

The nursery staff are expected to 'bid' to the EY co-ordinator for consideration alongside the Reception, Y1 and Y2 staff for in-service training courses. The nursery staff do not appreciate this (manager's interview) and it appears to set up an element of competition.

**The nursery as a learning community**
The nursery has yet to become a truly 'learning community': the staff share what they know with each other but seem rather isolated and not 'open' to learning from new groups.

Staff share their evaluations at the end of most sessions with each other, where tasks and organisational arrangements are assessed against the question '*what activities are the children getting most out of?*' (manager interview). They make changes to later sessions, in the light of conjoint insight.

There is little input from students (who would bring new understandings from college and a new face to the children) or from colleagues in KS1 who are likely to have useful experience to share. Visits by students were halted because the staff found it too disruptive in '*such a small space*'. Exchanging of students between the Reception and the nursery class was not popular with nursery staff (manager's interview).

The nursery nurse attends school based INSET only when it has an Early Years focus and does not attend staff meetings (primary school headteacher's structured interview). Both members of staff have firm, positive convictions about their own practices, *'did not change anything'* after OfSTED and feel that often in service training is a waste of time (manager's interview).

The nursery is not involved in any 'partnerships' such as EYDCP and the manager is *'not sure if it's a good thing to try working 'across centres'* (interview).

**Ethos as portrayed through displays**
Some displays, invite children's investigation such as fish tanks, gerbils, plants, magnifying glasses, shells, and non-fiction books. This supports the staff's philosophy that children learn through first hand experience. Some parents report that the nursery staff display work a child has produced at home and this is likely to promote children's self-esteem.

Displays of work around the nursery are mostly of art activities (collages, stick prints) that have been led by one of the staff (field notes). As there is heavy emphasis placed on an end product it is reasonable to conclude that work by children that is put on display is not always at their level. There is also some evidence that displays are not always changed regularly as some of the children's work on display during the fieldwork was produced by the previous year's intake. The staff also use purchased posters and charts (field notes). The staff say they adopt a child-centred view, yet they do not always put work on show that is the authentic work of three-to-four year-olds.

**Philosophy**
The prevailing declared philosophy in the nursery class is one of children learning through first hand experience rather than through didactic transmission of knowledge. The policy states that children learn through play, but *'play with a purpose'* and that children need to experience both *'spontaneous'* child-centred play and activities '*structured and guided*' by adults. The staff strongly agree with each other in this perspective and in their daily provision purposefully set up opportunities for children to engage in both free choice activities and adult-led activities, however, there was more evidence of structured focused group activity than free-choice. There is some provision for free choice activities in all areas of experience (OfSTED report, field notes) and this results in a busy productive set of children, with some children beginning to concentrate and persevere for sustained periods of time. Adults rarely intervene in the free choice activities either indoors or outside which leaves children to co-operate, interact and collaborate without adult intervention (field notes).

Adults do intervene in Language, Mathematics, Design and Technology and art and craft activities. These are at times over-directed (OfSTED) and mostly staff have a desired end product in mind (the same type of thing for each child) and tend to guide children towards that (lesson observations). This inhibits children's creativity (OfSTED, observations) and would appear to contradict the staff's policy and beliefs. Children don't appear to contribute to their portfolio of work and so are not directly involved in self-assessment.

Children are listened to with formal sessions arranged for feedback- where adults and children recall what they have done or (through Circle Time) explain what they like doing in and around the nursery (Vignettes, field notes). But there was little evidence to show that adults acted upon what they learn from the child's voice to change what happens in the nursery.


**G CURRICULUM**
**Policies**
The Nursery Policy which is short and covers the nursery's aims, ethos and curriculum as well as many 'sub' policies in a general way (admissions, special needs, parents, safety, behaviour). The termly Scheme of work for the Autumn gives details on learning objectives, proposed activities and what teachers 'should' do as does the termly Scheme of work for Spring and Summer.

There is clear evidence that the curriculum on offer is based on the Early Learning Goals (ELGs). The Nursery Policy states this clearly and the termly schemes use ELGs as the foundation from which to develop learning objectives and activities. In addition, the class teacher has recently taken account of 'Stepping Stones' (see glossary) identified by QCA (DfEE, 2000) in medium and short-term planning (field notes).

Policies appear to be regularly updated. The nursery teacher is responsible for this but planning is checked by the EY co-ordinator. The documents appear to be working documents. The termly plans are annotated, showing where changes and adaptations have taken place.

**Balance and breadth**
The curriculum provided in this nursery class is reasonably broadly based and balanced – across, language and literacy, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative and physical development.

The OfSTED inspectors observed many practical learning experiences in intellectual, physical and personal development that successfully encouraged learning 'across the curriculum'. However, our research observations indicate little access to musical instruments, although singing is common and music is planned for in the medium term plans.

The nursery classroom, is organised into different curriculum/play areas which indicates a fundamental intention to introduce children to different areas of experience. Our field notes (and teacher interview) suggest that there has been an effort to improve provision in art and craft. However, this may have resulted in an overemphasis on 'learning the colours' at the expense of genuinely creative work.

Items in children's portfolios show they have been working within different areas of the curriculum (free drawing, sorting and matching, weather mapping, copying letters, beginning to form letters). Photographs included in the portfolios also show children engaged in finger painting, blowing up balloons, listening to an Easter assembly, and going on a field walk. Practitioner tick lists are evidence of children's involvement in activities concerned with number, money, shape and emergent writing.

Notes provided by the nursery teacher (and observations from the researcher) are clear indications that the two members of staff make a conscious effort to change daily activities. The range of what

is on offer for children is changed in small world play, construction apparatus and floor play and for mathematical and scientific exploration.

Children are introduced to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the nursery, and have had computers and software since 1998 (OfSTED).  The computer is available 5 days a week (teacher's organisational notes) leading to children becoming more confident and proficient in the use of ICT (OFSTED).

To provide the outdoor curriculum, the nursery has an exclusive playground, funded by the LEA, with provision for a range of curriculum activities.  Hard surfaces, grassed areas and built apparatus offer opportunities for gross motor physical activity (climbing, sliding, crawling), as well as social skills such as turn taking.  Picnic benches and the summer house have the potential to invite socio-dramatic/role play; bird tables and planted borders potentially promote knowledge and understanding of the world; a builder's bench and tools encourage children to use motor skills, design and make.  Tricycles and other such toys as well as small apparatus (bats/balls) are provided regularly (teachers notes) and there appears to be 'daily access to a range of equipment outdoors' (researchers observations).

For further physical development the nursery children are time tabled for access to the Infant hall one period for the morning children and one for the afternoon children per week.

**Practitioner emphasis**
The Nursery Teacher in interview strongly argued that the curriculum for the under fives should represent a fusion of education and care and this view was corroborated in practice.  During observations, the nursery staff gave balance to both 'caring' for the personal safety and well-being of the children and developing them intellectually, socially and morally.

The nursery staff see socialising skills as being of great importance and emphasis is placed on good manners with frequent reference to being kind and sharing.  Priority is placed on personal, social, emotional and language and communication (manager's interview) but they have recently '*raised the profile of creative work*' (by making those activities the adult-led activities) because they feel children miss out on this when they reach Reception.  There is alongside this, the daily provision for a range of activities and broad planning that includes, careful Personal Social Education (PSE) planning through the Veritas Scheme and academic planning through Early Learning Goals (ELG) derived schemes of work, taking account of QCA, DfEE (2000) 'Stepping Stones'. So there is a balance between social and academic development for the children; although staff don't always record progress in all academic areas (see assessment, below).

**Assessment**
The Nursery policy explains that the staff use both formative and summative methods of assessment.  At the beginning of the year a brief assessment of the child is written and during the year observations of children are noted down. Termly Schemes of work indicate that formative assessment practices such as 'noted observations' and 'inter-staff discussion' should feed into record keeping.

Each child has pieces of work saved in a workbook and dated, (which are looked at for progress).  Similarly, the staff collect pieces of work and put them into individual portfolios. The nursery teacher described the portfolios as *'basically pieces of work we've kept….they can be anything, artwork, pencil and paper work, photographs…. where you can see a stage'*.  They are sometimes annotated by the teacher and used to see progression (manager's interview).  It was not clear how photographs included in the portfolio are used for assessment (possibly to jog a teacher's memory of an event and the child's participation/involvement in that event).  For Language, Literacy and mathematics there is a summative teacher assessment completed half termly.

At the end of the year a record sheet and examples of work go up to each child's Reception teacher. The local authority baseline assessment is also carried out and copies are sent to

Reception teachers and the school's Head teacher. The nursery teacher carries out all the baseline assessments and this exercise has shifted her focus (from having chiefly observed '*can they go to the toilet themselves*? *can they hold a pencil*?') to the criteria used in the baseline scheme (manager's interview).

Termly schemes of work and medium term planning documents give quite specific guidance on formative assessment methods to be used for summative purposes in each area of experience:
- Communication, Language and Literacy - observation, staff discussion, looking at 'work' to assess progress. This information is recorded for baseline and the school record card.
- Personal and Social Education - observation to feed into Baseline and 'school record sheet'
- Mathematical/Knowledge and Understanding of the world - 'working alongside children in practical activities'; talking with children individually and in groups to assess the children's knowledge. This information is recorded for baseline assessment and school records'.
- Physical development - regular observation and 'ongoing assessment' during activities

As well as all this, some sampling takes place – children carry out pieces of work to be sent to the school (writing name, colouring, drawing, cutting, emergent writing). There is no assessment specified for Religious Education (RE).

*The content of the teachers observation notes*
An examination of the teacher's notebooks illustrated the range of observations conducted on individual children. These included check lists and diary observations. The following is an example:

The observation notes made by staff on 7 children between September and November 2000 mainly focused on:
- Children's behaviour (settling in behaviour, ability to listen, non-compliance with behaviour expected).
- Children's emotional reaction to classroom events (getting upset/afraid of teacher shouting).
- Children's interactions with peers (horseplay/befriending).
- Children's personal competencies (go to the toilet alone).
- Children's speech and language competence (mostly where there was speech delay).
- What children could do in relation to the overt curriculum (spell name/ point to pictures in books/ sound out words/ count to 13, draw).

Comments on personal, social and emotional aspects outnumbered others. This could be given emphasis because the class teacher believes strongly that '*Nursery is about socialising*' (field notes).

The teacher explained that the purpose of her observational notes was to reflect on practice, to support feedback to parents and to devise learning plans for individuals.

The class teacher makes occasional reflective notes based on an overview of her observations. The purpose seems to be to guide future practice, based on the needs of some individuals. For example, one such note states that because many children are seen to have underdeveloped speech and language and social skills, the staff deployment and pupil organisation will be changed '*when thought appropriate*'. One member of staff will direct an activity while the other collects together a group of children to '*stimulate language, extend vocabulary, encourage the less enthusiastic and help children play together*'.

There is daily oral feedback on children's progress to parents (on request and by the nursery teacher only) and the portfolio of work samples is given to them at the end of the year (field notes).

OfSTED inspectors described how staff carefully observe and record information about the attainment and progress of children under five and then use records effectively to plan individual's future work and inform weekly planning.

**Curriculum planning**

There is evidence of short, medium and long term planning. The nursery teacher has the responsibility of writing the long and medium term plans. These are organised under different ELGs and comprise notes on learning objectives, activities by teachers and children, and resources and assessment techniques to be used by the teacher or nursery nurse. They contain planned opportunities to revisit learning objectives across terms.

Daily plans are a mixed bag of notes, comprising aide memoire to the teacher herself about what to do (e.g. '*welcoming children back*'); which games/ puzzles to put out; which story to read; what the substantive topic will be for the directed activity (e.g. '*the colour yellow*'); what techniques/skills to tackle with children (e.g. 'printing'/cutting out). Daily plans provide a useful skeleton for the staff's work during sessions and are influenced by discussion about the next day's planning at the end of each school day. Alongside the planning sheets, the schemes of work offer satisfactory guidance for teachers when planning daily lessons (OfSTED).

It is probably true that curriculum planning aims to promote continuous, steady progress from the nursery to Y6 (OfSTED) because the nursery curriculum is planned to be in line with that used in KS1 and is monitored by the EY Co-ordinator.

There is an apparent intention to strike a balance between starting from what children can do and starting from what they can't do. This is evidenced in Termly Planning notes which guide teachers in relation to different ELGs. For example, in relation to communication, speech and language: *'teachers should talk with children, wait for a response, not rush them'; 'teachers should acknowledge all speech then encourage wherever possible'; 'children should be asked for opinions'*. In relation to 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World', plans report, *'using children's own experience to draw out understanding of the senses' - 'on your way home look at the leaves on the ground…'*. Similarly across areas of the curriculum, the stress is on teachers playing <u>with</u> children and picking up children's understanding before stimulating or promoting development in that area. The staff do not believe in guiding home corner play in any way. In contrast, (in some subject areas) there is a strong steer towards teacher intervention, instruction and guidance (Design Technology [DT], IT).

There is no evidence in daily plans to suggest how the staff ensure differentiation between age or ability groups or individuals. The plans are simply entitled 'Nursery'.

**The role of visits and visitors**

Visits are specified in both medium term planning and termly schemes of work. This suggests that visits are seen as enriching the curriculum.

In the Autumn term, the plan for RE suggests that children and staff visit the church *'by ourselves to look and talk about what we can see'*. The objective is to make children aware that the church is a special place and '*God's house*'. A second visit involves the children bringing in a harvest offering, this enables them to join in with the school and '*to understand that not everyone has the same across the world and so sharing is good*'. The children are taken to mass in the church once every half term. A visit to the school 'field' is planned in the Spring term scheme, '*to begin to appreciate the wonder of new life*'. This is linked to RE and to Jesus' resurrection. The purpose of these visits appears therefore to be religious/spiritual/moral instruction and to a certain extent inducting children into school events.

To encourage children to observe and talk about the weather, changes in the weather and the beauty of nature, 'walks' are planned for the Spring term. Similarly a visit to a farm is an opportunity for children to experience and learn about farm animals.

Overall, the evidence suggests that visits for this nursery class are primarily used for the promotion of religious/spiritual/moral instruction and to enrich children's knowledge and understanding of the natural world. The Parish priest visits the children at least once a month to explain some of the things he does in the parish and at church. Occasionally parents and others may be asked to make a formal visit to the nursery class to explain their work ('a dad who works as a policeman/ambulance driver/fireman'). The Countryside Commission 'animal man' has also visited and brought in animals (field notes/ termly schemes) to show the children.

The role played by visitors is mainly to give children information. There is some evidence (scant) of specialists coming in to enrich the curriculum, specifically the 'library lady' who pays regular visits to introduce children to new books and involve them in story-telling (manager's interview).


**H PEDAGOGY**
**Practice**
Research observations have noted that pedagogy is driven by the staff's firm views on early years teaching and learning, although the bases of the curriculum derive from QCA's (DfEE) Early Learning Goals (Manager: *"It's written down – with the 'Stepping Stones' it's sort of Government led anyhow'*).

The nursery is always set up before the children arrive (teachers notes/observations). A range of 'free choice' activities are provided which staff describe as 'child-centred'. Sometimes they have chosen the activities with reference to the 'learning through play cards' (nursery teacher's notes). It is not clear if the activities are unsupervised or have specific intentions. Staff are conscious to provide a variety and balance among organisational arrangements (nursery timetable) and each arrangement is linked to particular activities such as:

Arrangement 1) Indoors and outdoors, individual children move around activities at their own pace. This is linked to a range of 'free choice' activities such as home corner/books/mark-making/computer/sand/puzzles/large and small outdoor apparatus. Teachers have little involvement with children as they explore the 'free choice' activities - although in the termly planning there is a written intention to 'work alongside children'.

Arrangement 2) Children are expected or asked to join in small-group adult-directed activities (usually indoors and linked to art/craft). This is a feature of weekly plans. There are two adult-initiated activities every session. Staff spend a lot of time in this (field note), suggesting that the communication between staff and children is of a particular nature (more directive than negotiated). Teachers appear to be primarily motivated to get children to finish the adult led activities in art and craft - to the adult's specification.

Arrangement 3) Children come together for 'group time' which is always linked to an adult guided/led activity such as question and answer sessions, looking at picture books with children, 'doing a little lesson' – the nursery nurse/teacher giving input or relaying knowledge about shape, colour/doing a sorting activity). Children are divided into two groups 'randomly' (there is no 'key person' to child system), and are assigned to one or other member of staff for a dedicated 'group-time' daily (Class timetable). The content of this session is decided when weekly planning takes place.

Arrangement 4) This is when the whole class comes together (always linked to a daily tidying up routine and a daily story telling session).

The teacher directed activities provide 'routines' that have been planned to include scaffolding – tasks are broken down, special features are emphasised and the activities are sequenced. The following example of Arrangement 2 was described by the teacher as the first stage in a 'junk modelling' project; the second stage would be completed the following day when the children would paint their models:

TEACHER 1 "*We've got a big job to do with these boxes. We've got to change them into something. Have a think. You could change them into a car, a castle, a train, and a house... Roll up your sleeves... There are lots of different bits - shiny bits for lights... Use the sticky glue to stick the things together. Start with a big box... If you find the bits hard to stick on, let me know 'cos I've got special tape...but try sticking first. I'll put some soapy water in a bowl in the sink for washing sticky hands.*"

The teacher often felt the need to prompt the children to add more to their models:

BOY 1          "*This is a boat.*"
TEACHER 1    "*Could it have a bit more on it? An engine or places for people to sit?*"
GIRL 6          "*It's an aeroplane.*"
TEACHER 1    "*Are you going to put wings on it?*

The main criteria for success with this design and technology activity seemed to be that the component parts held together with glue, and if that failed with tape. Praise was given to every child as they finished their artefact.

The following accounts of adult-directed language and mathematics activities are illustrative of the activities carried out in Arrangement 3:

*NURSERY NURSE  sits on a chair facing the children "Today I'll describe someone. You guess who it is. Ready? Listen. Who's wearing blue jeans with a dragon on and a red shirt? Who is it?"*
*JOHN -              "john"*
*NURSERY Nurse       "John  who?"*
*JOHN -              "john."*
*NURSERY Nurse describes each member of the group in turn - using mainly clothing but occasionally hair and eye colour. She insists that each 'guesser' supply first and family names.*

Adult directed activities also include 'Story time' and whole class demonstrations (e.g. of cooking) which may at times be unduly extended so that the children lose concentration.  Although a number of effective strategies are employed by the teacher/nursery officer to regain their attention (e.g. questioning and 'miming' the mixing of ingredients):

NURSERY Nurse is demonstrating how jam tarts are made
TEACHER to the CHILDREN *"You mix the butter in with the flour. (She mimes.) Show me... We've got to mix until we can't see the butter any more, it's all mixed in with the flour."*

Direct instruction and description is also applied in other contexts, particularly in mathematics and science:

NURSERY Nurse:  *"We kept getting rectangles today. It was our most popular shape."*
She removes a square, triangle, rectangle and circle from the bag and names and describes each one.

The following interaction was recorded as the teacher was observed by a group of children as she cleaned the gerbil cage:

TEACHER:  *"Yes. Every animal and every person has to pooh and wee and every person and every animal has germs. Animals don't have toilets so we have to be careful of their germs. We go to the toilet but we must always wash our hands after, to wash away the germs. (The CHILDREN look very interested.) Where do you think I'm going to put this? (CHILDREN - 'In the bin'.) I'm going to wrap it in newspaper first then put it in the bin."*

Children spend more time making free choices (inside and out) than engaging with adult-directed activities.  The difference between pedagogy outside and indoors is that outdoors there is more

stress on children's own exploration with little adult intervention. Indoors children's learning is directed by teachers three times a day, albeit for short bursts of time (i.e. in adult-led activity, in group time, in whole class time).

**The quality of interaction**
The quality of interactions can be good but are generally short. The quantity seems generally high - the Adult-Child Interaction Scale (see ARNETT, 1989) shows both adults have similar characteristics in their interactive behaviour with children. They both spend very little time not interacting with the children and they (very frequently) listen attentively to children, pay positive attention to children as individuals and talk to children on a level they can understand while kneeling, bending or sitting at the child's level to establish better eye contact:

| |
|---|
| *GIRL* walks past. She is wearing a hat and carrying a handbag from the home corner *"I'm going to the pub."*<br>*NURSERY NURSE*     *"OK see you later... What are you going to do at the pub?"*<br>*GIRL*     *"I work there."*<br>*NURSERY NURSE*     *"What do you do?"*<br>*GIRL*     *"Have a drink."* |

Observations of adult led activities show the nursery staff's repertoire to contain a variety of strategies which engage the children: repeating what children said as confirmation of a positive oral contribution; chattering while doing routine tasks and giving a commentary on their own actions which prompted children to think of things to say; asking children open questions about their families and about other first hand experiences. These more open forms of verbal interaction were balanced against more controlling ones, such as asking closed quiz-like questions, possibly to keep the children's attention, (e.g. 'what colour is that?') and giving orders and instructions – 'put that to dry'.

Both members of staff use modelling and demonstrating as interactive techniques, for example, when playing a game with children (when they also give a running commentary on what they are doing) or when showing how to clean out gerbils. Children join in and copy (field notes).

Staff appear mostly to differentiate by treating individuals differently during interactions, by changing the language used, asking more or less of children, using strategies suggested by the SENCO (field notes). In addition, what has been learned from reflection on sessions sometimes leads to one member of staff assembling a group with like needs to reinforce learning. Formative feedback is probably not a strong factor in continuity and progression. Many feedback comments were evaluative: 'Beautiful!' 'Lovely!'

**Special needs**
When the nursery staff need guidance in supporting children with special needs they liaise with the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). There are procedures for identifying children with special needs, based on staff observations in daily nursery life. Once concerns are raised staff follow the Code of Practice (CoP) (telephone interview). They note the concerns, support the child with classroom activities, then, if no progress is made they see the SENCO from the school and involve parents. They seek the assistance of parents at home to support and reinforce activities agreed with the school SENCO. They use the formal checklist of criteria for stages on the CoP and involve other outside agencies if need be (manager's structured interview). Every Autumn the EY co-ordinator asks for an audit of children's special needs (Audit document).

Speech delay is the only special need reported in documents (Scheme of Work, observation notes on children). Children, with speech delay, are monitored by the staff, and sometimes one member of staff will make a conscious effort to focus on a group including children with speech delay, and specifically encourage talk (formative change to planning is evident in the nursery teacher's notes). If children start with an identified need, staff assist with any programme that has been laid out and contribute their own advice and expertise. For example, one child had attended a nursery for

children with special needs before this one and s/he continues to go back to the SEN nursery in the afternoons (field notes).

**The role of play and direct instruction**
In the eyes of the staff, both play and direct instruction are conduits for children's learning. In practice the children are learning through play (OfSTED) and also through direct instruction: they make steady progress in the development of language and literacy and mathematical skills (OfSTED) probably due to the regular, focused, group activities. However, the nursery nurse sometimes makes inaccurate statements (in terms of curriculum content), and establishes or reinforces inaccurate concepts. Although the teacher does not verbally challenge her, she sometimes models more appropriate practice.

**The role of the teacher and nursery nurse.**
Indoors, free choice activities run simultaneously with adult-directed activities. Adults appear to spend this session at their designated activity with little formative intervention into children's learning in other areas e.g. home corner play. They play the role of instructor. Observations show they leave their seated position mostly to 'clean up' or offer other support in the role of carer. They then take a supervisory role over tidying up while children play outdoors. At the end of sessions they read children a story. Overall, it would seem that staff in this nursery lean towards a balance of roles: instructor, carer, supervisor. Although planning notes suggest adults should be co-players with children, there is little evidence of staff in this role from observations and vignettes.

**Developing particular dispositions**
Strong attention is given to developing a disposition towards reciprocity - developing team-player characteristics: weekly plans often stress how children must be supported and 'shown' how to 'work and play alongside' each other and learn to become part of a large group. Both members of staff rated highly on the Adult-Child Interaction scale for encouraging children to exhibit sharing and co-operation and to exercise self-control and be undisruptive to the group. Parent interviews report their children are 'learning to share', 'learning to mix'.

**I COMMUNITY OUTREACH OR INVOLVEMENT**
The school runs a course for parents called 'Helping your child with Literacy'. This is run in liaison with the LEA's adult education department. The manager also mentioned a similar 'Number' course. The school also hosts evening classes run through the LEA adult education department on computing (parent interview). Although some parents may take up those outreach projects, training is not offered routinely.

A Mother and Toddler Club meets on the school site (newsletter). Although there are no details about the philosophy or strategy employed by the group or whether it involves 'training', it is likely to offer learning opportunities for mothers/carers and perhaps some support. However, the nursery itself seems to play no role in this venture.

The infant school provides before- and after-school child-care facilities, run by the senior mid-day supervisor (7 am – 6pm. £2 per hour). Currently two of the morning children and one of the afternoon children make use of the facilities.

Although parents are not visited at home by the nursery staff, that there is emotional support for parents when necessary through the close liaison between priest, nursery and school (parent interview 02).

Sources of information
Profile
Field notes
Managers' Interviews
Parents' interviews
Termly Planning
Weekly planning
Nursery Policy
Nursery handbook for Parents
Daily notes from nursery staff
Maps drawn by researcher
OfSTED REPORT 1998
Vignettes of practice
Critical Episodes
SENs AUDIT
School prospectus
Curriculum information from walls of classroom
Children portfolio work
Nursery staff's written observations of children.
Nursery Timetable
Adult-Child interaction scale ratings
Nursery time-table.
Parent interviews
Staff observations

### 3.3    Nursery School

**A CENTRE PROFILE**
**Location, accommodation, intake**
This nursery school is in a large city suburb. It is sited in an area of small workshop/industrial premises and social housing.  The original Victorian back-to-back terraced housing was replaced by tower blocks in the 1960s.  There has been a recent regeneration programme to provide low-level social priority housing built in small cul-de-sacs and a small park with grassed areas, trees and children's play facilities. It is separated from one of the local primary schools by a high wall.

Each of the four classrooms (two on each floor) has its own bathroom area with cloakroom facilities, four child size toilet cubicles and washbasins, an adult size sink and storage for paints and water-play equipment.  It is planned that as funding becomes available each area will be refurbished and include a shower.  A soft play area has been installed in one of the upper classroom's veranda area (field notes).

There is a Family room and a Resources room on the upper floor to which parents have access. School meals are cooked on site (school information booklet).  An extension at the rear of the nursery built from City Challenge funds acts as a Community room.  This is used for training and meetings and used by a few local organisations including a Portage (peripatetic practitioners who work with young special needs children in the home) group (manager interview 2) It is purpose built with toilet facilities and also houses the Toy and Book lending library (plans).  This facility is open every Thursday to parents to borrow items for home use.  It is run by a member of staff and two parent helpers (field notes). The school is open during term times from 9am – 3pm with a flexible collecting time to 3.15pm.  It closes at 2pm on Wednesdays (school information booklet).

The nursery school is situated within an Education Action Zone (EAZ) and serves the local area. It is always fully subscribed, particularly as local primary schools are without nursery classes. Twenty-five percent of the current intake however comes from outside the immediate catchment area – these tend to be from families who moved out of the area after the children started and a few whose parent/s work in the centre of the city (field notes).  Until recently the population tended to be transient. With improvement in the housing in the local area the population has stabilized with only 2 or 3 children moving each year (research diary).  Attendance is reported as *'very good with parents being conscientious about bringing their children to school and providing an explanation if they are absent'* (OfSTED).

The nursery school was the first purpose built nursery school in the city and its aim was, then as now, to serve the local community. The population statistics from the EAZ is as follows
Unemployment 23% (31% of the male population)
Single parents 12.2% (11.7% female single parents)

The population around the centre is culturally diverse and there are a number of children for whom English is an additional language (EAL) on roll (see list below).  Forty-seven percent of the children are eligible for free meals, a figure well above the national average.

The percentages of children from different ethnic backgrounds is:
African-Caribbean      57%
White UK                   22%
Mixed heritage          11%
Indian                        6%
East African              2%
Vietnamese               1%
Pakistani                  1%

There are 110 full time equivalent places available (school booklet). The children start at the Nursery school in the September after their third birthday and remain for one year. In the occasional event of spaces becoming available during the year children may be admitted who become three after September, they then stay for the remaining part of the current year and the next one (field notes, manager interview 2).

**Funding**
The nursery school is funded by the LEA but operates on a partially delegated budget (school booklet, manager interview 2). In 1999 the nursery school managed on £243,600 with almost 90% allocated to personnel costs of teaching and non-teaching staff. Rent, bills and equipment costs accounted for the remaining 10%. The nursery school receives additional funding from Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for its 'Beacon Status', from the EAZ and some charities. It also receives voluntary contributions from the parents of £2 each week to pay for drinks, cookery ingredients, birthday and Christmas presents, entertainments, extra equipment and to subsidise outings (school booklet).

**B STAFFING**
The four classes are primarily supported by a qualified teacher and a nursery nurse although the headteacher tries to have at least three adults in each room whenever possible. These may be Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) or others employed to support special needs, student placements and/or voluntary help. All teachers, including the headteacher have teaching qualifications, either teaching/PGCE certificates, or degrees in education.

**Roles and responsibilities**
The headteacher has overall responsibility for the organisation, management and control of the school including managing the budget. She determines and presents an appropriate curriculum with regards to the needs of the pupils and provides appropriate training for her staff. She holds the post of Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO), co-ordinates a curriculum area and estimates spending at least 6 hours of scheduled time per week with the children. This involves regular timetabled activities but may increase if there is a necessity to cover for absent staff. The deputy headteacher assists the headteacher in the planning, the organisation and administration of the nursery school. She is also responsible for a class and co-ordinates a curriculum area.

The headteacher believes that the role of the nursery has changed in that it has become much more community based with a multi-agency aspect in providing a range of services as well as education. There is more management flexibility with the increased finance but this has to be balanced by increased accountability. On balance she feels that it is probably a more demanding role than in the past.

The teachers are responsible for promoting the general progress and well being of their children by planning and delivering the curriculum, assessing its impact and reporting to parents (manager interview 1). Teachers are supported by staff with Nursery Nurse (NNEB) or National Vocational Qualification and one unqualified LSA. Their main role is to promote the general progress and well-being of the children (manager interview 1) although this has become more curriculum focused and professional in recent years with a move to take on more responsibilities, attend staff meetings and be part of the professional development programme. Nursery nurses also have responsibility for a curriculum area. Planning with teachers and assessing and reporting progress has become the norm and presents a management issue for the headteacher in relation to remuneration which she can resolve only by offering training advice and opportunities (manager interview 2).

Eighteen of the twenty-four staff (including the lunchtime supervisors) are white UK heritage. The other cultural/ethnic groups represented are 3 of Black Caribbean heritage and 3 Asian. This mix does not reflect accurately that of the locality – all the teachers, including the headteacher are white UK heritage (manager interview 1). The staffing is stable with most employees having been

at the nursery for a minimum of 4 years (although many have been there 8+) (manager interview 1). According to the headteacher finding trained staff, filling new vacancies and retaining staff is not difficult, finding temporary qualified supply staff (to cover for sickness, courses etc.), however, does cause major concern (manager interview 1).

The nursery school employs secretarial support, a Building Services Supervisor, a cleaner, four kitchen staff and four dinnertime supervisors (field notes). A number of unpaid workers attend – at the time of the case study the nursery school had 3 timetabled parent volunteers and 4 placement students attending 4 days a week plus a number of other parents who helped out less formally.

A Speech Therapist, an Educational Psychologist, Health visitors and Social Workers attend when necessary for individual children and work with the nursery school staff as part of the nursery team (school information booklet).

## C MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP
The headteacher has been in post for the last four years and was praised by OfSTED as providing the nursery school with '*outstanding leadership.'* Together with the deputy head they give a *'very strong educational direction to the school. Both are very effective teachers and lead by example to promote high standards in all aspects of school life.'* (OfSTED, 2000).

The headteacher has a strong vision for the nursery school, she has good organisational skills, energy and personal attributes. She has leadership and management skills and is well liked and respected. The staff are co-operative to her demands and she is sensitive to their needs (observations and discussion with staff).

The headteacher feels it is important that staff share similar philosophies and work to policies which have been constructed collaboratively. Policies are formed from initial whole staff discussions from which the main points are pulled together by the headteacher and the co-ordinator and presented to the staff in draft form. The next phase is to discuss the draft until all agree. This process may take time but is seen as more effective because of the 'ownership' element (manager interview 2).

### Staff development and training
It is clear from the evidence that the headteacher is firmly committed to regular professional development (Inset/Staff meetings programme, monthly calendar to parents). All staff are encouraged to participate in professional development and in order to make this aim possible the headteacher has organised the nursery school to close early on Wednesday afternoons so that NNEBs and support staff can participate within their working hours.

Training is driven by a Development Plan. This is drawn up from a number of sources e.g. curriculum audit and headteacher observations etc. and is designed to identify the needs of the nursery school in terms of the children's education and the staff's professional development (School Development Plan).

A particular training issue may also surface from the programme of formal observations on staff made by the headteacher, where several staff members may identify similar areas for development. Training is managed by the deputy headteacher who has responsibility for staff development working in conjunction with the headteacher. In-service training (INSET) takes place in various forms - set sessions in the weekly staff meetings, INSET days, visits to other nursery schools and outside courses. Apart from identified needs, decisions to access certain courses are made according to the quality of the course, its relevance and whether or not it represents value for money. The development budget is small so balancing 'need' to 'cost' is an important consideration (manager interview 2).

*'Headlamp money has been available for one member of staff to visit Reggio Emilia in Italy last year, another member of staff was funded from income generated through training, with plans for a further two members to visit soon* (field notes).

Some staff members, including the headteacher have become trainers themselves, thus providing additional in-house expertise. The headteacher believes that, despite the preparation involved, training experience is a worthwhile development to pursue as it enhances self-esteem and increases awareness into the adult learning process (manager interview 2).

A staff appraisal system is in place and staff are regularly monitored by the headteacher (OfSTED 2000). The policy states that the purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to improve the quality of learning and teaching, to contribute towards an atmosphere of development and critical collaboration and to identify and share good practice (monitoring and evaluation policy).

Monitoring is on-going and fairly informal with the headteacher appraising performance through frequent conversations with the staff. In addition, each member of staff has a more formal annual meeting with the headteacher to review the year and talk about their ideas and feelings - what has been enjoyable, where support might be needed and future training needs. The headteacher uses this information to influence her future organisational plans and decisions (manager interview 2).

The headteacher also conducts a programme of observing staff working in the classroom. This is done both formally and informally using the Adult Style Observation sheets from the Effective Early Learning Project (EEL). Formal observations identify strengths and target areas for development. These targets are confidential, although if similar ones are identified for several members this may become an issue for INSET (see previous section - staff development and training). Staff also observe each other on a regular, informal basis.

The LEA's Early Years Advisor (Inspector) visits once a term to formally monitor the school with the headteacher. Strengths and weaknesses identified from this process are discussed with the whole staff (monitoring and evaluation policy).

### Whole school monitoring

During the first half of the Autumn Term a Behavioural Environment Checklist is carried out to look at the classroom environment. This checklist does not focus on the behaviour of individual pupils but rather on the classroom to consider where problems occur and why. It is suggested that the exercise be done with a colleague and used if necessary to form the basis of a Behavioural Environment Plan. This may mean a change in classroom layout or a staff meeting to refresh the group's understanding of the Behaviour Code and ensure they follow the same policies (Behaviour Environment Checklist and Plan).

A Quality Framework for Childcare Settings Exercise is also used to inform staff of the strengths and gaps in individual classroom provision. The headteacher and deputy may access these results to identify gaps in provision throughout the whole school. A curriculum audit is carried out by each curriculum co-ordinator to review and develop their curriculum area. This describes the present situation and 'flags up' future plans including training and identifies resource needs (curriculum audit sheet).

Staff are expected to consider and discuss comments from parents raised either informally or from the parent's questionnaire (a questionnaire devised by the setting to gain the views of parents) and also any informal comments made by visitors (monitoring and evaluation policy).

### D CLASSROOM ORGANISATION
### Pupil organisation
Children are placed into their classrooms to form as equal a mix of gender and ethnicity as possible, though children who are acquiring English as an additional language (EAL) go to one of

the two classes supported by bi/trilingual NNEBs  (field notes).  Each class is organised to have an equal age mix.  The range is between 3 years 10 months and 4 years 9 months except for one class with one child with special needs who is 5 years 7 months.

**Grouping arrangements**
Children work in a variety of groups according to the type of activity and their preferences.  The classroom is arranged and organised so that children can freely work collaboratively and individually (class plans).  Observations confirm this organisational structure.  There is a particular tendency for adults to plan to work with very small groups and also with individuals to maximise quality learning (observation 6).

**Room layout**
The nursery school scores consistently high ECERS ratings for room arrangement, indoor space furniture and furnishings (ECERS- R).  Each classroom is designed to occupy the same space although the upper floor classrooms benefit from the extra space from the overhanging balconies.

Each classroom is set out in areas to provide opportunities for:
- creative/art/craft play
- free writing
- mathematics
- reading/book browsing
- imaginative play
- large construction play
- science/investigation
- sand play
- water play
- music
- listening
- computer work
- design technology

The lay-out of these areas is left to individual room staff, as are the rules for numbers of children playing within them.  Each area has a list of opportunities on display and many areas contain writing materials.  Resources are freely accessible to children and storage is labelled with pictures and words (field notes).  Despite minor differences all classroom arrangements are similarly organised to provide separate areas, space and easy access.  The extra space offered by the balconies is used to provide larger learning areas for the two upper classrooms (classroom plans).  Part of this area in one classroom is arranged as the soft play area with regular timetabled access for each classroom and the 'Stay and Play' Group (field notes).

**Outdoor provision**
The vision of creating an outdoor space for children, many of whom do not have gardens, has been developing for the last few years.  It aims to provide learning opportunities that are not exclusively physical so activities are set up which would usually happen inside e.g. writing table and fully furnished play house (manager interview 2).  However, because of the two storeys children cannot have unlimited access to the playground.  To alleviate this situation the whole school has three outside sessions every day: 10.30 – 11am, after lunch – 1.00pm, and 2.00 – 2.30pm.  During the morning and afternoon sessions at least one adult from each classroom staffs the playground.  Each adult is responsible for one area – the sandpit, the large construction, the garden areas, the imaginative play areas – to support play and/or lead planned activities.  Additional adults oversee the whole playground for general supervision and support/intervention.  Each room is responsible for the key to the toy shed on a weekly rota.  Staff from the relevant classroom take the children outside before the others to set up the outside area.  This ensures equal access to popular pieces of equipment (field notes).

The resources and equipment are in good condition and have been built and placed to encourage and maintain interest and imagination. As well as the expected sand pit and play house there is a wooden train engine, a secluded garden with large shrubs and a climbing frame, a grassed area with a wooden pagoda, a garden plot for digging and planting and a trail of stepping stone tyres. There are painted roadways, railway tracks, spiral lines and numbers. There are also boxes containing equipment for 'special days' e.g. kites and windmills for windy days (field notes). The nursery school received a National Primary Award in 1998 for the quality of its outdoor facilities (OfSTED 2000).

### Resources
The nursery school is well-resourced, both inside and out. Equipment and books are well looked after and in good order (field notes). OfSTED reports that the nursery school makes the best use of the resources and spending decisions relate directly to priorities for improvement and benefits for the children (OfSTED 2000).

## E PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
### Communication to parents to help them understand the nursery school
The nursery school is very aware of providing good quality communication for parents in written and verbal forms. Current news, future events and items of community interest are displayed in the entrance hall (field notes) and monthly news sheets are sent home with a detailed current calendar and the latest news and dates (news-sheet sample).

The information booklet for parents is an in-house production and is richly informative as well as user friendly. It is bright and colourful with coloured clip art illustrations and digital camera pictures of the children. The information and advice is direct with a lot of information on what the children will do and learn at the nursery school. It introduces the use of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and the six areas of learning (QCA, DfEE, 2000) as the framework used for planning and invites parents to examine the policies on each of the areas (kept in the classrooms and the entrance hall) if they wish.

It is made clear to parents how very welcome they are in the nursery school. They are encouraged to take an active interest in the nursery school's activities in the belief that parental involvement is beneficial for children. They are informed of the management support group the nursery school is developing which meets each term to discuss issues relating to the nursery and aims to include two parent representatives on its committee.

Finally, the booklet provides a handy list summarising the main services and points under the headings – Services for Children, Services for Parents/Community, Links with Professionals, Funding and Management.

### Parents day-to-day life at the nursery school
Parents are regarded as a positive resource and are viewed non-judgmentally as equal partners. *'We value the parents here as people and make them very welcome here and because not every parent is exactly the same, we try and reach them in different ways.'* (manager interview 2).

Besides the courses and workshop programme, parents can also get regular support from a 'Stay and Play' club for parents and toddlers and a Portage (a scheme for home visiting to work with families of children with special needs) worker. These events are organised and led by two separate Portage and NNEB trained women and take place in the Community room. Meetings can also take place in the Family room situated on the upper floor and open during school hours apart from 12 noon to 1.30pm when it is used by the staff.

Parents are able to talk confidentially to staff on request and also have access to a health visitor and Portage facilities. A 'Well Child' clinic organised by the health Authority is held at the nursery

school and offers regular advice from the nursery school's health visitor and the opportunity to arrange for three-year development checks (field notes).

**The Stay and Play Group**
This group is held every Tuesday morning in the Community Room. A Portage trained NNEB runs the sessions and claims the average number of mothers attending is 12 rising to as many as 16. The facility is available for all the parents and toddlers in the community but those who come tend to have children already in the nursery school or have places in the near future. The toddlers enjoy their own stock of toys and equipment and also have the opportunity to play on the soft equipment upstairs. They can also play in the sandpit outside if supervised by their parents. The sessions do not operate during the first half of the Autumn Term as the Community Room is used by parents involved in the 'settling in' process. (see Ethos - emotional climate) The purpose of the sessions is for toddlers to play and for parents to support that play. The NNEB plans and prepares a programme of activities and facilitates the session. Participants can stay to lunch and on into the afternoon if they wish. Families under stress are encouraged to come as a form of help and support (field notes).

**Parents and their child's education**
The strong belief that parental involvement is beneficial to the development of the child prompts the nursery school to encourage parents to take an active interest in what takes place at the nursery school. Working mothers are encouraged to get involved as the Centre provides suggestions for activities which can take place at home.

To help parents understand the experiences children have at the nursery school, long-term curriculum plans and daily feedback sheets are displayed for parents in the cloakroom areas along with eye-catching displays which include photos of the children engaged in a variety of learning activities. To learn more, curriculum policies are available in each classroom and in the entrance area (field notes, feedback sheet).

Parents are expected to take regular note of their child's profile portfolio and contribute to it at the start and end of the year. The portfolio is presented to them when the child leaves and represents a record of development and achievements. Staff are happy to talk to parents at the beginning and end of each day but evening sessions are also organised for longer discussions to take place. To ease child-care problems a crèche is provided on these evenings (school information booklet). Parent interviews suggest that they receive weekly feedback on their child's progress from the class teacher.

**Toy and Book Library**
Parents are also encouraged to take part in the Toy and Book Loan Service. This is situated in the Community room and open for one whole school day each week. A £2 registration fee per family is required to borrow toys and books. There are also books for adults as well as for children. The library is run by a member of staff and two parent helpers and parents are encouraged to ask for advice over what to choose for their children. A vignette suggests that staff give good advice in a generous and facilitative manner (vignette 5). Parents are also urged not to worry about items becoming torn or broken. '*We don't make a big fuss if things get lost. They usually turn up. We send a reminder note home*' (evaluation from observation). The nursery school's view is that only with the experience of handling these items will children learn to take care of them (school information booklet).

The library appears popular and well used. The evaluation records that by the end of the day 125 items were loaned to 45 families; 30 loans were made to parents and children and 15 to children on their own. This amount of use is judged to be about average. There are 113 members in the scheme although the local day care nursery school takes a bulk loan every half term for their own families and counted as one member.

Future plans are in place for staff to access the book choices made by the children for assessment purposes. This is currently being made possible by the father who initially programmed the computer to record loans and will take the form of a printout of the books each child borrows over a period of time. There are also plans to extend the borrowing facility to other early years settings in the area (field notes).

**What's expected of parents**
Parents are expected to supply the school with personal information and contact addresses and any necessary medical information about the child. They are also expected to comply with the 'settling in' policy and remain with their children until the staff and parent/carer decide the child has settled.

Although the nursery school is sympathetic to the demands made on working parents it expects them to take an active interest in their child's development and education and contribute as much as possible. They are encouraged to share their expertise – for writing computer programmes, making equipment, assisting in the classrooms and running the Toy/Book library. They are encouraged to support their children's learning at home by using the Resources Room to take materials and the Toy/Book loan scheme. They are also encouraged to support educational visits, Fun Days and Family Outings (field notes).

There is the opportunity to make weekly contributions of £2 to the school fund. In addition they are asked to support the one or two fund-raising events the nursery school organises each year with the proceeds going to provide extra equipment. The soft play area, computer equipment and an outdoor climbing frame have been bought from this source (parents' booklet).

**Parental attitudes towards the nursery school**
The nursery school has a good reputation locally and parents are informed about the nursery school from health professionals, friends, relatives and other parents who have or have had children attend there (parent interview 6).

There is a general consensus that parents feel their children are happy at this school and develop confidence and social skills. They appreciate that staff take time to listen to problems and offer support and advice if possible. They also appreciate the nursery school's attempts to help them with their child's education by offering facilities via the Toy Library, Resources Room and regular information on their progress.

Parents believe that the nursery school is effective because of the quality of the staff, the range of activities provided and the individual attention given to the children. They feel that the nursery school prepares the children well for primary school by equipping them with good social skills, independence and confidence.

Parents appear generally very satisfied with the nursery school and any changes they would like made are usually about longer opening times. One parent would like the school to open before 9 am on wet and cold mornings and working parents show some concern over the lack of 'before' and 'after' school care – the nursery school is currently considering this issue. There is also some criticism over the early closure on Wednesday afternoons as the decision was made without consultation with parents and poses problems for those who have to arrange additional child-care. The head commented that at the start of the school year all parents are aware of these practices and know this prior to accepting a place and since 2001 there is provision of out of school care (see last page of this case study). The criticism may be the result of increased consensual expectations stimulated by the consultation process set up by the nursery school via the annual questionnaire to parents asking for suggestions and feedback.

OfSTED notes that the nursery school *'has built very strong partnership with the parents'* and that during the inspection several parents voiced their *'approval and appreciation of the way the school teaches and cares for their children'*. This positive attitude was reflected in the questionnaire

responses and comments made during the parents meeting organised by the inspection team. It reports that parents particularly like the Pupil Profiles and the various initiatives such as 'Stay and Play' and the support offered by the Portage workers (OfSTED 2000).

**Parent education**
The education of parents is an important element in the aim of the nursery school to serve the community and, in raising parental self-esteem is a priority. Workshops and courses are available throughout the year, the content of which is partially determined by parents via an annual questionnaire. These can be practical crafts orientated e.g. book making, although information related to other curriculum areas are also popular.

The nursery school also welcomes occasional one-off talks and /or workshops from groups within the community offering valuable information and advice e.g. the Fire Brigade with information about the use and importance of smoke alarms (manager interview 2).

Parents are alerted to free or low cost courses organised by the Adult Education Service and the Women's Education Association that take place in various local settings.

**F ETHOS**
**The atmosphere**
The nursery school presents itself as open, warm and welcoming. It is very bright and colourful with displays and notices covering every space and surface with lots of explanations for parents and visitors. There is an air of enjoyment and purpose - the nursery school is committed to a positive attitude based on *'I can…' in terms of achievements, rules and behaviour for the children and supported by the adult's work on 'Well Being'* (field notes). OfSTED reports that *'children's attitudes are excellent…they come to school happily, look forward to their day and concentrate on tasks as soon as they arrive.'* (OfSTED 2000).

**The working climate for the children**
Children's work is richly colourful and well displayed. The stimulating environment offers a wide variety of learning experiences that can be accessed by children with different levels of maturity and development (curriculum statement). The emphasis is on free choice and play coupled with good opportunities to work with adults either in small groups or 1:1 (observations).

The design of the building and number of classrooms inhibits free access to the playground although the nursery school tries to ensure that a substantial amount of time is spent using the outdoor facilities (daily timetable). There is a policy to treat the outdoors as an extension of the classroom and staff provide activities outside which are traditionally connected with indoors e.g. writing and painting.

Children are expected to explore, experiment and do things for themselves. Staff do not encourage helpless behaviour or give needless help. Instead, they offer activities which pose intellectual and/or dexterity challenges to encourage concentration and perseverance to complete tasks and intervene with sensitivity only where and when necessary. Neither do they insist that tasks are completed before moving on although observations show that children are frequently engaged in activities with sustained concentration and perseverance (observations, field notes). OfSTED notes that children are listened to carefully by all members of staff and are allowed plenty of time to answer questions etc. (OfSTED 2000).

**The emotional climate for the children**
The children work in a climate where it is clear that the emotional well being of the children is a prime consideration. OfSTED notes that the nursery school is *'highly successful in creating a positive atmosphere in which children feel secure, valued and appropriately challenged'* (OfSTED 2000).

At the very onset of a child's career at the nursery school their emotional development is a matter of sensitive handling. A 'settling in' period is employed where children are introduced gradually into nursery life. Parents are asked to stay when their child starts and remain until the child is ready to be left. It is strongly emphasised that there is no time scale for this process as children take varying amounts to settle. Working parents are alerted to the possibility of taking time off from work unless a close relative can act as a sensitive substitute.

On entry the children are also assessed on their levels of well-being (see assessment section). This process measures their ability to relate to adults and their peers but also offers tools to express feelings, be assertive and deal with conflict. The scheme encourages children and adults to express their feelings honestly - staff say *'that makes me cross'* rather than *'that makes me sad'*.

Parents are told how important regular attendance is for their child to develop relationships with staff and other children as well as benefiting from the educational programme. This process described in the parents' booklet encourages parents themselves to practice good parenting skills and allows access and possible support (via the parents room) with each other (parents' booklet).

During the first term the whole school focuses together on the same topic 'All About Me'. The aim of this is to promote and develop self-awareness and self-esteem by engaging in lots of activities involving awareness of self e.g. looking in mirrors, painting self portraits etc. The staff aim to nurture and build upon children's natural energy, enthusiasm, curiosity and sense of humour (curriculum statement). Circle time features as part of the daily routines of each classroom (field notes).

**Behaviour**
The nursery school operates a Positive Behaviour policy. It works from the principle that the school aims to provide *'a caring, emotionally secure environment where both adults and children are expected to promote an ethos in which every individual is valued.'* In order to promote such an environment the nursery school feels it is essential that the overall strategy encourages *'care, consistency, courtesy and effective communication.'*

The nursery school appears to be well aware that to be successful a number of strategies and attitudes need to be addressed. These aspects are summarised by bullet points that claim that:
- a high level of consensus about behaviour management exists between staff members generating morale, support and a sense of commitment;
- the school has an established structure of effective communication between staff members;
- there is a shared belief that good quality relationships are fundamental in promoting good behaviour;
- bullying is not to be tolerated;
- staff set a good example, treating children with respect at all times and with the same consideration and courtesy they treat other adults;
- the curriculum is well planned with high quality teaching and learning;
- pupils are given opportunities to use their initiative and accept responsibility.

Children are introduced to a set of simple rules that are displayed in each classroom with appropriate photographs to support them. Guidelines are given to the types of suitable reward to be given for good behaviour and how they should be given. These strategies are closely linked to building and maintaining high levels of self-esteem and co-operation. Children are praised verbally by the adults in their own class and receive approval by staff in other areas of the school. They are also encouraged to acknowledge and value the contributions and achievements of others.

The word 'naughty' is never used as it is regarded as 'labelling' a child who may then live up to it and an admonishment from an adult is directed to the behaviour and not the child (behaviour policy document). It is recognised that children need to talk about their strong feelings and find ways to deal with them which are not violent or negative. The Children's Well Being scheme is seen as an important supportive structure in this area. Sanctions include short withdrawal of privileges but

generally the policy urges that all responses to inappropriate behaviour be handled with sensitivity and skill to suit the particular child and situation.

If a child does act in such as way as to potentially cause hurt to others the policy directs that s/he is removed from the scene by a member of staff.  If a child continues to cause concern they will be monitored to see the extent and ways they interact with peers (interaction screen document) and if necessary an Individual Behaviour Plan will be drawn up.  At this step the nursery school would expect to consult with parents or contact appropriate outside agencies (policy document).

Staff demonstrate their support for the behaviour policy and also their willingness to oppose conflicting parental views in relation to discipline issues.  Children are urged to find other ways of managing conflict and not retaliate like with like, even if parents have told them to. They urge children to tell an adult when they are hurt and believe children should be enabled to sort out their own quarrels by talking through things with one another (vignette 6, critical episode 1).

The nursery school is aware some parents have difficulties with this philosophy and conflicts arise between home and school.  The headteacher accepts that home rules may differ from those at the nursery school and feels the best way to tackle the problem is to explain to parents what the Behaviour Policy means in practice before children are enrolled.  (headteacher's comments on critical episode).

Behaviour in and out of the classrooms is reported as *'very good with a spirit of co-operation and friendly play throughout the school.'* (OfSTED 2000).

**Special needs**
The headteacher acts as the nursery school's SENCO.  There are currently two children with Statements of Special Educational Needs each with their own LSA.  One has Down's Syndrome and is a year older than his peers, the other is diagnosed Autistic.  There are 23 other children identified as having Special Educational Needs and placed at various stages on the nursery school's SEN Register. All these children work to an Individual Education Plan (IEP)(field notes).

The nursery school does not employ a separate Special Needs curriculum as *'all children have special needs from time to time which can generally be catered for within the breadth of the curriculum as a whole'* (policy doc.).  The positive approach of the nursery school aims to foster independent learning skills and self-esteem within a supportive whole school philosophy and ethos helps to ensure that children with special needs are able to have equal access to the curriculum (policy doc.).

A Speech Therapist, an Educational Psychologist, Health visitors and Social Workers attend when necessary for individual children and work with the nursery school staff as part of the nursery team. It is made clear to parents that their permission has to be obtained before any outside agency can see their child and the nursery school promises that they will be kept fully informed of involvement and progress.  Parents are encouraged to attend and/or support discussions and decisions made and reassured of the importance their contribution makes in the process (school information booklet).

**Equal Opportunities**
The policy statement states that the philosophy, aims, organisation, practice and curriculum of the nursery school offer an '*excellent framework for equalising opportunity'*.  Achievements are valued whatever the child's race, culture, gender, special need or disability.  The nursery school is aware of how the 'hidden' curriculum can affect equal opportunities and urges awareness; *'what is not said is as essential as what is said'* (policy doc.).

As policies are the result of collaborative effort it is reasonable to suggest that the issues surrounding equal opportunities are known and understood by the nursery school staff. Organisational aspects are regarded as important.  Classes are organised to ensure a balance of

gender, age and ethnicity and cultural heritage. School meals cater for vegetarian and other special diets. Festivals are noted and reflected in curriculum planning and community events (long-term curriculum plans).

Children sharing the same home language are placed in the same classroom with a member of staff who can provide an effective role model and it is the intention that home/school liaison is communicated in the home language whenever possible (policy doc.).

The nursery school attempts to appoint staff that *'reflect the cultural diversity and provide positive role models.'* (policy doc.). In reality staffing figures show that White UK Heritage staff out number other ethnic/cultural backgrounds by 3 to 1 (manager interview 1).

However, in the main, the evidence suggests that the nursery school is aware of the issues involved in inclusion and works in a number of important ways to ensure maximum access to the curriculum for all the children in the nursery school. A lack of discrimination in terms of gender, race and culture was noted amongst children and adults (field notes summary).

**Staff co-operation and collegiality**
Evidence suggests that staff enjoy high levels of mutual support and co-operation. The management style of the headteacher and the systems in place are instrument in helping the staff work *'exceptionally well together.'* (OfSTED, 2000). OfSTED also notes that all staff co-operate to promote the values and aims of the nursery school and provide high quality experiences for the children. They exhibit high expectations for the children and frequently discuss their practice with each other to evaluate effective teaching and learning. This practice suggests that the staff share common values and educational beliefs and support each other in delivering a meaningful curriculum.

The monitoring and appraisal system ensures that formal and informal conduits operate to ensure a free exchange of ideas and opinions between management and staff. Many decisions and policies are formed through collegial means (manager interview 2).

**The nursery school as a learning community**
Starting from a firm commitment to on-going professional development the nursery school is very aware of itself as part of a 'learning community.' All staff, including non-teaching staff are expected to develop their professionalism to a high level (Inset/Staff meetings programme, monthly calendar to parents).

The education of parents is an important element in the aim of the nursery school to serve the community. Parents are encouraged to share talents and expertise and invited to attend a programme of courses and workshops designed specifically for their needs and determined by their responses to an annual questionnaire. The parents have free access to both the Community Room on the premises and to the materials in the Resources Room to use with their children at home (field notes).

The Community Room is also open to other local community groups with recent increased use and popularity to the point where it seems to be 'bursting at the seams' (manager interview 2). Plans are afoot to increase the lending facilities of the Toy and Book Loan Service to other early years settings in the area.

The nursery school has a high profile and receives many visitors from professionals (field notes). The headteacher thinks it is important that the staff are involved (as well as herself) with showing visitors round to explain their practice and policies. She feels this is good for professional development as the process encourages articulation and reflection (manager interview 2). Pupils from local secondary schools, nursery nurses, speech therapy students and other students are regularly placed at the nursery school to gain experience as part of their education and training courses (school information booklet).

Our observations and the written evidence suggests there are influences from Reggio Emilia (Italian curriculum model), Te Whariki (New Zealand curriculum model) and EEL (Effective Early Learning project based on practice development project) which suggests that staff are reflective on other ways of working and pick up good practice after reflecting on it. They also appear to be aware of research findings and put these to good use.

**Ethos as portrayed through displays**
Displays and notices cover every space and surface to create a warm, bright and very colourful impression. This nursery school is a print-rich environment with children's work, photographs, certificates, notices, policies and letters from dignitaries (including the Queen) accompanied by explanations where necessary for parents and visitors. All classroom displays are of very high quality, some are inspirational. Many include photographs of children engaged in a learning activity and their comments recorded in caption style (field notes, own observations).

The headteacher feels that displays are very important in making the environment stimulating and for developing creativity. Some are purposely done for parents to encourage them to help their children by illustrating their capabilities and stages of development e.g. writing skills, others are primarily to inform parents and visitors of the actual processes connected to a piece of learning. Photographs as display resources are regarded as particularly valuable in that children always respond favourably to them, are eager to talk about them and are good triggers to encourage writing. They also demand that parents should see them and this can help parents access and learn about aspects of the curriculum (manager interview).

**Philosophy**
The philosophy of this nursery school is deeply rooted in child-centredness. Decisions, whether at management or practitioner level are made based on the ways a child will benefit and develop.

Philosophy and aims are considered as integrated aspects of the same concept. All children are valued equally by the nursery school with a belief that an important aim of the curriculum is the 'development of self-esteem, self-confidence and a 'learning to learn' disposition'. It aims to achieve this view by providing a warm, welcoming environment that ensures educational needs are met within an emotionally secure structure. The nursery school is committed to providing quality learning experiences and aims to develop social and collaborative skills and encourages independence so that children are able to make informed choices. It firmly believes that parental involvement is beneficial to the development of children and recognises the value of the family as educators (school information booklet).

The nursery school is also committed to a pivotal role within the community. It makes overt moves to liaise and work with other organisations which contribute to the education and welfare of the local people.

**G CURRICULUM**
**Policies**
The nursery school provided the following documents for us to analyse:
Curriculum statement
Language and Literacy
Mathematical Development
Knowledge and Understanding of the World - Science Policy
Creative Development – Music
Creative Development - Art, Craft and Design
Outdoor Classroom
Physical Development
Assessment Monitoring and Evaluation
Equal Opportunities
Special Needs
Behaviour

School Development and Action Plan
Health and Safety
Parental Involvement
Guidelines for Students/Work Experience

It is clear from the language and style of the policy documents that their purpose is to be used as working documents. Most policies are dated with original and review dates, indicating that they are reviewed regularly. They are written in clear, jargon free language, using bullet point style. They are personal to the setting and illustrate the inclusive philosophy of the nursery school.

The policies generally introduce the subject from general principles followed by the intended process and practice. Policies are created collegially. The whole staff consider new proposals that are then drafted by the headteacher with the deputy or relevant curriculum co-ordinator. The drafts are then examined by the staff for discussion and approval before the finalisation of the document. The process of reviewing policies follows the same route (manager interview 2).

**Balance and breadth**
The nursery school claims that it aims to '*ensure that each child will experience a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.*' It acknowledges that education begins at birth and parents are the child's first educators giving reason for the nursery school to be involved with supporting parents in the care and education of their children (curriculum statement).

The nursery school has a history of commitment to a child-centred led curriculum and has within the last two years incorporated many of the principles from Reggio Emilia and work done through the EEL project. The nursery school acknowledges that children vary in their maturity and development and therefore aims to design educational experiences to match individual achievements and needs. To ensure balance and breadth plans are underpinned by the Foundation Stage's six areas of learning and the ELGs (QCA, DfEE, 2000). OfSTED reports that the nursery school is '*effective in covering the six areas of learning.*' (OfSTED 2000).

The headteacher appears to regard care and education as equally important within the nursery setting. She believes it important that care and education specialists work closely together to share knowledge and skills to ensure that children have access to the setting most suitable to their needs (manager interview 2).

According to the headteacher the process by which young children learn does not fit neatly into separate learning areas but they are equally important in that they complement and integrate with each other. Although unwilling to prioritise she feels that on entry emphasis is placed on social and emotional well being and language development because '*we sometimes feel for our children that's where you need to put the emphasis first.*' (manager interview 2).

**Assessment**
Assessments on entry show that many children enter the nursery school with a low level of attainment. However, '*children achieve exceptionally well and attain standards above the expectations for children of their age.*' (OfSTED 2000).

Children undergo a baseline assessment on entry, the result of which is regarded as a 'snapshot' (manager interview 3) along with the Pupil Profiles into which detailed records are added regularly. Staff monitor children's learning by observing their activities, listening to their interaction with others and by questioning them (monitoring and evaluation policy). The profile is shared with the parent and contributions from home are added to it to build over time a picture of individual personality, interests and strengths in all areas of the curriculum (pupil profiles). At the end of the year this information is passed on to the Primary School (school information booklet).

The nursery school is also engaged in assessing the well-being and involvement levels of children. Children identified as having a low sense of well-being are observed again using the school's

observation sheet. Some of these children are assessed further using an Individual Observation and Analysis form to help staff to focus on specific areas which may be significant e.g. relationships with teachers or other children. Despite a few reservations the process is generally accepted as a useful tool for observing and getting to know the children with useful opportunities for identifying specific areas contributing to low well-being. It is also useful for identifying friendships and group dynamics and provides the children with the language to express and deal with feelings involving others. It also helps to identify children who need support who had not previously been identified on the SEN register.

Photographs are used for assessment purposes. Not only do they proffer a record of a particular child's stage of development or level of engagement they also offer opportunities for unexpected insights to be made about the child or others in the picture that might have been missed during the normal process of a session (manager interview 2).

Many activities are accompanied by an evaluation sheet designed as a grid to record individual children's responses. This document also offers a simple method of keeping track of who has experienced the activity. General evaluative notes are written on the reverse side if necessary (activity evaluation grid).

**Curriculum planning**
Plans take note of the six areas of learning together with specific learning outcomes ('I can do'….sheets). During the children's first term in September the nursery school engages in a whole school theme of 'All About Me'. This topic has strong personal and social elements designed to encourage independence and build self-esteem and develop a positive ethos. The following two terms planning is decided upon by the individual class teams based on children's interests. The starting point may be a visit, a book or a child's question. In the third term there may be more than one focus. Short-term weekly activities for all three terms are planned by room staff. They are based on long term aims and children's needs although ideas are frequently shared between rooms. Needs are identified by formal and informal observations. The staff within each room meet before and after school to finalise daily plans and evaluate outcomes (field notes).

About six Specific Learning Outcomes/Skills are entered on the weekly planning sheet followed by the activities that will support the learning outcomes. The sheet includes a grid to note how each activity will cover the areas of learning. All activities cover more than one, some all. These activities are not entered in great detail, although spaces for Talking Points, Observations and Developments are included.

A Staff Weekly Planning Sheet shows which member of staff is responsible for the various activities and play areas. Tasks seem to be shared out equally between members of staff although the teacher seems to be the main contact for the children and parents at the beginning and end of the day (weekly and staff planning sheets).

At daily planning level each activity has a 'Specific Planning Sheet' which is formatted to record the following:
Learning outcomes/skills/concepts
Description of activity (including differentiation)
Talking points
Assessment
Observations
Developments.

A small grid in the top right hand corner records the areas of learning the activity covers - 3 or 4 simultaneously. This sheet forms the plan for an activity that may take place several times during the day or week. The plan may be for a member of staff to work with small groups and the whole group but also for activities which favour a 1:1 approach. They also cater for more than one adult sharing the same activity (planning sheet).

**Visits and visitors**

The headteacher thinks it is very important for the children to go out as often as possible, both locally and further afield. Children visit points of interest in the locality in small groups or in a whole school outing with their parents. This Family Day Out is organised during the Summer Term (school information booklet).

Some visits are linked to a specific theme or topic, either to trigger or to consolidate learning. Visitors are also welcome and commonly used to enhance and extend learning. The nursery school plays regular host to artists and musicians. Parents are welcome to come in to share their skills e.g. a dad cooking (and providing a useful role model) (manager interview 2).

Each year a small group is taken for a five day residential break to a Holiday Farm. The nursery school organises a mid-week evening visit for parents and carers to see their children but also to look around the farm once the children have gone to sleep. The educational opportunity embedded in this arrangement is to enable the adults to make the most of the children's experiences by being able to talk about them more fully when they return, this form of drawing upon 'embedded experiences' is seen as important (OfSTED 2000).

## H PEDAGOGY

### Practice

OfSTED reports the nursery school as '*outstanding*' providing '*high quality learning experiences*'. It praises the quality of the teaching and the way that staff demonstrate '*a very good understanding of the needs of children*' and their provision of '*exciting and purposeful activities which take account of children's interests.*' It notes that the detailed records and photographic evidence are used effectively to re-visit experiences to clarify, deepen and strengthen understanding. Activities are meaningful and children are therefore highly motivated. It is also noted that the nursery nurses make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching in the nursery school (OfSTED, 2000).

Classrooms are ready for when the children arrive and staff must complete preparation before their regular morning team meeting at 8.30am. They are therefore in the classrooms well before children arrive. To facilitate preparation and tidying up, detailed routines for the classroom, the bathrooms and the balconies are on display. This is a good management strategy to help temporary staff and ensure that all tasks get done. Thus all learning areas are tidied and replenished, reducing morning preparation time (routine sheets).

Because the nursery school aims to provide educational experiences designed to take account of individual achievements and needs, whole class teaching is seen as rarely appropriate. Children learn predominantly through individual activities or working and playing in small groups. The curriculum and associated activities are based on play and a wide range of first hand experiences in a structured framework. Within this structure children are given the freedom to make choices, develop and plan their own ideas, recall and review what they have done and begin to solve problems independently (curriculum statement).

### Quality of interaction

Evidence suggests the quality of interaction is high. The Adult-Interaction Scale (see Arnett 1998) shows a high degree of consistency in staff behaviour with a strong emphasis on positive responses to children and their emotional and learning needs. The Scale offers a picture where staff enjoy being with children and engage with them in a respectful, caring way, without criticism or harshness. They encourage children to try new experiences and are very enthusiastic about their efforts. They are closely supervised but allowed to pursue their own desires within a firm framework that encourages pro-social behaviour (Adult/Child Interaction Scale).

Staff appear to be constantly aware of looking out for opportunities to scaffold children's learning by inviting children to say what they think in order to assess their levels of knowledge and understanding. They intervene to 'model' when they think it appropriate but more often allow children to have plenty of time to explore for themselves first. Interactions are most often in the

form of asking open-ended questions that provoke speculation and extend the imagination and encourage sustained shared dialogue and thought. Praise and positive feedback is used freely (vignette 4).

**Role of play and direct instruction**
The nursery school is committed to allowing children to explore and experiment through play and learn skills in context and as they are needed. They tend not to directly instruct or inform but when they decide it is appropriate they offer a small amount within an immediate context (vignette 2). Staff play alongside children to introduce and learn about concepts which have a specific learning outcome (vignette 3, observation 1) and to extend imaginative play (vignette 8).

**The role of the staff**
The staff act as enablers to allow children to speculate, discuss, explore and revise their own knowledge and understanding. They respond to their questions and areas of interest not only by providing explanations but with providing opportunities for further exploration. They also allow spontaneous lines of enquiry to be extended and use them as a basis for their planning e.g. a chance question, 'How did God make himself?' develops into a project with high quality opportunities for learning about bones and skeletons, comparing a human skull with that of a sheep and finding where various bones are in living bodies. This example also illustrates how the staff members are sensitive to and yet manipulate emotional intensity - in the above case excitement bordering on fear (and certainly awe) was encouraged to generate and maintain interest. Their role is also to imagine and plan for where the lines of interest might proceed and how other areas of learning can be incorporated e.g. particular vignette shows the teacher introducing concepts of size and the method of comparison (vignette 1).

Teachers and nursery nurses use observations to collect evidence for use in planning, making assessments and recording progress and may use the time to observe while supporting play (observation 7). Observation sessions are planned for individual staff members to collect evidence when faced with a specific concern e.g. poor concentration, inappropriate attention seeking (observation document).

The various management strategies and systems adopted by the nursery school ensure that all staff know what they are doing throughout the day and where they should be. Together with the fixed weekly and daily routines in place it is reasonable to suggest that transitions occur as smoothly as possible.

**Differentiation**
A high level of differentiation is provided by staff support and input, as described above. Children with IEPs work to a differentiated curriculum (field notes).

**Ensuring continuity and progression**
Continuous and on-going systems of assessment and planning ensure that continuity and progression take place (field notes). Informal and formal observations of the children in a variety of contexts and learning situations feed into these systems recording both progress and flagging up areas for further development. Children's achievements are regularly recorded and collected for their Pupil Profiles and act as personal records throughout their time at the nursery school and beyond to primary school. (Pupil Profiles doc.)

**Developing dispositions**
Children show pride in their work and frequently engage in activities with sustained concentration and perseverance (field notes). Staff are aware of developing dispositions towards learning. This is demonstrated by the inclusion of skills connected with this development in the school information booklet. These skills are listed as confidence, concentration, co-ordination, co-operation, curiosity, creativity and the ability to communicate (school information booklet). OfSTED note that the attitudes of the children are *'excellent'* and that *'even the youngest pupils come to school happily,*

*looking forward to their day and concentrate on their tasks as soon as they arrive.'* (OfSTED 2000).

**Preparation for primary school**
Children move from the nursery school to a number of different primary schools. They transfer in the September during the school year in which they are 5 years old. Parents are urged to visit their chosen primary school as soon as their child starts the nursery and place their name on the waiting list. Close links are maintained with all local schools, thus aiming to ensure a smooth transition from the nursery school.

**I COMMUNITY OUTREACH OR INVOLVEMENT**
The nursery school is firmly committed to playing a useful and supportive role within the community on a number of levels. There is an impressive list of services for children, parents and the community in the school booklet along with a number of links the nursery school currently makes with professional bodies. The nursery school is involved with out of school care provision, provides opportunities for family education, support and entertainment and has developed links with other local early years settings and primary schools. The Community Room is well used for local groups in and out of school hours.

As a Beacon school it is recognised as a nursery school of excellent practice and plays host to a number of professionals seeking to benefit from its good practice. OfSTED notes that the links with the community are strong and continue to develop and identifies this aspect as a particular strength (OfSTED, 2000).

The nursery school aims to make strong links with other community projects. It is currently in partnership with a nearby setting created to provide a variety of community services, including childcare and courses for adults. The partnership provides 24 after school places at the nursery school for children registered there. A fee is charged for this service which occurs during term time only.

Close links have also been made with the local Community Day Nursery catering for children from babies to 4 years. Staff exchange visits and join up for training days (school information booklet). Close links are also maintained with all local primary schools to ensure smooth transitions from the nursery school.

Sources of information
Field notes
Field notes summary
Researcher's Fieldnotes
OfSTED report 2000
Manager interviews 1, 2 & 3
Adult/Child Interaction Scale
Interviews with parents
Parent questionnaires
Vignettes
Critical episodes
Observations
Class lists
School Information Booklet for Parents and visitors 2001
Philosophy and aims document
Planning documents
- long-term
- staff weekly
- weekly
- specific (daily)

Curriculum policy statement
Parents daily feedback sheet
Individual Child Tracking Observation Sheet
Interaction Screen document
Activity Evaluation Grid
Curriculum Audit Sheet
Behaviour Environment Checklist
Behaviour Environment Plan
Policy documents with particular reference to:
- Behaviour
- Special Needs
- Assessment
- Monitoring and Evaluation
Nursery school plans
Pupil field notes sample


**3.4 Local Authority Day Care** – unusually unlike most local authority day care which has largely care staff and very little teacher input this is also an integrated/combined centre which has a good ratio of teachers and care staff.


**A CENTRE PROFILE**
**Location, accommodation, intake**
The focus of this case study is an inner city centre for children under five, which offers fully combined care and education provision administered by the Local Education Authority.

From our field notes and local maps we can describe the Centre as housed in a purpose-built unit. The Centre comprises an entrance hall with space for buggies and displays opening out on to a main corridor, off which is an administrative area with an office, laundry and general storage facilities, toilets and a kitchen. There are three classrooms for children: the Toddlers Room, and Blue Room and Green Room (interlinking) for the 3-5 year-olds (who are collectively known as 'The Nursery Class').  All rooms have access to a pleasant outside area. Immediately outside is a covered area for tabletop, water and sand activities and a ball park. In the open area there is a garden with digging areas, a hillock and 'fixed' climbing frames, slides and tunnel.

The Centre is open Monday to Friday from approximately 8am until 5.30pm for 49 weeks of the year.  It offers 'core' day-care (9.30am – 3.30pm) and 'extended' day-care 7.45am – 5.30pm. The Centre offers 60 places for children aged between 1.6 and 5.0 years, a third of these places are for toddlers and the rest for 3 –5 year-olds. Two-thirds of the children attend the centre full-time. Children who attend this centre come from a wide range of social, economic and cultural backgrounds and some have English as an additional language (EAL).  There are seventeen EAL children.

The Centre has, over the period of the EPPE research, always contained children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) with numbers varying according to intake. At the time of the case study (April 2000) there were two children in the 3-5 year old group whose SEN was so severe that they were 'statemented' (Code of Practice DfES 2001).  Additional adult support for those children was in place. It is a policy of the Centre to accept 30% of children from families 'in need' and /or children with Special Educational Needs.

Local Education Authority funding in 1998 was approximately £400,000 (which covered both teaching and non-teaching staff, rent and bills and equipment costs).  A half-day session is provided free for a 3-5 year-old. Thirty children were from families getting full subsidy to support childcare, 22 were on partial subsidy and four children had their tuition paid fully by their parents. The range of fees for income-based payments varies from  £9.50 - £56 per week (manager's interview).

**B STAFFING**

The staff comprises: The Head of Centre who has been in post for about 10 years, the deputy who has worked with her for 8 years, three nursery teachers (all working in the 3-5s nursery class and two of whom job-share) two Education Workers (EWs) working closely in teams with the teachers and two EWs working with the deputy in the Toddlers Room. There are also two support workers. The staff work shifts because of the extended day. Members of staff who maintain the unit are a cleaner and a handy person. The Staff are of mixed heritages (Black Caribbean, Black African, Mixed Race, White UK) and as such they represent the inner-city population of the catchment area.

Not all staff employed to work with children have qualifications. Those who are qualified are: the Head and teachers (who have qualified teacher status) and the deputy, one of the EWs and one of the support workers (who hold an NNEB).

**Staff responsibilities, retention and relationships**

Responsibilities within the Centre are quite clearly defined. The Head has overall responsibility and deals with administration and all contractual issues concerning staff, general management, organisation and curriculum, health and safety and implementation of the Code of Practice for children with special educational needs (SEN). To ensure continuing professional development of her staff, she runs four development sessions a year. The Head does not work directly with children in a teaching role and has no scheduled time with children but she assists with breakfasts, and teas and covers absences and this amounts to 10 hours a week.

The deputy has key worker responsibilities for Toddlers. This worker is also the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and has site safety responsibilities. The Centre operates a key worker system so overall responsibility for individual children and their family is clear. The teachers are responsible for a fixed number of children – for their education, pastoral care and assessment. One of the teachers has a curriculum responsibility to oversee the drafting of plans.

Although teachers lead on how learning plans are developed and realised, it is the responsibility of EWs to help decide on activities and provision for the children. During interview the manager stated that as part of their professional development, EWs have been given incentive payments for developing organisational aspects of the mathematics curriculum and assembling children's portfolios.

Our diary notes suggest that there are support workers who are responsible for helping staff where needed, setting up lunch tables and supervising 'extended day' children when they are in the outside area from 3.30-4.30pm.

Staffing on the whole is very stable. Staff tend to stay a minimum of 5 years (and some over 10 years). There has been minimal change among staff since the research began. Two teachers who left recently (maternity leave and to travel) were both replaced by secondary–trained teachers who 'converted' to Early Years. Interestingly, the Head also 'traded' two EW posts for a trained teacher post, hence going from two to three teachers (diary notes, manager's interview). This change was strategic and planned by the Head because she wanted more teachers to guide and lead the professional development of EWs, particularly their understanding of the curriculum for the under-fives, although this Centre had a Social Services daycare history, clearly since becoming an integrated care and education setting the Head has promoted the educational component of the Centre.

The Centre does not have any major problems in appointing or retaining staff. The conditions of service include written job descriptions and contracts, regular staff appraisal and payment for planning time, attendance at staff meetings and attending staff development sessions for which expenses are also paid. Staff are provided with paid holidays and have access to a pension plan.

The Head's main problems are filling vacancies for support workers, and covering EWs on annual leave. The Centre cannot recruit additional staff when an EW takes annual leave.

Our EPPE research officer visited the Centre on numerous occasions before conducting the case study and during the visits and through reading the OfSTED inspectors report it would seem that the relationships between adults in the room teams are very good (teachers and EWs). The staff provide a welcoming atmosphere, they relate well to parents, children and other visitors.


## C  MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Our diary notes show that during conversations with staff  they perceive the Head as being 'less of a team player' and describe her as confident in taking decisions without always consulting staff.

*'I do know what I want from the children and I know what I want from the staff and I know when we are falling short and I sort of say [it]'* (headteacher interview)*.*

This strong statement from the Head of Centre gives a flavour of her leadership style. She has vision and is ambitious for the Centre and uses legislative moves by Government to propel staff into action. For example, she saw Desirable Learning Outcomes (when they first appeared during 1996) as a '*useful tool in getting staff to look at planning and record keeping'*, she used the introduction of the Code of Practice as a vehicle for self review and '*pulling our socks up'* and she used the OfSTED report in 1997 to promote discussion and action: *'It forced us to look at our development plan and priorities. A good management leverage for getting things done'.*

With the support of the teacher in charge of curriculum planning, the Head seems to lead from the front on curriculum issues. Strong philosophical strands come through in policy statements (learning through play, challenging children, and the important role to be played by adults in scaffolding learning).  In interview, she would not rate her major objectives in any kind of priority but felt all aspects of social and academic learning were of equal importance.  She is clearly committed to a fully integrated provision.

She has a firm belief in continuing professional development for staff, especially in curriculum*: 'If staff have a really good sense of different curriculum areas then they can be so much more inspiring to the children. They can set tasks that are much harder. And they can set them on a much more regular basis'* (manager's interview). Those beliefs have led to the establishment of sound structures. For example, planning sheets show that teachers and EWs know the learning intentions for children and their own responsibilities for each session and there is institutionalised non-contact time for teachers to prepare activities; 8.30 - 9.30am each morning (diary notes).

There is a management group that meets 3 times a year. The purpose of the group is to act as an advisory body to the Centre, however its impact on the way the Centre is managed is unclear.

Certainly, the management structure within the setting is specialized and hierarchical. The background and expertise of teachers is more important than that of EW, as evidenced by the Head's purposeful 'trading' of two EW positions for a teacher.  The hierarchical ethos is further promoted through clearly defined roles and responsibilities.  For example, EWs are given less responsibility for key work because the Head does not believe they have the required level of training in child development and curriculum.  Also, although teachers and EWs may be present during the extended day, they do not assist the support workers with the children because they have other defined administrative duties to do at this time.

Growth and change within the setting arise from a top-down model.  The researcher's diary notes indicate that staff are aware and act when the Head is unhappy about something, as she lets them know directly (for example we documented an incident when she required more careful selection of work for children's portfolios). There is a high quality of communication about curriculum, learning and teaching.

## D CLASSROOM ORGANISATION
### Child organisation
Foundation Stage children are assigned to specific teachers/key workers and are on either Green or Blue Room registers. After register and story time spent with their teachers, the 3-5s have access to both rooms and outside to explore the activities. Well-defined routines ensure that they come back together in their groups at other times during the day such as Circle Time.

### Layout
Blue and Green rooms are full of opportunities for learning. Room maps drawn by the researcher show that the curriculum has been clearly defined by what is set up in each room. In one room (fully-carpeted) there are three distinct areas: a literacy area with books and computer, a mathematics area with resources displayed, and a quiet area with sofas, cushions, bean bags and music tapes to play. In the other room you can see that the curriculum activities cover cooking, painting and other artistic/expressive experiences, sand play, water play and constructing and building. In each room there is a class assembly corner with a teacher's chair and whiteboard. A home corner is tucked away in one room while large African snails are housed near the window in the other.

The curriculum spills into the communal entrance space (where musical instruments are displayed for handling and trying) and into the outdoor area where there are some permanent features: ball park, slide, ladder going up a tree and three climbing frames (all with fixed soft mats).

### Resources
Diary notes describe the Centre as being extremely well resourced, both indoors and out with well-chosen good quality apparatus and equipment to promote learning in literacy, mathematics, science and 'the world about us' and for creative and physical development. All areas of the Foundation Stage are catered for.

There are a great many books, big and small, both fiction and non-fiction materials to prompt an understanding of phonics. More than one copy of reading books is available so that children can share the same experience. Bilingual tapes, books and signs about the room are used well to help children develop their skills and to promote a feeling of belonging and an appreciation of the diversity of the backgrounds which children come from.

Mathematical developments are equally well resourced with threading materials, number and shape puzzles, sorting games, scales, and dominoes. Cooking apparatus, sand timers, magnifiers, reflectors, magnets and a range of natural objects is provided to stimulate learning through science. Art materials cover both 2D and 3D and there is a variety of (ethnically diverse) musical instruments and a wide range of small and large construction materials, a broad variety of toys for sand and water play and two computers.

Beyond the permanent features set up outside there are many diverse items to promote physical development (hoops, balls, bikes) and role play (pushchairs, tents).

## E PARENT INVOLVEMENT
### Communication to parents to help them understand the Centre
As an outcome of recommendations made by the OfSTED during the inspection in 1997, the Centre has improved its communications with parents by producing a very informative brochure. In this brochure, the Centre goes to great lengths to make the Centre structures clear to parents. It includes explanations of the key worker role and responsibilities, the purpose of observing children, the record-keeping policy, the rationale behind staff training, how the Centre sees parent involvement and the services used to support children with SEN. Recently the contents of the brochure have been transferred on to a website (manager's interview). Overall written communications giving information between Centre and parents seem to be more effective than verbal communications.

**Parents and the day-to-day life of the Centre**

In 1997 OfSTED reported that *'The Centre works hard to create and maintain partnerships with parents'* and this seems to have continued as the current brochure states clearly that *'The Centre staff welcome and encourage parent participation to contribute their skills and interests'*. Coffee mornings are arranged to entice parents to stay and help, which has worked sometimes, but not on a regular basis.

Parents who *can* spare time appear to want to help in the Centre; they accompany children on trips (of which there are many), a parent has volunteered to make sure *Books from the Home Scheme* are returned (Books Home Scheme Letter) and two parents have taken up jobs as support workers in the Centre. Some parents help with digging the garden and covering books and the handy person is a parent (manager's interview).

The Head's attitude is that parents are welcome when they can directly contribute to children's learning and progress. She is less interested in pastoral care of parents and rated support for parents, close relationships between staff and family as of less importance. She did not agree that the Centre should be more like a home than a school and was not open to parents' dropping in to see children during the day (manager's interview). Indeed, parents have 10 minutes to settle their children (9.30-9.40). If they come any later, the parent has to stay outside with the child until 10am. *'No disturbance permitted'* during the story session.

There is no special room allocated for parents despite a request made in 1998 for an extension for their use (maps, manager's interview). However, three events a year are set up so that parents can meet socially and to raise funds.

**How parents are made to feel part of their child's education**

There is a genuine orientation and thrust towards parents as partners in their children's learning: *'As parents you are the most important adults in your child's life',* is a strong statement made in the Centre's brochure. *'We want to work closely with you to ensure your child succeeds',* is a clear declaration of intent.

Those intentions are carried through by means of various procedures:

- four to six weeks after a child has started there is a review meeting used as a basis for discussing /agreeing how the child has settled in. This meeting takes into account the views of the Centre personnel as well as that of the parents and child.

- parents are encouraged to be involved in assessment and record keeping through sharing information about their child's developments. They can make an appointment at any time to discuss their children's life at nursery (brochure) and there are bi-annual parents' meetings to formally discuss progress (OFSTED).

- parents can ask questions of the staff, especially key workers at any time and appreciate informality, although many took the opportunity to meet key workers on a regular monthly basis:

*'If I ever feel like I need to ask or need to know something, I can on an informal basis'. I don't feel I need to have formal meetings. When you sit down for those chats, it's very much going through a form, his motor skills…In a way it's interesting but it's not so sort of personal'* (parent interview b).

The strategies appear to be paying off and more than one parent interviewed reported that their children were making progress. For example:
*'There's a lot of learning going on, I can see the progress from when he first started'* (parent interview d).

Thinking of parents as the audience, Centre Staff display plans and lists of activities, learning intentions, and evaluations of activities in the classrooms. The brochure spells out to parents why

curriculum plans are displayed in classrooms: ' *so that you are aware of the work that we are doing and are able to become involved or develop these ideas further with your child'*. At least one parent felt she knew about her child's progress through 'work on the wall' as much as through her child's portfolio (parent interview a).

The main corridor displays are accompanied by a script explaining the purpose of each display and parents appreciate this: *'There's stuff on the walls which is really nice so you can see what they're doing'* (parent interview b).

The Centre places great importance on the development of literacy and recognises the importance of parental involvement in developing those skills (brochure). Consequently, a Home Book Scheme enables all children to take home one book every week. Children have the opportunity to select their own book with the support of an adult in school and a notebook is included with the reading book for parents' comments on the child's response to the book or any other observations they wish to make.

The rationale for the 'Home Books Scheme' is explained in a dedicated handout to parents and in general parents see the benefits. As one expressed:

*'The teacher let me take one of the books for the weekend and [my child] sat and read the book word for word and that was fabulous actually. The pirate. He's memorised it. He's very proud'* (parent interview d).

Another way in which the centre encourages an interest in literacy is to invite parents to come in and make support materials and props for story telling (parent interview a).

Although a similar 'Mathematics Home Scheme' is mentioned in diary notes, the only details available are that children in the nursery class may choose a 'toy' to take home each week. It is likely that this is a puzzle or game to encourage sorting or counting.

There are four parents on the management committee and they are invited to make an input to Centre policies (manager's interview). In this way they are likely to learn more about children and their learning at this early stage in their development.

The case study evidence suggests that parents ARE made to feel an important part of their child's education.

**What's expected of parents**
Parents are expected to follow Centre routines and policies. Initially, parents are required to fill in an Entry Profile giving details of the child's eating and food preferences, sleep patterns, 'comfort' needs and personal care. This is not, however, done at a distance, but at the Centre and in discussion with key workers. In the Admissions Form, parents must give details of home language, siblings, medical history, child-care history, special interests and favourite books.

Parents are then expected to comply with the Centre's set admissions routine:

Day 1 – the child visits with parent for approximately one and a half hours; they meet and talk to key worker who tries to assess the needs of the child.
Day 2 – the time spent by the child in classrooms is extended while the parent stays in the staff room.

Although there are strict rules for parents, there are no hard and fast rules about the length of time a child must take to settle in and it can take as long as 3 months (manager's interview). Parents are expected to say, in a review meeting after 6 weeks, how they feel their children have settled. When their children go into the nursery class, parents are expected to be punctual and to leave

within 10 minutes of arrival so that their children can get on with the business of socialising and learning.

Parents reported that they are invited to contribute ideas at parents' evenings and they feel that often those ideas are taken up:

*'They've encouraged us to get involved with the curriculum'* (parent interview b).

*'Somebody wanted them to brush their teeth after meals …so we sorted that out. It's quite practical. Yes, if I had an idea like that I could put it forward'* (parent interview b).

Overall, then, although parents are asked to follow and comply with Centre protocol, they are also seen as people with views on the curriculum that are worth listening too.  Parents are expected to take a running interest in their children's learning: *'If you're doing stuff with them at home and actually taking notice of their work, then I think that's what the parents' job is all about'* (manager's interview).

**Parent education**
The Centre educates parents in a number of ways but the focus is always on how parents can *support* their children's personal and academic growth:

- As a precursor to the 'Mathematics Home Scheme', parents must first come to a workshop to familiarise themselves with the toys before a child can join the scheme.  Workshops are held termly to 'train' parents in the shared home-school mathematics and reading schemes (OfSTED report).

- The staff give ad hoc suggestions to parents on how to work with children at home. Parents report,

*'I've had good feedback about what to do with [my child] at home'* (parent interview b).

- The Centre has also organised parenting skills workshops (on sleeping and toilet training) and shiatsu massage lessons for parents to use with their children (manager's interview).

- The brochure gives 'practical tips' for parents when leaving their child at the nursery. The tenor of those is supportive and not dictatorial.  For example:
'When leaving your child:
- Always say goodbye, smile and leave immediately – never slip out.
- Prolonging your exit will only upset your child for a longer period.
- Be confident in your child's ability to cope alone as they will pick up on those positive feelings.
- Please do not use us as a threat or punishment as this affects the relationship that we have with your child'.

- Diary Notes from April 2000 indicate that the Head of Centre was planning a 'Creative Club' for Saturday mornings where parents and children could work together with ceramics and fabric. The underlying aim is to encourage parent-child communication as well as expression and creativity.

**F ETHOS**
**The atmosphere**
Everything points to the welcome being warm. The hours are very flexible and this in itself gives a message that parent/carer lifestyles are understood. Breakfasts are served which offer a comforting start to the day.

On many, many occasions, the researcher observed staff giving warm friendly greetings to parents, visitors and children and taking special care to acknowledge parents who arrive late. Indeed, time has been managed so that 'the routine permits one staff member to be free for advice and information to be given to parents' when they arrive' (manager's interview). This is clearly appreciated by parents  (parent interview b).

The staff appear to be intrinsically disposed towards children becoming agents in their own learning:

- children have the opportunity to select their own home book with support of an adult and they are encouraged and allowed to take the initiative in some learning situations, with staff following their lead and interest (OfSTED report);

- self-assessment is encouraged: each child has a profile book where photographs and examples of work, comments and observations are routinely kept to celebrate the child's achievements and, importantly, staff discuss with the child what should be included (brochure);
- staff have high expectations. They don't appear to talk down to children. For example, correct terminology is used by staff  ('spiral', 'pupa', 'cocoon') and used in the correct context, resulting in children showing evidence of growing vocabulary (OfSTED report);

- children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own working environment, to take part routinely in tidying up.

The staff have worked hard to create an ethos that is conducive to learning so that all children can have equal access to learning with minimum social disruption.

The staff discourage imaginative play based on aggressive or violent behaviour (Behaviour Policy statement) and see their role as providing good role models and as treating children with respect, praising good behaviour (rather than criticizing negative behaviour) and giving children strategies for dealing with difficult situations.  Observations point to consistency across staff in this approach. Children were seen to be using the strategy given by staff of saying, *'NO! NO!  I don't like it, it bothers me!'* when being annoyed by another child.

Parents are encouraged to act as positive models when in the Centre and expectations of their behaviour are outlined as key points in the Centre brochure:

'We have a policy that all adults in the Centre provide good role models for children. We therefore ask you to support this policy by avoiding the following behaviour:
Shouting or smacking
Expressing discriminatory attitudes
Smoking on the premises'.

The Centre has an inclusive approach to children with SEN and aims to support them with the involvement of other agencies, where appropriate, and in consultation with parents (brochure). In addition, within the routine day, children with SEN and EAL are given regular support in small groups (OfSTED report and observations).

Over the case study period, staff support of one child (hyperactive and aggressive towards other children - biting, hitting and spitting) has been unremitting (often with one member of staff shadowing him to keep a watchful eye (Diary Notes). One whole observation is peppered with the

interaction between this child, his peers and his teacher who shows endless patience and persistence in directing him away from disruptive pursuits to engage in something else – even playing with him for longish periods of time and cuddling him often. Because other children are affected, the staff have to sometimes deal with stressful confrontations with parents, but they seem to be able to do this calmly and with empathy. The staff appear to provide an oasis in a busy, hectic day by showing children how to relax to music and offering them soothing head massage.

Tolerance for diversity is promoted through the ethos. Festivals of the range of cultures represented in the Centre are celebrated throughout the year. Artefacts from different groups are present in the 'Home Corner' so that children can learn to respect others. Good use is made of posters and photographs, especially those that present positive images (OfSTED report) rather than stereotypes of gender or race.

Personal and Social development was seen as a strength of the Centre in the OfSTED report, with children showing developing confidence in making independent choices of activities, equipment and materials and showing an understanding of right and wrong, sharing and turn taking. The staff work hard on this for example, by reinforcing 'saying sorry' (observations).

Inside at lunchtime younger children have lunch with EWs and support workers who engage them in conversation. This is a sound foundation for later when older children serve themselves at lunchtime, sit together without an adult and enjoy a convivial lunch. Social skills are evident and the conversation is child-initiated. Children are allowed to eat at their own pace (observations). Outside the children co-operate well with each other. Children have free access to snacks throughout the day and are encouraged to serve themselves. Overall, staff respect and listen to children – for example if a child does not want to go on one of the minibus trips, they are allowed to opt out.

**Staff communication, co-operation and collegiality**
Diary Notes indicate that the staff are very chatty and relaxed with each other. On most occasions they co-operate with each other, handling each day as it comes and coping by sharing. For example, they have been known to work till 1.30pm without breaks when short staffed. In the 3-5s rooms, the teachers and EWs work well as small teams.

Although the Head leads very much from a managerial orientation and takes little responsibility for providing or 'teaching' the curriculum, she does encourage her staff to work together and improve systems and procedures for children's benefit. For example, the staff developed an observation schedule together, it was an EW who instigated older children serving themselves at lunchtime and a teacher who effected the display of books in the main corridor so parents could browse and get interested (manager's interview, diary notes).

**Support for staff**
The staff have a great deal of professional support. The Head monitors day-to-day activities, *'spends much time going round…knowing exactly what is going on, talking individually, giving feedback and getting a sense of what is collectively amiss'* (Manager's Interview). A staff appraisal system is in operation, areas for development and training are targeted and regular in-service training (INSET) days are held (OfSTED report).

The Centre is allotted a half-day closure per month from the LEA and those days are used for raising awareness of current priorities and for collegial discussion. The staff have access to LEA training. Recent INSET provided by the central team Under Fives Training department covered literacy (reading and story props) and mathematics, but also policy development, organisation, SENs and Health and Safety (manager's interview). The Centre has its own budget for 5 INSET days a year and recent in-house 'development' days covered issues concerning taking children out on trips, and a review of recently introduced systems and procedures. On those occasions, the staff also give input on curriculum issues (diary notes).

The Head has consistently followed her belief that staff training is fundamentally important to children's learning and has brought in well-known speakers. Both the full and part-time staff are paid for attendance at staff meetings and training workshops and both have either financial or time off recompense for overtime. As part of their professional development, EWs have been given incentive payments for developing aspects of the maths curriculum and for compiling portfolios with children (manager's interview).

**Learning community**

Aided by the clear steer from the Head, this Centre is truly a learning community; there is a genuine openness to listening to others in order to improve. The staff have taken on wholeheartedly recommendations from the 1997 OfSTED report (more attention to identification of children with SENs, more information for parents through the brochure and better use of questioning in interactions with children). All of the staff participate in regular meetings and ongoing training (brochure, interviews). *'Staff have a real sense of purpose and there is recognition that their job is about education; people are more willing to accept they need training, that things change all the time'* (manager's interview).

The staff acknowledge parents as educators. They look through parents' comment books regularly and photocopy any significant comments; these comments from home are included in a child's record and often demonstrate a different aspect of development from that noted by the nursery staff (assessment policy).

There is an orientation towards practitioner research in this centre; for staff to learn from what they can see. The staff are asked to observe and provide information on children's attitudes and learning styles (as well as their knowledge, skills and understanding) and to highlight where children are engaged, or bored, or uninvolved and what they are interested in (assessment policy). Reflective thoughts jotted on weekly plans show that some staff know how to motivate children by observing their interests:

*'J. was assembling an attractive garden feature which excited lots of interest. Could extend by providing art straws and tape to erect similar structures'.*

*'Reading Bear books. L. noticed a question mark and asked what it was. General interest. We looked for question marks in texts. Extend next week'.*

Weekly plans include a column headed 'evaluation' – where the teacher notes what she has learned from the children's responses to the activities and the future implications of this. For example:

*'What did the chicks look like when they came out of the egg? – Children found it difficult to focus on 'change' in the chicks – this needs more discussion'.*

Weekly plans have a column headed 'spontaneous activities'. The function of this seems to be to stimulate teachers into focusing on (and learning from) what children do over and beyond what was provided by the teacher herself. For example, when a teacher had been demonstrating mono-printing, she noticed that children did copy but then went on to explore and use the printing rollers themselves to make marks and new original prints.

In another instance, where the day's theme had been 'Pirates' and the teacher had been showing a group how to make play dough, she noticed a group sometime later having a spontaneous discussion on what pirates like to eat, where they live, could there be lady pirates etc. Role-play, pirate-style laughs and the children began to make pirate cakes, some of them using a large 'P' shape for the cake.

**Ethos as displayed through displays and booklets**
**a) Displays**
The staff are in the habit of making displays 'mixed media', portraying the extent of creativity exhibited by the children. One such main corridor display, resulting from an outing to Kew Gardens, included observation drawings annotated with children's thoughts and ideas and statues on stands made by children. Diary notes also show that one of the pin boards is called 'The Gallery'. This in itself gives status to the individual paintings, prints and collages exhibited.

**b) Booklets**
The main publication, which hints at ethos, is the brochure. The Centre acknowledges that each child will have different ways of adjusting to day care. The brochure clearly explains that staff believe in tailor-made regimes for each child through the system of key-worker and parent/carer working together. Expectations of behaviour have a slant on encouraging positive behaviour. Parents are asked to support a policy of adults as good role models of behaviour.

The Foundation Stage Curriculum is spelled out for parents in the brochure with bullet points covering what children will learn. Overall the Centre has made a good attempt at making the language of this accessible to parents ('Thread beads, place pegs in holes, run, jump, throw and catch') with only the odd lapse into jargon ('The language of time and space').

The brochure is illustrated with many photographs of children enjoying both the indoor and outdoor curriculum and of children on visits. This supports the theme running through the text that education is both broad and balanced. The brochure asserts strongly that Centre policies are underpinned by a firm belief in equal opportunities. Handouts to parents are attractively presented using desktop publishing techniques (seaside trip letter). This suggests that the staff are predisposed to quality in anything they send out.

**The philosophy**
The Centre's philosophy comes through loud and clear from the data. *'Our philosophy is based on children learning through play. We believe that play is the key to learning'* (brochure; Draft Curriculum Statement). Observations and other policies corroborate this view and outdoor play is considered to be as important as indoor play (observations and discussion with staff).

The philosophy is strongly implanted by the Head but is borne out in the practice of the staff. The manager sees the Centre as *'keeping improving stuff from 'care days' and [adding] the best of what we feel education can offer a child'* (manager's Interview).


**G CURRICULUM**
**Curriculum policies**
The following documents were provided to the research team:
Health and Safety Policy Document
Special Needs Policy Document
Draft Curriculum Statement
Science Policy Document
Language and Literacy Policy Document
Assessment and Record Keeping Draft Policy
Mathematics Policy Document
Social/Emotional development/behaviour Draft Policy Document
Outings Policy Statement and Procedure

All policies are well written, lucid and punchy in bullet-point fashion, yet comprehensive and with a decided lack of jargon or esoteric vocabulary. Policies are well organised to include aims, staff responsibilities and procedures and the role of the adult. Some policies were being revised.

Policies are co-ordinated by the Head (and written by her) but with much input from staff and the wisdom of invited speakers. They are now guided by the QCA/DfEE's (2000) Early Learning Goals (ELG).

Policies, consistently support the child-centred philosophy which is predominant in the ethos. Policies state clearly that they will be monitored and updated and monitoring questions are spelled out. For example, the questions in the special educational needs policy are:
-*Is there effective communication between staff, parents and SENCO?*
-*Are the IEPs (note Individual Education Plans for SEN children) addressing the needs of children and are targets achievable?*
-*Are we identifying children's difficulties early and quickly?*

The policies seem user friendly and underpin planning. It is likely (given their dates) that the policies were produced in preparation for OfSTED. However this does not demean their quality or function. They are recognised as *'strong programmes … for all areas of learning'* (OfSTED report).

**Balance and breadth**
This centre offers children a broad and balanced range of activities. All areas of the Foundation Stage were well covered by OfSTED and there were no weaknesses in any of the areas.

Wall and 3D displays described in diary notes convey the breadth of the curriculum. For example:
-designing and drawing each page from a well-loved book (Literacy);
-photos of grandmothers and word-processed captions by children about them (Knowledge and Understanding of the World);
-two eggs in glass jars (one sunk, the other floating) and children's drawings of chicks hatching (based on their observations of real chicks) all with children's scientific explanations;
-number line 1-20 relating to numbered eggs that had hatched (Mathematical development);
-photographs of children pulling different faces, children's thoughts and explanations of the feelings they portray (Personal, Social and Emotional development -PSE).

One mechanism to achieve balance and breadth is the theme or topic approach. The nursery class uses this approach, for example, taking the theme of Pirates. Another way of ensuring balance and breadth is to dedicate areas within a room. In this centre, the curriculum is clearly defined into discrete areas through the way the 3-5s rooms are laid out.  Outside, some activities cover the same curricular areas as indoor provision. Considerable effort goes into making rooms and outdoors look attractive, inviting and motivating and all children have equal access to indoor and outdoor provision (observations). Diary notes suggest that the outdoor (physical) activities are well used by most of the children, although there may be patchy use of some of the table top activities.

To extend children's physical development, two sessions a week are booked at a local swimming pool with trained instructors (brochure), this is funded by LEA.  It is facilitated by the free use of an LEA minibus. At least 4 children are regular attendees (diary notes).

**Practitioner emphasis**
In this centre, documentation and interview would suggest that (although the activities provided are broad and balanced) the staff place emphases on literacy, mathematics and PSE. OfSTED saw these as *appropriate priorities'*.

*'Developing language and literacy is central to our work at the Centre',* is clearly stated in the Language and Literacy Policy. Literacy is emphasised through a 'Home Book Scheme', purposefully started to develop children's interest in books, letters and writing and to ask for parental support in this (brochure, interviews).  Talking and listening skills are fostered at group-time and in one-to-one situations throughout the day (observations).  Many opportunities are offered for role-play and story telling (OfSTED report).

Mathematics is linked into topic work but there was also, at times, a particular focus on one aspect of pure mathematics (mathematics policy). There is also a 'Mathematics Home Scheme', where parents are trained how to use puzzles and toys with their children. Mathematics was seen by the OfSTED report as a strength of the setting because it was integrated throughout the daily programme.

The social, emotional development policy and the researcher's observations point to PSE being promoted throughout the curriculum, for example through organisational arrangements (which encourage children to work co-operatively in collaborative groups) and through adult interventions (to encourage turn taking). In addition, OfSTED observed that children are encouraged to care for their environment and for one another. Staff have put effort into the 'hidden curriculum', and have spent development time discussing acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and have arrived at their own policy on reacting to unacceptable behaviour (discussion document: Immediate Responses to Unacceptable Behaviour). When the staff worked together in this way, it leads to a consistency of approach and firm guidelines for children.

### Assessment
The main assessment strategy is close observation of children, using an in-house schedule developed by the staff as a team (manager's interview). The schedule covers all areas of the ELGs and breaks down the categories, for example 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World' is broken down into scientific, technology, Information Technology (IT), History/Geography; Creative development is broken down into Graphics/Art, Dance, Music and Imaginative role-play.

The staff are asked to notice and note down 'significant developments' as they work with children. There is no particular time scale as observations are continuous, although care is taken to make sure different groups of children are observed each week. Observations are made in different learning situations and different social situations.

Another type of assessment encouraged in this centre is child self-assessment. Each child has a profile book or 'portfolio' where photographs and examples of work, comments and observations are routinely kept to celebrate the child's achievements (brochure).

Children are encouraged in self-assessment by working alongside an EW and deciding which pieces of work they would like to put into their portfolios. This happens once every two-three months. Conferencing in this way becomes another mode of assessing - the EW talks with the child about work and reports the child's insight to the teacher.

Profile books also act as a vehicle for ipsative assessment. They offer an instant way (for staff) of recognising what a child can do at different periods of the year – and, by looking across the work, to see whether progress is being made.

Profile books are used as a basis for sharing information about a child's progress regularly with parents (parents handout). In the Centre there is more inclination towards formative rather than summative assessment, although a Baseline Assessment model is also in use.

### The content of observation notes
Observation and note taking is clearly a regular activity of centre staff; they use both the 'official schedule' and also make jottings and annotations on planning sheets.

### The use of observation notes
Teachers are responsible (as key workers) for the observation and assessment of a fixed number of children but if a significant development is noted by any other member of staff, they will inform the key worker /teacher concerned (diary notes).

Observations are regularly entered into records. Staff may carry out a focused observation of a particular child if there appears to be a gap in the child's records for specific curriculum areas (assessment policy).

Records become a tool for planning future learning experiences for individuals. This is a recurring argument of the Head, that one of the main characteristics of effective nursery practice is a good record keeping system to target the needs of the child (manager's interviews).

**Curriculum planning, continuity and progression**
Planning was identified as a strength of the Centre by OfSTED. This continues to be the case. The bases for planning the activities are: baseline assessments, ELGs and the Centre's Curriculum Policy. Planning is the responsibility of teachers. At weekly room meetings, teachers and EWs discuss provision for the week ahead. The teachers lead but contributions from EWs are encouraged, welcomed and used (manager's interview).

Weekly planning formats are of two kinds. The first format lists all areas of experience as in the ELGs to ensure that the staff plan activities for breadth and balance. The second format is of considerable interest. The headings include: learning intentions, resources, children to be targeted, role of the adult and MORE interestingly 'Challenges', 'Spontaneous Activities' and the teacher's evaluation of the activities.

Thus the planning sheets are used both to record intended outcomes for children's learning through various tasks and activities AND as a record of the teacher's observations and reflection of unexpected outcomes, children's spontaneous activities, and how children had generally responded to the activity provided. This facilitates continuity (i.e. the teacher can link the next piece of work appropriately) and progression (the teacher can see where the child needs to go next or whether small groups need to come together for reinforcement).
In their planning teachers think ahead to language they might use in posing a challenge to children. For example, *'Can you measure the size of your eye?'; 'What will happen to the apple when we cook it?'; 'Can you log on to the new programme using the icon?'* Teachers also predict the challenges children will face in the task set (for example: 'thread a needle'; 'sew three pages together'; 'match a sentence or word to the text in the book, using colour clues'). In a way this last aspect makes teachers think carefully about the learning intentions they set.

There is good evidence that staff are guided by the QCA/DfEE curriculum guidance and do not rely heavily on published schemes or nursery project materials (Manager's Interview, curriculum planning sheets).

**The role of visits and visitors**
This Centre goes out of its way to enrich children's lives by taking them on outings. Every two weeks the 3-5 year-olds get the opportunity to go out of the centre, made possible by use of the LEA funded minibus. The staff choose children to go on different trips, trying to match up children with experiences that would particularly benefit them.

In the data collected, there is more evidence of visits than there is of visitors. The role of visits is to extend knowledge. In interview the Head explained that, '*It's very important that children learn from visits'* and this philosophy is taken through into curriculum policies: '*through outings children extend their knowledge of the world through real life experiences, which cannot be provided within the centre'* (outings policy, science policy).

On the odd occasion there is a pastoral motive behind visits. For example on a trip to the seaside, activities had been planned so that parents and children could join in something together - games, singsong (seaside trip letter). Parents accompany children on the outings and one outcome for some parents is that they make new friends (parent b).

**The curriculum of the 'early' and 'extended day' children**
This Centre offers extended day care. The numbers of children who come 'early' or stay 'after' school vary. There are usually around 10 'early children' for breakfast and around 15 'extended day' children for tea. The approach taken with the 'early' and 'late' children is visibly relaxed (research officers notes). There is much less intervention by adults. Before breakfast children are usually outside (full age range) playing with fixed apparatus or helping EWs and teachers on that shift to get out apparatus. After breakfast, 'early' children often play in the corridor with construction materials.

The regular scenario for 'extended day' children is that they have access to the outside area from 3.30-5.30pm mainly climbing frames, houses and bikes, led by support workers in a supervisory role (diary notes). However, support workers do use this opportunity to prompt imaginative play (for example by asking, '*Could you make me a cup of tea*?').

When tea is provided there are opportunities for learning about personal hygiene (washing hands) and there are conversations with adults about children's individual interests. Children interact well with other children at this time (diary notes). After tea children often play in the book corner and look at books until they are collected.


**H PEDAGOGY**
**Practice**
Practice is driven by activities planned by staff to meet the ELGs but also by children's interests (as evidenced by staff notes on planning sheets). In addition, policies stress that adults should start from what the child can do and observations corroborate that this is the case. Adults perceive the children's response and often alter their own actions accordingly or look for opportunities to enhance what children are doing . For example an EW was observed following up a child-initiated activity (making parachutes) by providing a range of appropriate materials and equipment. Activities and the provision of apparatus and equipment are planned as a team and the staff have clear responsibilities for 'setting' up every day. Some activities are changed daily or even between morning and afternoon, some activities remain the same for two days to encourage the disposition of persistence (diary notes).

The Centre's draft Curriculum statement explains that the staff provide a balance of adult-directed and self-chosen activities and this was evident in our research observations. Teachers don't stay in the same room all the time – they work in different rooms which means they take responsibility for organising the activities for different curriculum areas. The rooms are divided into discrete areas. One outcome of this must be that children get the benefit of three teaching 'styles'/approaches to any one area of learning.

There is evidence from the researcher's diary that teachers like to make sure they have worked with all the children but also to make time to focus down one-to-one. The staff operate a range of groupings. The functions of those groupings are to give pace and variety to the day, to offer contexts best suited to different learning situations and to allow children to mix and learn alongside different 'others'. For example:

- children with EAL are grouped together for some of the day to enable them to communicate in their own language. Small group work is carried out to encourage the development of their language skills.

- Circle Time happens in each room each morning, led by one of the adults. The aims are to give a time when all children from one register group can sit together to talk about the activities they would like to do and to give staff the opportunity to reinforce acceptable behaviour (diary notes).

- Story time occurs every day from 9.40 –10.00. Stories are chosen to match the understanding of particular groups. This is strictly adhered to and no one is allowed to disturb the session (observations).

- In group time, children are divided up into two groups per room (one large and one small) for focused tasks with an adult. New children go into small groups so teachers can focus on their needs more easily (diary notes).

**The quality of interaction**

The quality of interaction seems generally high. When the Adult-Child Interaction Scale was used in one session, the nursery teacher and EW showed similar characteristics in their interactive behaviour with children in that they both are totally uncritical of children, always talk to children on a level they can understand and listen attentively when children speak to them. When the children are present, they spend all of their time with the children and not in non-contact pursuits. They never appeared either hostile or irritated by the children.

During our observations there are many incidents of staff getting directly involved in children's play and stimulating children's imagination by open questioning and promoting role play by suggestion.

**The role of play and direct instruction**

Play acts as a mechanism for learning, often scaffolded by adults. For example our observations show that most adults reinforce numbers in as many ways as possible and especially through songs and rhymes. There are also open invitations placed alongside enticing materials: 'Can you make a pirate ship hat? (diary notes). A question such as this stimulates a child to engage in both technology and role-play.

Looking at weekly plans under the column headed 'Adult involvement' we see the specific strategies planned as direct instruction. Among them are *'Demonstrate mono-printing ','Look at self in mirror – modelling sad and happy expressions', 'make books from hand-made paper'*. Clearly then there is much demonstration of processes and skills. The planned role of direct instruction is to model possibilities for children. However, in addition, our observations point to adults 'dropping in' facts to enhance children's knowledge and understanding (as when an EW explained about chicks hatching). This kind of instruction was carried out on a more ad hoc basis. The role of play and direct instruction become blurred when adults play alongside children (taking a role in a game, riding a two-seater bike with another child). Many such incidents were recorded in our diary notes.

**The role of the staff**

The role of the adult is to scaffold children's learning and to actively seek opportunities to do this. This is illustrated by the following policy statements:-

*'The role of the adult is more than just the provision of an exciting stimulating environment. Adults can choose to spend time in areas which are rich in opportunities for scientific learning, extending children's thinking by responding to their questions and raising new questions…'I wonder why?…'I wonder what would happen if…?* (science policy).

*'We aim to provide adults who listen and who will provide the language necessary to extend thinking and understanding….'* (language policy).

Diary notes and planning sheets suggest that adults in the Centre do adopt this role, often with great enthusiasm, thus motivating children.

**Identifying children with SEN**

The staff in the centre are very keen that parents relay their observations of children to them (on first applying and at the 6 weekly review meeting). Equally staff will tell parents if they feel concerned about any aspect of a child's development (either during the settling in period or when the child is more established in the setting).

Identification and assessment arrangements for children with SENs comply with the Code of Practice (DfES 2001 SEN Policy document). An Education Welfare Worker and Educational

Psychologist visit on a regular basis so that the centre can informally discuss any concerns and take their advice (brochure). Staff work closely with outside agencies in both the identification and assessment of needs and keep parents informed of progress (OfSTED report).

Once a child is identified, s/he is placed on the SEN register. The Centre has its own SENCO (the deputy) who develops IEPs for those children as well as liaising with others who can support the children, including a teacher from the Learning Support Service for children with visual, hearing, language impairment, Speech and Language Therapists, an Occupational Therapist, Clinical Psychologist and the Local Authority's Child Guidance team. Some staff appeared to be particularly aware of the needs of parents of children with SENs and are always willing to take time to talk to them (diary notes).

### Ensuring continuity and progression

Within the centre, there are systems set up to ensure continuity and progression. For example transfer from toddlers to nursery class is decided not on a child's age but on a child's stage of development and readiness. Within the nursery class, individuals have differentiated learning tasks and the extremely functional observation system ensures the assessment informs the curriculum. The practice of co-compiling portfolios ensures that there is a feedback dialogue between adult and child about work.

When children move from the centre, a detailed record of a child's achievements in each curriculum area, and the strategies that have proved successful in achieving those, together with parent comments, is sent on to the receiver-school (brochure). The centre also tries to ensure progression by enclosing a letter to the reception class teacher, when the child moves into school, drawing attention to the child's baseline assessment and the records they send (manager's interview).

### Developing dispositions

The Centre aims to *'foster skills and attitudes which will encourage children to become successful learners: interest, curiosity, perseverance'* (draft curriculum statement) and its themed approach to curriculum organisation can be seen as a deliberate strategy to encourage children to make connections between different areas of experience. The Centre appears to encourage children to develop a responsibility for their own learning. Examples of this would be: teachers take up suggestions made by children, children can self-initiate activities, children make judgments about work to go into portfolios and are listened to when they talk about it, Circle Time has been introduced as a mechanism for the child's voice.

The Centre promotes assertiveness and a sense of a personal right to learn through the behaviour policy and strategies, and its attitude to equal opportunities, illustrated by this quote from the head teacher's interview: *'They've got to be fair with everybody – not be racist, not put people down in any way. They've got to hold their own'.*

### I COMMUNITY OUTREACH

More emphasis is placed on reaching parents, than the community at large. However, a Holiday Play scheme was introduced in April 2000 and older children and their siblings can attend (diary notes).

Sources of evidence
Centre brochure
OFSTED report (June 1997)
Researcher's Observations
Books Home Scheme Letter to parents
Seaside Trip Letter
Adult-Child Interaction Scale
Diary Notes over two whole weeks.
Interviews with parents
Manager Interviews (2)

Children's Portfolio work
Curriculum Policies
Observation notes
LA application form for place at EY Centres
'Registering your Child' note to parents
Entry Profile proforma
LA Admissions Form
'Why Have Profile Books?' (In-house A4 rationale sheet)
Course Application proforma (LA Under Fives training dept)
'Guidelines for parents for transferring toddlers to the nursery class'
Weekly plans (two formats)
Registers for Green Room and Blue Room
Discussion document: Immediate Responses to Unacceptable Behaviour.

### 3.5    Playgroup

**A CENTRE PROFILE**
**Location, accommodation, intake**
The focus of this case study is a playgroup situated in a densely housed urban suburb approximately five miles from the City centre.  It is sited in an Infant School playground surrounded by houses which are both rented and owner occupied.  A small, recently built, council estate also lies adjacent to the site with the main road to the City nearby.  Apart from the main road, the area has many mature trees along the streets and roads and in the gardens (profile).

The Playgroup opened originally in a hut in a corner of the Infant school playground.  There is also a separate junior school on the site.  Later the pre-fabricated purpose-built playgroup building was erected alongside the nursery class and opened as the Playgroup and Community room.  The accommodation consists of a spacious, light and airy room with kitchen area, toilet and washroom facilities.  The furnishings and furniture are well maintained and the standard of safety and hygiene is high. Children have access to soft cushions and a comfortable, private rest area (ECERS-R).

The children have no access to their own outside area but are allowed to use a fenced off play area separating the Infant and Junior playgrounds.  However, infant classes engaged in outdoor games and PE and the two school's break-times means that access is limited to good quality, planned or spontaneous outside play (profile).

The area around the centre exudes a strong sense of community.  This is a multi-faith and multi-cultural community that is settled and stable.  Many of the children are second or third generation Black and Asian British with extended family links.  Employment among the parents is high with only one of the playgroup children coming from a family where neither parent is in paid employment (profile).

Forty children attend the playgroup. The majority of them attend either the five morning sessions from 9.00 – 11.30 or the four afternoon sessions from 1.00 –3.00.  The playgroup closes on Friday afternoons to provide space as a community room for a Mother and Toddler group.

Several children also attend part-time at other playgroups.  The few children who fail to obtain places in nurseries are invited to remain at the playgroup until they reach the September of their fifth year.  There are currently four such children although it is not known if they are full or part-timers.

Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and/or Special Educational Needs (SEN) are accepted, although at the time of the case study there were no specific numbers for either category.  One child certainly receives speech therapy (parent interview).

The intake reflects the ethnic mix of the area.  The breakdown is as follows;

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Indian | 23 | 62.16% |
| African-Caribbean | 6 | 16.21% |
| Mixed | 3 | 8.10% |
| Pakistani | 3 | 8.10% |
| Bangladeshi | 2 | 5.40% |

**Admissions policy**
The majority of children stay in the playgroup until they are eligible for entry to the nursery class of the adjacent school.  The usual pattern is to progress from playgroup to nursery class to the infant school. *This pattern helps to foster the feeling of community and stability within the neighbourhood* (head interview).

The children may enrol at the playgroup after their second birthday and must be toilet trained. Evidence from a parent interview, however, shows that being toilet trained is not always a strict requisite. The interview describes a child continuing to attend the playgroup in nappies for a whole year although it seems that the mother was unable to leave him until he was trained. Even so, the interview seems to suggest that there was no particular pressure from the playgroup to get him dry so she could leave.

The policy also states that priority is given to children referred by Social Services or other agencies (policy doc.) and it seems that the playgroup is registered to receive 20 (i.e. 50%) places from Social Services referrals (profile).

**Funding**
The playgroup is a non-profit making registered charity managing on a very low income. Costs, (including wages) are maintained by parental fees and a small amount of local authority funding (manager interview 1, profile). The school does not contribute directly but does allow the playgroup free use of the room, presumably paying for heating, lighting and maintenance costs (field notes).

Until the beginning of this year rates were charged on a daily basis, fees are now charged weekly; £6.00 for morning sessions and £4.80 for afternoon sessions (source: profile, letter to parents). Exemptions are accepted if a child is ill and the parent informs them with plenty of notice (source: letter to parents). Personnel costs including salaries, payroll taxes and benefits account for 77% of the budget with the remaining 23% for equipment. New equipment has recently been acquired from Lottery funding.

In 1998 the playgroup manager applied to the local authority to register and receive funding for 3+ year olds. In order to satisfy the requirements of this bid the number of sessions per week needed to be increased to the current nine sessions - an increase from the previous morning only sessions, to include 4 afternoon sessions. This arrangement began in October 1998 and the playgroup currently receives local education authority funding for fifteen 3 year-olds and two 4 year-olds.

**B STAFFING**
There are three paid members of staff, two co-managers and a playgroup assistant.

Co-manager 1 first became involved with the original playgroup when her own children attended. She took her Diploma (DPP) and (BTec) qualifications and by 1993 joined forces with the other co-manager to run the playgroup. Although they both hold the same title she seems to take the lead in that she is the one who goes to the main school and liaises with the deputy head of the Infants school and she also decides how the money is to be spent. This seems to include not only equipment and materials but also rates of pay. In addition to working in the playgroups she is also currently employed as a part-time pre-school worker in community health centres paid by the local Pre-school Association and also works as an assistant in the nursery every afternoon. These commitments mean that she only works 3 mornings a week at the playgroup. Her salary is in the range £4,000-7,000 (manager interview 1): made up from her three part-time jobs. She has recently decided to leave the playgroup by the end of the academic year (profile).

Co-manager 2 holds a BTec qualification, is the only full-time member of staff and is paid solely from the fees paid by parents at the playgroup. Field notes suggest that she has negative feelings about her pay, under £4,000 (manager interview 2) from her belief that she could earn more elsewhere. She has requested a pay rise but this has not been forthcoming. She will be taking over as sole manager when her colleague leaves (profile).

The third member of staff has worked at the playgroup since 1999. She initially came to the playgroup for her placement as part of her NVQ level 2 training and joined after completing her

course. She started NVQ level 3 but postponed it temporarily to study for A level English Literature. She works each morning from Monday to Thursday and is paid from playgroup fees.

The playgroup relies on student help and volunteer parents who work on a regular rota. There is additional regular help from a childminder (diary notes). She attends the morning sessions. Without this non-paid help the children coming to the afternoon sessions would have to be looked after by the full-time co-manager by herself. Thus the ratio of adults to children fluctuates between a low 1:2.5 to the maximum 1:10, although this seems a rare occurrence (observation notes). The playgroup offers placements for students studying NVQ level 2 in Childcare and Development and regularly has 3 or 4 such students for 3 days a week from a local Women's Centre and the local Technical college (profile, field notes).

**Staff co-operation**
Despite the disparity in pay and responsibility, the two co-managers work comfortably as equals with each other and have been running the playgroup together for 7 years. They have been instrumental in the various changes that have occurred and essential to its development and growth. They work well together and share common views about the care and management of children (source: observations). Both are unhappy about the coming changes and the end of their working relationship. The second co-manager, in particular, shows strong feelings about this when she says *'I don't want her to go. I won't let her go'* (field notes).

There are few opportunities for staff development. They are welcome to attend in-service training (INSET) sessions organised by the Infant school but find that the content is not always suitable for their needs. The centre receives some support from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) in the form of advice and information on useful contacts, grants and training days although there is no evidence to suggest they attend these (manager interview).

**C MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**
Although much seems co-operative in style because of the co-managers length of time together and their similar attitudes and ways of working with children they are not equal in terms of their salaries or qualifications, consequently, Co-manager 1 is regarded by the others as the leader. Her extra responsibilities include liaising with the Infants school and managing the budget (manager interview). She also seems to be the one to ensure planning and assessments are done collaboratively (observation notes).

Co-manager 1 has attended a variety of courses, mostly provided for in her pre-school worker capacity. She has attended courses on equal opportunities, first aid, SEN, food hygiene. Co-manager 2 has received training in food hygiene and first aid. The staff are able to attend courses at the Infants school but feel that they are not relevant to their needs in the playgroup 'it's mostly to do with the school and not much the nursery. Like they have mathematics and science and things like that' (interview).

There are no systems of monitoring or appraisal in place (manager interview 2). Co-manager 1 believes the role of manager has changed in that she is not so directly involved with the children as she would like to be**.** It is unclear whether this is a genuine increase in paperwork within the playgroup or because she has two other jobs elsewhere. She clearly sees the paperwork as problematic and claims to get more satisfaction from being with the children rather than '*having to do this and that and planning'* (manager interview). This is supported by the observations made in the sessions when the co-managers are regularly involved with administrative duties (general observations).

The preparation for the OfSTED inspection has motivated the co-managers to examine the centre from a managerial perspective for the first time and a few policies have been produced addressing management as well as curriculum issues. Policies in place so far are: health and safety, fire procedures and guidelines for students (centre policies).

**D CLASSROOM ORGANISATION**

The children work together in one large room with equipment and furniture organised to ensure opportunities for tabletop and carpet activities operate efficiently. The water and sand trays are placed in a separate area away from the carpet area, a separate quiet space is available and the space is arranged so that children can move easily between activities (ECERS-R). There are well established routines catering for individual, small group and whole group work, led or supported by an adult (observations, time-table). There are also plenty of opportunities for child initiated play which are rarely uninterrupted by adult intervention (general observations, timetable).

Children have access to a variety of manufactured indoor equipment, labelled where necessary and in good order. They are encouraged to access equipment independently and to tidy away after use. There is continual access to fiction and non-fiction books, some of which are torn and shabby. Adults make regular use of book sharing and story reading during the sessions (fieldnotes, observations).

There is limited access to outside play because of having to share playground space with the adjacent schools. Outside activities are therefore timetabled for 15 to 20 minutes each session when staff accompany the children and provide them with outdoor equipment for independent play. In wet or cold weather the children stay inside and take part in alternative physical activities, such as dance, drama and action songs and games (staff observations).

**E PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

**Communication to parents to help them understand the centre**

Parents are expected to collaborate and form a governing body to make financial decisions (a charity status requirement). It is unclear how this happens. Interview responses are vague and brief, neither was there any information available on monitoring the finances (manager interview). There are no formal decision-making or finance monitoring processes in place. A letter (undated) was sent out to parents asking for support to form a committee. It is clear that although the playgroup has been running as a charity for some time, there is no committee as yet, as the letter asks for those interested to come forward so that a future meeting can be arranged to elect a Chairperson, Secretary and two committee members as soon as possible (field notes).

There are two notice boards within the centre, which notify and involve parents although neither are sited to ensure easy access to all parents. One notice board is directed more to playgroup practice and includes timetables, weekly and daily plans, policies and the 'Accident' and 'Trip' books but some of its displayed information is useful and necessary for parents e.g. the times of the Friday Parent and Toddler Group and a list of 'Things not allowed in the Playgroup' e.g. chewing gum, dungarees, toys and sweets. The other board displays 'official' posters, such as 'Dangers in the Kitchen' and a Pre-school Playgroup Association poster showing the benefits of different kinds of play. There is also a list of the duties, presumably for the daily rota of volunteer parents who help in the centre, which are mainly 'domestic' but also supervisory. The information is limited to playgroup matters and does not include information concerning the community.

The playgroup also provides a brief information booklet for parents with the names of the main staff, session times, adult/child ratios, fees, aims and the admissions policy. This is a new development since the OfSTED inspection; information before this was exchanged informally by word of mouth. Information and reports of children's progress is still passed on by informal contact at the beginning and end of sessions. Letters are also sent home occasionally (parents booklet, field notes). Written reports are given to parents when the children leave the playgroup to attend nursery or school (profile).

**Parents and the day-to-day life of the centre**

The playgroup seems to be very relaxed and supportive in its dealings with parents who appear, by and large, to be pleased with the care and experiences their children receive (profile). They are welcome to volunteer as regular 'helpers' and are a valuable element in keeping the adult/child ratios low. It seems clear that without this regular parental involvement the playgroup would find it difficult to survive. Parents are also encouraged to stay on a less formal basis: in order to settle a child, for example, or just because there is time to spare. However there is no formal way of encouraging and using parental expertise.

Parent interviews show that the centre is generally regarded in a very positive light and is recognised as part of the community. The centre in turn, offers a constant source of formal and informal support and consciously aims to do so (source: parent's information booklet). Members of staff are always available to parents who can receive on-going feedback of their children's progress or problems (profile).

The parental interviews show a lot of appreciation towards the staff. They comment on the variety of interesting activities, the well organised room, its cleanliness and hygienic standards, and the staffs attitude towards the children. One mother quotes ' *they are really dedicated to the children, they actually love the children….they don't shout at them, they don't get angry.*' And another,'*they know how to handle them, it's a lovely feeling what they do with the kids, they just make the kids feel really special.*' Children are encouraged to take work home and generally are very eager to do so (fieldwork notes).

**Parents and their child's education**

Weekly and daily plans are displayed on the notice board but there seems little evidence to suppose parents are actively encouraged to read them. Progress and any problems are reported and discussed by any member of staff informally when a parent brings or picks up their child. Written reports are given to parents when the children leave the playgroup to attend nursery or school (profile). The playgroup does not hold evening meetings for parents to either involve or inform (parent interview). This seems to be because the centre sees itself as providing an informal package of education and care and that these more formal arrangements come under the responsibilities of school.

**Parents and decision making**

Parents are required, as part of the management structure of many playgroups, to form a committee and take an active role in the financial running of the centre but this has not as yet happened. One factor in this seems to be the lack of interest in this side of affairs from the co-manager and also her current temporary status there. Parents are not expected to contribute to the planning of the curriculum (manager interview).

**Parent education**

The centre does not offer educative experiences for parents other than on an informal ad-hoc daily basis whilst in operation. Parents may well see good ways of dealing with difficult behaviour or interesting activities which they can use with their children at home, but this is unintentional and from the evidence largely unnoticed by the staff (fieldnotes).


**F ETHOS**
**The atmosphere**
The research officer notes offer a picture of a centre that is colourful and inviting, welcoming to children, parents and visitors and with an atmosphere that is relaxed and comfortable. One of the aims of the playgroup is to provide a safe and stimulating environment in which children can feel happy, safe and secure and several observations confirm the high level of awareness among the staff to matters of hygiene and security. The bright, airy spaciousness of the building also contributes to this general pleasant atmosphere (centre plan, profile).

Although not a specific aim, the centre also offers support to parents in a variety of ways. They are genuinely welcome to stay with their children for as long as they want to and seem to be accepted by the staff without judgement (observations, parent interview). There are also several comments on the patience of the staff and their willingness to take time with the parents *'the door is always open….it's an open door really. Anyone can go in. You can stay with your child. There's always advice you can always ask for'* (parent interview).

The research officer includes a vignette that supports this caring philosophy to parents as well as to children and also illustrates the centre's aim to 'promote the well being and welfare of the children.' It describes how Co-manager 2 supports a very anxious father who has caught his 3 year old daughter hitting her new sibling, not for the first time. After the father has left the co-manager speaks quietly and gently to the little girl and later discusses the issue with other staff and plans a strategy to help the family without focusing directly on the daughter. The plan is to invite mothers into the playgroup with their babies to talk about them and also to stimulate the playgroup children to think about themselves as babies, about the clothes they used to wear, the food they ate, and compare what they did when they were babies. They hope that this might help all the children, and particularly the daughter, to understand that they were babies once and how little and helpless they were and how much attention they needed. This proposed follow-up has the potential for capitalising on the children's interest in themselves and younger siblings and should help develop self-esteem and foster caring attitudes (critical episode).

**The working climate for children**

The playgroup aims to '*create opportunities through play and provide opportunities for intellectual development through structured learning experiences that start from what the child already knows, understands and can do'* (documentary evidence). Planning documents and timetables show a variety of activities that are appropriate and stimulating and the adult to child ratio is generally high enough for children to have on-going interactions with adults, some of whom are bi/tri-lingual so that children can be supported in their home languages. However, there is also evidence to show that there is also a high level of adult initiated activities that rely on worksheets that are not always age-appropriate (profile, observations). The majority of children show pride in their work and want to take things they have made home for their parents (profile).

**The emotional climate for children – behaviour, equal opportunities and special educational needs**

Another aim of the centre is to encourage personal, social and emotional development, recognising the importance of self-confidence and self-esteem and to provide opportunities for the development of independence (parent's booklet).

The Adult/Child Interaction Scale (a research instrument used in the EPPE research to investigate interactions within a centre, see Arnett, 1989) shows a commonality between the co-managers' attitudes and approaches in relation to the children; interacting with them with warmth, kindness and enthusiasm. They are both firm with children if they misbehave and explain matters to them at a level they can understand without irritation or threats. They both spend a lot of time closely supervising the children although the research officer also notes substantial amounts of time are spent talking to each other and other adults in the building (source, observations). They are also keen to promote self-control and obedience (Adult/Child Interaction Scale).

The behaviour policy states that discipline should be maintained by the re-enforcement of good behaviour and worthwhile activity. Children are praised for good behaviour '*at any opportunity*' (policy doc.) and staff try to divert attention away from potential conflict (staff observation). The children are also rewarded for good behaviour with stickers and occasional sweets. (policy doc.) Records indicate that some children are beginning to play together co-operatively even when unsupervised and are developing turn-taking and collaboration skills. There are only occasional and transient disputes between children which are handled efficiently and calmly by the staff (research notes, profile). It is interesting to note that the behaviour policy also stresses that '*it is strictly forbidden for any member of staff, student/voluntary adult, to "smack, slap or shake children*

*being cared for or to use any form of corporal punishment irrespective of the wishes of the parents."* This is not only a good safeguard for the playgroup utilising a number of unqualified assistance and transient students but also offers a learning opportunity for parents into ways of treating and rearing children which might have some positive outcome.

The playgroups policy for equal opportunities shows an awareness of the range of issues to consider where equity and inclusion are important, such as admissions, employment, families, the curriculum, resources, SEN, discriminatory remarks and behaviour, language and food (policy documents).

Further evidence of the playgroup's commitment to caring and providing for families comes through the awareness and recognition that '*many different types of family successfully love and care for children*' (policy doc.). The multicultural diversity of the playgroup is reflected in the desired aims under Language; '*Information, written or spoken, will be clearly communicated in as many languages as possible. Bilingual/multilingual children and adults are an asset. They will be valued and their languages recognised and respected in the playgroup.*'

The case study cites many examples of attempts to implement the policy. There are resources and displays that show positive images of gender, race and culture (profile). There are volunteer parents and students who speak several languages which they use to help the children (vignette 1). The research officer witnessed no discriminatory behaviour from children or adults in relation to race or culture but notes two incidents that indicate the level of awareness of gender issues of the playgroup assistant is less than might be expected from the policy statement (vignette 2, staff observation). It seems that the staff are unaware of what needs to be provided to fully achieve the aims set by their policies. Attention to these equity issues stops at providing suitable equipment e.g. books, dressing up clothes, and suggests a training need for all staff (ECERS-E).

Some books and some other equipment e.g. jigsaws, do cater for the multi-ethnic intake including those children with EAL (OfSTED report). However, the playgroup does not provide the extensive range of artefacts from other cultures with which to celebrate diversity to any significant degree (ECERS-R).

There also appears to be little awareness of gender equity and there is evidence to show staff consolidating stereotype views in their interactions with the children (ECERS-R and vignette).

The parents' booklet shows that the playgroup is registered by Social Services for 20 children (i.e. 50% of the intake) but apart from one example of speech delay documented (parents interview) there is little made of SEN. Liaison with outside agencies must occur e.g. social workers, speech therapists but there is little evidence in the case study to the extent or interest.

## G CURRICULUM
### Policies
In response to the confirmation of inspection by OfSTED the co-managers of the playgroup have recently written several documents in line with the other school departments. Policies on Behaviour, Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety are now in place and also an updated Prospectus for parents. These were written by the co-managers and were then checked by the deputy head of the Infants who gave advice about format and text. There are no policies related to the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage or Early Learning Goals (ELGs) as yet, and the response to this question suggests the co-managers are in some confusion between policies, activities and planning, ' *we've got files with ideas and activity sheets in like letter formations and Festivals. We've got to look at long term planning so we'll have to get our aims and skills written for that'* (interview 2 - both managers).

**Balance and breadth**

The curriculum provided by the playgroup is reasonably broad and balanced with a variety of adult and child initiated activities (plans, profile, observations) and OfSTED reports that *'most of the children are likely to achieve the Desirable Learning Outcomes in all six areas of learning by the time they are five years old'* (OfSTED inspection report).

According to the co-manager the curriculum is not planned according to the ELGs in the Foundation Guidance as they have not had time to take them on board. She feels that the centre does cover all the areas with emphasis placed on '*literacy, mathematics and Personal Social Education (PSE)'* (manager interview 2). OfSTED comment that, *'provision for personal and social development is very good and a strength of the playgroup. Children respond in positive ways to the enforcement of clear ground rules and their behaviour is very good. There is a strong emphasis on building children's confidence and self-esteem'.* Praise is also given for mathematics, language and literacy with particular mention to priority given to developing children's speaking and listening skills (OfSTED inspection report).

Termly plans, however, show that once a topic or theme has been chosen, it is divided into the six learning areas, although the designated activities for the categories show some confusion e.g. cleaning tables and washing dolls are placed under 'physical development'. Weekly and daily plans are in place and given to the research officer as evidence although they were not seen in use during the case study. The daily plans are incomplete and sketchy, showing a lack of staff knowledge and understanding of current education processes. Attitudes are generally negative towards planning, it is seen as a chore rather than as an aid to teaching (staff observations).

Two areas of weakness were identified during the OfSTED inspection. These were 'outdoor physical development' and 'knowledge and understanding of the world'. It is not surprising that the children do not develop outdoor skills as well as they might, given the limited access they have to the outside area, but evidence also suggests that the staff themselves are not sharply aware of the importance of regular planned and unplanned outdoor play (staff observations).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills also appear to be limited although at the time of the case study a new computer and software had just been acquired through a Lottery Grant (case study profile).

The inspection process does seem to have steered the co-managers into areas where they are not familiar or confident. The liaison between them and the nursery department has contributed to an increased awareness of the bureaucracy involved (having to write policies) and an anxious reliance on worksheets for key activities (interview 2 - both managers). These worksheets did not always appear appropriate to the specific needs of the age group (sample copies). It is not clear from the case study whether these worksheets have been given or suggested by the Infant department, but some of the samples included are those that would be commonly found in Reception and Infant classes.

**Practitioner emphasis**

Although the case study does not provide firm evidence to establish whether care or education takes precedence and the playgroup's aims are ambiguous, we suspect that because of its history and the experience of the co-managers the centre's focus is on 'care' over education at the moment. However, the recent receipt of grant funding, more liaison with the Primary Schools and the OfSTED inspection may be changing that focus more towards educational aspects.

**Assessment**

Records and assessments of each child are made at the end of each term and provide a summative perspective on the child's development over the year. This record is handed over to the nursery at time of transfer and also to the parents. Samples of their writing and drawings are also collected for the same purpose.

**Curriculum planning**

Activities appear to be planned according to the six areas of learning from a theme chosen as appropriate for the age group. From these, weekly and daily plans are made. These show a list of activities for each day that will be adult-led or supervised. There are no details of methods or learning outcomes but some progression and attempt at consolidation can be seen from one day to the next (for example a 'floating and sinking' activity on one day is followed by a related worksheet on the next). In addition to the 'planned' curriculum each day different table-top activities are set up for children to access freely with or without adult intervention. The plan shows a good choice of toys and equipment rotated weekly so as to offer a range of experiences.

**Continuity and progression in learning**

There are no formal systems in place to ensure continuity or progression. Formal observations are not made to determine the planning or progress route and it is not clear how the termly themes are chosen.

**Visits and visitors**

Annual summer term trips are planned and are an opportunity for whole families to get together and join in. '*The children can't come unless they have at least one parent with them. Most children have both parents and other brothers and sisters. Some bring their grandparents*' (co-manager interview 2).

Visitors are invited regularly as a planned supplement to the programme. A dentist came to contribute to their hygiene theme and the Animal Man (a specialist in demonstrating and talking about a variety of animals) had also visited. The playgroup is also welcome to attend anything suitable organised by the Nursery or Infant classes.

**H PEDAGOGY**
**Practice**

There is no direct evidence that the pedagogy is driven by any firm philosophy other than a 'child-centred' approach evolved from the views and experiences of the staff working with young children. One of the playgroup's aims is to '*provide opportunities for intellectual development through structured learning experiences that start from what the child already knows, understands and can do'.* However, there is no evidence to suggest that this aim is carried out in a systematic conscious fashion. The staff do not use observations to plan for individual needs or if they do they are instinctual acts that are unidentified as recognised good practice. Neither are there any formal systems for finding out what the children do know.

The playgroup has well established routines catering for individuals and small groups providing adult and child initiated activities over a range of subject areas (profile). Children are allowed a choice of adult or child initiated activities some of which appear to be chosen randomly rather than fitting into a scheme of work or to satisfy objectives. There are opportunities for children to practice and extend skills and they are also introduced to a variety of new experiences. Observations record that children show sustained interest and concentration during the sessions and respond very well to the adults. However, many teaching and learning opportunities are lost, as staff do not capitalising fully on opportunistic learning situations. All members of staff show examples of this tendency; the less experienced playgroup assistant more than the others. This ties in with the general lack of formal training into teaching and learning processes that is witnessed and also assessed from case study evidence (observations). Further evidence of a confused understanding of learning processes and child development on a formal basis (exacerbated by the attentions of OfSTED) is the extensive use of worksheets (general observations, field notes and worksheet samples).

Children are timetabled to spend more time in indoor adult led activities although when children are engaged in free play they are left alone. These activities are designed for working with the whole

group, in small groups and with individuals. There are no plans for outside play - staff members take out equipment daily based on their spontaneous choice for the children.

**Quality of interaction**
Quality of interaction is good in many cases, with adults paying a lot of attention to children and engaging them in a range of learning experiences whilst paying attention to their language development and social skills. However it is important to note points connected with interactions made in the previous section.

The Adult/Child Interaction Scale (Arnett 1998) shows both co-managers have similar attitudes towards children. When they interact with the children they speak warmly and listen carefully; pay positive attention to children as individuals; encourage them to try new experiences and are not harsh or unkind. Observations suggest that quite a lot of time is spent on talking with each other or other members of staff and adults present.

Observations of adult led activities show several examples of staff 'thinking on their feet' in order to adapt their plans according to how the children respond. They also exhibit a range of other positive approaches to engage the children; encouraging participation, repeating instructions carefully, praising appropriately, asking questions (though predominantly closed) and demonstrating an activity for children to copy. There are also moments when adults break down tasks into smaller, more manageable steps for the children to understand, treat them with patience and give them plenty of time to complete tasks (staff observations).

Observations also show some misunderstanding amongst the staff of certain areas of curriculum content. More than once confusion was evident and incorrect information given over the connection between density and weight when conducting a floating/sinking lesson (staff observations).

Children have the opportunity to interact with plenty of different adults who work as volunteers in the playgroup and often do so using their first language. First names are used between the children and adults.

**Role of play and direct instruction**
The general ethos and aims of the playgroup suggest that the members of staff have no conscious philosophy and are going through a period of change towards being more education orientated. At the moment they employ an equal mix of play and direct instruction but they are not always sure of their knowledge and understanding of Early Years education.

**The role of the staff**
Adults set up the tables before the children arrive and take turns to organise and lead activities that are linked with the planning. While working with a group they also keep an eye on the other areas and engage in conversations with children or other adults. Children playing quietly by themselves or with others are left to get on but any child who seems distracted or unengaged is invited to work at the table. Students and parents work with individuals or help within a group and/or carry out domestic duties (see parents duties poster) but procedures all seem flexible with adults working where necessary. It would seem that all adults take on roles of instructor, carer and supervisor according to the need of the moment, with the paid staff acting also as supervisors towards the parents and students.

**Identifying children with SEN**
The playgroup is registered to receive 50% of its intake from Social Services so it can be assumed that there is a good proportion of children with SEN. From the evidence it appears that the staff are calm and sanguine about dealing with a variety of SEN but there are no formal systems in place to identify, cater for or monitor progress of children with SEN.

**Transition**
The playgroup does not have any systems in place to ensure continuity and progress on a formal educative level other than a summative assessment sheet designed to go to the child's next nursery or school. However, continuity of a more social nature naturally takes place because of the relationships between the members of the community and different family members who have attended in the past. Continuity is also achieved in the usual progression through the primary school; from the playgroup through the nursery class and infants, and on to the juniors.

**Developing dispositions**
The playgroup is keen to promote good behaviour and self-control. They also try to help children play co-operatively and observations support this, along with some ability to take turns and collaborate. Observations indicate that children are encouraged to remain on task and show persistence and concentration in both adult and child initiated activities (observations). Parents report that the playgroup has enabled their children to mix with others, to enjoy company, and to learn.


**I COMMUNITY OUTREACH OR INVOLVEMENT**
There is a strong sense of a stable and supportive community in the area although community links between the play group appear to be limited to visits to the local shops and the weekly Mothers and Toddlers Group. Visitors are invited from the community when necessary. Community links are maintained with the local Technical College and the Women's Help Centre with the centre regularly providing placements for the students. Co-manager 1 is also qualified to supervise and assess these students who are mainly young Asian women.

Sources of information
Profile
Fieldnotes
Managers' interviews 1 & 2
Parents' interviews
Planning documents
-        time tables
-        example of term plans
-        example of weekly plans
-        example of record/evaluation
Policy documents
-        Behaviour
-        Equal Opportunities
-        Health and Safety
-        Fire Procedure
-        Guidelines for Students
Parent's booklet
Maps drawn by researcher
OfSTED report 2000
Vignettes
Critical episodes
Assessment sheets
Activity sheets
Timetables
Adult/Child Interaction Scale Ratings
Observations

### 3.6    Private Day Nursery (also a Montessori centre)

**A CENTRE PROFILE**
**Location, accommodation, intake.**
The centre is sited in a church in the middle of a residential square in the heart of an inner city borough.  Although there is some local authority accommodation situated nearby, the immediate housing is largely owner occupied.  Parent employment in the area is high with many professional and upper middle class families who employ nannies to assist with childcare.

Once inside the gate, the church is surrounded by a grassed/garden area with a path running around the whole building. The whole area is fenced but two gates make it easily accessible to the public.  The opening times of the nursery are:

Part-time     Monday to Friday      8.45am – 12 noon
              Monday to Thursday   1.00pm – 3.00pm
Full day      Monday to Thursday   8.45am – 3.00pm
              Friday                8.45am – 12 noon

The indoor area of the nursery is divided into four small class areas separated by shelving. All staff are able to see each other and all the children. A communal, central area houses the home-corner, book corner, blocks and painting/chalk easels.  An adjacent room is used for music, ballet and computer sessions and also for class stories and rest time.  The Principal/manager has an office next to the hall which doubles as the staff room and links onto the kitchen.   At the end of each week all equipment is stored away to enable the church to have sole use over the weekend. The centre is closed to children on Friday afternoon.

The centre has an outdoor area with access to the church gardens and a nearby park. The use of the immediate outside areas is used as a selling point in the centre's brochure being described as 'delightful church gardens.' The reality is that the use of outdoor space is a continuous problem as the church gardens are also open to the public (including vagrants) and  dogs.

The centre has a three-year waiting list and admission is on a first come, first served basis. Parents seeking admission have the opportunity to visit the centre where they are given a guided tour and have the Montessori methods explained to them by the Principal.  Some of the parents chose the nursery specifically because it follows the Montessori principles, others are less clear of the benefits of the approach (parent interviews). Termly fees are paid in advance.  Children have a half day's familiarisation visit before starting and are expected to be toilet trained before admission.

**Funding**
Fees are £1500 per year (full time), £1200 (am only) and £1000 (pm only).  Optional classes (French, ballet, computer) are £70 per year extra.  The running cost of the centre (which include staff costs, Rent, Bills and Equipment) is £120,000 p.a. and the income generated from fees is £194,000 p.a. so the profit per year is in the region of £74,400, based on information provided by the centre principal/manager interview and enrolment figures.

The centre caters for 52 children between the ages of two years eight months and six years. There are 15 children aged 2-3 years, 21 in the 3-4 year old group and 16 aged 4-5 years old. Currently there are 16 full timers, with 24 part-time morning and 12 part-time afternoon children. The full time places are reserved for the oldest children.  The prospectus states a ratio of 1:8 but this can be less for some group activities. The centre aims to have an equal balance of boys and girls.

Whilst the information brochure states that the centre, *'welcome children from all religious and ethnic backgrounds'* the images contained in this commercially produced pack do not reflect this. The ethnic composition of children enrolled in the centre would not be typical of the borough as a whole.  There are no bi-lingual children currently enrolled. Practices in the centre would indicate

however that staff are sensitive to the promotion of multi-culturalism and are developing sensitivities in this area. There are books and topics in the centre that reflect the diversity of the community in the inner city. The centre's equal opportunities policy reiterates their commitment to ensuring that they present *'positive images of race'.*


## B STAFFING

There are 6 members of staff who work directly with children. The Principal (who has a non teaching role but will cover if necessary), the head of nursery (who works with only the oldest children) and four other Montessori teachers. The two part-time non-teaching staff are a cleaner and an administrative assistant. All staff are women, in the age range from 26 to 38. Two of the staff are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Peripatetic teachers are bought in for extra curricular activities (computer, ballet and French). The Principal has a part-time assistant who helps with administration. There are no classroom support assistants and any support for special needs children is through visiting specialists i.e. speech therapist. There are no unpaid helpers in the centre.

All staff employed to work with children are Montessori (two year) trained and hold Diplomas. Three members of staff are also graduates and one has an NNEB. Salaries range from the Principal in the £20,000 to £24,999 range (for a 60+ hour week) to all other teaching staff who are paid in the £12,000 - £15,999 salary range (expected to work a 40 hour week). These data are based on fieldwork conducted in 2000.

### Staff responsibilities, retention and relationships

Responsibilities within the centre seem clearly defined. The Principal has overall responsibility. She deals with administration and all contractual issues concerning staff. She buys equipment and is the main interface with parents. The four group teachers are responsible for their own teaching group of approximately 8 children. The centre operates a key worker system so overall responsibility for individual children is clear. The Head of the nursery (not the Principal) is responsible for the welfare and day-to-day liaison with staff. She also has responsibility for the oldest children (and deputises for the Principal in her absence) and the Principal takes responsibility for special needs. There are no other special areas of responsibility outside of the key worker scheme.

Despite some recent staff turnover (leavers going onto study or travel), staffing on the whole is very stable. Staff tend to stay a minimum of 3 years (and some over 9 years). The Principal has been in post since 1999. Staff absences are few and it is usual for staff to arrive early and work late. The centre does not have any major problems in appointing or retaining staff. Conditions of service include written job descriptions and contracts, regular staff appraisal and payment for planning time, attendance at staff meetings and attending staff development sessions for which expenses are also paid. Staff are provided with paid holidays but do not have access to a pension plan. Absenteeism is low and absences are covered, in the first instance, by agency staff and then by the Principal.

The relationships between adults appear to be very good, warm and based on mutual respect (researcher notes). The staff ensure the atmosphere is welcoming, they relate well to parents, children and other visitors. They work well as a team and communicate effectively with each other. The staff meet informally together (on a daily basis) to discuss childcare practice and individual children.


## C MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

The Principal is a good communicator, who relates well to staff and fosters a collegiate atmosphere. She identified 'leadership qualities' as one of the factors she considered important in good quality child care and education (interview). The staff see her as approachable and she has

a very high profile in the centre, being the interface between the staff and parents. Outside of the informal channels of communication she has a formal system for appraising new members of staff. She watches them teach and discusses their delivery of the Montessori exercises/activities. She is involved in planning and oversees the delivery of the curriculum. One of her key roles is in 'quality control' and ensuring the delivery of the Montessori 'method' (policy statements).

## D CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

The centre caters for children from 2 years 8 months up to 6 years. Children are assigned, according to age, to one of the four teachers. Children begin their day with children of a similar age in their classroom area. Their teacher will assign the activities and once this is done they are free to complete their work anywhere in the nursery. The children will, at different points during the day, be collected by their teacher into their class area to look at and discuss completed work, read a story or for whole class activities. So, whilst some lessons are completed in age cohorts children are able to mix freely with children of different ages.

There is one central communal area which is divided into 5 main 'interest' areas (Centre plans): Chalkboards, brick tower, painting easel, book and home corners. The layout is such that the children are visible to staff at all times. The materials within the interest areas are not always labelled but the children are taught where equipment is, encouraged to use appropriate equipment and are actively encouraged to tidy up before they move on to a new activity. The communal areas appear to be under utilised. In particular, the home corner is underused and not well equipped. It is used as an area for extending practical life teaching rather than as a resource for socio-dramatic imaginative play. It is never changed or recreated into more imaginative settings i.e. hairdressers or a travel agent. Only 2 children can use the home corner at a time and have to ask permission of the teacher when it is free. It is used mostly by the youngest children. The chalk boards are not in frequent use and the easel only has 3 colours of paint available at any one time.

The areas for the 3-4 year-olds are well looked after and according to Ofsted *'provide an attractive and stimulating setting for learning'*. Within each class there is a range of Montessori materials i.e. writing materials, blocks, puzzles etc. There are no set areas for reading, writing or mathematics, the children choose the work they want to complete and work with it on the floor or at a table. Three to five year olds share the same sized furniture. The children have no access to sand or water.

The centre makes a regular investment in quality resources and new materials. Resources are well selected, well looked after and support most areas of learning. Books include a good range of non-fiction and quality children's literature representing a variety of cultures and traditions. All resources are well organised, very accessible to children (by virtue of open shelving) and according to OfSTED used to '*support learning effectively'*. The emphasis is on resources (puzzles, jigsaws etc.) which support Montessori teaching. There are plenty of resources to support the development of children in subject skills but little that encourages imaginative play (i.e. dressing up etc.), social and gross motor skills. All of the equipment, shelving and furniture are on trolleys and wheeled units that can be easily packed away at the end of the week and quickly laid out on a Monday morning.

## E PARENT INVOLVEMENT
### Communication to parents to help them understand the centre

Prospective parents are shown around the centre and have their questions answered by the Principal on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 9.30am for 30 minutes (1 set per visit). These appointments are usually booked a term in advance. Particular care and attention is given to parents at the time of enrolment. The Principal spends a great deal of time ensuring that they understand the Montessori approach to early education. The centre provides parents with an A5 size folder. The folder consists of a commercially produced and attractively presented prospectus (with colour photographs of children), and a series of loose leafs, which can be changed easily,

giving general information i.e. information on fees, staff, application form etc. Policy statements are written clearly and are easily understood being largely jargon free.  In addition to the colourful prospectus the centre sends home three termly newsletters written by the Principal, which alert parents to forthcoming events.  These are chatty and friendly in tone.

There are very clear formal structures set up for parental involvement.  These are very much focused on monitoring children's progress and work to date, weekly written reports are sent home. A regular time of 45 minutes is set aside each week for any parents/carers who want to look at/discuss their children's work with the class teachers. The parents' notice board in the entrance, is well labelled and gives administrative information about the centre i.e. routines and rotas.  It also has public information i.e. adverts for nannies, mother's groups, sales etc.

**Parents and the day-to-day life of the nursery**
Parents are not permitted to bring their children into the classrooms, although they are encouraged to settle their child on admission. Parents are not encouraged to take an active role within the nursery and they do not come in as helpers, however they are extremely well-informed about their child's education.  Outside of the 45 minute weekly consultation time, parents are encouraged to discuss any aspect of their child's welfare on a daily basis, with either a Montessori teacher or the Principal.  In reality this is managed quite formally, with an appointment system in operation. There are regular parent's days and mornings planned (without children) for the same purpose. There is no specific place/room allocated for parents and given the nature of the accommodation, and space being at a premium, it is difficult to see how this could be achieved.

**Parents and their child's education**
Termly curriculum plans are displayed in the main office but not on the parent's notice board. Parents are however, given a formal weekly report (record card) that focuses on the areas of work their child has covered.  The card records: 'This week I have been…', 'I have worked on…', 'My class has…' and 'I have particularly enjoyed…'. This practice is highly valued by parents.

A separate weekly progress card also has headings which monitor children's involvement during the week with 'Montessori materials', 'Project work' and the 'Highlight of the week'. In addition to weekly reports the parents also get a more detailed termly report which logs attendance and leaves space for comments on progress in 'pre-writing', 'sounds/reading', 'number skills', 'art and craft', 'music, movement and singing', 'play with other children', and 'general conduct'.  An additional sheet notes progress in extra curricular activities.

Incidental letters sent home suggest to parents how they can help to prepare children for topic work i.e. for a space project parents were encouraged to *'spend some time with your children observing the night sky'.*  Children take examples of their work home on a regular basis.  The staff also send reading books and other materials home for parents to use with their children on a regular basis. The centre sets regular weekly and holiday homework.  It appears that the staff are keen to involve parents in supporting the educational aims of the Centre at home.

Despite what appears to be only very formal channels for communication the majority of parents are very happy with this formal system (parent interview).  Given that many of the Centre's clientele are working professionals this regular, albeit formal system, for keeping in touch appears mutually convenient.  Only one parent who was interviewed appeared to want more informal involvement.  However, the parent interviews suggest a group of parents who feel confidence in the centre and well informed about the progress their children are making. In the most recent OfSTED report it was noted that *'in order to work in partnership with parents during the holiday period the school telephone number is diverted to the Principal's home'.*

**Parents and decision making**
There is no evidence to suggest that parents have any formal or informal mechanisms for effecting decisions made in the nursery. However, the research diary notes and analyses of a critical incident would suggest that parents can be exceptionally demanding and articulate.  When a

parent complained about keeping tadpoles (part of science work) on the grounds of it being inhumane the Principal explained the educational purpose for keeping them but two days later they were removed from the nursery.

**What's expected of parents**
A well attended 'drinks' evening is arranged once each term for informal contact between parents and staff. This is very popular with very full attendance. The Principal encourages parents to contribute to the newsletter and some do. In a recent newsletter a parent publicised a website of interest to parents of pre-school aged children. Holiday homework is set and it is clear that there is an expectation that parents will help children to complete this. Other than a commitment to ensuring that parents understand the Montessori methods there appears little the centre offers in the way of parental education.

The centre offers a warm welcome to children, parents and visitors (notes & diary). Although parents do not, as a rule, come into the nursery those who do, to perhaps settle a child, are not discouraged or made to feel uncomfortable about doing this.

The stated aim of the nursery is to *'create a safe, happy and caring environment in which each child learns and develops at their optimum pace'* (Prospectus). Consistent observations would suggest that children work in an atmosphere which is calm and productive. Children are familiar with the routines, appear motivated and keen to explore the available resources. The atmosphere is one where children seem eager to learn and where independence is encouraged (this is a central tenet of the Montessori philosophy). Children are encouraged to bring in things from home (books, toys) to talk about or use in topic or circle time. The last OfSTED report stated the nursery provided a *'happy secure environment which stimulates and challenges the children through a well balanced programme of activities.'* The aspect most valued by parents is the opportunity provided for their children to develop social skills before they go to school:

*"…I mean, children are going to pre-school instead of staying at home so that they are not lacking social skills. Reading and writing they'll soon pick that up, they don't have to learn it at three. But they do have to learn how to be considerate of other children and other people and what I think is very important in a school like this is actually the mixture of ages. When my older daughter was here she loved looking after the little ones in the afternoon so the sense of being younger and being older is there. When they go on to the big school they're always with children the same age as them. Whereas here there is the looking after the younger ones or being looked after by the older ones. It's a much better lesson in life for life later on than the more academic subjects"* (parent interview).

Yet many of the parents have high academic aspirations for their children but during the interviews it was clear that all the parents felt they could provide for some of this at home and did.

**F ETHOS**
**Equal opportunities**
The nursery has a published commitment to providing for the needs of 'all' children. It has policies which highlight the importance of an awareness of issues concerning race and gender although there is little reference anywhere to socio-economic background. A range of evidence would suggest that the Centre, recruits from a homogeneous community being largely white, professional, middle class. The staff are, however, sensitive to portraying positive images of other cultures and challenging gender stereotyping. The lack of obvious bilingual material could at enrolment discourage approaches from parents outside of the homogeneous group the centre currently serves. Whilst one of the stated aims of the nursery is to *'have an involvement with the local community'*, there is little evidence to suggest that goes beyond the narrow socio-economic group it serves. The Principal visits all of the primary schools which her children transfer to and it is interesting to note that of the 27 schools that children have transferred to in the last few years, 25 (or 93%), are fee paying independent preparatory schools, with just under half being single sex.

The nursery is very clear about the extent to which it can cater for children with special needs. It does not subscribe to a fully integrated model. Whilst working with outside professionals to support children with special needs it will only do so providing they do not draw disproportionately on the time and energies of staff. Where children do require additional attention this is a concern for staff, who often feel unprepared for dealing with children whose needs are outside of the 'normal' range of behaviours (research notes & observations).

**Children's behaviour**
The 'Code of Behaviour Policy' expects that children behave in an *'exemplary manner at all times'* and that staff *'behave towards children, parents and other members of staff in a polite, quiet and courteous manner'.* Staff are also expected to *'set a good example of fine behaviour'* at all times. The policy is adhered to very closely (observations). Good behaviour, politeness and courtesy is encouraged amongst the children and expected from staff, who show consistent expectations of behaviour (observations). Staff appear to place a high value on obedience and can exercise firmness when necessary. On the odd occasion when conflict does arise, staff *'kneel down next to the child'* and *'talk sensitively',* trying to reinforce rules. Staff are consistent in explaining the consequences of rule breaking to children and encourage them in pro-social behaviour and the exercise of self control (observations).

The day-to-day environment in which children work is very chatty, with a feeling of intimacy and family. However, whilst children's academic progress is well catered for in the nursery, the area of imaginative play may not be so well realised (observations) as in the example below. In three out of four critical incidents staff dissuaded children from engaging in imaginative play and returned their focus to 'work'. Any use of the home corner play, outside of using it as a resource for extending practical life teaching, was actively discouraged:

| |
|---|
| TEACHER went to the home corner to talk to BOY. BOY was brushing his hair with a scrubbing brush.<br>TEACHER to BOY   '*that is actually a scrubbing brush for plates and dishes, not a hair brush'*<br> BOY stopped brushing his hair |

**The staff**
The most recent OfSTED report commented on the fact that the '*staff are very skilled in their management of the children and work together particularly well as a strong team'.* (Ofsted)
Staff observe each other at work as a means of facilitating further discussion as to how well plans have been realised in practice. The team meet together on a weekly basis and time is also set aside for staff to have individual discussion with the Principal about any aspect of their work. The Principal monitors staff through informal and formal means and OfSTED describes the relationships between this small team as being *'strong and monitoring systems operate well' (*OfSTED*).* Whilst there is a clear hierarchical structure evident in the nursery, this operates within a limited framework, for instance, outside of the status accorded to the Principal (and the special responsibility of the head of nursery) all other personnel have equal status. All are Montessori trained and there are no nursery nurses or other staff who could be perceived as being further down the pecking order. What hierarchy does exist appears to facilitate collegiality.

As has previously been stated (see Staff responsibilities, retention and relationships) the conditions of service for staff include written job descriptions and contracts, regular staff appraisal and payment for planning time, attendance at staff meetings and attending staff development sessions for which expenses are also paid. Teachers are encouraged to attend a range of courses, and recently attended sessions have included work on the Montessori curriculum and drama. Staff attend in-service training both during work time and at weekends. Whilst there is a commitment in theory to in-service training, there are practical challenges (Principal interview). There is little use made of courses provided by the Local Authority (although there is access to these), as they are often seen as very expensive, so finding the right course can be difficult. New members of staff are regularly monitored by the Principal during their induction period. She observes them teaching

and gives feedback.  All staff are expected to have completed a basic first aid course, and are appraised regularly.

The nursery invests in magazines and journals to keep staff up to date with news in early years education e.g. Nursery World.  A small stock of books is also kept to help staff plan topic work.  In addition to this there is Montessori information for staff reference.

There is little evidence of the nursery being a '*learning community'* in any broad sense.  The staff share their practice and are willing to attend in-service training but they appear to remain parochial in many respects. They do not take students, who can often inject new ideas and up-to-date developments in pedagogy. Neither do they build on, or learn from, the experience and expertise that parents can often bring into the classroom.

The nursery is not part of any partnership arrangements or any collaborative working across sectors. The Principal admits they do not have a good relationship with the LEA.  The interview with the Principal would also suggest that new initiatives and inspection arrangements have not really had much impact.  Although the most recent OfSTED report was very favourable the two recommendations for improvement (the development of imaginative play and activities to promote gross motor skills) have not been acted upon.  In fact the centre has chosen to withdraw from OfSTED inspections because the Principal felt that OfSTED did not take sufficiently into account the Montessori philosophy.  Whilst they do attend in-service training, much of which is on offer from either the LEA, or outside agencies (i.e. higher education institutions) this is regarded as prohibitive because of the cost.

**The Philosophy**
The centre subscribes to the Montessori philosophy, which is summed up as being based on '*utilising the child's natural desire to learn using the five senses'* to '*enhance self-motivation'* and '*develop their own interests and talents'* and to '*stimulate a fascination with learning'* (Prospectus). The prospectus states that each child is an 'individual' and should be treated as such with teachers who '*personalise their teaching programme'* to fit individuals. The nursery say they focus on a '*prepared environment'* to help children learn.  The staff see themselves primarily as educators. Although dealing with 'welfare' and 'care' issues they believe their main role is to promote children's intellectual development. OfSTED acknowledge that the quality of teaching is high: it contributes significantly to the children's attainment and progression. However our observations did not always show this (see section on pedagogy later in this report). There appears to be a very heavy emphasis placed on the acquisition of early reading, writing and number skills (observations, interviews, field notes).  Whilst there is a range of activities offered (and quality resources) these are heavily influenced by the approved Montessori equipment.  There appear to be some significant weaknesses in providing opportunities for extending children's imaginative and physical play (observations, OfSTED).

Adults often intervene in children's choices of equipment and activities.  They model practice and there is a high level of instruction. Many of the tasks are teacher led.   Although the philosophy gives the impression of individual programmes of work there has been in the past a tendency to use class 'worksheets' which the current Principal is trying to steer staff away from.

There is a range of evidence, which would suggest that staff do listen very carefully to children. There are opportunities after story time to discuss the characters and content of the story. Children are encouraged to bring toys and objects of interest to class for discussion and there is regular Circle time.  However the overall impression is one where 'work' or topic related discussion is useful and encouraged but children's own imaginative worlds are not valued or explored.

The staff give considerable thought to the learning environment and have made the best of their 'temporary' surroundings. Class displays are colourful and well looked after.  Equipment is tidy and similarly well looked after. Class displays are related to topics and are a mixture of commercial produced items, teacher and child produced work. The large displays are changed regularly as

topics change. Clear print is used on all displays with children's attention being regularly drawn to the work. Labels are at a level where children can see them. Children are encouraged to add their work to the displays. There is a good range of pictures, posters and books reflecting different cultural and religious traditions and the celebration of various festivals is incorporated in curriculum planning.

Booklets and letters that go out from the centre are well written and, in the case of the prospectus, commercially produced. There is little jargon used and it does not patronise the targeted audience of professional parents. There is a high level of satisfaction with the information the centre sends out (parent interviews).


**G THE CURRICULUM**
**Policies**
The centre has published policies on the following:
Service agreements:
Aims and Objectives
Parents as partners
Equal opportunities
Code of Behaviour
Settling-in
Management of behaviour
Special Educational Needs
Health and Safety (Aims and objectives, policy, food management, hot drinks, smoking), Complaints procedure
Accidents, First Aid, Fire Drill and Outings.
The policies are written clearly and concisely with expectations being clearly articulated. The policies very much reflect the practice observed (Field notes). The exceptions to this would be in the areas of parental partnership (where the dominant practice is 'leave the child at the door'), equal opportunities (which is 'improving' and 'developing') and outdoor play where the rhetoric on developing skills is inconsistent with practice.

There are no published documents referring to the delivery of the curriculum, the assumption being that they are based on the Montessori framework, (not included for documentary analysis). The prospectus does refer to a carefully structured education programme based on the Montessori method.

**How does this fit with the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage issued by QCA/DfEE?**
The centre's approach to the curriculum, is to develop *'mathematics, language (reading and writing), science and cultural subjects'* (Prospectus). In addition to this it states that children *are 'encouraged to express themselves freely using art and crafts, dance and music, percussion, singing and organised group activities'*. Each teacher designs a programme covering the following curriculum areas:
- Practical life – classroom behaviour, threading, care of self etc.
- Language - label objects, phrases and sentences, early grammar, phonogrammes etc.
- Mathematics - counting, sequencing, addition and subtraction, fractions.
- Art
- Cultural – biology, botany, zoology, geography, physical geography, political geography, social geography, climate, history, science
- Sensorial - visual (size, dimension, colour etc.) auditory, olfactory and gustatory
- Music and movement

These are in keeping with the delivery of the Montessori curriculum. Most of the above areas fit and overlap with the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) at some level but the ELGs are regarded by the centre as a secondary consideration. The OfSTED inspection found that the centre's *'standards of*

*provision are acceptable in promoting the DLOs for children's learning'* delivered through '*happy, secure environment which stimulates and challenges the children through a well balanced programme of activities'*. They considered children likely to achieve in all six areas of learning (identified in the Desirable Learning Outcomes and then revised to become the Early Learning Goals). Given the emphasis (from a range of sources i.e. observations, interviews) staff place on the development of 'core' subjects it is unsurprising that OfSTED found a strong *'emphasis on establishing language and literacy and numeracy skills'* developed through first-hand experiences. They also found evidence that children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered appropriately. Children also have opportunities for music, singing, dance, painting and drawing. From our observations there does however appear to be little evidence that the expressive arts or individual creativity is well developed.

The curriculum is delivered through a series of topics that embrace all 7 Montessori curriculum areas. Examples of recent topics are Space, The Woodland, Europe, Africa, Australasia and Science.

A craft activity observed included constructing and painting 'West African' mud huts from pre-cut paper and making flags. A range of dedicated 'cutting' and 'sticking' activities are provided:

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER TO GIRL | *"Do you have scissors at home GIRL ?"* |
| GIRL | *"Yes"* |
| TEACHER | *"Do you cut at home?"* |
| GIRL | *"Yes"* |
| TEACHER | *"With mummy or daddy?"* |
| GIRL | *"Daddy"* |

GIRL had finished cutting and TEACHER encouraged her to place the paper in an envelope

TEACHER            *"Right, shall we get an envelope to put the paper into?*

This is part of the school's Montessori method, however the children are unaware as to why they are placing paper into an envelope. It is also not explained to the children.

**Balance and breadth**
The curriculum is broad and becomes more detailed as the children progress through the nursery (Field notes, observations). This is reiterated by OfSTED who saw evidence to suggest that the *'educational programme is…designed to promote sound progress in all the areas of learning'* (OfSTED). Whilst there is evidence which would suggest a broad curriculum, there is insufficient attention given to (and highlighted in OfSTED reports) physical education and imaginative play, which begs the question whether the curriculum experienced by the children can really be described as 'balanced'. Children are actively discouraged from engaging with imaginative play, which could be described as part of holistic development of children of this age. Similarly the opportunities for the development of gross motor skills are extremely limited. Opportunities for outdoor play are irregular (Research notes). Although the centre has recently invested in outdoor bats, balls and beanbags there is a dirth of the type of equipment which would encourage stretching, balancing, climbing etc. When staff do take children outside it is under very controlled conditions with children chasing after a grown up or engaging in 'controlled' play rather than having opportunities to 'let off steam' in a slightly freer environment.

The parents are clearly aware of this limitation in the provision:

*"…the lack of outdoor space is limited. I've looked at another nursery near the B and I was struck by the difference there. Huge outdoor area that the children have. Particularly if they are there all day. If you've got a boy who's doing full time day I think it is a limitation of this nursery. However hard they try with the gardens. And I would personally like to see more play with water and sand*

*and that kind of group setting, instructional messy activity which they don't seem to do here. X would love that."* (parent interview)

On the rare occasion that the children misbehave the staff response is sensitive, rational and to explain why the behaviour is inappropriate; as in the three examples below.

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1) At this point most of the class began screaming copying BOY

TEACHER     *"Why are you screaming like that? You only scream if you are in trouble. You are disturbing other classes and STAFF 1 and STAFF 2 do not want to hear you. I thought you'd hurt yourselves, you scared me."*

2) TEACHER cleaned up after GIRL 1. Meanwhile GIRL 3 put her jumper around GIRL 5's neck and started pulling her.
TEACHER  to  GIRL 3 *"No, now stop it. If your not going to be sensible you'll have to go and have snack in STAFF 3's class. It's not nice. I want you to sit really nicely because I know you can"*

3) TEACHER goes over to GIRL who was throwing rice out of a tray onto the floor.
TEACHER  to  GIRL  *"Now we'll have to wait a long time for you to put your work away. Do you understand?"*
GIRL          *"Why?"*
TEACHER     *"Because if you keep throwing rice on the floor we won't have any left for other children to use."*

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The centre provides optional tuition in computers from a peripatetic teacher. There is little in the documents provided for analysis to suggest that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) goes on outside of this.

On balance the Centre's emphasis is on 'education' over 'care'. This is acknowledged by the Principal who during interview reaffirmed the centres '*strong educational emphasis'*. A range of sources would suggest that there seems to be a particular emphasis on language development with staff encouraging children to think about not only what they've said but why they've said it. OfSTED reaffirms this by stating that there are ample opportunities for children to develop speaking and listening skills.

There is a strong emphasis on early reading skills (i.e. linking sounds to letters, sight reading through Oxford Reading Tree, one to one reading evident etc.) and literacy. With OfSTED stating that *'reading and writing skills have a high priority and are an integral part of the day. Phonic skills are well developed in reading and are applied in both writing and reading. Overall, this area is a strength of the nursery'* (OfSTED). Despite accolades in this area observations would suggest that writing tasks are very directed with no particular emphasis on emergent writing.

Mirroring development in language albeit to a slightly lesser extent the nursery places emphasis on the development of early number concepts with lots of number activities; number displays and the use of Mathematics Heinneman Educational books. Again OfSTED considered this a strength of the centre with children demonstrating good mathematical vocabulary which they use to discuss shapes, size, quantity and position. They are able to count, sort and compare objects and can make mathematics patterns and solve simple addition and subtraction problems. The programme of work is carefully sequenced to promote their acquisition of skills and knowledge of mathematics.

Opportunities are frequently taken to support children's development of number skills in between other activities to 'fill time', this may simply be through choral counting (e.g. to 10), or through questioning:

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TEACHER     *"Ok let's have register. Are you ready?"*
All sat quietly. After calling out their names TEACHER continued to focus on number.

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| TEACHER | "How many of us are there?" |
| TEACHER | "1,2,3" |
| GIRL | "1,2,3" |
| TEACHER | "And me makes 4 |

The children also benefit from more structured number activities and the field notes show they were clear about how to use the Montessori equipment (Field Notes).

Staff place great emphasis on personal and social development (OfSTED, obs.). This is also an essential area in the Montessori practical life skills area (taught through exercises specifically designed for the development of social skills, grace and courtesy) and children are encouraged to take turns, recognise right from wrong, take initiative and to be independent.

Praise is usually given for completed activities and it is also given at times to encourage good effort although the 'Montessori' emphasis upon developing choice and self help clearly requires a careful balance of encouragement and challenge:

TEACHER to BOY *"what he would you like to do".*
Boy chose to complete a number puzzle
*BOY* *"I can't do it"*
*TEACHER* *"Well it was your choice. You don't have to do it"*
Boy continued to complete the puzzle and succeeded
*TEACHER* *"Well done, very good"*

### Assessment
The assessment of children's progress is a significant strength in the centre (observations, Ofsted). Children's achievements are assessed against a Montessori record card which all children have completed by the time they leave. Thus the spiral bound A4 booklet which is 30 pages long is meant to represent what a child should be able to do over the period of their entire time in the nursery. There are no age recommendations indicated in the booklet and clearly children will complete different parts of the booklet as they reach different developmental stages. Regular assessments are conducted on children using this format. The training for conducting these assessments is done as part of Montessori training. Baseline assessments are completed on the children at entry using the Montessori record card framework. Assessments are used to identify children who may have SEN.

The Montessori record card is divided into 5 of the 7 areas of the Montessori curriculum (see How does this fit with the Curriculum Guidance for the foundation stage issued by QCA/DfEE?) each of these areas is subdivided into the Montessori exercises which have been designed to monitor the development and acquisition of particular skills. Taking 'Practical Life' as an example the subdivided areas cover :-
- ground rules for classroom conduct for teacher and child i.e. how to talk in classroom, carrying apparatus etc.
- pouring i.e. pouring large beans from one identical jug to another, pouring water from a jug into two equal containers etc.
- transferring i.e. transferring rice with a spoon, transferring glue with a paste applicator etc.
- opening and closing i.e. assorted bottles, locks and keys etc.
- threading i.e. large beans on a shoelace, sequencing card etc.
- cutting i.e. introduction of how to handle scissors, cutting up fruit etc.
- sewing i.e. sewing cards, introduction of threading a needle etc.
- folding i.e. folding in half, folding horizontally
- walking a line i.e. free walking on a line, walking with a glass of water etc.
- the silence game, whispering names, opening a door silently etc.
- exercises for care of self i.e. washing and drying hands, blowing nose etc.
- care of the environment, i.e. dusting, care of pets etc.

- classroom skills i.e. sharpening pencils, putting work in finished work box etc.
- cooking skills i.e. weighing, sieving etc.
- fire drill
- exercises for the development of social skills, grace and courtesy i.e. interrupting "excuse me", serving and sharing food etc.

The record card also provides space for teachers to comment on children's general development i.e. concentration, motivation etc. and social development i.e. co-operation with peers, participation in group activities, physical development i.e. gross and fine motor skills, emotional development i.e. attachment to parent and teacher, and special education needs i.e. educational and physical. Each of the subdivisions of the record card allows the teacher to log the date when the exercise was presented/comments/date completed.

Art and music are the only two areas in the curriculum which do not appear to be formally assessed. They are not mentioned in the formal record card assessment booklet. There was no evidence presented to illustrate how children were assessed in these areas other than progress logged in the weekly and termly reports to parents (Field notes).

In addition to the formal Montessori assessment, children take home once a term, a profile book. This contains children's pictures and pieces of work which have been chosen to demonstrate progress and achievement.

There is no policy on assessment, although the rationale for this may be part of Montessori training. It would appear that the dominant strategy driving the assessment framework is largely summative. The Montessori record card system provides a firm steer as to what should be assessed and there was little evidence to suggest that teachers operated much outside of this framework. Observations would suggest that most teachers keep their own personal ongoing diaries and transfer summative reports in preparation for parent conferences. Staff are encouraged to focus on a specific area of the child's development each week in order to complete their record cards (Research notes). It would appear that assessment documents are written very much with parents in mind and in that respect parents have a very strong part to play in the assessment arrangement.

**Planning, continuity and progression**
Planning appears to be a significant strength in the centre (obs OfSTED). Planning was reported as a collegiate activity with all staff working together, following Montessori methods but being mindful of the ELGs (Principle interview). Curriculum plans are designed to link with the Montessori exercises detailed in the summative 'record card' used to assess children's progress. Detailed curriculum plans are followed each term. The teachers appear to decide together on an overall topic for the term, with each teacher designing a particular programme for their own class. Some of the termly plans are topic diagrams or 'web charts' which focus largely on content without being explicit about skills, attitudes etc. being developed. The curriculum plans only identify the broad brush strokes in as much as they describe what activities are going to be tackled. In order to ensure complete coverage of the Montessori exercises some of the topic plans seem quite contrived i.e. sensorial in a topic on Africa says 'shapes e.g. pyramids in Egypt'. They are not very child centred, and appear quite abstract (i.e. Africa, the planets etc.) they also appear to include sophisticated curriculum areas (i.e. physics, chemistry and meteorology). There is a danger that some of the geography topics may reinforce stereotypes of an area i.e. movement in a topic on Africa is about walking with something balanced on your head. They are also very variable in quality and seem to cover a huge amount in a short space of time.

There is little evidence that planning is thought of in short, medium or long term stages. There was evidence of termly plans being fleshed out by weekly plans. Each terms topic appears to be self contained and 'stands alone'. There is no evidence in the planning documents to suggest that the work is differentiated in any way.

Planning shows continuity with progression informed by regular informal and formal assessments close links between the OfSTED assessment of individual children's progress and the planning of future work (OfSTED). OfSTED considered language and literacy and mathematics programmes to be well structured to support continuity in children's learning and that projects which cover science, geography and history were also clearly linked to work in basic skills to further enhancing children's learning.   However, our observations would suggest that continuity and progression is implicit at a class level rather than explicit.  This is not to say that it does not happen but that there is little documentary evidence to illustrate how this happens.  It may well be that the responsibility to ensure differentiation, continuity and progression is left to class teachers to demonstrate in practice rather than recording this formally. There is evidence to show that staff  know what children have covered and how to move them on because they informally record each child's achievements, pending a weekly formal report to parents and that they consolidate and reinforce learning before moving children on. This is done both in group time and on an individual basis.

**Ensuring continuity and progression**
Continuity and progression appears to be done largely by reflection on summative assessment judgements. The detailed monitoring accomplished by the various summative assessments and the record card gives staff a very clear idea (within the Montessori framework) what a child is able to do and what they need to go on to do next. Teachers were observed at times to offer children formative assessment during their interactions with individual children. The approach taken for the identification of SEN includes regularly observing and working with children, Principal and teacher conferencing, speaking to parents and the involvement of outside agencies. The Montessori assessment record card allows staff to note any special needs, educational or physical which the child might exhibit.

However, there seems to be some conflict at the heart of the delivery of the curriculum. There is a clear intention on the part of the staff to start from what the child knows and can do but this does not always sit comfortably with the choice of topics for study.  There is little to suggest that children's own interests are followed.

**The role of visits and visitors**
There is a policy on 'outings' and staff are asked to *'present a plan of your project including where you plan to visit'* to the Principal at the beginning of each term. However the value of visits or any visits to be made (during the term of the case study) was not identified in planning. For instance a topic on 'The Woodland' does not include a visit to a woodland, but instead identifies a *'talk about children's visits to woods'*.  This seems to make the assumption that all children have visited a wood (which may well be true given the background of the majority of the children).  Good use is made of the local library to borrow books mostly non-fiction to support topic work and children are taken regularly to the local park.  Outside of visiting peripatetic teachers for French, ballet and computers, the centre seems to encourage visitors who are willing to come in and talk to the children. One newsletter to parents details the arrangements for a visit from the local Fire Brigade and other visits are planned from the Ambulance and Police services.  The role of visitors appears to give children information, especially when linked to a current topic.


**H PEDAGOGY**
The Montessori method drives the pedagogy on offer and is the binding thread that unites the teachers in their approach to working in the early years.

The staff arrive early and set out the tables for the day (obs. notes). They also use lunch time to set up activities, write up notes on children etc.  Although the communal areas are meant to be used for more 'free play' activities these are chosen to fit in with the delivery of the Montessori curriculum and assessment framework.  The activities for the day appear to be teacher directed and initiated with little opportunities for 'free choice' activities or truly imaginative play.

Within boundaries children choose where they will work and determine their own pace in completing work. They are however, expected to complete certain teacher initiated tasks within a set period of time. Children are actively encouraged to complete a task to an adult's specification and exhibit a high level of concentration, involvement and engagement with activities. This would suggest that many of the activities are well matched to children's abilities and capabilities.

There is a reasonable balance struck between individual, small group and whole class work, although it should be borne in mind that a class group is defined as 8 children (obs notes). The day starts off with class group story and discussion and after this children are normally divided into small work groups. Children appear to work exceptionally well together in small group situations maintaining concentration when the adult moves away (Field notes and obs). There is little opportunity for children to 'self select' which groups they may want to work in, usually being assigned to a group by the teacher. However given that the main mode of curriculum delivery seems to be through assigned group work there is nevertheless opportunities for staff to engage with children as individuals. Teachers try to ensure they work with each child on a one-to-one basis at some point during each session. (Field notes)

Topic work activities appear to be set for the whole class and children complete this at their own pace, so differentiation appears to be, very much by outcome. Literacy and mathematics work appears to be more individualised with more customised programmes of work. Much more time is allotted to indoor work than outdoor and the pedagogy for outdoor work is predominantly teacher led.

**Special educational needs**
The Centre recruits very low numbers of children with recognised special educational needs (SEN). Until recently no children with SEN attended but the Centre currently caters for the needs of a child with dyspraxia and one who has language and speech difficulties. The centre's SEN Policy says that SEN children should be '*recognised and their requirements addressed'.* The centre does not commit to a fully integrated view of special needs and states in its SEN policy that *'children should be taught at the nursery as long as we are able to provide suitable teaching and materials for every child'* and that *'it may be necessary for a child with recognised special needs to be placed in a special unit where his/her needs can be more appropriately met'.* The two children with special needs, whilst having outside support in the centre from peripatetic health workers i.e. speech therapist, are of considerable concern to the staff who feel the additional time spent with them can be at the expense of other children.

**The quality of interactions**
The quality of interactions seems generally high. Teachers maximize on opportunities to extend childrens' language skills in particular. Teachers appear very attentive to individual needs in framing questions and initiating discussions/questions to individual children. They ensure conversations take place, they join in and help children to extend their use of language (Research notes). They encourage children to try new experiences and talk about them. The Adult/Child Interaction Scale (see Arnett, 1989) would indicate that when speaking to children the staff are warm and listen attentively. When talking to children they kneel, bend or sit at their level to establish eye contact. There is very little time spent on activities by teachers which do not involve interaction with children.

Teachers spend time asking questions and the research officer noted that children appeared not to be inhibited in asking teachers questions (Research notes). Staff questioning appeared appropriate and this played an active role in encouraging children to think (OfSTED). Questioning is clearly used for a variety of purposes that included holding the children's attention and providing a context for instruction.

The staff make a systematic effort to spend time with each child and, despite the emphasis on developing the children's independence, they spend a significant amount of time demonstrating particular skills and practices on a 1:1 basis:

> TEACHER encouraged BOY to complete a teddy bear dot to dot.
> BOY fetches some pens and sits down at the table. TEACHER sits down with him
> *TEACHER*        *'What number is that? (pointing to the picture)*
> *BOY*        *'11'*
> He was correct
> TEACHER showed BOY how to hold his pencil correctly and then demonstrated how to use it
>
> *TEACHER*        *'Stop, draw a line from here to here. Let me show you'.*
> TEACHER counted as BOY (3:4) drew from line to line 15-16-17 etc
>
> *TEACHER*        *'Now what have we got?'*
> *BOY*        *'A balloon'*

Some of these 1:1 interactions are, at times, extended but not based on the child's interests:

> TEACHER fetched a box of wooden letters and pulled out the ones that spelt GIRL
> *TEACHER*    *'Oh look at this it looks like a number one doesn't it'* (it was a K)
> TEACHER 1 demonstrated with her finger on the letter the correct way of writing it
>
> *TEACHER*    *'Up and down'*
> GIRL copied
>
> *TEACHER*    *'Very good. Shall we do some other letters now? Shall we write some words?'*
> *GIRL*    *'Yes'*
> TEACHER writes a letter and GIRL copies it on the same piece of paper.
> *TEACHER*    *'Shall we write dog'*
> *GIRL*    *'Yes'*
> TEACHER got the letter D out and drew it on the paper for GIRL to see
>
> *TEACHER*    *'Ok go up and down and around. Good, well done'*
> (TEACHER goes through each of the letters explaining how to write them.
>
> *TEACHER*    *'Very good, very good'*
> GIRL finished writing on one piece of paper and went to fetch another one.
>
> *TEACHER*    *'What do you want to write this time?'*
> No response
> TEACHER 1 pulled out the letter N and GIRL copied it
>
> *TEACHER*    *'How about writing Fox?'*
> TEACHER showed the letter F and GIRL copied it
>
> *TEACHER*    *' What's next?'*
> Teacher takes out O and then X. No time for GIRL to respond. GIRL wrote the letters to make the word.
>
> *TEACHER*    *'Well done, F-O-X'* (spelling it out)

Although there are very few children in the centre who have identified SEN the extent to which they monopolise the teachers time and limit interaction with other children is a concern to staff. The staff do spend additional time with these children but they feel guilty that this may be at the expense of dedicated time to other individuals. Staff are not really equipped to fully integrate special needs children and have not managed to differentiate work sufficiently for these children to

be 'independent' learners rather than overly dependent on teacher's time (observations). One teacher said that she felt that other than giving a special needs child additional time she was not really providing activities to help him get to grips with his disability.

**The role of play and direct instruction**
Play is not one of the central tenets of this nursery. Play which is related to the delivery of the aims of the curriculum is encouraged and built on, but imaginative play has little place. Children are not encouraged in escaping into their own worlds and when this happens, particularly for the older children, they are often brought back down to earth and refocused on their 'work'. It would appear that the dominant model for extending children's learning is through a range of direct teaching techniques from the teacher. They set up the activities, organise the groups which children will learn in and set the specification for the final produce of a task. There is use made of work sheets and the staff have a very clear notion of the work which is to be covered during the course of a term. There is little to suggest that children's spontaneous interests are followed or that staff are prepared to go off at a tangent in response to imaginative outbursts from the children. However, within this children *are* encouraged to discover and explore for themselves although the overall impression is that this is guided exploration and controlled discovery. A good deal of the instruction is provided for individuals by the teacher although whole group activities are also commonly employed. All the children are encouraged to identify their name via stickers and attach them to their work once completed. Teachers are not afraid to provide the correct information and correct children's mistakes.

**The role of the teacher**
There is a strong level of satisfaction amongst parents with the staff in this centre (parent interview). They are happy that the staff provide a loving environment which is seen as a good extension of 'home'. The staff see themselves first and foremost as educators but they are loved by the children and the parents appreciate the important role that the teachers play in their children's lives. The staff provide what the parents appear to be looking for: a strong emphasis on cognitive development and a focus on the 'basic' skills most notably in reading, writing and number work. Teachers appear to direct the learning and have a strong commitment to the delivery of the Montessori curriculum and assessment framework. They have a strong instructional role. Because there is no ancillary help in this centre it must be assumed that the staff also do all of the 'mopping up' which needs to be done with young children but the emphasis still remains firmly on the educational side.

**Developing dispositions**
The staff in this centre demonstrably encourage children to complete activities, developing application and perseverance. One of the offshoots of this is a high level of engagement. Children were observed repeatedly 'on task' even when the teacher was not present. Although encouraged to be independent in getting out and putting away equipment children often appeared 'at sea' in free choice activities as they are more used to an instructional approach, being told what to do and when to do it. Children are told clearly if they are doing something right or wrong and encouraged to explore and discover for themselves. There is consistency amongst staff in developing pro-social behaviour and children are encouraged to share, take turns and co-operate together in getting a task completed. A strong emphasis is placed on self control and independence with high expectations of children in clearing up and looking after their appearance and their surroundings.

**I COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**
There is little evidence to suggest that the centre has a strong affiliation to the local community although it is situated in a church.

Sources of information
Centre profiles
Centre's Brochure
Research Officer's Diary notes

Research Officer notes introductory visit
Policy statements
Newsletters
ECERS E 31.3.00
ECERS E 19.5.98
Adult/Child Interaction Scale (Arnett)
Centre Managers interview I
OfSTED report 1997 (the centre pulled out of OfSTED inspections after this report)
Centre Managers interview II
Termly plans
Research officer's display notes
Research officer's assessment notes
Research officer's observation evaluations
Research officer's interview notes
Weekly record cards
Progress reports

**3.7     Reception Class**


**A CENTRE PROFILE**
**Location, accommodation, intake**
The case study is set in one of the Reception Classes in a Primary School located in an inner suburb of a large city. The school site is sandwiched between two roads, one being a very busy main arterial road to the city centre.  Major improvements have been employed over the last few years with streets of low-level housing replacing 1960s tower blocks and Victorian terraces.  A few towers still remain although they have been refurbished and together with the new trees and grassed areas and the small shopping precinct and Leisure Centre nearby there is a general feeling that efforts of regeneration in a previously deprived and depressed area are being made.

The school was built in 1997 to replace an older primary school.  An Early Years Unit has been created to incorporate the two reception classes and is housed in three rooms on the ground floor of the two-storey school building. The rooms have been adapted to make a semi open plan suite with the two classes based at either end with a communal area in the middle (profile).  Each class has its own separate cloakroom with toilet and washing facilities.  Outside, the classes have their own fenced in playground, which is currently being developed.  Plans include a safety playground surface, painted markings and some climbing apparatus with additions as money becomes available. The school grounds offer a large grassed area, a playground and a pond set in a natural habitat.

The school operates a successful breakfast scheme from 7.30 to 8.30 am. This is funded by Educational Action Zone (EAZ) and has been evaluated by the National Health Service (NHS) and Area Health Authority.  Its success has led to two other schools in the zone joining the scheme (headteacher interview).

There are 254 children on roll with numbers rising.  The fluctuation in attendance over the past few years reflects the period of local decline followed by regeneration.  Rising numbers at the lower end of the school indicate the reversal of a previous trend of families leaving the deprived area. Larger numbers of younger children have resulted in the Reception and Year 1 classes being increased to a one and a half form entry, while the rest of the school maintains a one-form entry.

There are 45 full time places in the Early Years Unit (one and a half form entry) with 44 currently on roll.  The class population seems fairly stable – four children left and one new one came during the first term.

The ethnic mix of the class is as follows -

| Ethnicity | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Middle Eastern | 1 | 4.35 |
| Indian | 1 | 4.35 |
| Mixed | 3 | 13.04 |
| White/UK | 6 | 26.10 |
| African Caribbean | 12 | 52.17 (profile) |

These figures, combined with others relating to the children's social circumstances, indicate an area of high social need. Fifteen children (65.22%) are eligible for free meals, which is well above the national average. Fourteen children (60.87%) come from single parent families (profile).  A large number of the children come from families receiving income support (OfSTED 1997). Two children (8.70%) come from homes where English is an additional language (EAL); one is described as 'very fluent in English in most social and learning contexts' while the other is 'becoming familiar with English.'

Six children (29.09%) have been identified by the class teacher as having special educational needs (SEN) and have been placed on the school's SEN register after confirmation from the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO).  86.96% of the children have had pre-school education before entering the reception class, with most of them attending a local nursery school. The figures are as follows  -

| Pre-school Type | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| LEA Nursery school | 19 | 82.61 |
| LEA Nursery class | 1 | 4.35 |
| Other | 1 | 4.35 |

### Admissions policy
The children begin school in the September after their fourth birthday and remain in the Unit for one academic year.  If numbers exceed the 45 per year group allowed, priority is given to those living closest to the school or who have siblings already attending (information booklet).  During the first week of the Autumn Term the children attend half days with full time attendance starting from the following week (profile).


### B STAFFING
### Responsibilities, retention and relationships
The Early Years Unit is staffed by two full time qualified teachers. These are Reception 1 (R1)  and Reception 2 (R2) with R1 being the EPPE case study teacher.  These two teachers are supported by three teaching assistants (TA).  R1 is supported by a full time TA. The TA is unqualified but has worked for over 11 years in various classes throughout the school.  The other two both work a 0.5 job share supporting  teacher R2. Both of these TA are Nursery Nurse (NNEB) qualified. One of these TAs has worked in the school for 12 years.  All but one member of staff are White UK.

The teacher responsible for R1 is also the Early Years (EY) co-ordinator.  She has been in post for 2 years and was recruited to 'start with a blank canvas' by amalgamating the two reception classes into a new Early Years unit (R1 interview).  She is responsible for planning the early years curriculum, the administration of the Unit, supervising the full time TA and teaching her own class. She is also responsible for monitoring the assessment procedures and organising ways of reporting back to parents.  Her curriculum area for the whole school is Geography.

Although responsible for all the official 'paper-work' she collaborates closely with R2 over planning and other day-to-day matters.  The TAs are regarded very much as part of the team and are welcome to contribute to planning etc.  It is clear that the staff have very good relationships with each other and work well as a team (profile, observations).

### Other staff
Students from the local further education colleges are regularly placed in the Unit as part of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)  training.  It also hosts work experience pupils from a nearby Secondary School.

### Adult/child ratios
The unit officially operates a ratio of 1: 11/12, which is regarded by the EYs co-ordinator as providing adequate provision in this setting (R1 interview).  However this ratio is frequently less when students and work experience pupils are taken into account.


### C MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP
The school is described by OfSTED as an *'improving'* school.  The report states that the '*strong leadership of the headteacher coupled with the new determination of the governing body*' are the reasons behind clear direction and sustained improvement.  OfSTED reported in 1997 that a number of changes had improved the school during the previous five terms and the headteacher who had been in post at that time for only six weeks was so far providing '*strong and supportive*

*leadership.*' (OfSTED 1997). Since then it seems that moves have been made to improve standards by creating a School Development Plan, developing policies and using staff more effectively. The creation of the Early Years Unit in 1998 is an example of how the headteacher aims to raise standards and the profile of the school.

The class teacher of the case study, as well as being the EY Co-ordinator and responsible for the management of the Early Years Unit, is also a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) which includes the headteacher, the deputy, the co-ordinators for Key Stages 1 and 2 and the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO). They meet regularly to review documentation and items from the School Development Plan (profile).

The headteacher supports the Unit and approves of its practice, '*I like the Early Years approach and there are elements that we can use all the way through to the top of Key Stage 2*' (headteacher interview). The detailed documentation provided by the co-ordinator indicates not only her high level of commitment but also the autonomy permitted by the headteacher. She seems to have a strong and positive effect on the EY Unit and staff and has recently been invited with other LEA Reception teachers to be part of an LEA working party to develop assessment procedures in relation to Baseline criteria (profile).

### Staff development and training

There is no school policy for staff development but teachers may access LEA courses for which they make 'bids' to attend. There is also some 'in-house' training. Staff meetings are held each week after school which NNEBs and teaching assistants (TAs) are welcome to attend (profile).

The headteacher encourages members of staff who show enthusiasm to attend courses but acknowledges the 'ad hoc' nature of staff development in the school because of a lack of an in-service training (INSET) policy. Redressing this situation does not seem to be a priority at the moment. His reasons are not entirely clear other than difficulties in securing cover (headteacher interview).

### Monitoring and appraisal systems

Teaching staff are regularly monitored by the Headteacher and Deputy through lesson observations, examining planning and the children's workbooks, after which staff receive written feedback (profile). The performance of TAs is not currently monitored although there are plans to do so once the present system is firmly in place (head teacher interview).


### D CLASSROOM ORGANISATION
### Pupil organisation
The 44 Reception children who form the Early Years Unit are assigned to two classes – Class R1 and R2, and are mixed to provide equal gender, age and ethnicity. Both classes are housed in an open plan area with their own separate classroom base at each end and a shared communal area in the middle. Although the target class is R1 the two classes work as one. The children are in school from 9am to 3.20 pm with a lunch break from 12.00 to 12.50 pm. The age mix is between 4 years 7 months and 5 years 6 months.

### Grouping arrangement
The children from the two classes are ability grouped according to Baseline assessment results for Literacy, Numeracy and Knowledge and Understanding of the World sessions. There are four such groups - red, blue, yellow and green. The red group includes the most able children and the green group the least able although these groupings are fluid and will alter throughout the year according to rates of progress. For PE and Swimming, Creative, and Personal Social Education (PSE) sessions the children work in their class groups. Both classes combine for a Music session once a week led by a peripatetic music teacher.

In the course of a day children will experience a variety of grouping arrangements. Registration is conducted in class groups as are the introductory sections of the Literacy and Numeracy sessions and any plenaries. As the ability groups are quite large with approximately 11 children in each they split into smaller groups of 4/5 to engage in turn in adult-led activities, or work in pairs or individually while they pursue subject orientated 'free-choice' activities set out in the class and/or communal area. They may congregate for a whole unit story or music session and will also join the rest of the school population in whole school assemblies.

**Room layout**
The Early Years Unit is an open plan environment with the class bases at each end and a communal central space. This communal area is arranged to provide role play, a mathematics area with apparatus, books and work cards, a book corner, large and small construction play and a listening corner. Storage trays hold games and jig-saws and there are comfortable foam seats and bean bags. There is also a purpose built art/craft area with a tiled floor and two sinks where art activities and water play take place. There are no separate areas for science/discovery or musical instruments (profile, room plan).

R1 is mostly carpeted with a separate area defined for the installation of the 'big book' stand and white board and enough room for the children to sit comfortably in front of them. There are several tables with chairs, units for trays to hold the children's books and a bookcase to store writing equipment and story time books. There is also a small tiled area with an adult sized cooker, sink and drainer unit (room plan).

The cloakroom area for R1 houses the sand tray and accompanying equipment while the EYs book lending library shares the cloakroom area belonging to R2 (profile).

**Resources**
The Unit is well equipped with all resources accessible and labelled. Equipment is clean and in good order. The two classes share a computer which is used every day but has to be brought in from a secure unit which is not particularly easy to access. Several stacker boxes of role play materials are also kept in the communal area. These are used to equip the role play area with a change of focus every four weeks, usually relating to the current topic work. Outdoor equipment is kept in a shed in the playground (profile).

**E PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**
**Communication to parents to help them understand the centre**
Copies of the curriculum, school policies and the latest OfSTED report are available for inspection and it is made clear to parents that they are welcome to contact members of staff with any request in relation to these documents (school information booklet).

Parents are invited to open days before they register the children and are given information via a separate Early Years booklet as well as the more elaborate school information folder. Both of these documents are clear and informative although the Unit booklet focuses exclusively on Early Years matters and so appears more user friendly and especially reassuring to new parents. The Unit also provides updates on specific topic activities via termly newsletters while general school information is provided in weekly School Newsletters (profile).

**Parents day-to-day life of the centre**
The school has increased its efforts to inform and support parents since the criticism received by OfSTED in 1997. Parental involvement which previously had not been high is improving and a number of strategies are currently in place to maintain this. It is the clear intention of the school to develop partnerships with parents acknowledging that they are 'the most important influence' in their children's lives (school information booklet).

The Unit is pleased to accommodate parents who wish to help in the classroom but arrangements for this seem ad-hoc without any high expectations of regular commitment. Formal plans are therefore not made for including parental help and parents are assigned to adult initiated table-top activities in response to offers of help (parent interviews).

In times of crises the school will act to support parents informally by contacting and/or directing them to the most appropriate agency (headteacher interview). Parents feel that the school would act in this way for them if necessary (parents interviews).

**Parents and their child's education**
At the beginning of the Autumn Term parents are invited to attend workshops on reading and mathematics (profile). Progress is reported to parents on an informal basis at the beginning and end of each day and more formally at termly parent's evenings. A parents evening coinciding with the case study reveals that 19 out of a possible 22 parents attended suggesting that attendance is generally high (observation). Parents receive a progress report at the end of the academic year and are also able to keep their children's workbooks.

**What's expected of parents**
Parents are expected to support the school's '*positive approach to promoting good attendance*' and get their children to school each day and on time. They are expected to inform the school of any absences caused by illness or other unavoidable reasons and give details of any future absences in advance. They must also ensure that staff know of any changes in arrangements for collecting children at the end of the day. Parents must report to the school secretary during the times 9.30am and 3.00pm when the school gates are locked for added security. In addition, parents are urged to ensure that doors are closed properly so that they lock (school information booklet).

Besides being expected to co-operate in the home reading scheme parents are also encouraged to use the book lending library each week. Parents who have agreed to their children receiving weekly English and Mathematics homework are expected to ensure it is done and returned to school on time. They are also encouraged to attend assemblies and accompany their children on class trips and outings. The school actively encourages parents to offer their talents in supporting after school clubs although this may apply more to the older age groups.

Parents are expected to take note that although school uniform is not compulsory it is strongly recommended as practical and '*a statement of pride in the school*'. Parents seem to agree to this and most children wear school uniform which can be bought from the school at reasonable prices (school information booklet, observations).

**Parental attitudes towards the reception class**
Parents feel satisfied with the level and amount of information they receive and appreciate the efforts of the school to improve and strengthen home-school relationships. Parents feel content and reassured that their children are safe, happy and learning well. Those interviewed felt that the humour, enthusiasm and sensitivity shown by the staff, and in particular the co-ordinator, were important characteristics in creating a good learning environment. They also liked the '*ordinary*' and '*down-to-earth*' approach that the staff displayed and were particularly pleased with their ability to know and respond to the children as individuals. The arrangement of the unit stimulated contrasting responses - one parent was impressed by the lay-out of the classroom while another expressed initial anxieties to the open-plan arrangement. Any worries seem to be allayed by their consensus to the quality and variety of the learning opportunities. Several parents mentioned how much their children liked coming to school and one noted how fond her son was of his teacher (parent interviews).

**Parent education**
Parents are encouraged to access the Workers Education Association Study Group that runs courses in one of the school buildings (see the section, 'The centre as a learning community', for more details).


**F ETHOS**
**The atmosphere**
The Unit presents a bright welcoming place with a happy, busy atmosphere and enhanced by a sense of calm purpose.  The staff appear friendly and good humoured with plenty of adult jokes and banter (field notes).

**The working climate for the children**
The children work to a weekly timetable with a highly structured programme. Numeracy and Literacy hours are organised for each morning, except on Thursday when the children go swimming. Numeracy and Literacy sessions are highly organised and follow the National Strategy plan beginning with a whole class introduction highlighting the learning objectives followed by adult led or initiated group activities and ending with a whole class plenary.  Afternoon 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World' (KUW) sessions are similarly carefully planned and structured but offer more flexibility in that there are opportunities for the children to self select from a limited number of adult initiated and child initiated activities as well as working within adult led small groups.  Here children experience working in a variety of different group sizes or work individually.

The timetable suggests that the children experience a well balanced diet of lively and stimulating learning activities during any one day with a fairly brisk pace to cover the substantial content. Although there are some opportunities for quieter, more reflective pursuits during story time and KUW sessions most are strongly teacher led or directed (timetable).

All the children in the Unit (R1 and R2) have regular access to one another, in their ability groups for Numeracy and Literacy and other self selected or teacher led groupings.

**The emotional climate for the children**
Unit practice and procedures show that staff are sensitive to the stress involved for some children making the transition to full time primary education.  The two week induction period is designed to help children settle in and discover that learning is enjoyable and non-threatening (induction policy document).  Those children with pre-school experience find there are several familiar practices and routines to make them feel at ease e.g. snack times and regular birthday celebrations.  There are also regular public acknowledgements of good behaviour and academic achievement that are ritually rewarded and celebrated.  The children work to a structured programme of appropriately matched activities in an atmosphere where staff foster good relationships between all parties involved – staff, children and parents.  It seems that the children respond well in this climate by the level of co-operation observed in their activities together and the extent that they can take turns, share and collaborate when given the opportunities. Formal Circle Time is held once a fortnight (profile).

**Behaviour**
The Early Years (EY) Unit follows the behaviour policy developed in 1999. As this was the first policy to be tackled by the new headteacher and developed collaboratively by the whole staff it suggests that behaviour was an important issue for the school.  This idea is supported by the 1997 OfSTED report which although praising the school for considerable recent improvement in reducing the number and severity of incidents of unacceptable behaviour and offering examples of responsible and sensible behaviour seen by the inspection team around the school, it noted that movement around the school was '*over-controlled in a very time-consuming way*' with the implications that the children were '*not to be trusted to move about sensibly on their own*' (OfSTED report 1997).

The behaviour policy works from the basis that children should take responsibility for their actions and be given opportunities to develop self-discipline. In order to maintain these principles the school operates a system of rewards and sanctions with an accent on the positive, a very clear set of school rules and the involvement of parents during the early stages of concern. It is intended that the policy will evolve and change according to need. It is thought to work equally well throughout the whole school age range including the Early Years (headteacher interview).

The policy aims to support individual teachers with instructions on how to implement the rewards and sanctions model and suggestions relating to classroom management and behaviour management strategies. There is also a Behavioural Environment Checklist designed to help teachers identify where problems occur in the class or playground and thus determine appropriate action. Individual children who cause particular concern are monitored and incidents logged for future evidence (behaviour policy doc.). Merit points are given either to individuals or to whole class teams (of which there are four) for 'good behaviour' (observation) and marked on a class sheet designed to display merit and penalty scores (sample sheet). Each child also has an individual 'Good Behaviour Sticker Card' to collect stickers to a maximum of ten to reach first a silver, and then a gold star as a reward. These achievements are publicly acknowledged and praised. Observations suggest that the policy encourages a highly structured method successful in developing conformity and maintaining teacher control. Staff model examples of politeness and respect for the children and good manners are seen as important (observation).

It seems fair to assume that this focus on behaviour has been beneficial with a reduction in unacceptable or violent behaviour. From observations the school appears reasonably calm and peaceful but the area and intake suggest a certain volatility (researcher's observations).

**Special needs**
Children's needs are identified by the close monitoring and recording procedures of the school. Those identified as having special educational needs are provided with Individual Education Plans (IEP) by the SENCO (who is also the Deputy) and the class teacher. The SENCO also liaises with the parents to ensure they are fully involved and are aware of the steps taken to support their child's learning (school information booklet).

**Equal opportunities**
There is no formal equal opportunity policy in place at the moment. The message to parents is that the school is aware that children and adults in school need to be '*treated fairly and have equality of opportunity*'. This is maintained by valuing the efforts and contributions of everyone in the school, offering a '*relevant and appropriate*' curriculum, using resources that reflect diversity, monitoring practice and challenging discriminatory practice (school information booklet).

Displays in the entrance foyer support these intentions in part but a clear assessment cannot be made from the given data. ECERS scores show that the practices in the Unit offer minimal to fair response to these principles with appropriate books and pictures but a paucity of multicultural artefacts and props (ECERS-E).

**Staff co-operation, morale and collegiality**
The level of collegiality existing in the whole school is difficult to assess from the evidence given. The supposition is that it is reasonably high given it operates in an inherently hierarchical institution working to meet the requirements of a National Curriculum. The headteacher has delegated the production of policies to the curriculum holders which the staff 'own' through the consultation and re-drafting process. He is confident that the EY co-ordinator will improve the early years provision without constant supervision and intervention (headteacher interview). As a full member of staff she is expected to follow the school policies but also has the freedom to adapt systems that are more relevant to early years e.g. regular progress meetings with parents at other times besides formal parents meetings (R1 interview).

Within the Unit relationships are very good, with a high level of support and respect. Clear leadership from the co-ordinator (R1), coupled with working to structured systems and a dense but workable timetable ensures that all the staff know and understand what to do and where to go. There is a general feel of people '*getting on well*' both professionally and personally and staff morale can be deduced as fairly high (profile, observations).

### The centre as a learning community
The Worker's Education Association runs a Study Group for parents and members of the local community in a building near the School's main entrance. Day and evening courses are available with crèche facilities (profile). Parenting skills courses are offered but there are also opportunities to increase IT, Numeracy, Literacy and Communication skills at an adult level. The headteacher hopes this provision will improve parental involvement through increased awareness and interest in education both for themselves and their children. He also hopes that the association will expand to include a range of educational opportunities from entry/basic skills courses to GCSE and beyond (head teacher interview).

### Ethos as portrayed through displays
The Unit is a print-rich environment with bright and colourful displays of children's work relating to current work in various curriculum areas. Photographs of the children working are used with captions to explain learning opportunities and/or processes to parents and visitors. The displays are of good quality and spill out of the immediate classroom to the corridor and cloakroom/toilet areas (profile, observations).

### Philosophy
The Unit supports a sensitive undertaking of the principles and methods of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) and believes that this approach will result in developing a life-long love for learning and a developed sense of responsibility to oneself and others (Early Years information booklet). Careful, structured planning, clear systems and procedures are seen as important elements in this process along with the importance of play and parental involvement. Good behaviour is also regarded as important and encouraged (along with recognising achievements) with a complex system of rewards.


### G CURRICULUM
**Policies**
The following policy documents were provided:
Behaviour including Behavioural Environment Checklist June 1999
Special Educational Needs
Mathematics including National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) Sample medium-term plans
English

The school is currently involved in reviewing and revising all the other policies. Individual teachers have been delegated to drafting policies for their curriculum area to be presented to the whole staff for consultation towards a final consensus before implementation. All policies relating to the Foundation Stage were developed by R1 class teacher (Early Years co-ordinator) who was '*99% responsible for producing it*' (headteacher interview).

The exception so far has been the behaviour policy which was a whole school collaborative effort led by the headteacher (headteacher interview).

### Balance and breadth
The EY Unit provides a broad and balanced curriculum based on the ELGs within the CGFS (curriculum rationale, weekly timetable). The staff also exhibit a sensitivity towards the experiences the children have throughout the day by providing a good balance of learning experiences in terms of content together with an equal mix of focused activities which are teacher led and independent learning opportunities (teacher interview). There is an acknowledgement of

the emphasis in the CGFS on outdoor play to which the staff have responded by re-organising the use of their outdoor play area. Opportunities for swimming, music/singing and PE are included in the weekly timetable (profile).

**Practitioner emphasis – focus on care or education**
The school has attempted to respond to the needs of the community by providing a Breakfast Club that combines child-minding facilities before the school day. Four children from the EY unit currently make use of this arrangement. The focus of the unit is on education within a caring environment. The staff are aware of the home life of some of their children and attempt to deal with problems with sensitivity (critical episode). The unit appears to offer a high level of care with concern shown by the staff over children's emotional and physical welfare (observations). The regular slot for snacks and drinks that staff and children have together during the morning offers an inclusive time for learning and socialising and there are examples of adults offering support and sympathy (observations).

**Assessment**
Each child owns an Early Years Record Book where all assessments are kept. These include baseline results and examples of work from each term to show progression through the year.

Baseline assessments are carried out according to LEA policy after the children have been in school for 5-6 weeks. The results are used to group the children according to ability for Numeracy and Literacy adult-led group activities (profile).

When staff led a group activity they were observed making formative observational comments on children which were recorded. This information is used to guide future planning and termly assessments (teacher interview).

Reading is also monitored regularly (profile). The unit employs a home reading scheme where books sent home are recorded in a Home Reading Record Book with places provided for parents and class teachers to write their comments (record book sample).

Writing is assessed on a Writing Developmental Continuum along which there are six phases of writing ability - Role Play, Experimental, Early, Conventional, Proficient and Advanced. These are determined by a set of key indicators. Children need not display all key indicators to be placed in a particular phase, placement rests on the teacher's professional judgement (writing continuum doc.). Early years children would be placed in Phase 1 or 2, only exceptional children would be placed higher.

**Curriculum planning**
The Early Years Team intend to deliver the curriculum through Communication, Language and Literacy, Mathematical Development and topic-based Knowledge and Understanding of the World sessions. Three topic webs are made to ensure coverage – one covers four areas of the Foundation Curriculum for the Knowledge and Understanding of the World (KUW) (incorporating Creative, Personal and Social and Physical development) programme with separate webs for Mathematics and Communication, Language and Literacy. The last two webs incorporate elements of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and National Numeracy Strategy (NNS).

The topic webs cover the areas of learning under the following headings – Myself and My Family (Autumn Term), Travel and Transport (Spring Term) and Growing and Mini-beasts (Summer Term) with more detail given in each medium term plan. Short term planning is very thorough and detailed with identified learning objectives and key language to be addressed, a description of the intended activity, resources needed and space for evaluation (profile).

**Continuity and progression**
Evaluative comments about each activity are written on the back of the lesson planning sheets. In addition columns are provided to note any children absent for the activity and issues for future planning addressed.

**Visits and visitors**
Visits present an invaluable support to learning and are used to enhance children's Knowledge and Understanding of the world. They are planned events rather than spontaneous responses and are used to enrich topics (curriculum plans). However, the number of visits is restricted by a full and rather inflexible timetable.


**H PEDAGOGY**
**Practice**
It is the policy of the unit to spend the first two weeks of the year following an Induction programme to help settle the children into school. This system aims to '*develop confident and effective relationships and routines, allowing (the children) to move forward and progress into our focused curriculum.*' There is also an awareness of the '*new range of experiences and personal challenges*' school poses for children and so it is thought sensible to work to a flexible timetable with activities from a planned Induction Topic Web, while keeping the aims firmly in mind. Children attend either morning or afternoon sessions during the first week; full time attendance begins during the following week (induction week doc.).

Classroom practice is determined by the structured timetable organised into curriculum area sessions. Numeracy and Literacy Hours are timetabled for four mornings while KUW and Creative Development programmes occupy two afternoon sessions each. Learning objectives are shared with the children at introduction sessions. On one day the timetable changes to accommodate swimming (at the local baths) in the morning and a music session in the afternoon. Nevertheless elements of Numeracy and Literacy are still included with time tabled slots for playing Numeracy and Literacy games before swimming and after music. There are also weekly slots for PE and PSE. Story reading/telling, phonic and story videos and singing occupy the last 30 minutes of each day (timetable).

The Numeracy and Literacy sessions follow the National Strategies guidelines while work in the afternoon is topic led according to the plans made by the unit staff (curriculum planning doc.).

For each main curriculum area session the general pattern is to have 3 adult-led activities while the fourth adult supports the other children on independent activities many of which are adult initiated and linked to either the topic or the Numeracy and Literacy learning objectives. A large proportion of the work including independent activities appears to be work that is paper-based (profile, weekly planning sheets).

Adult-led activities match the learning objectives and independent activities are designed to consolidate concepts rather than extend them. Plenaries are planned to reinforce ideas and give children opportunities to reflect on and discuss their work. Sometimes reinforcing games are introduced in this session or problems posed (weekly planning sheets).

**Outdoor play**
The EY unit has welcomed the emphasis given to outdoor play in the CGFS and are trialling a system using their separate outdoor area to develop the children's physical, organisational and social skills. All the children in the unit play outside together in the morning for 20 minutes during which they have access to a range of small equipment. To ensure a balance in usage and skills development the equipment is changed each day over the week e.g. bats, balls and catchsticks on one day, skittles, quoits and bean bags the next. The timetable also describes the skills to emphasise with each group of equipment. In the afternoon the two classes use larger apparatus

(also provided on a rota system) during separate consecutive outdoor play sessions of 30 minutes each.  The focus is on imaginative and co-operative play demonstrated by the choice of different equipment provided e.g. petrol station and workbenches, or easels, writing equipment, tables and building blocks. Bikes and scooters are included every day.  Each session is supervised by two adults (one from each class). These practices are in an innovative stage in the planning and subject to review and revision as the sessions progress (curriculum planning doc.).

Although the reception class is attempting to improve the quality of outdoor provision there are inherent difficulties of providing such experiences in the current primary school situation. This is highlighted by the inadequate supervision indicated by the ECERS score  (ECERS- R).

**Quality of interaction**
Developing speaking and listening skills are planned as part of the Literacy and PSE programmes and it is clear from observations that talk is encouraged.  Opportunities are made for children to have experiences to develop their vocabulary and have conversations with each other and adults i.e. during a walk to the canal and during outdoor play etc.  Good relationships between children and staff indicate interactions are open and friendly (profile).

**Role of play and direct instruction**
Although the Unit provides 'play' opportunities as recommended by the CGFS these are limited by the timetable and a pre-dominance of adult-led activities in whole or small groups. When not in such a group the children are allowed to follow their own lines of interest within a fairly controlled choice of adult initiated activities with a member of staff available to oversee and interact with them. Activities totally initiated by children may well occur in the classroom but seem more likely to happen during outdoor play when adult supervision is less concentrated.

Direct instruction is a significant teaching tool used widely and regularly each day.  It is particularly evident in National Strategy introductions, small group sessions, whole class plenaries, story times, music lessons and assemblies.  The fast pace determined by the Strategies means that some contributions from the children are missed or ignored (observations).

**The role of the staff**
The unit is organised so that all members of staff share working with children directly on planned adult led activities with class teachers taking the lead over the whole class sections of the Numeracy and Literacy hours.  R2 teacher is responsible for planning the Literacy for both classes while R1 (EY co-ordinator) plans the rest of the curriculum (profile).

**Differentiation**
Children are placed in ability groups based on Baseline Assessment results and receive differentiated programmes in Mathematics and Literacy (profile).  These groups are also used to provide differentiated homework.

**Ensuring continuity and progression**
Children's progress is monitored by collecting examples of work from each term which shows their development throughout the year.  Monitoring knowledge and understanding in the six areas of learning is measured by a system of highlighting sets of statements that are related to each area of learning and chart levels of progress.  When children are still working towards a particular statement they are highlighted in yellow, when acquired they are highlighted in red.

**Developing dispositions**
The headteacher believes that the aims for teaching reception children should be to build on what the children bring to school with them and to develop their curiosity, independence and social skills.  By the beginning of statutory schooling he wants them to have developed positive attitudes to learning. This is identified as wanting to be in school to learn, beginning to understand the value of learning and  wanting to get on with each other (headteacher interview).

Observations show that adults in the unit are keen to develop listening skills and increase concentration and attention. They employ a range of techniques to keep children listening and on task and make direct checks on individuals frequently to assess levels of understanding (observations). Co-operative behaviour is encouraged and noted to feed into a whole school system designed to acknowledge and celebrate 'good behaviour' (behaviour policy).

**Transitions**
The two-week induction period is designed to ease the new children into the full-time school environment and become familiar with each other and the procedures and routines. Subsequent transitional problems are successfully reduced by the implementation of a clear set of unit procedures, well planned sessions and activities and a structured timetable. Playtimes are well supervised with familiar adults and lunch times are shared with staff until children feel secure enough to manage by themselves.

**I COMMUNITY OUTREACH OR INVOLVEMENT**
Apart from the courses organised by the Workers' Education Association (WEA) the school is not involved in any other community schemes or outreach activities.

Sources of information
Curriculum planning document
Induction week planning document
Profile
Timetable
Weekly planning sheets
Home Reading Record Book
Early Years Record Book
Parents information folder
Early Years parents booklet
Behaviour policy document
Field notes
ECERS -R
ECERS- E
Headteacher interview
Class teacher interview
Parents' interviews
Critical episode
Observations
Centre plans
OfSTED report 1997

## Section 4    What makes an early years setting effective?

### 4.1 Management and staff

Our data reveal that in all the good and excellent case study pre-school settings (in terms of child outcomes) there was strong leadership and long serving staff. Most of the managers and staff had been in the settings over 3 years. We know from Technical Paper 5 (Taggart *et al* 1999) that there is a high turnover of staff in the private sector, yet the 3 private day nurseries in our sample had stability of staffing with retention between 3-9 years. In the other settings, staff, especially at senior management level, had been in post even longer. Ten to 20 years was not uncommon.

All the managers took a strong lead, especially on curriculum and planning: "*If staff have a really good sense of different curriculum areas then they can be so much more inspiring to the children. They can set tasks that are much harder and they can set them on a more regular basis*" (Manager, setting 214).

In most of the settings the strong leadership was characterised by a strong philosophy for the setting, which was shared by everyone working in the setting.  These philosophies varied from being strongly educational to strongly social or a mixture of both, but all were very child-centred. The idea that the staff should develop (or have) shared aims was consistently seen as important. Another aspect of strong leadership involved 'leading from the front'. The managers were not afraid to take responsibility and set the vision for the setting e.g. "*I do know what I want from the children and I know what I want from the staff and I know when we're falling short and I ..say (it)*" (Manager 214). About Manager 324, the Ofsted report says: "*The head teacher provides clear and very determined leadership with a strong belief about what young children can achieve. She works effectively with all the staff and together they form a strong team*".

All of the most successful managers in terms of child outcomes had a strong educational focus. They valued the importance of adult:child interaction and they supported their staff in developing better ways of engaging children.  Many of the settings were involved in projects such as the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project, and they were interested in a variety of curricula models such as Reggio Emilia (Italy), High Scope (America) and Te Whariki (New Zealand), as well as adopting a sound and positive stance towards the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS)  (QCA/DfEE, 2000). The majority of the settings with minority ethnic children were making efforts to reflect and promote equal opportunities, especially in terms of recruiting minority ethnic staff.

The staff were encouraged to attend staff development sessions, although the nature of this varied greatly. The nursery classes and the playgroup attended training in their adjoining primary schools and the staff did not always feel this was appropriate (perhaps because of the focus on older children and curriculum). Less qualified staff in some of the settings e.g. the playgroup and the nursery nurse in the nursery class sometimes claimed that further training, especially on subject area of the curriculum, was less relevant to them. The Early Excellence Centres and the nursery schools had specific centre based training, while a minority of settings (e.g. 426) had an afternoon per week dedicated to staff training as well as off-site in-service sessions provided by the LEA and through national conferences. It seems that there is a good deal of variation in the training that is on offer, and attended. We know that training under the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) (which now has to include all sectors of the early years) is a positive way forward but it seems that it needs to be more sensitive to the starting points of where practitioners are.

All the case study settings were keen to engage parents in their support for children's learning. The settings which offered specific engagement with their own educational and care aims in an attempt to influence the learning environment at home appeared to have more successful child outcomes than those who simply expected parents to be supported for their own benefit. We expected that both kinds of support would be helpful to families but in this study we were especially interested in

identifying the specific help which led to better child developmental outcomes (for both cognitive and social/behavioural development). This is discussed further in the evidence below (section 6).

All of the centres benefited from a strong and supportive management with good emphasis on staff development and parent partnership. However, we noted that there are variations in training backgrounds and where there are trained teachers we found a stronger educational emphasis with the teachers leading the curriculum planning with the manager.

## 4.2 Ethos and climate of the settings

We can see from these seven detailed case studies that there is a great deal of variation in the conditions and the services that are provided. For instance opening times vary greatly, from children attending half day sessions a few times a week, to attendance every day during term time, to extended day care and education for part or all of the week and settings being open 48-50 weeks of the year. In addition the salary range for the playgroup is £3,000-7,000 p.a. (in many playgroups staff earn far less than this), while the maintained sector staff receive £15,000-32,000 p.a. and the private sector £11,000-24,000 p.a. Also the number of staff and children varies. The playgroup and nursery classes provided for 20 or so children in any session, while nursery schools, daycare and early excellence or fully integrated centres have much larger numbers of children, in our sample from 100-200 children. The staff numbers reflect the numbers of children and the extent of the services that are on offer. Most nursery classes and playgroups are small with two or three members of staff. Most private day nurseries are medium sized with 3-8 or more staff and nursery schools with up to 12 staff. The more complex fully integrated centres, local authority day care and the early excellence centres (EEC) have large numbers of staff due to the large numbers of children, their outreach work to parents, and their role as trainers and in dissemination. For centre 426, which caters for 200 children and has EEC status, the staff total is 55!

The following should be read with this wide variation in conditions in mind, within Foundation Stage provision. Our findings leave us concerned about the impact of these differences across types of provision on quality across the country. It is clear that the EPPE project has been able to locate good to excellent settings from among all our types of providers. However, we remain mindful that there were many fewer settings to choose from in the top range for playgroups and local authority day care and that given the variation in pay, training and opportunities for development this is unsurprising. There is no level playing field. In spite of this we found each of our case study centres were able to portray some quality characteristics in terms of their ethos.

All the case study centres had a warm, caring, safe, secure and supportive approach to the children. It was only in one nursery class that we observed any criticism of the children, and even in this context the majority of learning episodes were respectful and engaged the children's interest. All of the settings engaged the children in a range of groupings, providing individual and group play, group focused table top activities, interest areas, and class snack and story times. Virtually all of the settings provided full day care, and learning activities were provided throughout most of the day e.g. during lunch times, circle times and during general discussions and outdoor play. Only the reception classes, added to our analysis as part of the REPEY study, appeared constrained by the literacy and numeracy strategies in particular. The only other time this was obvious was when the playgroup started to adopt worksheets and more formalised work (children sitting at tables) in preparation for an impending OfSTED inspection, even though this was some months away. This was their perception of preparing for OfSTED and not necessarily what OfSTED inspections require.

All of the settings had a welcoming appearance. Most provided excellent displays that reflected the children's work. In nursery school case study 421 we noted: "*The climate is positive with an emphasis on recognising and valuing children's achievements within a framework of clear rules and behaviour management. There is an air of excitement and involvement*". In the playgroup (401) we noted: "*There are well established routines and behaviour is good. The children are encouraged to work well together, to take turns and share. The stated educational priorities in the*

*centre are language and social skills*". For private day nursery 413 we note: "*The general atmosphere is warm and welcoming and the staff appear calm and purposeful. The surroundings are attractive displaying a high standard of children's work and a variety of positive images*".

In the case study settings, children are generally treated with respect and the centres are warm and inviting places. The staff are calm and engage well with the children. All of these centres also had fairly good resources, even the playgroup. However the outdoor play environments varied greatly, some had purpose-built open spaces e.g. nursery schools, EEC, nursery classes while others in the PDN and Playgroups were constrained by funding or by the environment they were renting or using e.g. a church hall.

**Section 5 Interrogation of the quantitative findings with the qualitative data**
As previously suggested, the qualitative data was interrogated in an effort to provide explanations for some of the correlations that were identified between particular items in the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS), and particular multi-level analysis outcomes. Where the qualitative analysis provided explanatory support for any particular outcome, the data were explored further in those individual case studies achieving the best results in those terms. Hypotheses were also developed to be investigated in further deductive analysis of the EPPE project quantitative data. Five general areas of correlation were identified for particular attention and each is summarised here and then illustrated and discussed at greater length in the following pages:

**(i) A correlation was found between the verbal cognitive outcome and the ECERS-R Personal Care Routines sub-scale. The item 'Greetings and Departing' within this sub-scale prioritises the individual attention given to children by the staff in welcoming them to the setting and in keeping them involved in activities throughout the day. Pre-reading outcomes were also found to be correlated with the ECERS-R Language Reasoning sub-scale which has the item 'Using Language to develop reasoning skills'. Another correlation was identified between the Early Number Concepts outcome and the ECERS-E Science: Living Processes item.**
The 'Using language' item is scored highly in settings where they talk through problem solving, introduce concepts and language such as 'same-different', 'big-little' and identify logical relationships and sequences when children are playing with stimulating materials. The ECERS-E Science: Living Processes item, is scored highly in settings where the children are encouraged to engage in investigations of their own and to ask questions and record their results. In depth analysis of the case study observations carried out in the Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project has led us to identify the specific qualities of Adult-Child Interaction (Arnett 1998) and 'sustained shared thinking' (Wells, 1985) that are especially effective, but we also found that the practitioners understanding of the curriculum couldn't be taken for granted (See Section 5.1 below).

**(ii) A correlation was found in the quantitative analysis between the ECERS-E sub-scale for diversity and children's progress across the cognitive outcomes in Pre-reading, Early number concepts and Picture similarities.**
The diversity sub-scale includes differentiation, including gender and race equality, observation, meeting individual needs, record keeping and ability grouping in the sub-scale items. While any association with the latter (ability grouping and record keeping) in the qualitative data proved to be unclear, a good deal of our qualitative evidence confirmed the importance of formative assessment to meet children's particular needs. A significant correlation was also found between performance on Picture Similarities (a measure of non-verbal reasoning) and the item 'Provision for Parents' (ECERS-R Parents and Staff sub-scale). This item prioritises the sharing of 'child-related information between parents and staff' and the involvement of parents in decision making about their child's learning programme (See Section 5.2 below).

**(iii) In the quantitative analysis, The ECERS-R item on 'Discipline' (on the Interaction sub-scale) was found to be correlated with the outcomes of 'Co-operation and conformity', 'Independence and concentration', and 'Peer sociability'.**

The discipline item scores settings highly where a non-punitive approach is applied, where staff help the children to talk out their problems and think of solutions while being sensitive to the feelings of others. It also scores highly where staff are consistent and pro-active in supporting the children in developing their social skills through e.g. using '*story books and group discussions to work through common conflicts*'. Some tendency was also found to associate the 'Co-operation and conformity' outcome with 'Staff-child interactions' (ECERS-R Interaction sub-scale) and settings score highly on this item when staff-child relations are warm and caring, respectful and where they are sympathetic in response to any children being hurt, upset or angry.

The 'Peer sociability' outcome was also found to be negatively associated with 'Group Time' (ECERS-R Programme structure sub-scale). This item scores settings highly where the children are only gathered together as a whole-group for short periods and they remain interested and involved. It is therefore possible that the practice of grouping all the children together for long periods is detrimental to peer sociability. It may also be significant that the only case study to achieve a relatively negative outcome in these terms (not positively significant) was the integrated centre (214) where the children generally attend for a 'long' whole day, however this centre also contributed to making the children less worried and anxious (For further discussion of these issues see Section 5.3 below).

**(iv) In the quantitative analysis, The 'Indoor Space' item in the ECERS-R Space and Furnishings subscale was also found to be negatively associated with the outcome 'Anti-social, worried and upset'. This item scores settings highly where there is ample indoor space and children are allowed to move around freely and it seems as if this leads to less anti-social behaviour, less worry and upset. But given the positive outcomes of each of our case study settings in these terms the sample didn't lend itself to further investigation of this.**

**(v) The quantitative findings have also shown that the children who were taken to the library, who read with their parents, who played with letters and numbers and who sang songs and rhymes at home had a head start even at age 3 on cognitive scores.**

We therefore expected our excellent settings to reveal a home education more in line with these behaviours; it was what the settings did with the parents and children to encourage these behaviours that was of interest to us in conducting the case studies. The correlation noted in 2 above associating performance on Picture Similarities (a measure of non verbal reasoning) and the item 'Provision for Parents' which prioritised the sharing of 'child-related information between parents and staff', and the involvement of parents in decision making about their child's learning programme provided a starting point for detailed analysis again carried out within the REPEY framework (see further discussion in Section 6).

## 5.1 Adult-Child Interaction and 'sustained shared thinking'

In the REPEY study (see Siraj-Blatchford *et al,* 2002, Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years Project Report 356, DfES) we have argued, and provided evidence to support the idea that learning is usually the result of a process of cognitive *construction* that is only achieved when the child is motivated and i*nvolved*. We also argue that it is only consistent to treat the part played by the effective educator in the same way. The cognitive *construction* in this case is mutual where each party engages with the understanding of the other and learning is achieved through a process of reflexive 'co-construction'. A necessary condition of this is that both parties are *involved*, and, for the resultant learning to be worthwhile, that the content should be in some way *instructive*. Our analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data have substantiated this model. A good example is provided in the following:

BOY who has been watching (various items floating on water), *"Look at the fir cone. There's bubbles of air coming out."*
*NURSERY OFFICER "It's spinning round."*
The Nursery Officer here is modelling curiosity and desire to investigate further

*BOY          "That's 'cos it's got air in it."*
NURSERY OFFICER 1 picks up the fir cone and shows the CHILDREN how the scales go round the fir cone in a spiral, turning the fir cone round with a winding action.

*NURSERY OFFICER  "When the air comes out in bubbles it makes the fir cone spin around."*
GIRL uses a plastic tube to blow into the water
*GIRL          "Look bubbles."*
*NURSERY OFFICER "What are you putting into the water to make bubbles?... What's coming out of the tube?"*
*GIRL          "Air."*
(Document 421 NS)

Our research has therefore shown that adult-child interactions that involve some element of 'sustained shared thinking', or what Bruner calls 'joint involvement episodes' (1996), and Stremmel (1993) referred to as 'responsive teaching', may be especially valuable in terms of child development in the early years. This occurs when a sharing of purpose between child and teacher is established within a joint activity. As Stremmel argued, to achieve this, the adult must understand the cognitive, cultural and social perspective of the learner so that they can "*build bridges*" (p.3) between what the child knows and what she/he is capable of knowing.

Of course this does not suggest that most of the children's time needs to be dominated or led by adults. In the excellent settings the children spent around half of their time engaged in freely chosen play activities. What it does suggest, however, is that adults should use their involvement with children in a planned and focused way to encourage shared thinking. In achieving this, the provision of worksheets and/or over directed or didactic teaching is unhelpful. We found that in the settings where shared thinking was most encouraged, a substantial proportion of interactions were child initiated and they provided a better basis for learning right across the curriculum: The socio-dramatic play of the home corner provides a particularly useful context for such interactions and we identified several incidents of staff getting directly involved in children's play, and stimulating their imagination through open ended questioning. The following episode provides a typical example of the kind of 'sustained shared thinking' that we observed in socio-dramatic play, but many opportunities for this kind of interaction were also missed and we observed a good many interactions that involved little cognitive challenge.

*TEACHER 1* Goes to home corner   - *What's this?*
*GIRL          'Teatime'*
*TEACHER       'Can I join in?'*
*GIRL          'Yes'*
*TEACHER       'What's for dinner?'*
*GIRL          'Spaghetti'*
*TEACHER       'What kind, long or short?*
Teacher here is encouraging descriptive language
*GIRL          'Short'*
*TEACHER       'Well I'll have a little bit'.*
*GIRL          'Would you like a yellow plate? What else would you like?'*
*TEACHER       'An egg please.'*
(Document 106 NC obs 6)

When we looked in greater depth at the practices of those case study settings identified as especially 'excellent' in terms of the cognitive and social outcomes (in the REPEY study, Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002), we found increased sustained shared thinking, and greater cognitive

challenge (See Section 5.1.1 below). In the settings where this sort of shared thinking is most encouraged, the interactions are often child initiated and they may provide an important context for learning right across the curriculum:

BOY 7 began crawling on all fours and acted like a dog
TEACHER 1 automatically became a dog, BOY 2 copied and they began following each other around the room.  TEACHER 1 then pretended to be the dog owner.

*TEACHER      'Oh come and have your dinner doggie'*
BOY 2  appeared to like this game. TEACHER 1 led them into the home corner.
Four children have now joined in. TEACHER 1 gets some bowls and puts them on the floor…
Once they had finished dinner.

*TEACHER      'Come on doggies, bedtime in here'.*
TEACHER led them to the book area

*TEACHER       ' Right, go to bed doggies, Night, Night'*
They all lie down and the TEACHER begins singing.
*TEACHER       'See my little doggies sleeping until noon'*

All jumped up in anticipation of what was going to happen.  BOY 2 is the main focus- he joined in and seemed to enjoy it. The research officers notes that good spontaneous activity ended up reading and sharing book about dogs and that the teachers curriculum plans have been followed.
(Document 214 obs 7)

We also found many incidents of staff getting directly involved in children's play and stimulating children's imagination by open questioning:

*TEACHER      'Oh I think I need my gloves on'.*
*GIRL          ' I've got crocodile gloves.'*
*TEACHER      ' Do they bite?'*
*GIRL          'No'*
*TEACHER      'Oh that's good. What do crocodiles eat then?'*
*GIRL          'Spiders'*
(Document 214 DC doc)

But despite some really good practice at times, the study also identified many cases of missed opportunity:

*GIRL          'Volcanoes are a bit scary'*
*TEACHER      'They're not nice are they!'*
No discussion about why the volcanoes might be scary
(Document 219 PDN obs 2)

GIRL walks past. She is wearing a hat and carrying a handbag from the home corner
GIRL                          *'I'm going to the pub'.*
*NURSERY OFFICER*           "OK see you later....... What are you going to do at the pub?"
*GIRL*                        "I work there."
*NURSERY OFFICER*           "What do you do?"
*GIRL*                        "Have a drink."
GIRL  leaves.
(Document 417 NC obs 7)

By way of comparison, the following interaction shows what may be achieved by children of the same age when they are supported and encouraged:

| | |
|---|---|
| BOY | *"How did God make himself?"* |
| TEACHER | *"Well in most of the books about God, it says God just is."* |
| BOY | *"Well how did God make us?"* |
| TEACHER | *"I don't know. What do you think?"* |
| BOY | *"I don't know."* |
| TEACHER | *"Well how would <u>you</u> make yourself?"* |
| GIRL | *"I would make myself happy."* |
| BOY | *"I think when God made us, we made God."* |
| TEACHER | *"He putted (sic) our bones in first and then he putted our blood on the bones and then he putted our skin on."* |
| BOY | *"No – he opened up our bones and put the blood in us."* |
| GILR | *"No – if he put it in our bones, the blood wouldn't come out."* |
| BOY | (changing subject) *"You don't know what's there* (pointing to throat). *These are microphones to talk. My dad told me."* |
| GIRL | *"You're wrong."* |
| BOY | *"No! I'm right!"* |
| GIRL | *"No <u>and</u> your dad's wrong."* |
| BOY | *"No he's not! He's right………. I want to draw"* |

He goes to get paper and pencils.
*BOY* returns and begins to draw *"a bone".*

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRL | *"That's a funny bone."* |
| BOY | *"Yes – but it <u>is</u> a bone."* |

*GIRL* drawing *"He's got long arms to let him make his dinner. 'Cos my mum's got long arms like me.* pauses and thinks *….. If the blood was inside your bones..."*
*BOY* interrupting *"I know your blood is out of your bones….."*
*GIRL* ignoring Boy's comment and pointing to a blood vessel in her finger *"Look! So Why are you telling me blood's in the bones?……………I know God's got blood."*

| | |
|---|---|
| BOY | *"No he hasn't."* |
| GIRL | *"Yes he has. Why do you think we have blood and everybody has blood and he doesn't?* |

Showing her picture to GIRL 2 *"Look I done (sic) God"*

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRL2 | *"That's not God …. It's too little."* |
| BOY | *"So how did God make eyes and eyelashes?"* |
| TEACHER | *"I don't know."* |

*GIRL "I know – he does the bone in the eye (pointing to the iris) and then he paints the white."*

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | *"So God paints you does he?"* |

The following week the teacher brings in a dog's skull and the following week a skeleton - the discussion about bones and blood continues in detail and in an equally dramatic fashion.
(421 NS Vignette 1)

The qualitative analysis of our teacher observations appear to show a very clear association between curriculum differentiation and matching in terms of cognitive challenge (Appendix 3), and sustained 'shared thinking'. The qualitative evidence suggests that the better the setting does on each of these dimensions of good pedagogical practice, the more cognitively effective it will be. The only setting that contradicts this tendency has been 413 (private day nursery) where our research showed less day-to-day preparation and organisation, poor scaffolding and little 'shared thinking'.

*Case study observations suggest that the quality of adult interaction varies between quite good to poor. It is obvious that the staff miss many learning opportunities. They regularly demonstrate a lack of awareness of how conversations can be extended or how activities can reveal new experiences. Neither do they examine the extent of a child's understanding, either by careful listening, asking questions or making pertinent comments. Furthermore, unless directly involved*

*with a group the most common interaction is for staff to watch quietly without much intervention. Observations show that planned lessons are usually delivered didactically with little understanding of the children's thought processes. They are also shorter than their designated time of 30 minutes each. Most last 15 to 20 minutes and move at a fast pace without time for discussion, consolidation or reflection, supporting the view that they are unable to use activities to their educational potential.* (Field notes and observations 413 PDN doc)

The fact that despite these limitations the setting was achieving significant cognitive outcomes needed to be accounted for. We have come to believe that the explanation lies in the special relationship that the (mainly private) settings have developed with their middle class parents, and the efforts that are made at home to continue to involve children in educational activities outside of the nursery context (centre 413). (see Section 6).

The quality of adult-child interactions in the excellent settings in terms of the cognitive outcomes was particularly striking. The quality of interaction in setting 421 (Nursery School), for example, was very high. The EPPE Adult/Child Interaction Scale showed a high degree of consistency in staff behaviour with a strong emphasis on positive responses to children and their emotional and learning needs. The staff clearly enjoyed being with the children and engaged with them in a respectful caring way, without criticism or harshness. They encouraged the children to try new experiences and were very enthusiastic about their efforts. The staff appeared to be constantly aware of looking out for opportunities to scaffold children's learning by inviting children to say what they thought in order to assess their levels of knowledge and understanding. They intervened to 'model' when they thought it appropriate but also allowed the children time to explore for themselves. The adult interventions were most often in the form of questions that provoke speculation and extend the imagination; as in the following example of an adult participating in, and extending a child's imaginative play:

---

The NNEB and a group of CHILDREN are seated at a table working with play dough.
It has taken BOY minutes to make a play dough cake and he is now sticking plastic cutlery into it.

*NNEB Would you like something else to use as candles on your cake?*
Turning round to boxes placed on shelf behind her.
*Would you like match sticks or lolly sticks?"*
BOY opts for lollipop sticks and the NNEB 1 passes the box to him. He removes the cutlery and starts to replace it with lollipop sticks.........5 more minutes pass ......
BOY has finished his cake and starts to sing *'Happy Birthday'* to the NNEB.
*NNEB* pretends to blow out the candles*. "Do I have a present?"*
BOY hands her a ball of playdough.
*NNEB "I wonder what's inside? I'll unwrap it."*
NNEB quickly makes the ball into a thumb pot and holds it out to BOY *"It's empty!"*
*BOY* takes a pinch of playdough and drops it into the thumb pot. *"It's an egg."*
*NNEB* picking it out gingerly, *"It's a strange shape."*
Another CHILD tries to take the 'egg'
*NNEB "Be very, very careful. It's an egg."*
To BOY *"What's it going to hatch into?"*
*BOY "A lion."*
*NNEB "A lion? Oh, I can see why it might hatch into a lion, it's got little hairy bits on it."*
NNEB sends BOY to put the egg somewhere safe to hatch. He takes the egg and goes into the bathroom. After a few minutes, BOY 1 returns to the group
*NNEB "Has the egg hatched?"*
*BOY "Yes."*
*NNEB "What was it?"*
*BOY "A bird."*
*NNEB A bird? We'll have to take it outside at playtime and put it in a tree so it can fly away."*
(421 Vignette 8)

---

In setting 426 (Integrated/Early Excellence Centre) the unit co-ordinator insisted that their good practice had developed from the quality of interactions with the children. These were based on a deep level of respect that arose from acknowledging the extent and depth of their emotional state at any one time (Nursery Teacher interview). The setting policy suggested that the adults should take every opportunity to extend children's language and literacy and develop a positive attitude to communication by listening actively and responding accordingly (policy). Our observations showed that the quality of interactions were very good with adults able to extend the children's understanding by skilful use of a variety of questioning techniques. The adults frequently participated and/or intervened to extend imaginative play.

There is a great deal of corroborating evidence within the psychological literature that learning is just this kind of interactive event, where the child actively constructs his/her own understandings within a social and physical environment. Hohmann and Weikart (1995) have called this "*active learning*" (p.17) and define it as "*learning in which the child, by acting on objects and interacting with people, ideas and events, constructs new understandings*" (p.17). Young children require direct and immediate experiences that will enable them to derive meaning from these experiences based on their previous ones. The learning environment must, therefore, provide children with opportunities to be active and to take the initiative to learn. The primary role of the adult is to provide these opportunities and experiences through setting the physical *and intellectual* environment and through consistent planning and rigorous assessment so that appropriate opportunities may be given. The research shows that the more knowledge the adult has of the child the better matched their support and the more effective the subsequent learning; later we will look at this in relation to parents and home educational experiences. Adult support is also important to *encourage* children to learn in an active and participatory way.

Research has suggested that a wide range of techniques and strategies might be appropriate (including direct teaching) where simple *procedural knowledge*; 'knowing about the things in the world, and how to act upon them' was concerned. The development of *conceptual knowledge* by contrast, which includes ideas and the understanding of principles and their relationship to each other, requires a constructive process. The maturest kind of knowledge is *metacognitive knowledge*, knowledge about one's own cognitive processes. This last kind of knowledge requires that learners are able to reflect on and regulate their own thinking, practices usually acquired during episodes of **'**sustained shared thinking' offered by adults or more capable peers.

'Shared sustained thinking' may therefore be seen as a necessary pre-requisite for the most effective pedagogy and this can be defined in terms of:

a) the teacher having an awareness of, and responding to, the child's understanding or capability vis-à-vis the particular subject/activity in question;

b) the child's awareness of what is to be learnt (i.e. what is in the teachers mind)

c) the active co-construction of an idea or skill.

Both participants contribute to the learning process, although not necessarily in equal fashion, or to an equal extent. This formulation provides the basis for understanding the value of the sort of dialogue that we sometimes found involved in 'sustained shared thinking' and it also gives us a good basis to apply the literature on metacognition.

Also from this perspective 'Scaffolding' as a pedagogy can be seen to be successful in practice because the teacher, through providing the support that is needed for the child to achieve a successful outcome (or understanding) – has been required to first identify (assess) what the child's current (unaided) capability/understanding is – and then, in the process, and as a result of their provision of the appropriate support they ensure the child has a good grasp of what a successful outcome actually is (i.e. what it is that they will later be aiming to achieve on their own).

The adult then gradually withdraws or reduces the support and allows the child to develop confidence in their independent performance.

From this perspective the provision of exploratory play environments (e.g. sand/water play) will only be 'effective' if the materials/apparatus are chosen carefully to provide cognitive challenge within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) *and* positive outcomes for the activity are either modelled, or otherwise identified in the children's actions and encouraged. Of course that doesn't mean that these activities would only be justified if they were structured to make them pedagogically effective in terms of learning – they might, for example, be intended to provide opportunities for the children to express themselves or for free discovery and exploration.

**Modelling**

Much of a child's earliest learning is the product of interactions with adults and peers even where there has been no deliberate attempt to provide instruction. Children learn a great deal from their observations of those more competent than themselves. We can draw upon the social cognitivist theory of Bandura (1986) to account for the way in which social (and media) experiences provide for this sort of observational learning. For Bandura the process of social learning begins with 'imitative' learning which is subsequently internalised through identification and thereby incorporated in the individual's self-concept.

The child's construction in this case is founded upon the behaviour of the other person who is considered especially significant. The value of practitioners modelling appropriate language, behaviours, skills and attitudes should therefore be especially recognised; such modelling is likely to be consequential in terms of cognitive, social and dispositional outcomes. It is worth noting in this context that analysis of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 2000) has identified a striking emphasis upon practitioner modelling which suggests a general acceptance of an 'emergent' learning philosophy in all six areas of the Early Learning Goals (Siraj-Blatchford, I. & J., 2001). Further research is required to investigate the relationship of modelling to specific outcomes.

Our systematic observations and analysis of the case study data suggests that in the excellent settings modelling is often combined with sustained periods of shared thinking. These interactions are often child initiated and they seem to provide a very significant basis for learning right across the curriculum: Another concrete example drawn from the case studies will clarify what is required of adults in these terms:

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRL | 'We found a coconut TEACHER 1!' |
| TEACHER 1 | 'Well done! Oh it's an acorn, if we planted it what do you think would grow?' |
| GIRL | 'A flower' |
| TEACHER 1 | 'Not quite, if it came off that tree what would grow?' |
| GIRL | 'Don't know!' |
| TEACHER 1 | 'Ok, lets get a pot, some stones and soil and plant it to see. Off with 5 CHILDREN Which way up do you think? I think on its side it will have the most chance. What do you think it will grow into?' |

The teacher here is using an opportunity presented by the children to model growth/wonder and to investigate: Children now have investment in it

| | |
|---|---|
| CHILD | 'A tree' |
| TEACHER 1 | 'Mmmm, I wonder what kind?' |

(Document 106 NC obs 6)

**5.2 The excellent settings**

In the REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford *et al,* 2002) target child observation (see Appendix 4) analysis we reported on the pedagogical practices of 'excellent' (i.e. the centres with outstanding child outcomes) compared to the 'good' (i.e. the centres in which children's developmental outcomes were good but not outstanding). Our findings from this analysis are reproduced here verbatim.

Figure 4 shows the different patterns of cognitive pedagogical interactions which children experienced with practitioners in excellent compared to good centres. For comparison purposes, the observations from reception class settings are also included in the figure. The children and practitioners in excellent centres engaged in the highest proportion of sustained shared thinking interactions, suggesting that the excellent settings promote intellectual gains in children through conversations with children in which adult and child co-construct an idea or activity. For the practitioners in the good settings, the most commonly used interaction was monitoring, a distinct difference to practitioners in the excellent and in the reception settings.

**Figure 4: Proportion of 'adult' cognitive pedagogical interactions in settings varying in effectiveness.**
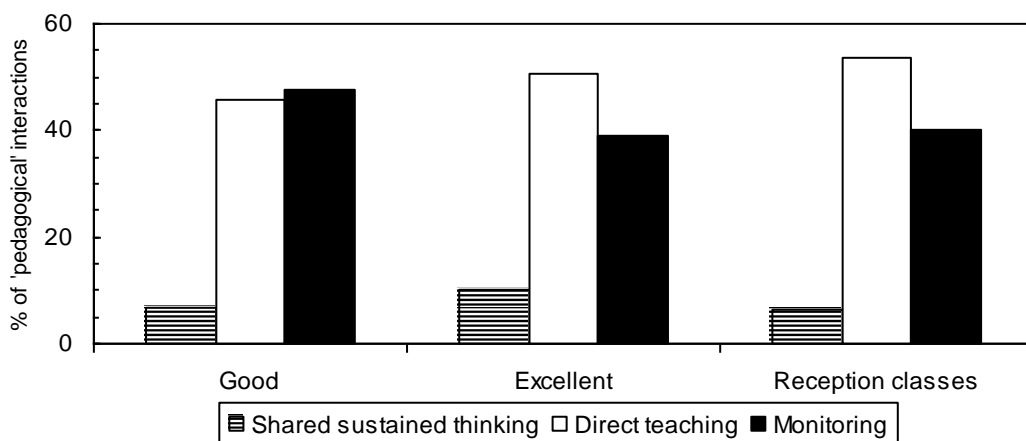


Figure 5 shows the different amounts of socially oriented pedagogical interactions practitioners engage in with children in excellent, good and reception classes. More encouragement was seen in excellent compared to good settings. Staff in excellent centres also engaged in a higher proportion of social talk with children compared to those in reception classes. Children in good (but not excellent centres) experienced the highest proportion of caring interactions with their practitioners.

**Figure 5: Proportion of social pedagogical interactions in settings of varying effectiveness**
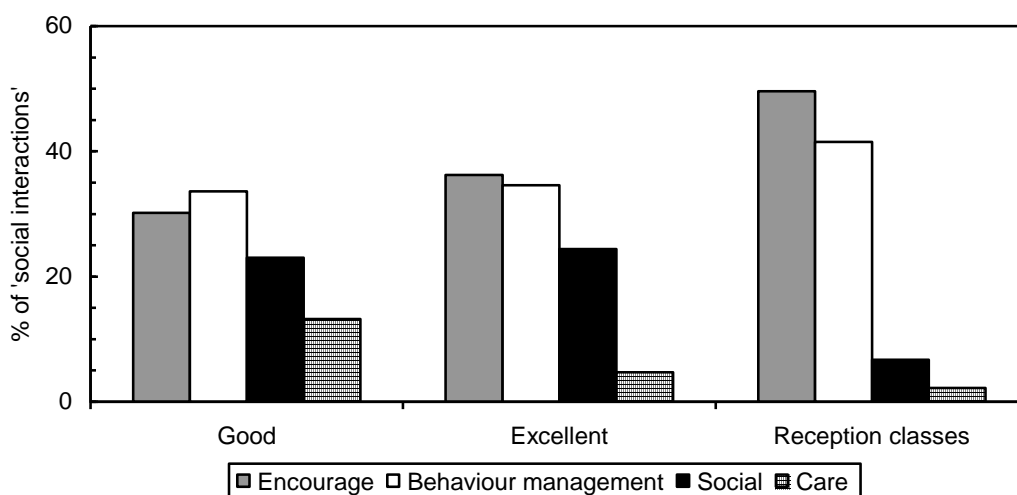


Figure 6 (below) shows the pedagogical interactions used by adults in different areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. The highest proportions of 'sustained shared thinking' were observed during children's literacy and mathematics activities. This provides clear evidence of the different ways in which practitioners respond to the children in the different areas of the curriculum. Levels of direct teacher involvement with children also varies between different curricular areas,

with the highest proportion of direct involvement with children's learning (sustained shared thinking and
direct teaching/instruction skills) occurring in literacy and mathematics compared to the lowest levels in physical development.

**Figure 6: Pedagogical interactions broken down by curricular area**
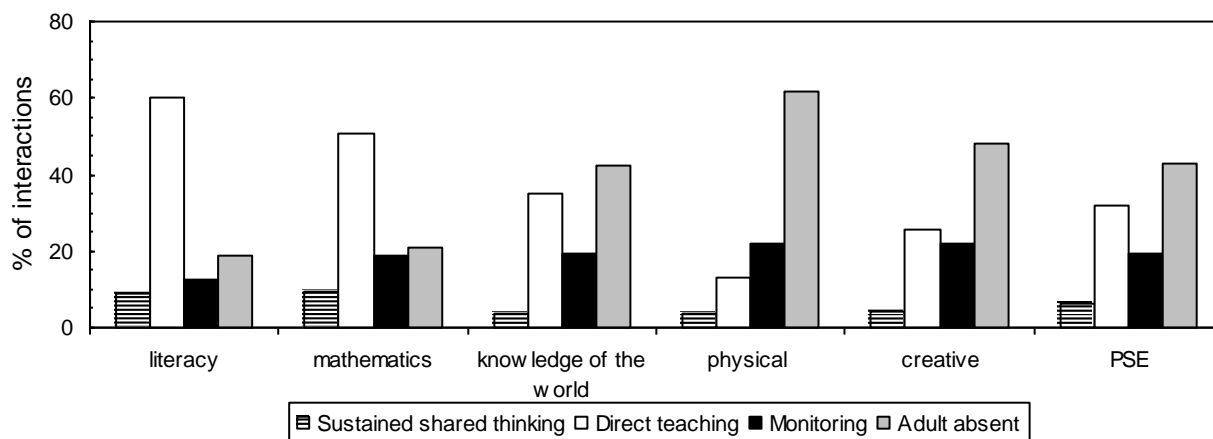


The analysis of randomly selected learning episodes from child observations allowed a deeper analysis of classroom pedagogy; these analyses included considering the initiation of episodes (by either child or staff member, see REPEY report for further details on episodes), the level of 'cognitive challenge' each episode provided for the child, and the staff's most important contribution to the learning episode. The latter is intended to shed light on the degree to how and which activities stretch children's thinking. Figure 7 considers from all learning episodes the proportion of adult or child-initiated learning episodes, and shows that in good and excellent settings a similar ratio of child-initiated episodes to adult-initiated episodes occurred. It is important to note here that in the excellent and good settings about half of the learning episodes were initiated by children, this very important side of these effective settings pedagogy may be overlooked. In Reception classes, however, three quarters (76%) of all episodes were initiated by a staff member (which might be due to the higher level of structure).

**Figure 7: Proportion of all learning episodes which were adult or child-initiated**
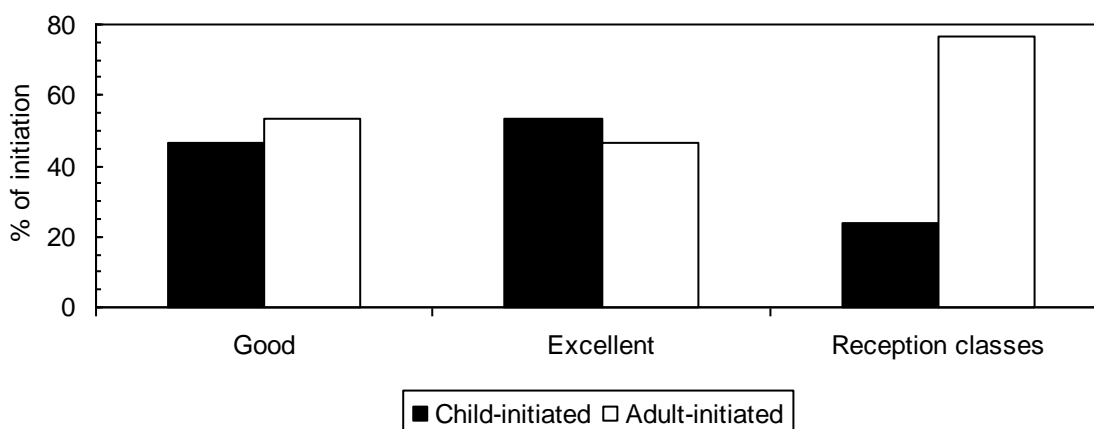


The greatest proportion of high cognitively challenging episodes (see appendix 3) occurred in the Reception classes (29% of Reception classes learning episodes), the excellent settings had 26% of high challenge learning episodes, and 22% of the good settings learning episodes were high challenge.

When the initiation of just the high challenge activities is considered, an interesting picture emerges (Figure 8). In excellent settings the importance of staff members extending child-initiated

episodes is very clear; just under half of child-initiated episodes observed as high cognitive challenge involved interventions from a staff member which extended the child's activities. The predominance of staff extension in child-initiated activities appears unique to excellent centres, while reception classes are the only setting type which have children extending staff-initiated episodes, which is due to the different approach taken in Reception classes with a much larger emphasis upon adult-initiated activities. While the percentages of child-initiated high cognitive challenge episodes may look similar it must be remembered that these graphs are showing who initiated high cognitive challenge episodes in each type of setting.

**Figure 8: Initiation of high cognitive challenge activities within each setting type**
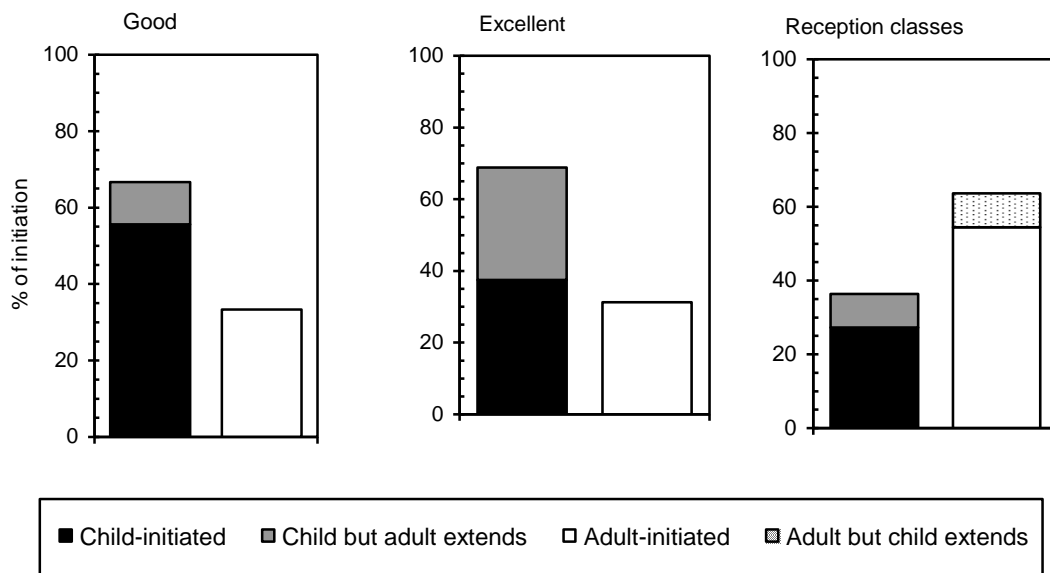


Our analysis of the episodes revealed how and why the 'critical moments' of learning episodes influenced and developed an idea or skill substantially. Analysis showed that the most common critical point ('lifting the level of thinking') occurred when a practitioner 'extended' a child-initiated episode by scaffolding, thematic conversation or direct teaching. Analysis of all 'critical moments' revealed that in Reception classes 29% of critical moments were 'lifted' by adult extension, 23% of the critical moments in excellent settings were extended by adults, dropping to just 15% in good settings. This reveals the pro-active nature of the adult's role in these settings.

When considering the high challenge episodes it can be seen in Figure 9 that the highest proportions of high challenge episodes occur in the excellent settings. Conversely the good settings have the highest proportion of low-medium challenge episodes.

**Figure 9: Occurrence of challenge episodes within each setting type**
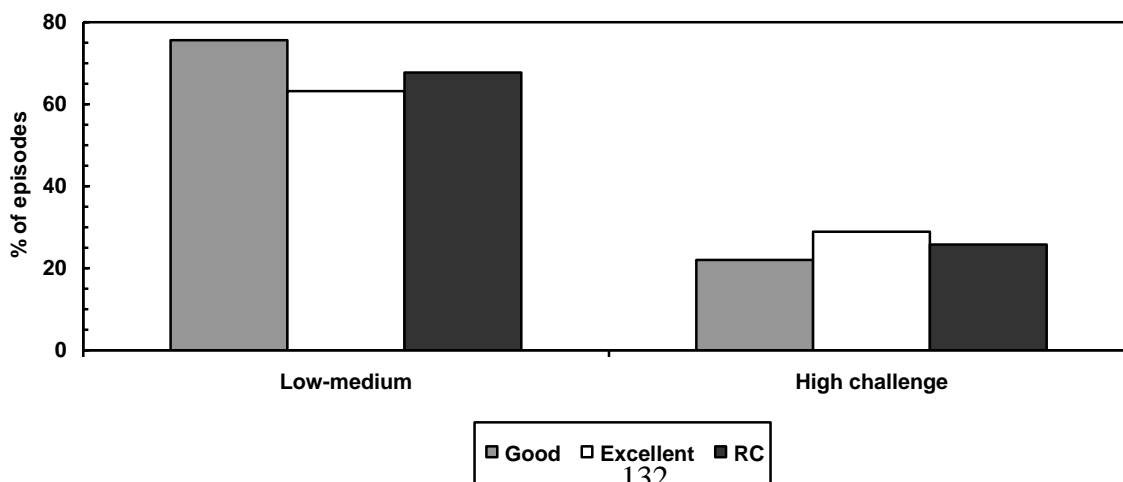
## 5.3 Organisational structures for learning

All but one of the case study settings routinely combined both programmed and open-framework provision (Weikart, 2000). The programmed provision involved focused group work that was often highly teacher directed and provided for little initiative on the part of the children. The curriculum content is often highly differentiated. The rationale for this method is drawn significantly from learning theory. This pedagogy is usually applied where curriculum objectives may be clearly (and objectively) classified and is likely to be most effective where learning involves the development of basic skills, procedural knowledge or memorisation.

The Open-framework provision that we observed was intended to provide the practitioners with a pedagogic structure (or framework) that supported the child in their explorations and interactions with, and reflections upon, the learning activities and environments on offer. But in many of the settings the involvement of staff in the programmed/focused group work left little time for scaffolding the child-initiated play.

Only in setting 225 (integrated centre and EEC) did we see a purely open-framework approach being practised. The curriculum classification was weaker with the child having a good deal of freedom to make choices between the various exploratory learning environments that were provided. It may be significant that the setting manager informed us in the manager interview that they were dissatisfied with the balance that had been achieved between adult-led and child initiated activities:

*"25:75. 25 adult-led, 75 child led. That's what we're aiming for the next year. I would say it's more like 15:85 at the moment which is too low".* (225 Manager Interview)

This is a case study setting which was notable for its 2 poor cognitive outcomes. Despite extremely positive Social/Behavioural outcomes, the setting was rated at -2 for both Pre-reading and Language Significance. Plans developed for each child were produced through a collaborative process involving team members. In order to do this two children were targeted for observation from each group each morning and afternoon through consultations with the key workers. The intention was to focus on the individual child's level of involvement and plan accordingly rather than to provide any list of skills. Extensive records were also kept on each child. From our case studies we know that the settings with better cognitive outcomes achieved a good balance of adult and child initiated activity and interaction.

Figure 10 below shows the different social groupings of children in good, excellent and 'reception class' settings. As can be seen, children in 'excellent' settings when compared with others spend the highest proportions of time in one-to-one, paired and small group situations. Children in 'excellent' settings spend the least amounts of time in the whole class situation.

**Figure 10: Social groupings across settings of varying effectiveness**
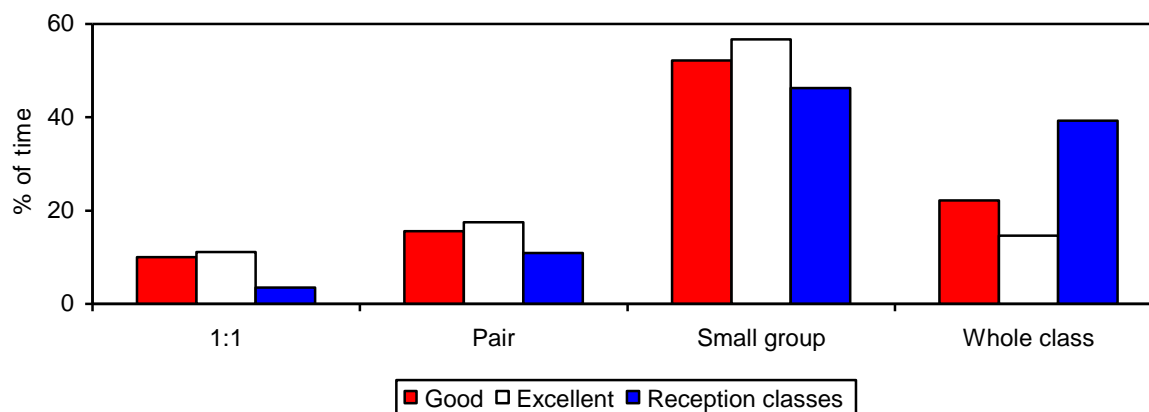
While 'shared sustained thinking' might be considered a necessary pre-requisite for the most effective pedagogy in the early years; our analysis also shows that on its own it is insufficient. We found examples of practitioners whose knowledge and understanding of the particular curriculum area being addressed was inadequate and this led to missed opportunities or uncertain outcomes, and this was particularly the case for the direct teaching of phonics.

It is generally recognised that different pedagogic techniques are required for the effective learning of different forms of knowledge, skills and understanding (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999a or b) and in teacher education this is often referred to as 'pedagogical content knowledge' (Shulman, 1986); '*the way we make the knowledge accessible and understood to others' (the children).* We found many examples where teachers demonstrated problems with both their subject content knowledge and their pedagogical content knowledge.

The observations that we recorded of directed phonics work for REPEY were very mixed. A variety of strategies are applied, for example, one observation from setting 017 Nursery Class, which the EPPE analysis shows is currently underachieving in terms of developing pre-reading skills, showed little challenge being provided.

In most of the settings letter sounds are routinely identified but the evidence suggests that this in itself is insufficient when it comes to the development of good pre-reading outcomes. The most sophisticated phonics work that we observed was carried out in the reception classes where longer periods are devoted to the activity, but even here the teacher's subject knowledge in this area appeared to be quite limited at times.

The following examples illustrate some of the problems that we observed, unfortunately the Private Day Nursery reflected a larger proportion of these type of examples:

---

Example 1 : Phonics
BOY 4, BOY 3 and BOY 5 sit at the table and BOY 4 and BOY 5 fight for a seat.

| | |
|---|---|
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Today we're going to play a game where you have to find a word and the picture"* |
| *BOY 4* | *"I can do that; I did that this morning at home"* |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Now, we must remember to only find our own words, not anyone else's, okay".* |
| *BOY 4.* | *"I know everything"* |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Right BOY 3, you start, can you find the word tap".* |
| *He picks the word "net"* | |
| | |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Is that tap?"* |
| *BOY 3* | *"Yes"* |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Lets have a look at the word. What letter does tap begin with?"* |
| *BOY 3* points to 't' | *"good, what's this letter"* point to an 'n' in the word net |
| BOY 3 says nothing. | |
| | |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"What's wrong with that letter?" What is that letter"?* |
| BOY 4 wants to join in. | |
| | |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Don't help BOY 4 unless he wants it".* |
| *BOY 3* | *"I want BOY 4 to help"* |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Okay BOY 4 can you help BOY 3 to find the word tap".* |
| BOY 4 finds it quickly. | |
| | |
| *NURSERY OFFICER* | *"Excellent BOY 4 well done".* |
| BOY 4 and BOY 5 both have a turn | |

---

> *NURSERY OFFICER*        *"Oh you boys are too clever for this game"*
> (BOY 3 is struggling)
>
> *NURSERY OFFICER*        *"I'm going to spread the cards out in the middle. BOY 3 can you find the word sat".*
>
> BOY 3 reaches for BOY 5
> *NURSERY OFFICER 1*      *"Well done BOY 3 what goes next*
> BOY 3 points the letter 'a'
> *NURSERY OFFICER*      *"And what's the last letter"* She keeps repeating the word 'sat'
> *BOY 3*        *"I need help"*
> *NURSERY OFFICER*      *"You need help, BOY 4 can you help BOY 3 to find the last letter in sat?"*
> *BOY 4* finds the letter 't'
> *NURSERY OFFICER*      *"Well done boys".*
>
> The same game is repeated with each child. BOY 5 attempts to spell 'pin'. He gets the letters 'p' and 'n' but cannot get 'i'.
>
> *NURSERY OFFICER keeps* repeating the word *'pin' and asking him what letter goes in the middle.* She does not break the word down into letter sounds.
>
> *BOY 4*        *"I "*
> *NURSERY OFFICER*      *"I" well done, it's 'i' isn't it BOY 5?"*
>
> After going to the other 2 she then goes back to BOY 5 to spell out his word with the letters in front of him - he struggles with this.
> (206 PDN obs3)

There were a number of pedagogic problems with this task:

- The task was completely decontextualised from the children's experience e.g. not related to their names, or words in a story.
- The nursery officer seems to think that reading requires letter identification and doesn't seem to understand the letters aren't phonemes… nor that hearing the sounds in sequence is a difficult task and that middle vowels are the hardest.
- It might have been better if she had understood about onset/rhyme?
- What governs her teaching? Why is she teaching these letters? Is there any order to the letters taught? These were not part of her planning.
- The nursery officer has poor subject-knowledge – she thinks that after recognising 'whole words' the children need to learn the <u>letters in the word.</u>
- She doesn't ever TELL or teach the child – it's as though she's testing all the time, never telling the child why that letter says /t/ or T, testing is not teaching.
- There's no 'modelling' here and not much 'help with assembly' (breaking the task down to smaller components to help build up to the learning) either.

There were other examples of practitioners whose knowledge and understanding of the particular curriculum area under study was inadequate leading to missed opportunities or uncertain outcomes. Two notable examples may be taken from science and from design and technology, in both cases the focused group work was of low quality. In the examples below the practitioners appeared to have little understanding of the importance of *explanation* and *evaluation*, key concepts in science, design and technology and maths.

### Example 2: Mathematics

In a 20 minute structured maths activity NURSERY OFFICER 1 (306 PDN) attempted to introduce a group of 4 children to the concepts of addition and subtraction symbols that are used in

mathematics. She explained to the observer that she would not be teaching them to add or subtract but simply to recognise the symbols. The children were seated at a maths table. NURSERY OFFICER 1 explained that they were to look at the signs that are used in maths. She began by showing the CHILDREN an equal's sign and told them what it was called. She then did the same with 'take away' and 'add'.

---

Example 2: Mathematics

BOY 1                              *"to get some more"*

He looks unsure of his answer - although NURSERY OFFICER 1 says "to get some more" she does not praise him.

NURSERY OFFICER demonstrates addition using the add and equals sign and counting teddy bears. NURSERY OFFICER 1 demonstrates 1 ted - 1 ted = 1 ted!!

BOY 2                              *" 1. ".*
NURSERY OFFICER              *"1 well done, that's a really hard concept to understand"*

Despite the fact that she is using Teds as concrete objects she is not demonstrating but is rote talking them through the task. They are capable of counting but remain unclear about what adding and taking away are.

2 CHILDREN use smaller sums and 2 other CHILDREN use larger sums.
One CHILD GIRL 1 gets up and leaves, this distracts all the others and GIRL 2 wishes to leave.
BOY 1  and BOY 2  want to go out.
GIRL 2  does the sum 1-1=1 again so it was not a mistake. BOY 2 who is at a slightly higher level does 2-1=2
The CHILDREN prepare to go out.

---

The Nursery Officer later explained that the activity had come about because they had observed many of the able older children adding teddy counters: "*boy 2 put 3 and then 2 counters together and said "That's five".  He visually counted them and we were like wow! We hadn't even thought of doing that with them".*  Approximately five children were felt capable of this.

She said they were not intending to teach them to add up or anything but simply to introduce them to the fact that there are signs in mathematics  which can be used. The staff were going to 'see how it went' with the older children and see if their interest in it was maintained.  She described how she felt that a lot of them lost interest and that she had worked hard to maintain their interest as they wanted to go out. She felt that they were very able and that as it was the first time working on this then perhaps they would come back to it again as they obviously needed to be moved on to this stage. Many references were made to how bright the children were and it was suggested that they had to present the work at this level: "*We feel we don't put as much work into the maths as we do the literacy as that is a set scheme…we need to keep on top of the maths with the older more able ones, this is why we have introduced a specific maths activity at 2.00 pm every day*".
(306 Critical Episode 1)

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Example 3: Science - floating and sinking
APPARATUS: Large container of water; container of different objects; work sheet; A4 sheet of paper; pencil; list of children's names.
NURSERY OFFICER stands at door and calls 6 CHILDREN to her: BOY 1,  GIRL1, GIRL2, GIRL3, BOY2, GIRL4.
She takes them into cloakroom. Sits in front of large container of water. CHILDREN stand around container
NURSERY OFFICER              *"Do you remember this sheet from yesterday?"*
Holds up work sheet.
*CHILDREN nod or say*          *"Yes"*

Pointing to relevant parts
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"It's got a bucket of water. We've got some water here. We'll put some of these things into the water and see if they float or sink."*
Puts down sheet and picks up pencil and A4 paper.
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"I'll draw 2 columns and then we can write if they go down to the bottom. What's the word?"*
*BOY 1*        *"Sink"*
NURSERY OFFICER writes Sink at the top of first column.
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"Yes, sink...or if they stay on top of the water. What's the word?"*
*BOY 1*        *"Float."*
NURSERY OFFICER writes Float at top of second column.  She takes a coin from the container at her feet and shows it to the CHILDREN.
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"The first thing is........?"*
*CHILDREN say*        *"Money"*
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"Yes, money...a coin. When I put it into the water, will it sink or float?"* *"What do you think GIRL 4?*
She asks each CHILD in turn to predict what will happen. Then puts the coin into the water
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"What happened?"*
Process is repeated with a plastic and metal spoon, a wax crayon, a stone, a plastic car - which she also tries upside and filled with water; it floats both ways
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"It still floats. Mmm." - a nail and a twig. "The last thing is a plastic cup."*
She puts it into the water and it floats*.*
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"Shall I fill it up with water and see if it still floats?"*
*CHILDREN say*        *"Yes".*
She fills the cup with water*.*
*CHILDREN say*        *"Floats."*
*NURSERY OFFICER*        *"Which things sank to the bottom? Look and see."*
CHILDREN call out items.        When they say *"Spoon".*
 NURSERY OFFICER corrects them *"Metal spoon."*  *"Which ones floated?"*
Again CHILDREN call out items…..
(401 PG observation 1)

The session ended with the Nursery Officer asking the children to list the things which sank, and then the things which floated. No attempt was made to identify the reasons that the children had for making their predictions or to engage in any way with those reasons.  The activity failed to provide an investigative or exploratory model and the opportunity to develop the children's understanding of floating and sinking was also missed.

Example 4: Design and technology
EQUIPMENT: variety of 'junk' materials; glue.
BOY 1, GIRL 4, GIRL 5, GIRL 6 and GIRL 7 are standing beside the 'craft' table.

*TEACHER*        *"We've got a big job to do with these boxes. We've got to change them into something. Have a think. You could change them into a car, a castle, a train, a house........... Roll up your sleeves................. There are lots of different bits - shiny bits for lights.............. Use the sticky glue to stick the things together. Start with a big box........ If you find the bits hard to stick on, let me know 'cos I've got special tape...... but try sticking first. I'll put some soapy water in a bowl in the sink for washing sticky hands."*
 (417 NC observation 3)

Throughout the activity the children freely changed their intentions as they experience difficulties in realising their objectives. No attempt was given to provide any support to overcome these difficulties so that they could realise their initial design intentions. All of the children's finished

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products were given equal praise and the only criteria for completion that was applied was that the child wished to be finished with the activity, and that everything that was intended to have been *stuck* to the product was securely *stuck*.

The following extract of a 20 minute science lesson involving eight 4 year-olds shows how a choice of developmentally inappropriate pedagogy and content may also be problematic:

| | |
|---|---|
| Example 5 | |
| TEACHER | *"What area of science did we cover last week?"* |
| CHILD 1- | *"The skeleton"* |
| TEACHER | *"What is the name of it?"* |
| CHILD 2- | *"Biology"* |
| TEACHER | *"This week we are going to be looking at Zoology"* |
| TEACHER | *"A zoologist is a person who studies animals"* |
| TEACHER | *"What does a zoologist study?"* |
| CHILD 1 | *"Animals"* |
| TEACHER | *"A biologist studies?"* |
| CHILD 3- | *"Animals"* |
| TEACHER X read from a book about zoology | |
| | |
| TEACHER | *"What's the backbone called CHILD 3?"* |
| CHILD 3 | *"The spine"* |
| TEACHER | *"Animals with a backbone are called vertebrates"* |
| Repeated this and the children followed | |
| | |
| TEACHER | *"I need you to know that animals with backbones are vertebrates, animals without backbones are called invertebrates."* |
| TEACHER | *"CHILD 4, an animal with out a backbone is called a…?"* |
| CHILD 4 | *"Reptile"* |
| TEACHER | *"No, a vertebrate"* |
| TEACHER | *"I've got some things for you to have a look at and then we're going to put them into categories"* |
| TEACHER | *"Do you think crocodiles have got a backbone?"* |
| CHILD 3 | *"A backbone"* |
| TEACHER | *"What kind of animals are they?"* |
| CHILD 3 | *"Vertebrates"* |
| All children invited to look at a poster of vertebrate/invertebrate | |
| TEACHER | *"We are going to look at the different groups these animals fall into. We're going to talk about mammals".* |
| CHILD 4 | *"It's like a reindeer"* |
| TEACHER | *"Yes it is, but what's the difference between a reindeer and a starfish?"* |
| CHILD 4 | *"It's like a star"* |
| CHILD 3 | *"The reindeer is a vertebrate"* |
| TEACHER | *"The female mammal feeds the baby with their own milk. This makes the mammal special"* |
| TEACHER | *"What else feeds with its own milk?"* |
| CHILD 5 | *"Cows"* |
| CHILD 3 | *"Tigers"* |
| TEACHER | *"What are we called? Are we mammals?"* |
| CHILD 1 | *"No"* |
| TEACHER | *"Why CHILD 3?"* |
| CHILD 3 | *"No we are. We have a backbone"* |
| TEACHER | *"Did Mummy feed you?"* |
| TEACHER | *"What with?"* |
| CHILD 1 | *"Cows"* |
| TEACHER | *"No, breast milk"* |

| | |
|---|---|
| CHILD 3 | "And very good it was too" |
| TEACHER | "Do you understand the difference between a mammal and an arthropod" |
| CHILD 3 | "Yes" |
| TEACHER | "How?" |
| CHILD 4 | "Size, mammals have a backbone and feed milk" |
| CHILD 3 | "To their babies "        (219 PDN obs 12) |

By contrast the following example shows good knowledge of the curriculum Knowledge and Understanding of the world and good pedagogy, especially the modelling of language and extending vocabulary and PSE, caring for living creatures:

Example 6
*ADULT'S INTENTION:*
*"I found some slugs and snails in my garden yesterday. We did mini beasts last Term but some of these snails are really small and I thought the CHILDREN might like to draw them outside in the garden".*

TEACHER unlocks the outside door and takes a tray, containing the snails, and a box of magnifying glasses outside. She sits at the picnic table and is joined by GIRL 1, BOY 1, BOY 2 (seated on a tricycle), BOY 3,  BOY 4 and BOY 5.

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | "Have you seen how tiny they are? ...... Some are very small....... |

The teacher here gives the children a 'hands on' experience.

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | " Be careful. Don't squash the little ones." |
| BOY1 | "I've got some at home." |
| TEACHER | "Where?" |
| BOYT 1 | "By my windows." |
| TEACHER | "I brought these from my garden .... (Pointing to a slug) do you know what these are? It's like a snail but it hasn't got a shell." |
| GIRL 1 | "It's a snail." |
| TEACHER | " Its body is like a snail's but it hasn't got a shell." |
| BOY 1 | "A worm." |
| TEACHER | "I don't think worms have antennae." |
| BOY 1 | "What is it?" |
| TEACHER | "It's a slug." |
| BOY 2 | "Come on." |

BOY 5 and BOY 4 leave to play on the bikes. BOY 1 has trapped a slug in a specimen container.

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | "The slug has crawled into a special pot." |
| BOY 1 | "Quick! I need a lid." |
| TEACHER | "I don't think you need to keep them in the pot. They can stay in the tray." |
| | |
| BOY 3 | "Ow! I touched a snail." TEACHER    "It's eating that leaf.... They seem to like these Hosta leaves particularly..... The ones in my garden are always covered in holes where the slugs and snails have eaten them...........Notice how it uses its antennae......... Every time it touches something it pulls its antennae in." |

BOY 3 leaves the table and GIRL 2 joins the group.  TEACHER leaves the table to sort out a dispute between BOY 3 and BOY 4 over a bike. She brings BOY 3 (4:4) back to the table.

GIRL 2 elbowing her way to sit beside GIRL 1.

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRL 2 | "I want to see the baby ones." |

TEACHER seated again, gives GIRL 2 a magnifying glass.
*GIRL 2* using the magnifying glass *"Big and fat. This shell is big."*
GIRL 2 touches a snail which begins to crawl across the tray. She screams loudly and GIRL1 joins in.

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | *"Don't make a loud noise..... I wonder can snails hear? They'll think you're very noisy."* |

The girls stop screaming.
BOY 3 picks up a snail. It's attached to a leaf. *"He's just sticked (sic)."*
GIRL 2 has been banging a snail's shell with the edge of the magnifying glass.

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRL1 | *"She's broke his shell."* |
| TEACHER | *"Who did?"* |
| GIRL 1 | *"GIRL 2.  She banged it."* |
| TEACHER | *"Don't do that. You have to be gentle."* |

The boys on the bikes come near to the table. They are roaring deafeningly!

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | *"Go to the top of the hill if you want to make that noise."* |

They ride off.


GIRL 3 joins the group. GIRL 4 comes and takes a magnifying glass from the box.

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRLS 4 | *"I'm going to look at the trees."* |
| TEACHER | *"OK. Bring it back and put it in the basket when you've finished."* |

All of the magnifying glasses have black handles, except one smaller one which has a red handle.
GIRL 1 takes it out of the box.

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRL 2 | *"I want the little mirror."* |
| TEACHER | *"Magnifying glass."* |
| GIRL 2 | *"I want it."* |
| TEACHER | *"I might draw a picture .... Shall I get some paper?"* |

GIRL 2,  trying to grab the magnifying glass from GIRL 1

| | |
|---|---|
| GIRL 2 | *"Me want it."* |
| *She begins to whine,* | *"Want that one. Want the one."* |
| TEACHER | *"Excuse me GIRL 1, could GIRL 2 have that one for a minute? Then she'll see that it's just the same as the others."* |

GIRL 1 gives GIRL 2  the magnifying glass and leaves the table.

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | *"I'll just go and get some paper and pencils."* |

She goes into NURSERY.
GIRL 3, BOY 3 and BOY 1 continue to look at the snails and slugs. GIRL 2 leaves the table (with the red-handled magnifying glass).
NURSERY OFFICER  comes out into the garden.

| | |
|---|---|
| BOY 1 | *"NURSERY OFFICER come and look."* |
| NURSERY OFFICER | *"Look at this one on the end of the leaf."* |
| BOY 1 | *"I throwed (sic) him down."* |
| NURSERY OFFICER | *"Oh that's not very kind really........ These are amazing BOY1. The way they're moving and stretching."* |

They continue to watch the slugs and snails. The CHILDREN use the magnifying glasses.


TEACHER returns and NURSERY OFFICER goes back into NURSERY. TEACHER stands a 'big book' about snails on the table, she has also brought A4 paper, pencils and some clipboards.


GIRL 2 rejoins the group and BOY 6, who has just arrived, stands at the table.

| | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | *"What happens when you look through the magnifying glass?"* |
| BOY 1 | *"They get bigger and bigger and bigger."* |
| TEACHER | *"They look bigger."* |
| BOY 1 | *"Yes."* |

*GIRL 2  is told not to bang the magnifying glass on the table.*
*TEACHER 1 to BOY 6 (4:6) "What do you think these are (pointing to the slugs)?"*

| | |
|---|---|
| BOY 6 (4:6) | *"Worms."* |
| TEACHER | *"They're very similar but these have antennae like snails....... They're slugs."* |

BOY 6 peers at them.

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| |
|---|
| *TEACHER*                      *"How are you BOY. I see you've brought an apple. Did mummy give it to you?"*<br>BOY 1   He nods. Pointing to the tray     *"What's that?"*<br>*TEACHER*              *"A piece of fruit for the slugs and snails. I thought they'd like to eat it but they really seem to like these Hosta leaves. I've got some in my garden and they always have holes in them."*<br>*BOY 1*   Pointing to a snail, *"That one's big."*<br>*TEACHER*              *"Which one's biggest?"*<br>*BOY 1*                *"That one."*<br>GIRL 2 is banging the table *"Tidy up time in a minute."*<br><br>*TEACHER*              *"Tidy up time for snails? Not yet............. This one's very active. What are these called? ..... Do you remember? ...... No? .... Slugs."*<br>*BOY 1*                *"I want to draw a picture."*<br>*TEACHER*              *"I've brought some paper and clipboards."*<br>She shows him how to put the paper under the clip.<br>*GIRL 2*               *"I want a paper like BOY 2."*<br>TEACHER 1 fits a piece of paper under the clip for her.<br><br>*GIRL 2* holding a leaf *"I want to draw a tree."*<br>*TEACHER*              *"A tree or a leaf?"*<br>*GIRL 2*               *"Leaf."*<br><br>TEACHER leaves the table to sort out a dispute over the bikes.<br>*GIRL 2* sings as she draws *"Green leaf. Green leaf."*<br>GIRL 3 helps herself to a clipboard and puts a piece of paper under the clip.<br>*BOY 1*                *"I've drawn a slug with eyes.... I want another piece of paper."*<br>GIRL 3 picks up a clean piece of paper and goes around the table to BOY 1. She fits the paper under the clip for him.  TEACHER returns.<br>*BOY 3*                *"I want to draw a snail."*<br>TEACHER passes him a piece of paper and a clipboard. BOY 3 tries to put the paper under the clip. BOY 1tries to help him.<br>*TEACHER*              *"You have to press hard. Watch your fingers. Do you want me to help?"*<br>GIRL 3 gets there first and puts the paper under the clip.<br>*TEACHER "Oh well done GIRL 3."*<br>TEACHER has to leave the table again to settle another dispute over the bikes.<br><br>As she returns to the table.  NURSERY OFFICER comes out into the garden.<br><br>*TEACHER*              *"I could do with another person out here. This is quite intensive work and I have to keep leaving to sort out disputes."*<br><br>NURSERY OFFICER wanders around the garden then goes back into NURSERY.<br>*GIRL 3, GIRL 2 and BOY 1 continue to draw.*<br><br>GIRL 3, GIRL 2 and BOY 1 continue to draw, though they seem to enjoy putting the paper under the clips as much as the drawing.<br><br>*BOY 2*  pointing to a snail trail on a leaf. *"Look TEACHER. What is it?"*<br>*TEACHER*              *"It's a snail's trail. It's sticky and shiny. You can see where the snail's been...... What else is sticky?"*<br>*BOY 1*               *"Glue."*<br>*(Doc 426 obs 4)* |

Fortunately, there are many examples of good practice similar to this. However, even in these excellent case study centres in EPPE we found enough evidence to suggest that early years staff

in the Foundation Stage require more support in developing their subject knowledge and their knowledge of how to scaffold children's learning.

## 5.5 Diversity and Differentiation
Citing a wide range of evidence Sadler, 1998, Askew et al, 1997, Medwell et al, 1998, Black and Wiliam, 1998, Gipps et al 2000, have all recently argued that assessment and the provision of feedback are especially important educational strategies.

It is therefore unsurprising to note that a significant correlation found in the EPPE study was between the ECERS-E sub-scale for diversity and children's progress in pre-reading, early number concepts and picture similarities. The diversity sub-scale includes items on differentiation, observation, individual record keeping, gender and race equality and ability grouping, and while any association with the latter in the qualitative data proved to be unclear i.e. in the areas of record keeping and ability grouping, a good deal of our qualitative evidence confirms the importance of formative assessment. A few examples illustrate how this works in practice:

TEACHER re-focused on GIRL. They both worked on the puzzle together
TEACHER     *"Where's the goose going to go? "*
Teacher gives girl a piece of puzzle.
TEACHER     *"Good girl GIRL, you're quick at puzzles aren't you?"*
TEACHER     *"I'm going to play with BOY now- show me when you're finished."*
TEACHER left the table but GIRL followed her. TEACHER then decided to stay with GIRL. TEACHER  then realizes that she should spend more one-to-one time with GIRL and record what had been happening.
Document '214 obs 7'

Staff are frequently encouraged to record the behaviour of children that they have any concerns about:
*…I try to balance out what I do in terms of observation because a lot of the time I'm interacting with them and unfortunately I don't think I have a very good memory, a little filing system. I tend to have a clipboard with me all the time where I can scribble things down. In fact I use sticky labels. So I can just write down the observation and stick it onto a sheet without re-writing it. If it requires too much work then it doesn't get done. That's my record for me. It doesn't need to be on computer for me, it's just for me to refer to later on. I do an awful lot of that. I might be making observations whilst I'm interacting or I might sometimes just try and sit and watch. I find that really hard to do because children always want you to be involved. But sometimes I just like to (if I can) just step back and see how they are without an adult there to get some insights. I think even from the point of view of choosing your topic that should be based on observations. I don't think you should just pluck them out of a hat.*
(Document '214 int teach')

The recent OfSTED (2000) report noted that detailed records and photographic evidence are used effectively to re-visit experiences to clarify, deepen and strengthen understanding.  Activities are meaningful and children are therefore highly motivated. It is also noted that the nursery nurses make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching in the centre.
(Document '421 doc')

## 5.6 Talking through behaviour problems and social conflicts
A great deal of concern has been expressed about the need to respond further to the behavioural and emotional problems of young children growing up in disadvantaged areas.  Some longitudinal studies have shown us that children provided with predominantly direct or 'programmed' instruction sometimes do better than those provided with other forms of pedagogy in the short term (e.g. Millar & Bizzell, 1983, Karnes et al, 1983). But the studies also suggest that when apparent these gains are short lived, with all significant differences having 'washed out' within a year of the provision ending. Highly structured didactic teaching has also been found to result in young children showing significantly increased stress/anxiety behaviours (Burts et al, 1990). A more recent and rigorous

longitudinal study conducted by Schweinhart and Weikart (1997a) showed little difference in the academic performance of young children provided exclusively with direct instruction, but they did find significantly more emotional impairment and disturbance leading to special educational provision. More importantly, the Schweinhart and Weikart study showed that the children in their direct instruction group, as adults, experienced more suspensions from work and more than double the rate of arrests as either of the other two groups. In terms of serious crimes requiring a custodial sentence, 43% of direct instruction group gained a felony record, compared with 17% of the child-centred group and only 10% of the open framework group by the age of 25. Both the Schweinhart and Weikart (1997) study and the High/Scope Perry Pre-school study showed a significant difference in the percentage of young adults married and living with their spouses: While 31% of the open framework group and 18 % of the child-centred group were married at age 23, none of those experiencing the direct instruction programme were (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997b).

Other studies have also shown that an exclusively didactic and 'formal' approach to teaching young children is counterproductive (Nabuco and Sylva, 1996), and can hinder young children's learning, generating higher anxiety and lower self-esteem.  We have found that the excellent settings combine the provision of open-framework, free play opportunities with more focused group work involving direct instruction.  This more balanced approach would therefore appear to be the most desirable model to promote.  Neither free play nor direct instruction is a problem in itself; it seems to be the balance that is important.

That said, it may well be significant that the excellent settings in terms of cognitive, social and behavioural outcomes also adopt discipline/behaviour policies that involve staff in supporting children in being assertive while rationalising and talking through their conflicts. In settings which are less effective in this respect our observations show that there is often no follow up on children's misbehaviour, and on many occasions children are 'distracted' from interfering with other children, or simply instructed to stop.

| | |
|---|---|
| BOY1 points to BOY 2 *"He hit me."* | |
| TEACHER *"Well you say to him, ask him, why did he do it.  Say, don't hit me."* | |
| TEACHER *"BOY 1, BOY 2 come here.  Can you hear what BOY 1 is saying?  He doesn't like that.  Only play it with children who WANT to play that game."* | |
| (Document 017 NC obs 5) | |

Other settings that achieved positive social/behavioural outcomes adopt similar policies and appear to have benefited in similar terms:

| TEACHER  notes BOY 's coat on the floor) | |
|---|---|
| TEACHER | *"Guess what I found, I found it on the floor, can you put it on your peg and I'll look after the computer for you".* |
| BOY | *"No, I'm busy at the moment".* |
| TEACHER | *"Well, if you don't you can't play on the computer".* |
| BOY | *"I don't want to ok?"* |
| TEACHER | *"You will have to come off the computer".* Spoken in a friendly, fun tone |
| TEACHER gets distracted - a parent arrives to give a gift. She then returns to BOY. | |
| | |
| TEACHER | *"OK, can you go and put your coat away?"* |
| BOY | *"No"* |
| TEACHER | *"Did you enjoy your lunch today?"* |
| BOY | *"Yes"* |
| TEACHER | *"What did you have?"* |
| BOY | *"Soup"* |
| TEACHER | *"OK, one second and then go and hang your coat up".* |
| BOY | *"I want to load the game".* |
| TEACHER | *"OK, but I want you to do good listening. If you don't put your coat away, you'll have to come off the computer and then you'll be sad."* |

> BOY                    *"Well, set up the colours then".*
> TEACHER                *"OK, I'll set up the colours while you hang your coat up.*
> BOY eventually did as he was asked. TEACHER really persevered with this issue. According to TEACHER the BOY's behaviour can be difficult, she believes it needs to be worked on. The TEACHER spoke in a friendly, warm tone throughout.
> Document 225 EEC obs 4
>
> GIRL is crying. There has been an incident in the role play area.
> NURSERY OFFICER   *"What's happened?" (*she says this to BOY who is GIRL's twin.
>                        *"What happened BOY 6 (4:0)?"* - Said in an even tone.
>
> NURSERY OFFICER talks quietly to both of them and GIRL 3 stops crying. The children return to the role-play area.
> (Document 421 NS obs 4)

It is instructive to compare these strategies with some of the others recorded by our researchers. In one setting (214 local authority day care with was also an integrated centre), for example, a nursery with some behaviour problems (scoring minus 1 for peer sociability), when any child is hurt or bothered by another child they are encouraged to say; 'NO, NO I don't like it.' But then no other action is often taken (214 obs 1). When our researchers questioned this they were told by a member of staff that she believed in trying to get the children to solve their own problems. She had taught the children to say 'No' and has told them to say it louder and louder until they needed to call for help:

> EY WORKER  returned and heard GIRL 6 screaming,  whilst playing
> EY WORKER         *"Uh, what's the noise for"*  as she goes up to GIRL 6.
> GIRL 6            *" I was chasing her"*
> GIRL 1            *"Yes, but she was upsetting me. GIRL 6 should ask me if it bothers me"*
> EY WORKER         *"Quite right"*
> (Document 214 DC obs 2)

Our observations showed that only too often there is no follow up on children's misbehaviour, and on many occasions children are simply 'distracted' from interfering with other children, or just instructed to stop.


### Section 6 Parents and the home learning environment

One of the main educational implications of our discussion of the processes of learning and pedagogy is that there may be an advantage for the parent in the home environment in so far as the individual child's interest and previous knowledge may be identified more easily, and therefore provides the starting point for any pedagogic exchange.  Between parent and child there can be an interactive partnership, where the child becomes responsible for the direction of much of his/her own learning, with the parent serving as a source of information as it is required.  Tizard and Hughes' (1984) study corroborate all of this.  This influential study was designed to compare the language experience of 30 four year old girls at home and at school.  The main areas of interest were:

- The amount of adult-child conversation in the home and school settings.
- The nature of conversations in the two settings .
- The activity or context in which conversation took place.
- The adult's curriculum.
- The role of the adult in the child's play.

Half of the children were defined as coming from working-class families and half were from middle-class families.  All the children attended a morning nursery school session and spent the afternoons at home with their mothers.  The children wore radio-microphones for three consecutive mornings at nursery school and for two consecutive afternoons at home and an observer was

present to note the context of the talk. Tizard and Hughes (1984) found that, whilst the conversational exchanges in the home were rich and encouraged the active participation on the part of the children, the exchanges in the nursery school between adults and children were impoverished, with teachers posing a series of questions, rather than fostering conversations.  This led to teachers underestimating the abilities of many of the children in the nursery. The young children in this study tended to initiate interactions, ask questions and seek information more readily at home than at school.  In the home much of the conversation and activity between adults and children concerned everyday life and was initiated by the child in response to happenings within the situation.  The parent was uniquely able to respond to the child because she/he too was part of the context.  Parents were also better able than other adults to respond to their child's previous understandings and experiences.   Wood (1986) calls this 'inter-subjectivity' and concludes that conditions for the generation of a contingent learning environment are more likely to be located within the home than in school.

Almost all school improvement and effectiveness studies corroborate that parental involvement is one factor (among several other factors) which improves schools (Mortimore et al, 1988). Research on school improvement and effectiveness suggests that where staff had been involved in the development of guidelines for their school, there was likely to be school-wide consistency in guideline usage. Where staff had not been involved, however, there was likely to be variation, with teachers tending to adopt individual approaches to the use of guidelines for different curriculum areas. It appears, therefore, that staff involvement was related to a more consistent school-based approach to curriculum. (Mortimore et al, 1988, p233). If we accept that parents provide sensitive, socio-culturally 'embedded' learning environments for their children then it is likely to follow that where there is some consensus and consistency in the home and school's approach to children's learning and the curriculum then more effective learning outcomes could be achieved (Jowett et al., 1991; Long, 1991; Epstein, 1988; 1991; Shaeffer, 1992).

All 14 case study settings encouraged parents to read with their children, but in those settings that encouraged continuity of learning between the early years setting and home, children had better cognitive outcomes. Some research on parent involvement, for instance many studies in reading and literacy development (Hewison, 1988; Hannon & James, 1990) have suggested that children's educational development can be enhanced with long term positive effects. The more knowledge the adult has of the child the better matched their support and the more effective the subsequent learning. While a good deal may be achieved by the teacher with structured observation and record keeping, parents clearly have a distinct advantage in this respect.

*"Not only may the experience at home provide something not readily available in school but also it seems that the skills involved apply as much to the process of attention, perseverance, task performance and work organisation as to particular areas of knowledge. Learning how to learn may be as important as the specifics of what is learned."* (Rutter, 1985)

In the United States the large-scale and longitudinal studies conducted by Epstein (1987; 1988; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) offer a useful model (below) upon which investigations of school improvement (particularly those aimed at raising the academic achievement of children) and parental involvement can be explored. We adapted our questionnaire to ask parents about:

1. Parenting skills, child development.
2. Communications from school to home.
3. Parents as volunteers in school.
4. Involvement in learning activities at home.
5. Decision making, leadership, and governance.

We interviewed a total of 107 parents from the 14 case study settings (see Appendix 1 for interview schedule).
Communication between parents and staff was, on the whole, very consistent but generally informal and responsive to the needs of the child in terms of their general welfare and well-being.

Studies arising from the Children and their Primary School's report (Plowden HMSO 1967) recommendations focused heavily on the frequency of parent contact with schools. As Bernstein and Davies argued in the 1960s, the notion that quantity of contact, of itself, could raise the educational achievement of disadvantaged children is extremely doubtful.

The qualitative analysis of our observations has shown an association between effectiveness, curriculum differentiation, and matching in terms of cognitive challenge, and 'sustained shared thinking'. But the evidence also showed us that some settings may be effective even where these conditions are not met. Our findings suggest that where a special relationship in terms of shared educational aims has been developed *with* parents, and pedagogical efforts are made at home similar outcomes may be established.

In the private day nurseries where the pedagogy of the settings was unremarkable the cognitive scores were high (after controlling for background etc.), and in two of them the scores on social and behavioural development were high as well. It was interesting that the predominantly (upper) middle class parents in these settings consistently wanted their children to develop social skills from the early years settings yet they were themselves very aware of providing a strong educational home environment; they were tuned into the discourse of education and were pro-active in initiating learning activities at home.

*'She'd been looking at numbers at school then I'd do that at home. If she mentioned she liked a particular book at school we'd find that in the library and we do letters at home. So, yes I do try to follow it at home. I think her particular project at the moment is woodland when we go out we try to do woodland things…I do think some of the project work is over ambitious but where I can relate to it then yes I do.'*                                                                                              219 PDN parent 09'

*'She's one of the ones who's been chosen to read in front of everybody. It's an awful lot of work for the key worker, they put together a little pack or wallet for each child and they put in the letters with the actions and the book and the stickers they have to put on. Its daily but it progresses weekly…She knows so many words, it's all phonetic, even words which she hadn't come across before. She is one of the youngest to start school, she's not four yet, she'll just be four when she starts school but she's going to be able to read. You don't know whether it's going to be good or bad. Hopefully they'll take it into account. ..The kids are not learning to read in a bad way... It's everywhere so I don't think it can do any harm. '*                                                    306 PDN parent 03'

We were interested to see if the parents of children from more disadvantaged communities where the cognitive and social outcome scores were high were supporting their children's learning at home, or whether it was entirely the setting's work with the children that gave them a head-start. We already knew from our observational analysis that some excellent pedagogical practices were being practised. Although the following examples may not appear remarkable, the consistent approaches by staff to inform parents about their child's progress and to communicate what the setting is trying to achieve with individuals was emphasised by the parents over and over again.

*They suggest things you can do at home and you take home books. You've got the library and they suggest how to talk to them if you've got any problems you know how to approach it. They do really help. I know they learn quickly and I know I've got the setting to thank for that. I know I've done some hard work but they've done a lot as well.* '
426 parent 06'

### 6.1 Information and feedback to parents
Other settings with good and successful outcomes such as 214 DC and 426 EEC provided regular information through records of achievement and monthly meetings with key workers. In the case of 219 PDN and 421 NS weekly feedback is provided. What is distinctive about all of these settings is that they focus on what they are teaching the children and report regularly to parents on their children's achievements. These settings engage in more regular on-going assessment of children's

learning, and this supports the parents from these settings in engaging more in complementary educational activities in the home.

*'The weekly report has a section on what activities the group has been doing we have talked about squirrels this week and things like that. She has mostly played this week with this type of material and she's learned the letter P and R she now knows numbers 1 to 4 for example. And the last bit is what she has enjoyed most. The end of report is like 3 or 4 pages, much more detailed and goes to cognitive development and social development of the child. What she has learned in terms of letters, drawing and ballet and French.* '
219 PDN parent 04'

## 6.2 Supporting parents

All three integrated settings (2 early excellence and 1 daycare) provide excellent parent support, an open door policy, classes for parent development (e.g. computers, assertiveness) and a very friendly informal environment for parents to meet each other. We have examples of settings in disadvantaged areas where parents give their children good academic support, however this is mediated through the work of the settings. The setting which cannot do this, setting 225, an EEC with excellent parent support has poor cognitive outcomes. It is employing a less effective strategy by emphasising parents' needs above those of their children, rather than seeing the needs of children and parents as different but complementary. They also promote social development and support above educational development, rather than seeing these as complementary.

*"I think I probably don't follow things up from here as such. Again I haven't been coming in as much. I suppose if he becomes interested in something from the nursery then we will do something at home that follows on from it.* '
225 EEC parent 06'

Involvement in *learning activities at home* and parent involvement in *decision making, leadership, and governance* have been shown to be associated with better academic achievement (Epstein 1991). Our findings show that it is the *involvement in learning activities at home* that is more closely associated with better cognitive attainment in the early years.

For families from more disadvantaged backgrounds, parent involvement (which was largely conceived by parents as 'helping out'), was not common or associated with setting outcomes. In fact some of the highest scoring settings had no voluntary parent involvement at all. Parent support was common in the EECs and the local authority day care centre but where it was combined with shared educational goals the outcomes were higher.

In contrast to this, settings where the cognitive outcomes were worse than expected (although not the social), tended not to communicate the children's progress regularly to parents. Sometimes parents were given written feedback or a daily chat (where requested by the parents), or a summative report, often at the end of year or term:

*"..that is one of the conversations I have not had very much with the assistant, which may be could be expanded; what we do at home has never been discussed very much with them. I would be interested how they felt; I imagine they would be talking with people whose child had a particular difficulty. They address the issues rather than (talk to us) if there is no issue.*
017 NC parent 06

*"They don't give written information of my child's progress, When I come in to collect him everyday and every now and then I will say ' How did he get on today?' they will reply ' Fine, OK or really good' If he's done something really good as I'm leaving they usually pull me up and tell me themselves. Most of the time I'll ask but there is no written information we don't get any of that to say how they are progressing.*' 401 PG parent 05'

Parents felt that settings, which were sensitive, responsive and consistent (in terms of staff), were more effective, and this links well with the research literature on good practice, especially in daycare (Bowman et al 2001).

Whether parents and/or children are tuned into what the setting is trying to achieve seems to be linked, at least partially, with what happens at home. It appears to be associated with what the parents do with their children when they are not at the setting or what the children initiate with their parents.

Parents do have anxieties about the difference in pedagogy and curriculum when their child enters reception, but the parents of the reception classes that we studied were reassured. Interestingly, parents didn't expect a different approach from reception, but one that articulates well with nursery practice, and does not become formal too quickly. This continuity in transition from pre-school to reception was important to parents:

*"The nursery was a very good start for my child, they were very good in teaching her starting to read and phonetics sounds and getting her writing. It was just a play environment and they weren't left on their own, they were encouraged and they were taken aside…She's only been in reception since Easter … they seem to be very caring about the children, they seem to be interested in the children, and my child on her second day here came back and said 'I've learnt stuff'."*
501RC parent 05'

## 6.3 The impact of pre-school provision on parents' use of time
In the parent interview we asked the parents what they did while their child was at pre-school. This is an area of interest given the Government policy on expanding childcare provision in order that women can return to work. Of the 107 parents we received 100 responses, by far the most common was associated with employment, followed by 'it gives me personal space' and almost equally parents who felt it gave them time to study or look after their other children. The 100 responses were as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Time to go out to work or undertake more hours employment | 38% |
| Own time 'my space' | 25% |
| Taken up study | 12% |
| Look after my other children | 10% |
| Want to work, sessions too short to do anything | 7% |
| Socialise more (other parents) | 5% |
| Involved in the centre | 2% |

Only one parent said it gave her less time because: 'I'm now busier because of my child's social life!'

These results might be taken to suggest that quite a high percentage of parents can find employment when their children attend pre-school. But it is important to remember that the 12 EPPE case study centres are not representative of the number of providers in each category. For example we have six settings that take children from a young age and offer full time provision. In reality some of the largest providers are playgroups and nursery classes who, like nursery schools, only offer half-day sessional provision. However, our data suggest that if more providers offered longer sessions parents would welcome this. The single, biggest factor which dissatisfied parents of all the 12 case study centres were opening times and the lack of flexibility of these times.

Our research suggests that the educational performance of settings in terms of child outcomes does not appear to be directly related to differences in their philosophies or to curriculum priorities, but it is associated with pedagogical differences and approaches. All of the settings have sound leadership, good communications, shared philosophies and consistent ways of working amongst

the staff. Most of the case study settings combine both programmed, teacher initiated group work and open-framework, teacher supported free choice provision. Most of the routine pedagogical interventions that we observed were satisfactory; some gave cause for concern, while others were good or excellent. We found that some of these interventions were planned but also that many were applied as an opportunity arose.

The evidence suggests that the achievements of settings against the cognitive outcomes appears to be directly related to the quantity and quality of the teacher/adult planned and initiated focused group work that is provided and also the quality of adult-child interactions. While it is clear that an instructive play environment may be provided that involves the child and encourages their cognitive construction or co-construction, there remains little research evidence to suggest that this is commonly achieved (Bennett & Kell, 1989).

**Glossary**

**Adult but child ex:** (Adult initiates but child extends) is an observation category where the adult has initiated an activity but a child has extended it.

**Adult throughout:** is an observation category where the adult has initiated an activity and led it throughout.

**As expected:** (learning as expected) refers to a description of the target child's ability by their practitioner; i.e. the target child was deemed to be learning as expected.

**CC:** Combined centre; where care and education are integrated with some teacher input. Also referred to as integrated centres.

**CGFS:** *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* (QCA/DfEE 2000) the core reference document for the Foundation Stage for children from 3 years old to the end of reception year.

**Child but adult ex:** (Child initiates but adult extends) is an observation category where the child has initiated an activity but an adult has extended it.

**Child throughout:** is an observation category where the child has initiated the activity and led it throughout.

**Co-construction:** In the traditional constructivist account of learning new understandings are considered to be founded upon the child's prior understandings. In our analysis we emphasise the importance of recognising that learning encounters involve processes of co-construction where each party engages with the understanding of the other. A necessary condition for this to occur is that both parties are involved and that the content should be instructive (See below).

**Conceptual knowledge:** Refers to the ideas and understanding of principles and of their relationship to each other.

**Creative:** Refers to the *Creative development* area of the CGFS.

**Critical moments:** An event occurring during an observation which influenced and developed an idea or skill substantially; this may have come from a child, a practitioner, or a resource.

**Curriculum differentiation:** The provision of differentiated curriculum experiences as a response to the identification of the specific needs of individual or small groups of children (See 'formative assessment').

**DC:** Local Authority Day Care centre, normally with a Social Services history but most are now managed by local education authorities.

**DfES:** Department for Education and Skills, the UK central government department who commissioned the EPPE and EPEY research projects.

**Direct teaching:** These are pedagogical interactions referred to by the Target Child Observations which include simple questioning, description of the activity, didactic instruction, task management, reading to the target child, and organising and allocating tasks.

**ECERS-E**: (**Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale: Extension) Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart (1998) University of London, Institute of Education:** A rating scale of 4 subscales which assesses pedagogy and the curriculum within the setting, including the areas of mathematics, science, literacy and diversity (whether staff plan to meet particular/individual needs).

**ECERS-R (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale: Revised) Harms et al (1998):** A rating scale consisting of seven sub-scales which provide an overview of the pre-school environment, covering aspects of the setting from furnishing to individuality of care and the quality of social interactions.

**EEC:** *Early Excellence Centre* (as designated by the DfES); a centre which offers fully integrated care and education for pre-school children with other services for older children, families and practitioners.

**ELGs:** Early Learning Goals as identified in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage for England. These cover Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Communication, Language and Literacy; Mathematical Development; Creative Development, Physical Development and Knowledge and Understanding of the World.

**EEL:** Effective Early Learning (EEL) project run by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood at University College Worcester to facilitate centre-based practice-development.

**EPPE:** The *Effective Provision for Pre-school Education* project, a 'value-added' longitudinal research study of the effects of early childhood provision on the developmental progress of 3000+ children.

**EPEY:** The *Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* project is the formal name of the research reported here.

**Excellent settings:** The group of 3 case-study settings (identified by EPPE) whose social or/and cognitive outcomes were excellent; i.e. where the children were found to make substantially more developmental progress than could be predicted by their family background and their pre-test assessments (see 'good settings').

**Formative assessment:** The process whereby information is collected to identify the extent of children's learning, and subsequently applied in the provision of feedback and in adapting the curriculum and pedagogy to provide for their particular needs.

**Foundation Stage:** a Stage of education for children from 3 years old to the end of reception class (see CGFS).

**Good settings:** The group of 9 (7 settings for the systematic observations) case-study settings whose outcomes were found to be good in some areas of social or cognitive development, but where the children largely made predictable progress according to their family background and their pre-test assessments (i.e. not 'excellent' see above).

**High cognitive challenge:** An overall qualitative judgement of how much the episode is 'stretching' the child's mind (see Appendix 7).

**Integrated settings:** also often referred to as combined centres. These settings include an equal emphasis on education and care as their core service to children but may also offer other services related to families and early years practitioners and may also include funding from health as well as care and education.

**Intervals:** The 30 second intervals which make up each 20 minute Target Child Observation.

**Instruction/Instructive:** The term 'instruction' has been applied to include both direct (demonstrating, questioning etc) and indirect instructional behaviours and intentions such as the encouragement of parental involvement and the provision of 'pedagogical framing'.

**Involvement:** The concept of involvement that we have applied has been adapted from the work of Ferre Laevers (1994) and Pascal and Bertram (1997). The term is applied to adults *and* children who have focused their attention upon a shared activity and are persistent. They are 'intrinsically motivated, rarely distracted, and appear fascinated and absorbed' (op cit) by their shared activity.

**Iterative triangulation:** A mixed methodology design was employed in the study and a process of iterative triangulation is described. This was employed to contribute to the internal validity of the study and to encourage a process of working; 'back and forth between inductive and deductive models of thinking'.

**Knowledge:** Refers to the *Knowledge and Understanding of the World* area of the CGFS.

**Learning episodes:** Coherent activities initiated either by children or adults.

**Level 2-4:** Practitioner qualification levels including NVQ level 2-4 and those which are equivalent to it.

**Level 5:** Practitioner with NVQ level 5 qualification or qualified teaching status.

**Literacy:** Refers to the *Communication, language and literacy* area of the CGFS.

**Modelling:** The process where early years educators provide a 'model' in terms of their language, behaviours, skills and/or attitudes for young children to imitate.

**Mathematics:** Refers to the Mathematical development area of the CGFS.

**Monitoring:** These are pedagogical interactions referred to by the Target Child Observations which include the practitioner observing the target child, and when the practitioner was available to the target child in their social context but not interacting with them.

**Nodes:** act as 'containers' in NVivo for categories and coding of the qualitative data e.g. in the coding of a transcript of an interview.

**NC:** Nursery Class, normally attached to a primary school and where children aged 3 and 4 attend nursery education, usually for half day sessions.

**NS:** Nursery School, whole schools catering for children 3-5 years old.

**Outcomes:** In this report they are referred to in respect to how much developmental progress the children in the EPPE case-study settings made which cannot be explained by background characteristics.

**PDN:** Private Day Nursery.

**Pair:** refers to a child pair, rather than an adult and child which is 1:1 (see the last entry in the glossary).

**Pedagogy:** Pedagogy: The practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching. See page 27 for a more detailed discussion.

**Pedagogical content knowledge:** Different pedagogic techniques are often required to make different forms of knowledge, skill and understanding accessible to young children. In teacher education the identification of appropriate strategies is often referred to as 'pedagogical content knowledge'. Requires knowledge of the 'subject' being taught and the child's level of learning.

**Pedagogical interactions:** Face to face interactions practitioners engage in with children; they may take the form of cognitive or social interactions (see figure 5).

**Pedagogical strategies:** practices which support learning, for instance, social interactions, assessment, the organisation of resources or management.

**PG:** Playgroup; a form of pre-school provision for children (2 ½ years and above), historically associated with the voluntary sector. Usually run by parents.

**Physical Development:** Refers to the *Physical development* area of the CGFS.

**Procedural knowledge**: Knowing about the things in the world, and how to act upon them.

**PSE**: Refers to the *Personal, social and emotional* area of the CGFS.

**Qualitative software package:** computer software programme used to code and analyse qualitative data using a node (see glossary above) structure to support the organisation, categorisation, shaping, and linking of the data.

**Reception/RC:** refers to the 2 Reception classes which were part of the REPEY case-study sample. In the UK, more than 90% of children enter the Reception class of a Primary (Elementary) School aged 4.

**REPEY:** The *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* project is the formal name of the research reported here.

**Setting:** the term refers to local authority day care centres, playgroups, nursery classes, nursery schools, integrated/combined centres, reception classes, early excellence centres and private day nurseries.

**Small group:** Code from Target Child Observation system referring to a group of between 3-8 children.

**Stepping stones:** are not age related but are in the CGFS to help practitioners in planning the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes that children need to learn during the foundation stage. The ELGs form the final stepping stones.

**Struggling:** refers to a description of the target child's ability by their practitioner; where the target child was deemed to be a struggling learner.

**Sustained shared thinking:** An episode in which two or more individuals "work together" in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend.

**Systematic observations:** Analysis from the timed *Target Child Observations*.

**V capable:** refers to a description of the target child's ability by their practitioner; where the target child was deemed to be a very capable learner.

**Target Child:** focal child being observed during the timed *Target Child Observations*.

**TCO:** *Target Child Observation* instrument (Sylva, Roy and Painter,1980). A timed systematic observation instrument used to look at children's experiences of the classroom.

**Whole class:** Code from Target Child Observation system referring to a group of 9 or more children.

**ZAD (zone of actual development):** Refers to the cognitive levels at which a child is currently operating.

**ZPD (zone of proximal development):** Refers to the higher cognitive levels which a child can achieve when supported by a practitioner or more knowledgeable other (the cognitive potential). See Appendix 3

**1:1:** One to one referring to a one adult and one child.

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**Appendix 1**

**Semi-structured parent interview as part of the EPPE case studies**

How long has your child been at the centre?

What did you know about the centre before you admitted your child, how did you know this?

What information were you given and how? e.g. through a home visit.

Was there any expectation of you in relation to your role as a parent? e.g. to ensure your child was toilet trained, visits to the centre, parent interview for records etc.

How does the centre communicate with you and how often? e.g. is there a 'key persons system' so you have an allotted adult, or parent evenings, written circulars etc?

How is your child's progress and development reported to you?

How often do you visit the centre and why?

What kinds of involvement does the centre encourage? e.g.
- as helper/volunteer, assistant to a trained adult, centre visits, fund raising;
- to attend workshops or other parent training;
- other forms of parent education;
- parent support for families under stress.

What kind of involvement do you have in your child's learning at home? What proportion of this is adult/child-initiated?

How much of this is supported by the centre? Give examples.

What opportunities do you have to get involved in the decision-making processes in the centre? e.g. through a PTA. Management/governing committee etc.

***Are you ever asked to comment on the curriculum, assessment or other policies of the centre, is so, how?***

What do you think your child gets out of attending this centre?

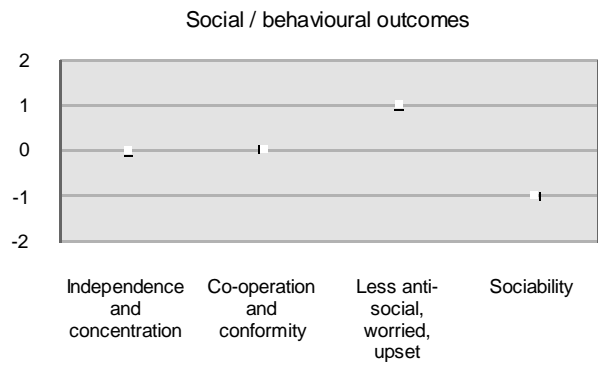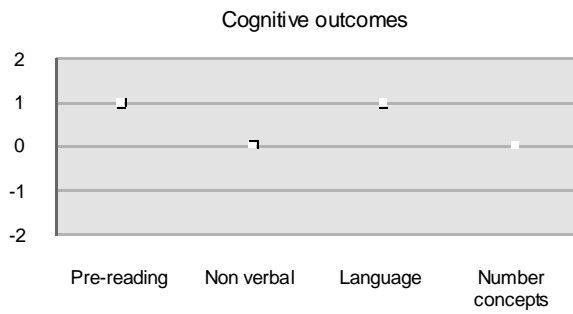What do you think makes a centre effective?

What do you get out of it? What do you do while your child is at the centre? e.g. Have a break, study, employment.

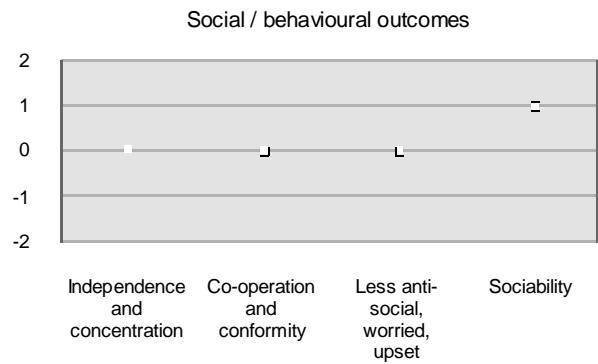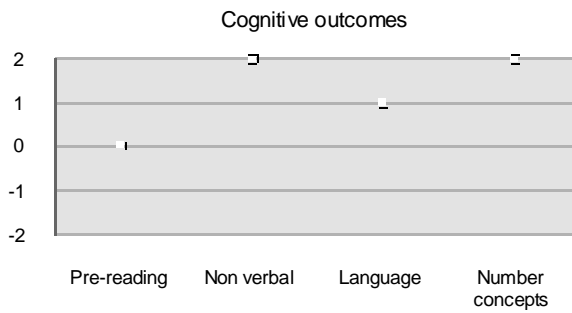Is there anything you would change about this centre?
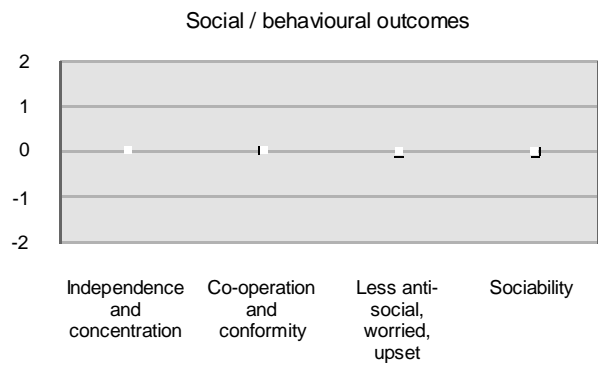
Any other comments? Thank you

© IS-B Feb. 2000 EPPE project

# Appendix 2 Examples of outcome profiles

## Centre DC



Cognitive outcomes



Social / behavioural outcomes

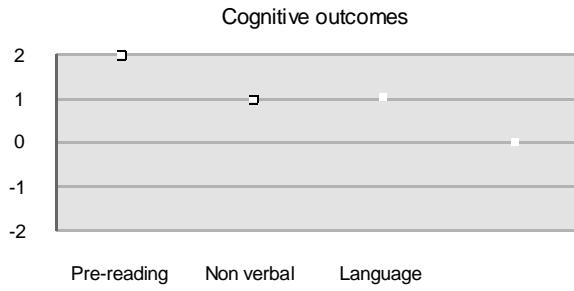## Centre PDN



Cognitive outcomes



Social / behavioural outcomes

## Centre PG



Cognitive outcomes



Social / behavioural outcomes

## Centre  PDN

**Cognitive outcomes**



| | Pre-reading | Non verbal | Language |
|---|---|---|---|

**Social / behavioural outcomes**



| Independence and concentration | Co-operation and conformity | Less anti-social, worried, upset | Sociability |
|---|---|---|---|

## Centre  NC

**Cognitive outcomes**



| Pre-reading | Non verbal | Language | Number concepts |
|---|---|---|---|

**Social / behavioural outcomes**



| Independence and concentration | Co-operation and conformity | Less anti-social, worried, upset | Sociability |
|---|---|---|---|

## Centre  NS

**Cognitive outcomes**



| Pre-reading | Non verbal | Language | Number concepts |
|---|---|---|---|

**Social / behavioural outcomes**



| Independence and concentration | Co-operation and conformity | Less anti-social, worried, upset | Sociability |
|---|---|---|---|

## Centre  EEC

**Cognitive outcomes**



| Pre-reading | Non verbal | Language | Number concepts |
|---|---|---|---|

**Social / behavioural outcomes**



| Independence and concentration | Co-operation and conformity | Less anti-social, worried, upset | Sociability |
|---|---|---|---|

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**Appendix 3    Cognitive challenge**

| *HIGH COGNITIVE CHALLENGE (COMPLEX)* | *ORIDINARY COGNITIVE CHALLENGE* |
|---|---|
| Child activity is: Novel, creative, imaginative, productive | Child activity is: Familiar, routine, stereotyped, repetitive, unproductive |
| Cognitively complex, involving the combination of several elements, materials, actions, or ideas | Cognitive unsophisticated, not involving the combining of elements |
| Carried out in a systematic, planned and purposeful manner | Performed in an unsystematic random manner with no observable planning or purposefulness |
| Structured and goal-directed –working towards some aim, whether the result is tangible end-product or an invisible goal | Not directed towards a new, challenging goal, 'aimless' and without structure |
| Conducted with care and mental effort; the child devotes a great deal of attention is deeply engrossed – takes pains | Conducted with ease, little mental effort, and not much care; the child is not deeply engrossed, his/her attention may not be entirely on that task |
| Learning a new skill, trying to improve an established one, or trying novel combinations of already familiar skills | Repeating a familiar, well-established pattern without seeking to improve upon it nor to add any new component or combination |

Sylva, K., Roy, C., Painter, M. (1980) *Childwatching at Playgroup and Nursery School.* London: Oxford Preschool Research Project p60

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## Appendix 4 - Target Child Observation (TCO)

This was based upon the Target Child Observation (Sylva, Roy, and Painter 1980; Sylva, 1997), which describes the behaviour of an individual child for 20 minutes during a randomly sampled time during the day at pre-school. It uses both time and event sampling to record an individual child's social grouping and participation, the individual child's activity, the individual child's curricular experience, and the interactions of any adults present, and notes any edu-care training which the adult may have.

An observer follows an individual child for one observation of 20 minutes, which is then divided into 30 second intervals. Each 30 second interval is categorised in four different ways:
- Main curriculum area which the child is experiencing (Time sampled).
- Social context, including if an adult is present and their level of edu-care training (Time sampled).
- Childs learning activity (Time sampled).
- Adult pedagogical interactions (Event sampled).

For each observation, further information was also recorded for use in analysing longer episodes. This includes who initiated the activities which the child took part in, the level of cognitive challenge of the child's activity, and what provided a 'critical point' (which influenced the development of the activity). This is fully described in Appendix 6.

### Target Child Observation Sample Details

The Target Child Observation sample consisted of 12 Foundation Stage settings from the 14 identified case-study centres. All had been identified as having effective practice by the EPPE study apart from the 2 Reception classes which were identified by Early Years Advisors. These were:

1 Playgroup
2 Nursery classes
2 Nursery schools
2 Private day nurseries
2 Integrated/Combined centres (Both were Early Excellence centres)
1 Day care centre – Social services
2 Reception classes (identified by Early Years Advisors)

In each setting about 20 children were observed during a week's visit at randomly selected intervals during the day. The researcher aimed to observe six children during a whole day session.

### Target Child Observation instrument categories

### Curriculum area
A record of which area of the Foundation Stage curriculum the target child is experiencing through the activity in which they are engaged. Coded by time-sampling for each 30 second interval.

**Social context**

How many peers there are in the target child's grouping, these include *alone or in a 1:1 situation with a practitioner*, *pair* of children, *small group* (3 to 8 children), and *whole class* activity (9 or more children).

If a practitioner is present in the group, what qualifications they have is also recorded. Distinctions are made between *level 5* practitioners, *level 2-4* practitioners, and *adults* who have no edu-care training.

The target child is also coded for whether or not s/he is 'interacting' with other persons or is 'parallel' to them. The child would be coded as not interacting if s/he was acting in parallel, e.g. counting in unison with other members, or dancing the same steps of the social group.

These items were all time-sampled for each 30 second interval.

**Learning activity**

50 codes were initially devised to create a detailed description of the activity in which the target child is engaged. These codes were grouped into related categories to make 15 main child activities (see below). When it was apparent that children were engaged in behaviour covered by more than one 'learning activity code' multi-coding was implemented.

The 15 grouped categories are as follows:

- *Games*: This included informal games, and games with rules.
- *Pretend*: Included instances when children where involved in pretend play (the transformation of everyday objects, people, or events so that their 'meaning' takes precedence over 'reality') and children's use of scale version toys.
- *Movement*: Large muscle movement, purposeful movement (actively moving from one activity to another or towards a person or object), and cruising (actively looking around for something to do).
- *Manipulation*: Activities which involved the mastering and refining of manual skills requiring coordination of the hand/arm and the senses (handling sand, dough, clay, water, or arranging and sorting objects).
- *SM/CON*: Structured material (the use of materials with design constraints e.g. jigsaw puzzles, peg boards, bead-threading), large scale and small scale construction.
- *Empty*: This included times when the child was 'standing around gazing' with no interest in any activity, as well as times when the child was 'waiting' for either an adult, or another child.
- *Domestic activity*: This included children using the bathroom, changing shoes, and lunch or snack times.
- *Observation*: Includes task related and non-task related observation.
- *Art and music*: Includes 'Singing songs', 'Playing instruments', 'Dancing and movement', 'Drawing', 'Painting', 'Cut and pasting' which are all free expression activities, and sometimes 'Adult directed art and manipulation'. (When the child is mastering or refining skills and techniques under <u>adult direction</u>, and sometimes with an adult-determined end product (e.g. tracing).
- *Mathematics*: Includes activities involving 'calculations', 'number symbols' or 'number concepts'.
- *Reading/writing/listening*: reading activities consists of; Looking at books, reading sounds, reading individual words, reading text. Writing activities

include; pretend writing, copying letters, writing individual letters independently, writing individual words.  Active listening activities include; adult reading, listening to a form of media with a literacy focus, other child reading, listening to an adult organise and allocate tasks.

- *Examination and exploring*: when children are engaged in 'examining' objects, or instances when a child is 'problem-solving'.
- *Adult-led*: Includes adult-led unison activities when the target child is part of a group of children under the firm leadership of an adult, and in which the child usually responds in unison with others.  This also includes 'cooking'.
- *Social talk*: This includes when a child is interacting with another child or adult in either a social conversation, or a conversation which is not related to the activity which the child is engaged.  However, if the conversation was task-related then it would be coded as part of the child's learning activity code, e.g. if the target child is completing a jigsaw and talking to a child sat beside them about the jigsaw they would be coded as 'SM/Con'.
- *Computing*: This includes the target child computing or watching another child compute.

**Adult's pedagogical interactions**
These codes were used for the systematic observations of children when they are with an adult and are divided into two areas: cognitive and social interactions.

The cognitive codes are divided into sustained shared thinking interactions, direct teaching interactions and monitoring.

- The sustained shared thinking interactions include *scaffolding*, *extending*, *discussing*, *modelling*, and *playing*.

*Scaffolding* is an interaction which requires the teacher to know the target child's level of knowledge, and to stretch his/her abilities through a series of questions or comments in order to take the child to a higher level of knowledge than s/he would have had before.
*Extending* is generally a quicker interaction when the practitioner makes a suggestion to allow the child to see other possibilities in the activity which s/he is taking part in.  For example the target child is arranging farm animals within a fence, the practitioner approaches and asks how the animals will get out.  This then encourages the child to consider the need for a gate within the fence and his/her play takes a new direction.
*Discussing* means that the practitioner must have a prolonged discussion with the target child.  It is more than a series of questions from adult to child, but allows an interchange of information or ideas.
*Modelling* includes the demonstration of activities accompanied by the child's attention and interest as well as a verbal commentary from the adult.
*Playing* is the adult using humour or playing with the target child.

- The direct teaching pedagogical interactions are simple *questioning*, *description of the activity*, didactic *instruction*, *task management* and *reading* to the target child, *organising and allocating* tasks.

The monitoring pedagogical interactions include:
- The practitioner is *observing* the target child.
- The practitioner was *available* to the target child in their social context.

The socially related pedagogical interactions include:

- *Encouragement.*
- *Behaviour management* such as 'sit still', and reprimanding the target child.
- *Social* conversation with the target child which is not related to the activity which the child is a part of.
- Physical *caring* for the child which also includes cuddles and sitting on knees.

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