

OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

NEWTOWN NURSERY SCHOOL

West Street Colne Lancashire BB8 0HW

DFE School Number: 923/1028

Name of Reporting Inspector

Mr M H Bradley HMI

Date of inspection: 10-12 May 1995

Inspection under Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out under Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992. Its purpose was to report on:

- * the educational standards achieved in the school;
- * the quality of education provided by the school;
- * whether the financial resources available to the school are managed efficiently; and
- * the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school.

The findings of the inspection will contribute to the annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to the Secretary of State for Education.

Basic information about the school

2.	Name of school:	Newtown Nursery School
	Type of school:	Nursery
	Status:	LEA Nursery School
	Age range of pupils:	3 - 4
	Headteacher:	Miss S Williams
	Address of school:	West Street Colne Lancashire BB8 0HW
	Telephone:	01282 864411
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	Telephone:	01772 54868
	Local authority area:	Lancashire
	DFE school number:	923/1028
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Intake of pupils and the area served by the school

3. Newtown Nursery School serves a large geographic area including urban Colne and its surrounding rural villages. Few families come from ethnic minority groups. There is a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Many of the pupils, who all attend for five mornings or five afternoons, have attended and continue to attend playgroups. Some children have been to Lancashire Social Services Department Day Nurseries.

School data and indicators

4. Number of pupils in each year group

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Nursery	47	55	102

Special educational needs

There are no pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

Teachers and classes

Full-time equivalent teachers:	3.1
Pupil to teacher ratio:	16.4:1
Number of special support assistants for special educational needs:	2
Non-teaching professional support staff (nursery nurses):	2
Teaching time per week:	25 hours

Pupil attendance

Percentage attendance figures for the fifth week of the term prior to the term of the inspection:

	Fifth Week		
	Actual attendance	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Nursery	93.3	6.7	0

Number of exclusions in the last 12 months

There have been no exclusions in the last 12 months.

Record of the evidence base of the inspection

Number of lessons seen:

Year	Ν
Lessons seen	36

Several children were observed individually for extended periods.

Discussions were held with all members of staff and with many of the pupils. Planning and policy documents were examined as were pupil records. 12 parents attended a parents' meeting and discussions were held with several others during the inspection. 46 replies were received to a questionnaire sent to parents. Seven primary schools to which Newtown Nursery pupils transfer provided comments on liaison arrangements and a local high school, the child development centre and a further education college commented on their links with the nursery.

MAIN FINDINGS AND KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

Main findings

5. The standards achieved in the school are satisfactory or better overall, but they are variable. Language and literacy skills are good; standards in numeracy are satisfactory but need further development. Work in scientific, technological, physical, and human and social learning is of a satisfactory standard overall.

6. The quality of education is good. However, the quality of teaching varies particularly when staff teach jointly planned activities in different ways. Sometimes the educational purposes of the activities are not fully recognised.

7. The assessment and recording of the children's progress needs to be based on more consistent criteria. At present, such information is not sufficiently used to inform the teaching. The curriculum is broad, balanced and well resourced, but there is a need for more equipment for example in science, music and design technology.

8. The management of the school and its finances is efficient and effective but the school development plan (SDP) does not currently identify resource and financial details. The school provides good value for money.

9. There is a good atmosphere in the school. Moral and social education are good. However, aspects of cultural learning are under emphasised at present and the spiritual dimension is under-developed.

Key issues for action

- 10. The school and its governing body, in conjunction with the LEA should:
- * maintain the current good standards, and develop greater consistency in standards across all areas of learning;
- * continue to develop detailed documents to cover all aspects of the school's curriculum. These should support the clearer identification of the knowledge and skills required for each area of learning, specifying the purposes of activities;
- * establish more consistent assessment procedures to inform future planning and to ensure that the work is appropriate for children of all abilities;
- * review resource needs across the curriculum in relation to the SDP and the school's budget;
- * maintain the present standards of moral and social education and develop those in the cultural and spiritual areas.

STANDARDS AND QUALITY

Standards of achievement

11. Standards of achievement are satisfactory overall in relation to the pupils' ages and capabilities, although in several areas of learning they include unsatisfactory aspects. In language and literacy good standards are achieved. In mathematics, number work is less systematically developed than other aspects. Work in science and technology is good overall. Aesthetic learning is at least satisfactory and at times good, for example in music. However, art occasionally lacks a clear purpose and standards are lower as a result. Similarly, the potential of physical activities is not always realised and standards vary from satisfactory to unsatisfactory. Human and social learning is satisfactory overall and sometimes very good.

12. The variations in standards achieved are frequently related to differences in the staff's knowledge of the curriculum. This is most apparent when staff teach jointly-planned activities but use too wide a variety of ways.

Quality of learning

13. The quality of learning was satisfactory or better in most of the lessons seen. The children have positive attitudes towards their work and the majority develop an appropriate

range of skills, particularly in language and the personal and social areas of learning. In many activities the children work co-operatively and on these occasions can frequently sustain their concentration for extended periods using good discussions.

14. The quality of learning is generally better in the brief group activity sessions, where the children work with one adult on a focused activity. Although some very good work was seen at other times, some children tended to engage in activities only briefly, moving from one area to another too often. However, overall, the children show good gains in knowledge and understanding, which are generally well supported by the carefully applied routines of the nursery.

EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

15. The school does not have a fully delegated budget. For the current financial year it receives funding for capitation, furniture, cleaning and caretaking costs and in-service training travel expenses. The LEA holds the budgets for in-service training and energy costs.

16. The delegated funds are managed efficiently, their disposition being reported by the headteacher to the governing body. The money spent reflects the priorities identified in the SDP, although this plan does not directly identify resource and financial details. In 1994-95, capitation expenditure was $\pounds77.74$ per pupil; the school raised over $\pounds5,600$ for its school fund.

17. The deployment of staff is effective and their in-service training is efficiently planned within the LEA-managed budget, although the school has not yet received details of the funds available for in-service training for the current year. The use of time is well organised as are resources. Overall, the school does not fully evaluate its cost effectiveness, particularly since its budget is only partially delegated.

18. The school provides good value for money.

PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOUR

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

19. The school achieves good standards in moral and social education. Spiritual and cultural education are less well developed.

20. The school has an appropriate set of aims and a written policy. These aims successfully promote an ethos in which the pupils show respect for individuals, co-operate with each other, and recognise the importance of responsibility and self-esteem.

21. Moral and social aspects provision includes a wide range of activities such as well chosen stories and role-play. Incidents within the daily life of the school are used effectively to promote ideas of right and wrong. The children show tolerance and patience towards others, especially in sand and water play, and when they have to share favourite

toys. They are sensitive and kindly towards children with special needs. The pupils respect property and handle equipment with care.

22. The current theme based on the exploration of the local environment is used to encourage children's awareness of their place in society and the need to care for and respect their environment. Visits are made to places of interest further afield, and visits from theatre and puppet groups widen the children's cultural awareness. Teaching about the multi-cultural nature of society is under-developed.

Behaviour and discipline

23. The pupils behave well. They are purposeful and confident as individuals, yet display tolerance, co-operation and patience towards others. Well established routines and the provision of a clear, succinct discipline policy give order and security and promote children's independence. Overall, standards of behaviour have a very positive effect on the quality of pupils' learning and their levels of achievement.

Attendance

24. Attendance levels are satisfactory overall. Each session begins promptly and there are few cases of pupils arriving late.

25. The requirements of DES circular 11/91 regarding recording pupils' attendance are fully met.

AREAS OF LEARNING AND OTHER CURRICULAR PROVISION

Language and literacy

26. Standards of achievement are frequently good, and the overall quality of learning is at least satisfactory in this area of the curriculum.

27. Speaking and listening skills are good. The children listen attentively. They contribute appropriately and show themselves to be increasingly articulate in discussions both with adults and amongst themselves. Early literacy skills are well developed; the children handle books carefully and readily relate pictures to the text being read to them. In some instances they are beginning to recognise words and letter sounds. A significant feature of the work is the development of mark-making leading to early writing. Several children can write their names and most can handle pencils and pens appropriately. Their dramatic play supports the drawing of "shopping lists" and similar items as a further extension of these pre-writing skills.

28. The quality of learning is good. The children use language for a variety of purposes, including describing a route in geography, commenting on musical sounds and speculating about the possible effects of actions. Books are readily chosen and used, both as story materials and, through pictures, for simple research.

29. The quality of teaching varies from satisfactory to very good. All staff are aware of the need to support and extend children's language and literacy skills, although at times teachers ask too many questions requiring specific brief answers, rather than encouraging the children to make more individual extended responses. Discussions with pupils are often of good quality and well sustained.

30. There are good levels of resources, including some books containing pictures drawn by the children with captions written by the teachers. The "workshop packs" of books and activities for loan to the children, which include items such as games and recipes, compiled by the staff, are of high quality. Together with the book and tape loan libraries they extend and enhance learning. They were very positively commented on by parents. The school is well supported by the local authority library loan service. There is good use made in school of audio tapes as well as other materials. Displays commonly feature captions to extend the children's awareness of language.

31. There is a detailed language policy, written by the co-ordinator, which appropriately supports daily planning in this area. It is carefully related to activities in ways which link with later primary school work in the National Curriculum, whilst focusing on the particular needs of nursery age children. It includes statements on resourcing, assessment and its own review timetable. This is a valuable document which significantly supports the good quality work in this area.

Mathematical learning and experience

32. Standards of achievement vary from good to unsatisfactory. They are best when the mathematical learning is clearly identified, for example in those activities which are linked to the current theme on the school locality. Simple graph work was well used to record journeys to school, and children were introduced to ideas of scale, direction and spatial awareness through the use of miniature roadways, maps, rail tracks and constructions using large bricks. Water and sand were well used for learning about capacity.

33. There are regular opportunities to practise number, sequencing, matching and pattern recognition through a range of activities which children can choose. However, standards of achievement at these times are less satisfactory because there is infrequent intervention by adults and the children's mathematical progression in the activities is haphazard. Nevertheless, the children have positive learning attitudes and show good levels of concentration especially when the work is challenging.

34. The quality of the teaching is variable and is at its best when the mathematical objectives of the activity are clear and understood by adults, for example in making graphs. At other times, opportunities to extend the pupils' understanding are lost because the planning of work does not fully recognise the mathematical potential in other activities, for example, in technology or outdoor play.

35. A recently written mathematics policy addresses many of the present deficiencies in the work and is about to be implemented.

Scientific and technological learning and experience

36. Standards of achievement range from sound to good. Children learn about living things through studying the growth of frogspawn, planting seeds and caring for the school's animals and insects. During the inspection, incubated hen's eggs began to hatch and the children demonstrated good levels of understanding of the process involved. The good standard of observation is reflected in diaries recording changes to the frogspawn and in detailed pictures.

37. Food technology is a regular and planned activity during which the children are introduced to a range of cooking techniques as well as scientific ideas about texture and the use of the senses, for example, in assembling the ingredients for making pizzas.

38. Children learn about information technology in a well planned sequential manner. A recently acquired computer and mouse has enabled pupils to understand the basic operation of a computer as well as explaining graphics including ideas of colour, pattern and spatial awareness. Design technology, however, is unsatisfactory. The children's use of commercial materials including magnetic and plastic building blocks, is often limited to replicating the manufacturer's designs rather than drawing on their own imaginative ideas. Work in three dimensions is under-developed.

39. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in science and good in information technology. The teaching of design technology is less satisfactory due to infrequent interventions by the teacher in activities which have the potential to develop aspects of designing and making.

Aesthetic learning and experience

40. The standards achieved are satisfactory, although both in music and art learning opportunities are occasionally not fully recognised by the teachers and consequently standards are less good than they should be. Regular experiences of singing, playing instruments, painting, drawing and other creative work are provided, although planned model making is less frequent.

41. The quality of the pupils' learning varies from good to unsatisfactory. In the best work in music, rhythms are well sustained and the children listen carefully. They are beginning to be aware of, and use, volume, and occasionally tone. In art, when required, they work carefully and use colour well. They have good opportunities to use a variety of paints, and can mix their own colours. However, in both subjects, the equipment, such as instruments and brushes, is not always held correctly, and this often lowers the quality of the work. The children concentrate well and enjoy their work in this area. Increased opportunities for observational art and for experimentation with sounds would be useful.

42. The quality of teaching is usually satisfactory and occasionally very good. Teaching in art is occasionally unsatisfactory. The best teaching is well organised and prepared before the lesson, with activities planned so that the task can be extended if necessary, particularly with the more able children. This enables the teacher to discuss the work in progress with the children rather than spending her time clearing away used materials and equipment and organising new ones. The sensitive support encourages the children to extend and develop their skills.

43. There is a brief curriculum document for music which considers aims, objectives and activities. This requires some reorganising in the light of the current nursery practices, in order to distinguish between specific music sessions and more general opportunities in this area. There is no policy document for art.

44. Resources for art are generally satisfactory. Those for music are more limited, particularly tuned percussion instruments.

Physical learning and experience

45. The children achieve satisfactory overall standards. Work in this area is undertaken both indoors and out. The indoor work uses taped music for lessons in movement, but at times it does not extend pupils' skills in a sufficiently organised way.

46. Children achieve good standards in detailed physical control by using jigsaws, small toys and writing materials. The outside play activities seen during the inspection provided limited opportunities for the development of skills because of the large number of children queuing to use the fixed climbing equipment, and using other play equipment in the relatively small hard-surfaced play area. Consideration should be given to use of the outdoor play areas for more structured play. The children work hard at these physical experiences when given the opportunity. They co-operate well and show consideration for one another.

47. The quality of teaching varies from satisfactory to unsatisfactory. In the absence of a policy document, the planned purposes of activities are frequently limited and unspecified. It is timely that consideration is being given to developing an outdoor play policy. It might usefully be extended to indoor physical activities.

Personal, human and social learning and experience

48. The children achieve good standards in this area of the curriculum. Personal and social aspects of the learning are well developed and are reflected in the children's attitudes to their work and in their relationships with each other. Parents expressed strong support for the school's work in this area.

49. The curriculum provides opportunities for the children to learn more about their environment. The current topic on the locality has developed geographical ideas of purpose, place and direction through a study of buildings and their functions. For example, children visit the local library, plan safe routes through the town and journeys to school. A litter campaign has emphasised the need to care for the environment. These ideas are promoted through well-thought out activities using photographs and models. The school makes good use of artefacts, photographs and other displays. Further learning could be developed through more structured play to recreate aspects of the environment; for example, road safety.

50. The quality of teaching is variable. The specific skills in topic activities need to be more carefully identified at the planning stage so that the different adults involved can give the children similar experiences and more consistent learning opportunities.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THESE FINDINGS

Quality of teaching

51. The quality of teaching was satisfactory in the majority of the lessons seen, but it varied from very good to unsatisfactory. The best teaching closely links the educational objectives in the half-termly plans to the weekly planned activities. The careful organisation of resources before these lessons enables the teacher to focus on the children's learning. This teaching has a very positive impact on the quality of learning and the standards of pupils' achievements. The quality of teaching is generally better where staff plan two short activities each session for their own group of children.

52. Elsewhere planning is less effective, especially when the teaching focuses on the organisation of the activity rather than also considering its educational purpose. Consequently, although the children are well occupied, their learning is insufficiently extended by skilled adult support, such as the use of challenging questions or the setting of tasks closely matched to individual pupils' attainments and abilities.

53. All of the staff work hard in preparing and organising the children's work. However, the present approach to planning does not identify explicitly enough or with sufficient consistency the skills pupils should develop and the progress they should be making.

54. The school should consider extending its system of planning, so that the work is more directly matched to individual pupils' abilities and their developing attainment.

Assessment, recording and reporting

55. There is a policy which sets out in broad terms the arrangements for the assessment, recording and reporting of the pupils' progress. However, at present there is no detailed guidance as to what should be assessed, or how best to make accurate and consistent assessments.

56. Initial assessments of pupils are based on information gained from a pre-school meeting and a home visit. Further information is recorded at regular monthly intervals. However, the lack of common criteria for measuring progress in different aspects of learning and overall development results in inconsistent descriptions and evaluations.

57. The regular collection of pupils' work provides an additional source of evidence of their progress. Samples are selected by adults and children to illustrate aspects of development and the finished book is given to the parents. Analytical notes would assist both the measurement of progress and the planning of future work.

58. The range of information gathered throughout the year forms the basis of a written report to parents. The school should consider providing a formal opportunity for parents to discuss their child's progress to complement and enhance the informal contacts established throughout the year.

59. In order to promote higher standards in the pupils' work, and to identify more precisely the learning objectives of activities, the school needs to give attention to the co-ordination of the various assessment, recording and reporting procedures and to provide detailed guidance about the matters to be assessed and the procedures to be employed.

The curriculum

i) Quality and range of the curriculum

60. The overall breadth of the curriculum is satisfactory. The quality of the curriculum as it is received by the children varies significantly from very good to unsatisfactory according to the expertise and awareness of the staff. There is a need to identify more clearly the purpose of activities in order to achieve curriculum goals more consistently. This is particularly the case in mathematics and design technology, whose potential contributions to learning are often not explicitly identified. This leads to an imbalance in the curriculum provision.

61. The school, with its governing body, is developing curriculum documents, but these do not yet cover all areas of learning. They vary in their detail and in the support they offer to staff when planning the daily activities.

62. Since most of the children attend the nursery for three terms, staff are able to review each year the range of learning experiences provided. Each half term the staff jointly plan a theme, writing out brief details of the content to be covered in terms of areas of pupils' learning such as language; moral, spiritual and cultural experience; mathematics and science. This outline plan is then extended by weekly plans of activities for each part of the nursery. These are used in different ways by different members of staff. Although this system is broadly satisfactory, the links between the half-termly educationally based objectives and the weekly activity based plans are variable. At times they are poor. Due to these variations the planning does not always fully support the school's aims.

63. The school's daily routines are well planned and effectively delivered. They provide the children with a consistently well organised approach to learning and have a positive impact on the standards of achievement.

64. The governing body receives detailed reports on the school's curriculum and discharges its responsibilities appropriately.

ii) Equality of opportunity

65. The school has a clear and appropriate policy on multicultural education and a statement which supports equality of opportunity. All pupils have equal opportunity to work at all of the nursery activities, and such participation is encouraged by the staff. A

variety of different pupil groupings is used, and the 'group time' twice each session provides the children with regular contact with one adult, and the opportunity to be with the same children at this time each day.

66. The multicultural aspects of the curriculum are relatively under-developed both in planning and resourcing.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs

67. The quality of learning and standards achieved by pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are good overall in relation to their capabilities. There are no pupils with statements.

68. The school has an SEN policy which has been reviewed in line with the Code of Practice. This is now beginning to be implemented following in-service staff training. The headteacher co-ordinates this area and a governor has been designated to support this work. The school has close links with the local Child Development Centre and the educational psychologist.

69. A classroom assistant provides good support in the mornings for four children with widely differing needs. She has received appropriate in-service training. During the inspection a further assistant began work during the afternoon session with another child; this support is most helpful.

70. Home visits by nursery staff are valued by the parents of children whose special needs may be temporary or long term. For children receiving additional staffing support, notes on progress are provided each session, and parental comments are invited.

71. In the short small-group sessions in the mornings, the four children play together using a range of well chosen equipment. They derive significant benefit and enjoyment from these sessions, but they are not always long enough for the children to take full advantage of the potential of the materials they use.

Management and administration

72. The school has a clear mission statement which it successfully meets. The governing body fulfils its legal responsibilities, including the establishment of an admissions panel to prioritise applications from pupils on the waiting list. Together with the headteacher, the governing body provides good leadership for the school.

73. The SDP covers one financial year and focuses on the development of curriculum documentation and related in-service staff training. This is appropriate in that it reflects the limited delegation of funding control to the school, but a more detailed consideration of the resource and financial implications would assist the overall management of the school's development. The implementation of the SDP is generally effective.

74. The routine administration and organisation of the school is efficient and internal communications are good. The overall administration of the school is effective.

Staff, learning resources and accommodation

i) Teaching and non-teaching staff

75. Staffing levels are good, and all staff are appropriately qualified to work with the nursery age range. In-service training is well planned and generally closely linked to the SDP's requirements. It has been sustained at a good level, with the LEA's support, despite overall funding reductions. There is evidence of its positive impact on the standards achieved by the pupils. All teachers have been appraised, including the headteacher.

76. The non-teaching staff are appropriately deployed. They play a full part in the planning of activities in conjunction with the guidelines devised by the teachers. They also assist in keeping pupils' records. There are clear guidelines for students from the local further education colleges and the high school when they work in the nursery.

ii) Resources for learning

77. The quality of the pupils' learning and their standards of achievement are generally well supported by the resources available. There is a good supply of fiction and non-fiction books which are well used as a part of display to promote learning as well as being appropriately accessible to the children. The book supply is extended by some stories illustrated by the pupils themselves. The recently acquired computer, partly funded through parental support, is a useful addition to the resources of the school. Reproductions of paintings and posters enhance the school environment.

78. There is a good supply of large play equipment for indoor and for outdoor use. The school places an emphasis on the care of pets, and has guinea pigs, tadpoles and a rabbit. At the time of the inspection some hen's eggs were being incubated. Materials for creative and artistic activities are in good supply and of good quality. Music resources are relatively limited, despite the staff having made some untuned percussion instruments. Science resources are also limited. This is partly the result of the school's focus on biology and botany. There is a need for more lenses and equipment to support work in physical science. Additional tools for design technology, particularly working with wood, are also needed.

79. Overall, resources are accessible and well used. They significantly enhance the curriculum.

iii) Accommodation

80. The single storey building is very well maintained, both inside and out, and is litter free. The interior has recently been re-decorated and refurbished to a high standard. The quality of caretaking is high. The rooms are large and airy with appropriate areas for different activities such as quiet reading and waterplay. The toilets are clean. The school also has disabled toilet facilities, with disabled access to all areas. Storage is adequate.

81. There are many homely touches around the school such as curtains and plants. Displays are interesting with a good mixture of children's work and commercial posters, as

well as information supporting current work and projects. There are many framed prints of works of art around the school.

82. Outside, there is a level tarmac area well marked out for play and a small wooden shed for storage. Further down the hill, reached by a steep tarmac path, is a satisfactorily maintained grassy area with a large climbing frame, surrounded by a soft landing surface.

Pupils' welfare and guidance

83. The school provides a secure and caring environment in which the needs of individuals are identified and well served. There are detailed policies on health and safety, and on security, which are implemented by the staff. Discreet and effective measures, appreciated by the parents, are taken to integrate children with special needs and to support those children who become ill or who are upset.

Links with parents, agencies and other institutions

84. The parents are very supportive of Newtown Nursery School in a variety of ways. In addition to fund-raising, which has helped the school to purchase a computer and a range of other equipment, several parents regularly help in school and, with others, support school outings. An outdoor play area was remodelled by staff and parents and fitted with good quality fixed equipment, funded by their efforts. The school has useful and appropriate policies on home-school links and parental involvement. Parents value the information provided by the school in home visits by staff before children enter the nursery, a regular newsletter and other informal contacts. Several workshops on nursery activities have been held for the parents.

85. There are links with a range of local agencies, including aspects of the health service and some farms. At the time of the inspection a large architects' model of a proposed supermarket development in Colne was in one room, linking with geographically oriented work.

86. Pupils go on to a large number of primary schools (11 in 1994), reflecting the wide catchment area. Despite difficulties of maintaining close liaison with so many schools, several have staff who visit the nursery over a period of time, and nursery staff accompany pupils to all the primary schools at least once. Such links are reported by both the nursery and the primary schools as being valuable, and include written reports on the children.

87. Parents also commented very positively on the value of the nursery experience, both in promoting their children's learning and in developing their social skills. For children from more geographically isolated homes the social benefits were regarded as being particularly significant.

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