

Low Hill Nursery School

Jenks Avenue, Low Hill, Wolverhampton, WV10 9JN

Inspection dates

11–12 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- This is a school which gives its children the time and opportunity to grow to be themselves, and to explore and find out how they can learn from the world around them.
- The children's outstanding achievement and rapid progress are secured by the ways staff listen to them, and help them to reflect on and think very carefully about their learning.
- Excellent teaching boosts significantly the children's personal, social and emotional development; this results in the children's outstanding behaviour and understanding of being safe.
- The use of excellent and regular day-by-day observations of the children ensures high-quality planning which builds on children's needs and interests.
- High-quality leadership from the headteacher, systems to check the quality of the teaching, efficient management and effective governance have combined to ensure excellent teamwork and a strong determination to provide the best possible education for the children.
- There is a sensitive emphasis on children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; this enables the children to become very sociable and to develop extremely well as individuals.
- The school has a very clear understanding of where it can make further improvements to enhance its work and continue to develop its partnership with parents and carers.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector made six separate observations totalling some four and a half hours. Displays and records of children's work were examined.
- All members of the teaching team present during the two days of the inspection were seen working with children. A session of the lunchtime arrangements was also seen. Opportunities were taken throughout the inspection to talk with the children.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of school documents including: development plans; policies; self-evaluation reports; monitoring files; safeguarding and curriculum materials; and information for parents and carers. Governing body documentation was examined, including the headteacher's reports to the governing body, and other reviews of the school's performance.
- Discussions were held with: the headteacher; the former deputy headteacher; the temporary class teacher; teaching support staff; the office staff; representatives of the governing body; a representative of the local authority; the acting assistant manager of the partner children's centre; the school's special educational needs coordinator, and a nursery nurse from the local authority's special educational needs support staff.
- There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), but the inspector took account of the school's own survey of its families which was carried out in July 2012. The inspector also spoke individually with a number of parents and carers during the course of the inspection.

Inspection team

Michael Miller, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average nursery school taking children from its local estates in the Low Hill area of Wolverhampton.
- There are two teachers at the school. The headteacher has been in post for six years, and is retiring at the end of the autumn term 2012. The deputy headteacher left at the end of the summer term 2012 to take up a similar post at a partner primary school. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed, and take up their posts from January 2013.
- An interim arrangement between Low Hill and the former deputy headteacher's new school has enabled the former deputy headteacher to continue with some of the management responsibilities at the Nursery throughout the autumn term 2012.
- The partner primary school has also seconded an acting deputy headteacher to Low Hill for the current term. This has been mutually helpful as it has enabled the teacher concerned, and the primary school, to benefit from Low Hill's expertise as a Forest School. These are schools which aim to help individuals of any age learn through positive outdoor experiences.
- The school works in partnership with Low Hill Children's Centre, which is also managed by the governing body. This centre was last inspected in March 2007, when it was found to be good, but it was not re-inspected at the same time as the Nursery.
- Low Hill Nursery School has places for up to 84 children aged three to four years. Most children only attend the school for the three terms of the Nursery year, but a few may join in the January of each year and stay for five terms.
- Children attend the school for 15 hours each week, over five sessions; there is a flexible approach so children can attend any combination of morning or afternoon sessions or a full-day session. In addition, childcare is available through the partner children's centre.
- The majority of children are of White British heritage; a few come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly Black African, White and Black Caribbean and Eastern European. A small minority speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs, including those supported by early years action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, is average. Such children's needs involve mainly speech and language difficulties.
- There are no children for whom the school receives the extra funding known as the pupil premium.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the impact of the ways staff assess the children's progress by encouraging more parents and carers to contribute to their children's learning journey records by including personal, family observations and photographs relating to their children's learning and development at home.
- Strengthen the governance of the school, the school's partnership with parents and carers, and its support from the local authority in order to:
 - make sure that the school's own review of the work and constitution of its governing body results in all vacant governor posts being filled during the spring term 2013
 - re-launch and maintain the school's website, and make sure that all the information required to be published there for parents and carers is included.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- School data show that children's skills and levels of knowledge on entering the school are well below those expected for their age. They are particularly low in respect of their personal, social and emotional development and in their communication, language and literacy skills.
- The school is particularly successful in helping children to catch up on their development. The large majority of children make significant, rapid and sustained progress to reach levels of development just below those expected for their age by the time they transfer to the Reception classes in other schools.
- Achievement has improved year on year since the last inspection because the school has acted successfully on the recommendation that they involve children more in the choices they make. Time is taken at the start and end of each session to talk with the children, in small groups, and reflect on their learning and the things they would like to do in the next session. The planning of activities is then tailored to meet the children's individual needs and interests.
- Discussions with the parents and carers of children who may be disabled or have special educational needs confirm the school's data which show that their children make excellent progress. This is because of the attention they receive as individuals from specialist support staff. Parents and carers say they see their children grow in confidence day by day and value the way resources, and even the layout of the main classroom, are adapted to meet their needs.
- Staff show a natural flair for communicating with the children and setting them at their ease. This has proved particularly important in enabling the rapid progress of children for whom English is an additional language. Signing and pictures are used effectively to enable the children's swift integration and involvement in daily activities. This is always accompanied by the repetition of key words and phrases, in both written and spoken forms. Consequently, children learn to grasp their new language quickly and to use new words in context.
- The strong partnership with the adjoining children's centre ensures continuity of care, activities and learning for those children who transfer to the nursery. This is especially successful for those children with speech, language and communication difficulties, or whose personal circumstances may make them more vulnerable.
- The school understands that most of its children learn best through the practical method of investigation and discovery. The 'Forest School' approach suits very well the needs of the children, and their learning becomes both creative and imaginative. The outside area is a much valued classroom in its own right, and is used daily by all the children in all weathers.
- The inspection took place on two bright, but very cold and frosty days. This did not daunt the children who took readily to a scientific investigation of the ice found around the garden. Experiments to see how ice in a water trough melted as warm water was added to it fascinated the children. Excellent questioning from adults prompted the children to explain the changes they both saw and felt. Children also showed their understanding of safety by avoiding the water spilt on the ground, which quickly turned to ice.
- There is a very strong focus on encouraging children to listen to sounds, not only those around them but also through music and everyday speech. This is standing the children in very good stead for the skills they need for linking letters and sounds. Other elements, such as their progress in mark making and encouraging a love of books and stories, prepare them

exceptionally well for future writing and reading work.

- Opportunities for promoting numeracy are not missed, for example the counting of building blocks or sections of wooden railway track, or a quick '1, 2, 3' when joining hands in a circle before sitting down as a group on a carpet.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The teaching and support staff combine to form an impressive team of early years educators and practitioners. Staff consider very carefully what may be best for each child, and how they may best support, encourage and foster the children's learning and achievement. This underpins their excellent day-to-day planning of activities.
- The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven naturally into everyday teaching and learning. Children are given constant opportunities to work together and to reflect on and share their thoughts and ideas. This strengthens and develops their confidence and self-esteem as well as their language and communication skills.
- The teaching staff are adept at knowing when to stand back and give the children the space to learn and explore by themselves, and when to subtly step in and ask questions. This approach not only enables the children to explain, in their own terms, what they have been doing and experiencing, but also allows the staff to assess the children's understanding.
- The provision of a digital camera for each member of the teaching and support staff has revolutionised the ways they assess children's progress. Many photographs are taken each day to record the children's progress and achievements. Written observations, on post-it notes, together with selected photographs provide accurate, reliable and detailed records of staff observations.
- Assessments are recorded regularly in the children's learning journey records. These are of high quality and enable staff, parents and carers to see the rate at which their children are progressing. However, although families are invited and encouraged to contribute to these, few do so in practice. Staff want to understand how the children put their learning into practice at home; consequently, greater contributions from families are being sought by the school.
- The headteacher and governing body have ensured the provision of only high-quality resources. In keeping with the 'Forest School' approach, these are mostly of natural materials such as wood. Such resources not only add significant quality to the classroom environment but also to the enjoyment of both teaching and learning.
- Modern technology is not forgotten, and the large interactive whiteboard is used constantly by small groups of children. The teaching of listening skills was enhanced as the children listened carefully to the program's instructions. Their physical coordination was developed well as they used their hands and fingers to drag and drop different coloured eyes, and shaped noses and mouths, onto an image of a teddy bear. Great fun was had by all, and the children also learnt the importance of taking turns.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Children are fascinated by their own achievements and those of others. One child, in an afternoon session, was delighted by the painting of Christmas baubles done by another child in the morning. There was true fascination at the texture of the dried acrylic paints, and a close

examination of a purple spot on the end of a finger where it had touched a still damp patch. Such experiences contribute much to the children's overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the ways they interact and cooperate with each other.

- There is a consistent and sensitive approach to behaviour management which ensures that staff have the very highest expectations of children's behaviour. A compassionate outlook by staff reinforces a proper understanding of right and wrong; the children respond excellently to this.
- Life at the nursery is never dull. Children are simply too interested and involved in their activities to become distracted. They want to come to school, and this is reflected in the keen way they explore what is new or on offer immediately they come through the door. Behaviour and safety are outstanding because children develop self-confidence, socialise exceptionally well, and sustain high levels of concentration throughout each session.
- The children's approach to learning is a significant factor in underpinning their excellent progress. They are enabled to develop very positive working relationships with all members of the teaching team; this plays a major part in helping the staff to do their job very effectively.
- There is an excellent community spirit which exists in and around the school. Parents and carers commented appreciatively on this and the school's pastoral approach, which enables their children to feel entirely safe and secure while at school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school's current success is the result of several years of hard work and dedication on the part of the headteacher. She sets a very fine example in the way she works alongside both staff and children. Consequently, staff understand very well what makes high-quality learning.
- The headteacher's work with both the children's centre and partner primary schools in ensuring the smooth transition of children from one phase of their education to another is of particular note. In this, the school has been recognised as a leading school within the local authority.
- In such a small school, the checking of teaching is, in practice, a daily occurrence. The formal and informal checking of teaching and learning blend together very effectively to enable accurate self-evaluation. This feeds into school improvement planning and the setting of suitably challenging targets for the teaching staff. Professional development is focused effectively on maintaining high-quality teaching and learning.
- Monitoring by the local authority is 'light touch'; this includes regular termly reviews of the school's performance, and appropriate advice about performance management. In this, it provides a balanced level of support. The local authority also facilitates and manages a website for the school, but this had to be taken down for technical reasons. As a result, at present, the school does not publish for parents and carers all the information it is required to provide on a school website.
- The school's excellent arrangements for safeguarding its children, including the practical rigour of these, were confirmed during the inspection. Discussions and documentation, as well as practical action, risk assessments and day-to-day health and safety monitoring, confirm this.
- The school has excellent capacity for further improvement. The headteacher, staff and governors have built a very firm foundation upon which the new headteacher and deputy headteacher may build from January 2013.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body makes an important contribution to the school's everyday life and work. It is well informed, not only through the headteacher's reports but also through regular visits to the school. A member of the governing body has specific responsibility for ensuring governors have the necessary training to help them fulfil their roles. The school benefits very well from both the personal and professional expertise of individual governors. There remain vacancies on the governing body for both parental and community representatives. In the past, it has proved difficult to fill these particular roles. Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance data; they share with the staff an appreciation of the importance of this in enabling and planning the children's learning. This has also been helpful in the school's work to close the gap between the attainment of the children when they start at the school and that expected nationally when they go to the Reception classes in other schools. The school's finances are managed effectively; the school has a healthy balance sheet and reserve funding to support the future work of the new senior leadership team.

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	104278
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	400698

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	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dean Cope
Headteacher	Julie Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	2 March 2010
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