

George Dent Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113983
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	378778
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2012
Lead inspector	Linda Buller

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 children	3–4
Gender of children	Mixed
Number of children on the school roll	144
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Harker
Headteacher	Carol Dawson
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2009
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Telephone number	01325 380802
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Introduction

Inspection team

Linda Buller

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector spent five hours directly observing children learning in four different focus groups led by three teachers and in free flow activities covering all areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. She talked to children informally during observations. Meetings were held with members of the governing body and staff. The inspector scrutinised the school's arrangements to safeguard children. She observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including improvement plans, self-evaluation documents, and assessment data measuring children's attainment and progress. Questionnaire responses from staff and 51 parents and carers were analysed.

Information about the school

The school has a similar number of children on roll as other schools of its type. Children are generally admitted the term after their third birthday. Children attend part-time for 15 hours throughout the week for either morning or afternoon sessions. The vast majority of children are of White British heritage, with a very small proportion at the early stages of learning English. A small proportion of children are supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school was awarded the Quality Mark for Early Years Basic Skills in January 2012.

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 school. An excellent knowledge of child development supports staff in the provision of an exciting and engaging curriculum, which fully meets the unique needs of each child.
- Achievement is outstanding. Children make rapid progress in most areas of their learning to reach levels of attainment which are consistently above those expected for their age. Almost half of the children in the current cohort have reached the Early Learning Goals expected nationally for children aged five.
- Progress in personal, social and emotional development is particularly strong. Children are curious, reflective and caring. They develop a strong sense of spirituality, excellent social skills and moral responsibility through the many opportunities to explore and investigate in cooperation with others.
- Detailed observations of children engaged in activities, which they choose for themselves, provide staff with high quality information regarding children's interests, ability and crucially, how each child learns best. The use of this information in planning the next steps in learning is at the heart of outstanding teaching. Occasionally, the more able learners are not challenged to extend their knowledge of letters and the sounds they make in order to further develop their early reading skills.
- Children's outstanding behaviour makes a strong contribution to their high quality learning. Very well considered activities provide an environment in which children can take safe risks and develop a secure understanding of how to stay free from harm.
- The headteacher's outstanding leadership is at the heart of the school's success. Her highly reflective practice provides an excellent role model for all staff. This together with a system of regular peer observation ensures staff's effective ongoing professional development and a shared drive for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the level of challenge provided for the more-able children to further extend their knowledge of letters and the sounds they make.

Main Report

Achievement of children

Achievement is outstanding because staff instil in children a desire to learn, the motivation and confidence to explore and the ability to value their own worth. From starting points which are generally in line with those expected of three-year-olds on entry to the nursery, children make outstanding progress to reach high levels of attainment by the time they move onto Reception classes in primary schools. Parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire overwhelmingly express their satisfaction with the progress which their children make. Children's progress in the use of language for communication and thinking is exceptionally strong. Staff take every opportunity to engage children in discussion, prompting them to think carefully about what they are learning and further stimulating their natural curiosity. Children are inquisitive learners because of the strong focus placed on allowing them to discover things for themselves. Whether engaged in construction, paint mixing or in the excellently resourced outdoor area, children are encouraged to 'have a go' and to explain what they discover. Children's progress in linking sounds and letters in order to develop early reading skills is improving strongly but not yet as rapidly as other areas of their learning.

Children who have special educational needs make the same outstanding progress as their peers. No time is lost in identifying their individual barriers to learning and providing high quality targeted support. The same high quality support is provided for those for whom English is an additional language. Overall, more-able children make the same outstanding progress as their peers, often as a result of high quality one to one working following the child's chosen activity. For example, a child's interest in the game of 'snakes and ladders' was used expertly to extend his ability to count beyond 20, his number recognition skills, his ability to draw a square and to solve problems. As a result of high quality dialogue with staff, he quickly realised the problem of randomly inserting his snakes and ladders onto the board he was creating. He used his well-developed knowledge of the rules of the game to explain that 'it would not work to have both a snake and a ladder ending in the same square.' This ability to sustain concentration and independent thinking is typical of that demonstrated by the majority of children.

Quality of teaching

All parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching is good; inspection findings indicate that teaching is at least good and most often outstanding. It is outstanding because all adults share the headteacher's vision to provide high quality activities which are extremely successful in developing

children as independent learners. Staff are adept at standing back and letting children take safe risks so that they learn from both their successes and their mistakes. In regular planning meetings, staff discuss how well activities have facilitated the progress of individual children. They provide each other with detailed feedback regarding their observations of learning and make constructive suggestions as to how provision, including the quality of teaching, can be improved even further. As a result, next steps in learning for different groups including those with special educational needs or those who are at an early stage of learning English are expertly identified and acted upon.

Staff are skilled at intervening in children's play to ask pertinent questions which extend learning and expertly link the promotion of academic learning with excellent provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, children were fascinated when observing and holding the newly hatched chicks. They listened carefully to staff instructions with an excellent understanding of the importance of making the chicks feel secure. They used their exceptionally well-developed numeracy skills to compare the size and age of the chicks, quickly developing the understanding that it was not necessarily the largest chick, which was the eldest. Cultural awareness is promoted extremely well through first-hand experiences, such as dressing the Chinese dragon or trying different foods. Occasionally, opportunities to develop the early reading skills of more-able children are not maximised. Staff regularly foster in children a love of books and through daily story time sessions support children's good progress in their understanding that print carries meaning. However, children who have securely acquired these skills are not always sufficiently challenged to use their knowledge to link the sounds they hear to letters and the formation of simple words.

Behaviour and safety of children

Most children behave exceptionally well with any minor squabbles managed expertly by staff. Staff have high expectations and are excellent role models. The children quickly learn to treat each other and adults with respect and consideration. They are polite to visitors and have the self-confidence to express their views, demonstrating excellent social skills. No incidents of bullying or racism have been reported or recorded. Parents and carers unanimously agree that behaviour is good in the school and that bullying is not a problem. This is clearly evident by the way in which children interact with each other and how happy and confident they are to become immersed in all the school has to offer as they arrive each day. Children are often reluctant to leave at the end of sessions and keen to share their experiences with younger siblings, parents and carers. Attendance levels are consistently good.

Children are taught to handle equipment safely, to identify potential dangers and make their own risk assessments. This is particularly evident in the outdoor area where children daily demonstrate the ability to consider the impact of issues, such as the weather, on the activities which they wish to undertake. They make sure they are suitably dressed and independently make adjustments to equipment such as that used in the obstacle course. They offer advice to each other and, when needed, seek adult support. They maturely explained to the inspector the need to return equipment to safe areas so that other children would not hurt themselves as they are running around.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for improvement, which is shared and respected by staff, the governing body, parents and carers. Regular and rigorous monitoring ensures that the school's provision is firmly based on equality of opportunity. Under her determined leadership the school fully meets its aim to create a safe, secure, stimulating and challenging environment for all children whatever their ability or background. The individual qualities of each child are fully recognised and celebrated by a very strong team of highly committed staff. Regular and systematic performance management systems are well embedded. High quality consistent feedback to staff, with clear links between the quality of teaching and the achievement of each child, successfully maintain the school's outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

The governing body have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They regularly seek the views of parents and carers as well as comparative information from independent sources. Leaders and managers at all levels, on occasion, miss opportunities to compare the success of the school with others nationally. This is one of the reasons why children's progress is not equally rapid in all elements of communication, language and literacy. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and are regularly reviewed. Policies are comprehensive and effectively shared with all adults, ensuring that children are protected and supported effectively. Parents and carers play an active and vital role in many aspects of the life of the school and partnerships are strong. Valuable contributions to records of achievement through learning journals are very much appreciated by staff and used to excellent effect in recognising children's personal interests.

The stimulating outstanding curriculum is central to children's outstanding achievement. Activities are expertly planned using staff's excellent knowledge of how young children learn best and with a clear focus on individual interests. The introduction of regular sessions of rhythm and rhyme have further enhanced provision and are resulting in increased rates of progress in children's ability to hear sounds and follow repeated patterns. Children benefit greatly from high quality natural resources, which provide excellent opportunities for them to explore the world around them. Growing vegetables, inspecting insects and even jumping in puddles are all used expertly to foster early scientific enquiry and to develop children's understanding of their responsibility for the precious resources within the natural world. The school's highly effective promotion of the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development helps them to learn quickly how to be responsible members of the school community.

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 exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child 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 children at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well children behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Children's 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 children are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Children's 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.



26 June 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of George Dent Nursery School, Darlington, DL3 7PY

Thank very much for your warm welcome when I visited your nursery school. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit, talking with you and seeing all the exciting things you do every day. Your nursery is outstanding and makes sure that your achievement is outstanding so that you transfer smoothly to reception classes as confident and independent learners. The headteacher and all of the adults who work with you are very skilled at making sure that your school goes from strength to strength.

I enjoyed seeing how you always try to do your best and how well you all get along with each other. You listen very carefully to your teachers and are very good at explaining what you are learning. It was very good to see how much you enjoyed being outdoors and exploring even when it was very wet. You sensibly dressed for the weather and used the rain to have great fun splashing in puddles. You are always curious and use your imagination very well. You are doing very well in extending your skills in speaking and listening and how well you can think about how to solve problems. I enjoyed reading books with you and hearing all about your favourites.

I have asked your teachers to do one thing to help some of you learn even more. Some of you are doing very well in learning about the sounds which letters make. I have asked that you are always challenged to use what you know to link the letters together so that you begin to learn to read independently.

I hope that you continue to enjoy nursery and that you are equally as successful as you are now when you move on to your next school.

Yours sincerely

Linda Buller
Lead Inspector

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