

Portman Early Childhood Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132151
Local Authority	Westminster
Inspection number	360379
Inspection dates	28–29 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Natalia Power

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	0–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona McCreedy
Headteacher	Joanna White
Date of previous school inspection	29 March 2011
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed the two class teachers, and also the early years educators and learning assistants in the open-plan indoor classroom and in the outdoor learning areas. The inspectors also observed the provision for the under-threes and the drop-in centre which houses the breakfast- and after-school clubs. The inspectors talked to parents and carers, members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked in particular at its self-evaluation and plans for improvement, the data collected on children's progress, safeguarding information (how children are cared for and protected) and governing body minutes. They considered the responses in 59 questionnaires that had been returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What is the quality of learning and the progress made by different groups of children, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language?
- What is the school doing to encourage regular attendance?
- What is the quality of the activities provided for children and do they promote their language skills?

Information about the school

In addition to its core intake of three to five-year-olds, the school also takes 12 children under the age of three. The under-threes have a separate classroom within the Nursery and are free to join the play activities along with the other children. The children remain at the Nursery until they move to Reception classes in a variety of schools. Around half of the children attend full time and eat lunch provided by the school. Around two thirds of the children are known to be eligible for free school meals, and this proportion is higher than usual. Most children come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Around nine out of ten speak English as an additional language and most of these are at an early stage of learning English. Over half of children either have, or are being assessed for, a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, and children with speech, language and communication difficulties form the largest group. The school forms part of the Church Street Children's Centre, which is managed by the governing body and is subject to separate inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The hallmark of this outstanding school is the high-quality care that is given, not only to the children, but also to their families. Parents and carers spoke to the inspectors about the way the school went to great lengths to support them when they were going through difficult times. The children, too, are given outstanding care and support. The children are carefully watched to ensure that they are learning well, and their progress is discussed daily, so that any necessary support can swiftly be put in place. As a result, all children, whatever their needs, make excellent progress in their learning.

The first-rate leaders and managers ensure that children are kept completely safe and protected. In this very safe and secure environment the children thrive. They behave extremely well, and play together harmoniously. They develop excellent relationships with the adults, and enjoy eating their lunch in family-style groups. They trust the adults and turn readily to them if they have any worries. This supportive ethos enables the children to grow in confidence and benefit fully from the many opportunities offered. The under-threes, too, benefit from this exceptionally caring and protective environment.

The children are set a wealth of exciting and enriching tasks, both indoors and outdoors. These provide excellent opportunities for them to become absorbed in topics and build their powers of concentration.

Teaching and the curriculum are outstanding, and a particular strength is the promotion of the children's speaking and listening skills. The adults extend children's learning through well-targeted questions and encourage them to answer in full sentences.

Since the previous inspection, energetic measures by the school have raised the overall level of attendance, and it is now above that found in many nursery schools. However, a few children still miss too much school for reasons other than illness, or arrive quite late in the morning. These children make slower progress than others because they have less access to the full curriculum.

The headteacher and her team are highly ambitious for the school and continually seek ways of improving it. All leaders and managers have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and are relentless in their focus on improvement. Their plans for the future are excellent. They have fully met all the recommendations from the last inspection. For example, the school has strengthened the role of middle managers, who now oversee the excellent provision for the high proportion of children who speak English as an additional language and those with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, the school has an excellent capacity to continue to improve.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work closely with parents and carers to improve the attendance and punctuality of the few children whose current patterns give cause for concern, in order to raise their achievement and ensure they get the most out of their schooling.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

Children make outstanding progress from their starting points which, in many cases, are below those typical of three-year-olds. By the time they leave the school, children from all backgrounds have gained skills which overall are above the levels expected for their age, particularly in their personal development, their knowledge and understanding of the world, and their physical and creative development. Children who speak English as an additional language receive focused and highly skilled support in their play-based activities and make excellent progress. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive outstanding support, particularly in addressing language and speech delay, and make progress in line with others.

Children make excellent progress because adults take the children's interests as their starting points. They then take every opportunity to extend the children's learning through thoughtful and well-targeted discussions. In one activity, for example, children were presented with toy animals which had been placed in water and then frozen. Their task was to puzzle out how to extract the toys from their ice casing. The children were excited by this, and the adults encouraged them to use quite sophisticated language, such as 'scraping'. At the same time, they successfully introduced the children to scientific and mathematical concepts, for instance, by asking them about shape, texture and size. The introduction to scientific concepts was also evident in the area for the under-threes, where the children developed their vocabulary and powers of concentration when studying the reflections in a mirror of a rotating toy.

Children feel exceptionally safe because the school environment is extremely well protected and there is always a trusted adult to turn to if they have any worries. They understand the importance of a healthy diet, and were quite clear when speaking to inspectors that 'carrots and tomatoes make you big and strong', but that 'sweets make your teeth go black'. They enjoy the healthy lunches provided by the school and develop outstanding physical skills by climbing, running and balancing in the garden and on the roof terrace. Their emotional health is promoted exceptionally well. For example, they learn to respect one another's needs and feelings through discussing the consequences of their actions. Consequently, their behaviour is excellent. Children from all backgrounds play well together and are ready to share and take turns. They are keen to contribute to the school community by tidying up their environment and by repairing broken equipment under the watchful eye of the adults in the repair shop. Children have excellent access to living creatures, for example, carefully cleaning the shells of the school's three tortoises. These opportunities inspire in them a sense of wonder and awe at the world around them. The school prepares the children well for their future lives. By the time they leave the school they have developed good oral and social skills, and are curious about the world and ready to learn.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Children's attainment ¹	2
The quality of children's learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
Children's behaviour	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attendance ¹	2
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and other adults provide an enormous wealth of activities, with opportunities for developing all six areas of learning both indoors and in the stimulating outdoor play areas. Through skilful questioning, the adults help the children to explore links between different areas of learning. For example, a story session based on 'The Shark in the Dark' was used not only to stimulate the children's imagination and introduce them to the rhythms of poetry, but also to encourage them to consider what family seagulls, ducks and crows all belong to. Teachers take every opportunity to build on the children's interests to promote their speaking and listening skills. For example, a game of cutting 'cakes' from playdough led to children being asked about size, colour, and texture, and the adult even held the playdough to a child's cheek to ask about temperature. The under-threes have a safe and welcoming environment, with opportunities to join in a wide range of exciting play activities. For example, the younger children were enthralled by trying to catch bubbles and were encouraged to blow bubbles for themselves and to experience plunging their arms into soapy liquid. The activity provided an excellent level of challenge, including for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Children are given outstanding opportunities to learn about the world outside their tightly knit inner-city community. For example, the children benefit greatly from opportunities to visit the Royal Air Force Museum, and to spend a night under canvas to experience the

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natural world. Examples of their work stimulated by these and other visits are displayed around the school, and illustrate its success in broadening the children's horizons and raising their aspirations.

The quality of care provided for the children and their families is second to none. Home visits ensure that children quickly settle into the school. Children with a range of additional needs, including those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, are given outstanding support. The drop-in centre with its range of activities provides excellent support for whole families. The breakfast- and after-school clubs provide a safe and calm environment in which the children who attend are given a settled start and finish to the school day. Those who stay at school all day eat lunch in family-style groups with adults and this contributes towards their developing excellent manners and personal qualities. In this safe and supportive environment, the children grow in confidence and maturity. This is because, in the words of one parent, 'Staff are very generous with their time and always make an effort for me and my child to feel welcome every day.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher manages extremely well the complex organisation of the centre, where the nursery school is at the heart of a range of family support services. She and her highly effective management team communicate their ambition extremely well, motivating staff to work as a cohesive team to help the children. As a result, the school is now stronger than at the time of the last inspection. Teaching and learning, for example, are now consistently outstanding. Leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination exceptionally well, enabling all children to succeed. They ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust and of the highest quality. Staff are well trained in child protection procedures and all adults are thoroughly checked and vetted before working in the school.

The governing body provides outstanding support. They are fully engaged in the life of the school and share the leaders' high standards and determination to maintain the school's exceptional qualities. The school is a much-loved hub of the local community, and leaders and managers promote community cohesion exceptionally well. They ensure that the children get on extremely well with one another, and that they have an excellent understanding of many faiths and ways of life in local, national and global contexts. The school works in excellent partnership with a number of outside organisations to provide focused and highly professional support for children with a range of complex needs. A

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particular strength of the leadership is in promoting highly supportive relationships between the adults and parents and carers. This is based on the school's philosophy, as stated in its mission statement, that 'high-quality education and care can transform the lives and life chances of young children and their families'. Leaders and managers keep parents and carers fully informed about their children's progress and encourage them to bring their skills into the school community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of questionnaires submitted during the inspection was unusually high. All the parents and carers who responded to questionnaires or who spoke to inspectors agreed that their children enjoy school and that it keeps them safe and healthy. All agreed that their suggestions and concerns were taken into account by the school. Inspectors, too, found that children enjoy school and are kept very safe and healthy, and that parents and carers play a full part in the life of the school. Parents and carers were unanimous in their approval of the teaching and of the leadership and management of the school. The findings of the inspection are that these aspects are indeed outstanding. A very few expressed minor concerns about the school. There was no specific trend or pattern to these issues. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are happy with their child's experiences at the school. One commented, 'This school is really amazing for my child and for me.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Portman Early Childhood Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 59 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 62 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	50	85	9	15	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	68	17	29	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	41	69	17	29	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	58	20	34	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	36	61	22	37	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	56	23	39	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	58	23	39	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	37	63	16	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	56	21	36	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	29	49	28	47	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	51	29	49	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	34	58	23	39	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	39	66	20	34	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of children.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 March 2011

Dear Children

Inspection of Portman Early Childhood Centre, London NW8 8DE

Do you remember when two visitors came to your school to watch you play and learn? Thank you for making us feel welcome. We had a wonderful time at your school and found out all sorts of interesting things about it. Here are some of them.

- You go to a fantastic school, and we call this outstanding. You learn an amazing amount for children of your age.
- The adults help you if you have any worries, and this makes you feel completely safe at school. They make sure that you stay healthy. You really enjoy your healthy lunches!
- All the adults are kind and take really good care of you. They help you to get on with one another, and share and take turns.
- Your school gives you a huge number of exciting activities to help you learn. You love fixing things in the repair shop and looking after your tortoises. You love being active, climbing and cycling, and going camping in Epping Forest.
- Your school helps you to learn new words so that you can chat about many different things.
- There are so many good things happening at your school that we do not want you to miss a day, unless you are really unwell, and we want you always to come to school on time so that you do not miss any of the exciting activities. Even though you are very young, you can play your part by reminding your parents and carers how much you love school.

I hope you look after the lovely cloth bags you made and decorated with your names and with pictures.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Natalia Power

Lead inspector

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