

Houghton Le Spring Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108746
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	377808
Inspection dates	15–16 May 2012
Lead inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Juliana Heron
Headteacher	Jane Bulmer
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Moira Fitzpatrick

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed 14 lessons or parts of lessons indoors and out, observing all teachers and practitioners, and spent time observing children directing their own learning. Meetings were held with groups of parents and carers, members of the governing body and staff. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at documentation relating to school improvement, children's progress, safeguarding procedures and children's learning experiences as recorded in their learning journey booklets. The inspector took account of the views of parents and carers expressed in 46 questionnaires returned during the inspection, as well as questionnaires returned by staff.

Information about the school

This is an average size nursery school. The majority of children is from a White British heritage. The proportion of disabled children and those with special educational needs is below average. The school provides flexible care for nursery-aged children, and extended care for children in the nursery and in two adjoining primary schools. This wrap-around care provides before- and after-school care for these children, including breakfast and tea. Lunch is provided for those children whose parents and carers request it.

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	1
Achievement of children	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of children	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- This is an outstanding nursery school. Children make exceptional progress because teaching, the curriculum, care and support are excellent. Children's behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. Their achievement is outstanding. Inspirational leadership by the headteacher drives the school to build continually upon existing outstanding practice. The school is rightly ambitious to extend parents' and carers' involvement in this initiative as staff expertise develops.
- Children make rapid progress in all areas of their learning because they feel safe and happy in the nursery and have total trust in adults to care for them and support them. They quickly become confident, independent learners who are extremely able at directing their own learning, sharing resources and supporting each other in the many exciting adventures and explorations they devise. The achievement of all is outstanding, regardless of their starting points because it is built upon strong foundations.
- Excellent teaching provides the opportunities, resources and challenge to constantly excite and engage children wholeheartedly in their learning. Teachers' accurate observations of children's learning are used most effectively to plan an outstanding curriculum that captures children's interest and fires their enthusiasm to find out for themselves.
- Children behave very well and feel extremely safe. Well-thought-out routines are followed throughout the day, ensuring that children know what is expected, and how to behave and care for each other. Children have extremely positive attitudes to all their activities.
- Leadership and management are excellent. All staff and the governing body rigorously challenge the school's performance so that it is constantly seeking improvement. Leadership of teaching by the headteacher is outstanding and has developed staff skills into new and exciting areas of expertise since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Deepen parents' and carers' understanding of their children's learning by engaging them more fully in contributing to their children's learning stories and regularly sharing these with their children.

Main Report

Achievement of children

All children, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs, make rapid and sustained progress in all areas of their learning, from expected starting points when they join the school. Their progress and achievement in personal, social and emotional development are particular strengths because the children are encouraged as individuals to recognise the needs of others as well as their own. For example, a child with emotional and social difficulties was very well supported to engage in play alongside other children when 'washing' the clothes from the role-play corner. Vigilant and caring support helped him to enjoy his play and direct his own learning without interrupting the play of others, so that all made very good progress.

Children's excellent attitudes to learning stem directly from well-established routines that allow them to know what to expect throughout the session. One child was quick to point out to the visitor that there was no time to share a story because, 'it's group time now.'

The development of children's communication and literacy skills is another notable strength in their achievement. Children and their teachers delight in 'telling stories' about learning, then record these stories in vibrant learning journals packed with information about each child's experiences. Parents and carers are becoming involved in sharing learning at home and writing their own stories about their children's learning, so that children are increasingly aware that learning happens everywhere. Children talk constantly about their learning and what they are doing throughout each session, transferring and sharing knowledge and extending their own and others' learning. A good example was the development into outdoor play of the 'witch story' that one group had created during story time. Cauldrons, witches and spells were introduced by children who had invented the story and then were quickly taken up by others who were eager to join in the imaginative play. Spells were cast all about, with frogs and statues suddenly appearing around the camp kitchen!

By the time they leave the school, most children have exceeded the expectations for their age and they are extremely well-prepared for the next stage of learning. Parents and carers believe that their children make good progress and achieve well. The inspection found that achievement and progress are outstanding for all groups of children.

Quality of teaching

The excellent quality of teaching is recognised and greatly appreciated by parents and carers. Teachers are ambitious for all children to be the best they can. Meticulous planning for activities is based on sharp evaluations of each child's learning. Staff increase the challenge and interest of activities with new resources, excellent questioning and discussion, and by following lines of enquiry set by the children. Each session is marked by a continuous hum of conversation as staff talk to children about their activities, describing what they are doing and asking what they will do next. This makes children's learning memorable, so they are able to recall previous learning and develop their skills and knowledge very well from day to day. Teachers have developed high-level communication skills since the previous inspection and use these to model talk in carefully-constructed sentences which children imitate in their own play and when talking with adults. Such high-quality teaching develops children's early reading skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. It provides memorable and inspirational experiences which continually develop their curiosity and love of learning.

Teachers' well-organised routines and consistently high expectations of children encourage them to explore the exciting resources and make decisions about where their curiosity will lead them. They quickly become absorbed in play and make considered decisions about what they will do next. One child developed her counting and number play into recording numbers, then into making a book of her work. She then decided to paint and decorate her book. The finished product clearly delighted her and she announced proudly, 'My mam will be amazed.'

Children's confidence and independence are exceptionally well-promoted so that children are able to plan and direct their own play with minimal support from adults. This ensures that all children learn at their own best rate, driven by curiosity and excitement about the world around them. They value highly their independence, and are quite firm when telling adults, 'I can do this myself.' Children develop high levels of resilience because they are free to keep going with activities and extend them from day to day. Support and intervention in learning are of the highest order. Teachers are watchful of children's play and unobtrusively give learning a boost with well-timed suggestions or questions. Children who are disabled or have special educational needs benefit greatly from the high-quality support that flows from this.

Behaviour and safety of children

Children's exemplary behaviour and attitudes to learning are firmly rooted in the high expectations of adults. They have been successfully maintained at this high level since the previous inspection. Teachers set an excellent example in their relationships with, and respect for, each other and the children. This develops a powerful atmosphere of mutual respect which children quickly accept as the norm. Outstanding care and support from vigilant staff ensure that children understand how their behaviour might upset another child; they are gently taught that kindness and forgiveness make the nursery the happy place it is. The result is that thoughtless, hurtful or bullying behaviour is rarely repeated. Children support each other very well by sharing resources, taking turns and including each other in their imaginative play. For example, those playing outdoors quickly included newcomers

into their 'camping game' and willingly invited them to help make the camp soup, by suggesting, 'You could get some leaves for this soup.'

Parents and carers are unanimous, and accurate, in their belief that their children are safe and feel safe at school. Children are taught the need for safety and care for themselves and others through simple rules and regular routines that are constantly reinforced by teachers. For example, a group of boys who were dismantling a wigwam immediately accepted the teacher's advice and checked there was no one in the way before they removed long branches. Throughout each session, children show an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. They feel safe and secure and are able to flourish in this vibrant and exciting environment.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers demonstrate the ambition, expertise and determination to continually improve the school. Members of the recently-formed leadership team make a powerful contribution to school improvement by leading initiatives, undertaking research projects and delivering training for staff. Their work is rapidly accelerating improvements to provision in the current year. All staff are highly motivated by the headteacher's passion for excellence in all that the nursery does, and they seize opportunities to contribute to its improvement. Teamwork is excellent and staff are keen to share their expertise within and beyond the school. Incisive and accurate evaluation of children's learning drives continuous improvement, ensuring that children's achievement is constantly improving through effective actions to tackle any perceived weakness. Teaching has developed very well through careful identification of needs, high-quality professional development and a focus on consistency of expectations and practice across the nursery. The school is constantly developing through dialogue with external consultants who bring fresh ideas and challenge to the school. Children's excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is testimony to the outstanding curriculum which creates a tangible sense of joy in learning that is a hallmark of the school. The effectiveness of these developments demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The governing body challenges and supports the school very well. Its members ensure that policies and procedures are up to date, understood well and implemented by all staff. They ensure that safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements. The needs of all children are very well known and met, so that every child has equal access to all the nursery has to offer; discrimination in any form is not tolerated. The school and the governing body make excellent links with parents and carers to ensure they feel fully involved in their children's learning and in the life of the school. Parents and carers are fulsome in their praise of the school and all it does for their children. The comments of one parent represent the views of many, 'This is an excellent school that is warm and welcoming. The children are nurtured to be the best they can be.'

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the child's work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor settings	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the children's attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



17 May 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Houghton le Spring Nursery School, Houghton le Spring, DH5 8AE

Thank you all for making me so welcome in your lovely nursery. I had a lot of fun joining in with your work and play. I really liked your game about Rapunzel, and I enjoyed seeing how well you make up such wonderful stories together. You behave very well and are very kind to each other. I could see that you feel safe and happy in school. You work very hard and learn many new things each day. No wonder your families and teachers are so proud of you. Well done, everyone!

I saw that you all love learning and enjoy the wonderful things your teachers plan for you each day. Your teachers are very quick to notice the things you are interested in such as knights and fairies, and different kinds of beds! They make your learning fun and exciting so that you are always busy and happy in nursery. Your teachers take excellent care of you and make sure you know what to do to make your nursery run smoothly, so that everyone is safe and happy.

Your headteacher, teachers and the governors all want the very best for you, to make sure that you enjoy coming to nursery and learn as much as you can. I noticed that you have lovely books that tell the story of your learning in the nursery and at home. I have agreed with your headteacher that to make your learning even better the school should help your families to write about the things you do at home and when you are out and about together. This will help you to see how much you learn outside of nursery as well as when you are there.

I wish all of you at Houghton Nursery a very successful and happy end to the year and hope you enjoy every minute of every day, as you did during my visit.

Yours sincerely,

Moira Fitzpatrick
Lead Inspector

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