

Appletree Nursery School

Milking Stile Lane, Lancaster, Lancashire, LA1 5QB

Inspection dates

13–14 November 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.

- At the heart of this school's success is excellent leadership by the headteacher and governing body and high quality teaching. These give children an excellent start to their education.
- Children of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make excellent gains in their learning. Particularly rapid progress occurs in children's social and personal development and their communication and language.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Children have excellent attitudes to learning. They are sensitive to the feelings of others, act safely and work happily with classmates.
- The accommodation is of a high quality and gives children a safe and secure place to learn. Learning outdoors is very popular. Children have great fun exploring every nook and cranny, playing imaginatively and discovering plants and hidden creatures.
- Excellent systems for checking how well children are learning give a secure picture of each child's progress. This information is shared with parents and used by staff to plan precisely the next steps in the children's learning. Any child at risk of falling behind is identified and given effective support.
- Parents rate the school very highly. They praise its safety and the care their children receive. Each child's 'Special Book' is treasured. It records their child's progress in an interesting way and enables parents to contribute their own opinions.
- Very strong links with the children's centre extends the quality of support for children in the nursery and their families. Good and deepening partnerships with the other school in the federation benefits the training of staff.
- The headteacher and governors constantly seek ways of improving teaching and achievement. This is why they are now making sure that all staff integrates even more opportunities to develop children's knowledge of letters into play activities. The management of the school is shared amongst staff. This adds to the school's effectiveness and its ability to carry on improving.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in the classroom and outdoors on six occasions. Discussions were conducted with the staff, a group of parents and representatives of the governing body. In addition, meetings were held with a representative of the local authority, a speech therapist who works with the school, a member of the local authority inclusion team, a health visitor and the headteacher of a primary school to which most children transfer.
- In planning the inspection, and when forming judgements, reference was made to any comments placed by parents on the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) together with recent questionnaires of parents' opinions conducted by the school. In addition, questionnaires from eight staff were analysed.
- A range of school documentation was evaluated. These included the documents relating to safeguarding, the improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation and records of children's attainment and progress.

Inspection team

David Byrne, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average sized nursery school. It has one class for children aged from three to four years old. Children join at three points throughout the year; September, January and April.
- The vast majority of children are of White British heritage.
- The school is part of a Sure Start children's centre, sharing the same site and some leaders. The children's centre is inspected separately to the nursery school.
- In September 2012, the school became a partner with another nursery school in the local authority (this is known as a federation). The current headteacher took up post in May 2011 and leads and manages both schools in the federation.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that all staff integrate more opportunities into their play activities for children in order to develop their knowledge of letters.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Children make excellent progress in the three most significant aspects of development essential for their age; personal and social development, communication and language and physical development. They thrive on the extremely well-planned and organised opportunities to learn through play both indoors and out.
- All groups of children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs make rapid gains in their learning, often from low starting points. Robust data provided by the school, validated by the local authority show that the proportion of children reaching the expectations for age increases rapidly in their time in the school.
- Social and personal skills develop at a rapid rate. Children develop the confidence to make decisions, modify ideas and sustain very good levels of concentration. A wide range of resources, both outdoors and indoors, encourages children to make up their own play. In so doing, they learn to make relationships by sharing together and listening to others views. Indoors, space is well organised to enable children to make choices about what and when they learn. Outdoors, excellent facilities offer children a myriad of learning opportunities.
- The strong focus on improving children's speech is evident in the suitably wide range of activities that prompt talk and inspire interaction between children and adults. A slug found outdoors provoked lots of conversation and utterances of wonder from children when they used a mini electronic microscope to magnify it on the interactive whiteboard. Opportunities to act out 'pretend experiences' such as making food in the 'camp' outdoors open up other chances for speaking, and often for children who are reluctant to talk.
- Some children struggle with speech and language. High-quality support from staff within school and from the health service professionals enables rapid improvements to occur. Children make rapid gains in recognising the value of books and how they tell a story. Some begin to pick out sounds from the letters that match their names.
- Children improve their physical skills at a good rate. When making models, for example, of imaginary boats, children quickly learnt to use scissors correctly, how to join things together with glue and ways of shaping materials. Children confidently take up a crayon and make marks. This prepares them to start writing. Outdoors, children move around safely, taking care when climbing steps and going under climbing frames. All children learn very quickly how to dress and undress, for example when putting on their boots and coats to brave the elements outdoors.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is of the highest quality. Staff are constantly seeking ways of improving their skills. This keeps them fresh and open to new ideas for example, planning has been refined to meet the new national requirements and is very clear and simple to use.
- The roles of all staff are clear. Each has responsibility for a group of children as their 'key worker'. This adds to the security of children and improves communication with parents because they know who to come to if they feel the need to. The strong partnerships with parents benefit the children's learning.
- Teachers use information about how well children have learned to help them plan future activities that meet the needs of each child. This makes sure that children who need additional help or need more challenge are suitably supported. All that goes on during each day has a clear purpose and the astute deployment of staff ensures that while children play, staff guide and support them so that they learn rapidly. Staff are now in the process of integrating into play activities ways of helping children to understand the sounds that letters make.
- Staff are constantly on the go, supporting, nurturing and cajoling children. They understand the needs of each child and skilfully intervene to challenge children to think differently, to explain what they are doing and to discuss their feelings and views. At all times, children are

encouraged to find out for themselves, solve problems and explore new things. This builds their ability to be independent. Time is given for children to think, reflect and consider how well they have done.

- Technology is used to inspire children's learning and to promote speech. The use of digital cameras is becoming routine and children often choose to use the interactive whiteboard to explore and learn.
- Disabled children and those with special educational needs are given high quality support as a result of excellent management. Efficient methods for identifying the needs of such children coupled with very detailed learning plans that involve parents as well, give the children every chance of doing well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- All adults have high expectations for the children's behaviour and model excellent standards of courtesy and manners. This is mirrored in the way children behave. They thrive on the warm welcome they receive each morning and afternoon and the way they are respected as individuals. As a result, children develop very positive attitudes to learning and behave extremely well.
- Children are captivated by the rich array of activities that are available throughout each day. Although many children have great energy, the safe, secure and welcoming atmosphere within the centre means that any misbehaviour is rare. Children quickly establish close friendships. They are keen to help whenever they can. Some children, for example, were determined to help out by gathering the leaves on the paths outdoors and others willingly help classmates when needing an extra pair of hands to construct their models.
- Children understand personal hygiene. They appreciate the routine of washing their hands before eating snacks and making cakes. Many take care to dress in aprons when carrying out messy work. Children develop a good understanding of how to weigh up risk and act safely. Their explorations outdoors in the 'wild areas' show their ability to negotiate safely different surfaces and to avoid walking on any that may be difficult.
- Strong partnerships with parents underpin the excellent conduct of children in nursery. Very close links with staff of the children's centre, and where necessary other professionals, offers guidance to parents about how to promote the best behaviour at home. This has a most beneficial impact when they come to school.
- The high levels of enjoyment evident in the children and the very productive relationships with parents results in attendance being above what is typical for nursery schools.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Visionary, astute and caring leadership and management by the headteacher are building on the school's previously outstanding provision. Excellent procedures for managing staff, linked to very effective training, are strengthening their skills even further.
- Some staff are keen to take on responsibilities that may lead to promotion. This ambition means there is no complacency and adds to the school's excellent capacity to improve further.
- All staff are involved in considering the school's strengths and weaknesses which gives an accurate view of the school's performance. This ensures that the most relevant areas for development are identified.
- The school has reacted swiftly to adjust learning activities to match the new national requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Staff recognise that the best outcomes are gained by enabling children to follow their own interests. Children are given interesting activities that inspire them to want to learn.
- Everyone is committed to meeting the needs of every child. This is achieved very successfully.

The provision for disabled children and those with special educational needs is extremely well managed. All children perform equally well.

- Many parents get involved with school life. Comments made to the inspector, and in their written returns to the school, show how important it is to their lives. Parents have access to many courses to help their child. They also benefit from high quality communication from informative newsletters and the attractive school website.
 - Partnerships with other institutions benefit children and staff. Particular advantages are derived from the close involvement with the children's centre and the nursery school with which it is federated. Good links with primary schools contribute the smooth transition of children moving onto full-time education.
 - The local authority offers positive support for the school. Regular visits to the class and detailed analyses of the school's assessment data sharpen the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are involved in the school and contribute to creating a clear long-term direction for its future. Considerable strength was shown by governors in securing the partnership with the other school in the federation. Governors keep a close eye on the school's performance and quality of teaching and make sure that where it can do better action is taken. Finances are carefully managed to ensure the teacher's performance is recognised and that the school gets the best value from its income. Rigorous action is taken to keep children and adults safe and secure.
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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	134991
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	402661

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	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judith Thomas
Headteacher	Julie Morrow
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2010
Telephone number	01524 64132
Fax number	01524 62046
Email address	bursar@appletree.lancs.sch.uk

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