

Rachel McMillan Nursery School

McMillan Street, Deptford, SE8 3EH

Inspection dates 18–19 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Children get an outstanding start to their school life because they achieve extremely well. Staff use children's interests and learning needs as a starting point for planning activities that motivate children's curiosity and imagination.
- Children make excellent progress in the key areas of communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development because teaching is outstanding and based on an excellent knowledge of how children learn.
- Relationships are excellent and children love coming to the nursery. They behave exceptionally well and are encouraged to sort out any problems themselves.
- The nursery staff ensure that the well-being and welfare of the children are paramount and, as a result, children feel safe, happy and secure at all times.
- All staff, under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, work highly effectively as a team and constantly strive to provide the best possible experiences for all the children.
- All leaders and managers share the view that nothing less than the best is good enough and they constantly check that this is the case. They work together to ensure that teaching is of the highest quality so that all children make the best possible progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector spent approximately seven hours observing children learning in the garden and children's class bases, known as shelters, and some short sessions where children spent time in groups with adults.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, other leaders, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and some parents and carers.
- The inspector also looked at documentation, including the school's checks on its own progress, the nursery's plans for improvement, records of children's progress and achievement, and safeguarding documentation and procedures.
- The inspector took account of 18 responses to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, along with the most recent school questionnaire for parents and carers and 21 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This was the first open air nursery to be established in England, almost 100 years ago, by the sisters Rachel and Margaret McMillan, who were pioneers of nursery education and the open air nursery movement. Their philosophy still underpins the work of the nursery today.
- It is larger than the average-sized nursery.
- Children register at the start of the morning or afternoon sessions in four bases, which are known as 'shelters', and then move freely around the shelters and the outside area, known as the 'garden'.
- At the time of the inspection, around half of the children attended all day and the rest attended for either a morning or afternoon session.
- The largest groups of children are of Black African, White British and Black British Caribbean heritage.
- Approximately half of the children speak English as an additional language. There are currently 42 different languages spoken.
- The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- There is extended day provision from 8am to 6pm for up to 16 children from the nursery.
- The headteacher and governing body manage the on-site children's centre, which was not included in this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the extremely positive relationships with parents and carers in working to develop their children's further independence, such as encouraging children to hang up their own coats and store their own book bags when they arrive at the start of the session.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Children generally start at the nursery with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age. From these starting points, they make outstanding progress and achieve exceptionally well. Many exceed the levels expected for their age by the time they leave the nursery. As a result, they are really well prepared to move on to their next schools.
- Children thrive in a rich, stimulating and dynamic environment, both indoors and outside, where they are extremely excited by all the different things they can do every day. For most of the time, they choose their own activities and so really enjoy all that they do.
- There are lots of opportunities for children to develop early reading, writing and number skills. Children delight in hearing stories read by adults; they listen very attentively and enjoy talking about them. They also listen and learn from each other. For example, two children who speak English as an additional language were counting, in their different first languages, how many beads they had threaded and a third child was accurately saying the numbers in English as they counted, which the first two children repeated.
- They enjoy their early attempts at writing, whether it is just for the pleasure or when they write for a purpose, for example when they write their plans for the following week in a big book. At this early stage in the year, some children confidently write all or some of the letters in their name and can link some sounds and letters together (phonics). They enjoy making up imaginative stories that adults write down for them.
- Disabled children and those who have special educational needs receive outstanding support. Their needs are identified at an early stage and support, including that from professionals who visit the school, is tailored precisely to their requirements. This ensures that they make the same excellent progress as others. The rich language opportunities benefit all children and in particular those children who are at the early stages of learning English, so they too make rapid progress.
- The majority of children's learning in all areas is through their play in the garden and, as a result, they are very active for most of the time and make outstanding progress in their physical development. They are confident to climb, jump, run, ride, build and dance, and they develop stamina and determination, for example to negotiate around obstacles on the bikes. Although children generally have high levels of independence, just occasionally at the start of a session for example, they rely on parents and carers or helpers to hang up coats or bags, rather than doing it themselves.
- Most parents and carers who replied to the on-line questionnaire and all of those who responded to the school's own questionnaire are pleased with the progress their children make.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is creative, inspirational and highly effective. It is very clear that all staff really delight in being with the children and enjoy their company.
- Staff have a thorough knowledge of how young children learn. Adults are reflective about their own practice and constantly strive to ensure the very best possible experiences for every child.
- Each shelter has a well-organised team of staff. The focus of teaching is on giving children an all-round education and begins with individual children's interests and aspirations.
- Adults are highly skilled in asking questions that help children to think and find things out for themselves. They extend children's learning through creative, but sensitive, guidance about how to make more out of the activities that they are taking part in.
- Great emphasis is given to listening to children and taking note of what they say, which means that children feel valued, confident to express their thoughts and ideas, and involved in making decisions about their learning.
- Children's time in the nursery is full of stimulating, exciting opportunities that fire their

imagination and creativity, and encourage them to find things out for themselves through playing and exploring. As a result, they develop concentration, determination and ability to stick at a task. They thoroughly enjoy their experiences. For example, children exploring the healthy eating display of fruit and vegetables were curious to know which were real and which were not. After some discussion, they decided for themselves that they could taste and smell them to find out. They discovered that, 'If it's plastic, it's hard and you can't bite it, so it's not real.'

- All staff are involved in making and recording high-quality assessments of children's learning to build up a very clear picture of each child's progress, achievements and next steps. Their achievements are celebrated, praised and encouraged. Children and their parents and carers are very proud of the Special Books and accounts of their learning, called Learning Stories, that provide an ongoing record of important steps in their achievement. Children chatted with great pleasure and pride about their favourite photographs in these Special Books.
- Almost all parents and carers agree that their children are taught well. The school's accurate monitoring over time shows that teaching is usually of very high quality, leading to children's excellent progress and achievement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Settling children in and building relationships with children and their families have a very high focus in the nursery. Children and their parents and carers stay for an increasing amount of time until children feel safe and secure and parents and carers feel happy to leave them. As a result, children settle with confidence and quickly make friends.
- Children from many different backgrounds get on well together and they behave extremely well. If there is a problem with sharing or taking turns, children are encouraged to sort this out for themselves and learn how to express their needs, likes and dislikes politely and without confrontation.
- Excellent relationships between the staff, children, and parents and carers, and the very positive atmosphere, mean that children settle into the school and the routines very well, and really enjoy coming to the nursery. Staff encourage children to be independent and parents and carers can help the school by not doing things for children that children can do for themselves.
- Children are caring and considerate of each other. For example, without any adult prompting, one child offered to show another who was wary of using the monkey bars, how to be safe: 'You just have to hold on tight. Come on, I'll show you.'
- Most parents and carers who used the on-line questionnaire indicated that children are safe and well behaved at school. The school's survey of last year's parents and carers showed that almost all were very positive about these aspects. Staff take a very positive approach to helping children make good choices and learn how to manage their own behaviour. School records show that behaviour is exemplary over time with no recorded incidents of bullying or racist incidents.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher's expertise and experience are highly regarded within the local authority and others more widely involved in early years education.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and staff are a dedicated and inspirational team, which is passionate about providing the best possible learning opportunities for all children. Together, they have maintained the school's outstanding position as reported in the previous inspection. There is, however, absolutely no complacency as leaders constantly strive to improve their own expertise and skills for the benefit of the children and challenge themselves to do better.
- All leaders have very high expectations and are totally committed to continuous improvement and innovation in order to remove barriers to learning for the whole school community.
- Senior leaders, shelter team leaders and members of the governing body monitor and evaluate

the school's performance very effectively and use the findings to inform robust self-evaluation and future planning for improvement.

- There is considerable emphasis on improving learning opportunities with a strong focus on how teaching can be improved. Systems for checking on how well children make progress are used to decide how best to give staff extra training where needed. Leaders' actions are highly successful because teaching has been consistently outstanding over time and the outcomes for children are excellent. Decisions on pay and salary progression are closely linked with the performance of teachers.
 - The school is committed to making sure everyone has an equal chance of success and feels involved and valued. Staff ensure all children's needs are met, that children can learn in a safe and secure environment and are treated fairly. All safeguarding requirements are met and procedures are well known and implemented by all staff.
 - Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well through the curriculum and is a great influence in all that the nursery does. Children like the many opportunities to explore and wonder at the world around them, from being fascinated by a ladybird, intrigued by paint patterns made in puddles, to the comment from one child playing in the garden with the sand who said, 'It's gone all drippy and like mud because of the rain.'
 - All leaders, managers and staff engage exceptionally well with parents and carers, as they are regarded as crucial to children's learning. The school has astutely identified, however, a focus on further developing the partnership between home and school to find out ways of how children's learning can be improved still further. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of all aspects of the nursery.
 - The local authority provides light touch support for the nursery, given its track record of success, but keeps in regular touch and provides some training as well as using the nursery as a model of outstanding practice.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - has consolidated its progress in improving the way it supports the nursery since the previous inspection by developing even better routines in the way members of the governing body check on what goes on
 - supports and shares the ambition and high expectations of staff and ensures that checks on the quality of teaching, along with high standards of day-to-day health and safety, are maintained to a very high level
 - is well organised and well informed through working closely with the headteacher to keep their 'finger on the pulse' of what is working well, and what can be improved when needed
 - is committed to keeping a check on what governors do well and how they can be even better in supporting the school to maintain its outstanding level of effectiveness.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	100097
Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	400389

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Jefferson
Headteacher	Theresa Lane
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 September 2009
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Fax number	020 8694 7853
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