

Huntingdon Nursery School

Ambury Road, Huntingdon, PE29 1AD

Inspection dates 14–15 March 2013

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's achievement is outstanding. Two-year-olds and three-year-olds all make exceptionally good progress.
- Disabled children and those who have special educational needs, and the many children who are learning to speak English as an additional language, make excellent progress.
- Teaching is outstanding. All the adults who work with the children have high expectations and match experiences very closely to the children's learning needs.
- Teamwork amongst the teachers, key workers and teaching assistants is exemplary. Each individual works as a part of a seamless whole, with a shared sense of purpose.
- Behaviour is outstanding and staff are highly skilled in bringing out the best in each child. Children feel very safe and enjoy trusting relationships with the adults who work with them.
- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She is supported exceptionally well by the assistant headteacher and other staff who are responsible for important aspects of the school's work. Together, they make sure that teaching and children's achievement remain outstanding.
- Over many years, the vision and dedication of senior leaders and the governing body have enabled the school to go from strength to strength.
- Staff provide excellent support to families, although parents are not informed as frequently as they could be about how to support their children's learning at home.
- The newly established accommodation for two-year-olds is developing and meets children's needs very well. It has a good range of learning equipment but this does not yet include 'treasure baskets' (baskets filled with a variety of objects for young children to explore).

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited 12 lessons and sessions where teachers, key workers and teaching assistants led activities for groups of children. She also observed sessions where children chose activities for themselves.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, and a telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 34 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), some written notes from parents and analysed questionnaires completed by 27 members of staff.
- The inspector looked at the school's work and at documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, its development plan, and information relating to safeguarding. She looked at records of children's attainment and progress and at samples of their work.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The proportion of children from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. Many of these are from Eastern European backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs supported through early action is broadly average. The proportion supported through early action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is high.
- The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average.
- As part of the government's pilot scheme, the school provides early places for 16 two-year-olds and offers places to children for whom there are known to be social or welfare concerns. The school has recently leased a room from the adjoining primary school and is using this as a dedicated space for two-year-olds.
- The school is the hub for Huntingdon Town Children's Centre, which is led by the headteacher and governing body but inspected separately.
- The headteacher and the assistant headteacher provide training for staff in other Early Years Foundation Stage settings.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the many existing strengths in the school's partnership with parents by:
 - providing more frequent information to parents about the things they could do at home to support their children's development
 - involving parents more closely in contributing to the ongoing record of their children's learning.
- As part of the current development of the room for two-year-olds, provide 'treasure baskets' that include objects of various shapes and textures for children to explore.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children join the school with skills and knowledge that are typically low for their age. Nearly half are at early stages in learning to speak English as an additional language. All groups of children make outstanding progress, including those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. By the time children leave the nursery, their attainment in all areas of learning is at least in line with and, in many cases, above expectations for their age.
- Two-year-olds make rapid progress because they receive a great deal of focused attention from adults, often on a one-to-one basis. Their communication skills are quickly developing and they are learning physical control in using a range of toys and equipment. This was evident during the inspection when a child held a felt-tipped pen effectively, made marks suggestive of a picture, then went on to write letter-like shapes for his name.
- Three-year-olds are making excellent progress in developing their communication and language skills, and in reading, counting and solving mathematical problems. Through regular sessions on letters and the sounds that they make, many children are already able to read words like 'cat' and 'pig', and are learning how the letters are combined to make words such as 'sheep' and 'duck'.
- Through hearing and retelling stories, children are learning to express a sequence of ideas of their own. After learning about traditional tales, four children worked together to produce the following modern-day story: 'Once upon a time, there was a boy called Sol. He skated on the ice to the shop. He bought some pizza. He found a caterpillar on a leaf. The caterpillar fell off. Sol took the caterpillar home. He gave the caterpillar some pizza and it turned into a butterfly.'
- As part of everyday activities, children learn to count and to solve practical mathematical problems. At snack time, a group of children were able to count a range of different options to see how many there were 'altogether'. In response to skilled questioning by the teacher, they went on to explain that with just four bananas, they would have to be cut up if all ten children chose to have banana.
- Children who are learning to speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups do as well as the rest of the children. They make rapid gains in learning English and are quickly able to communicate. Disabled children and those who have special educational needs make excellent progress because activities and support are matched precisely to the next steps in their learning, and staff work very closely with parents and specialist agencies in meeting their needs.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- A high proportion of the teaching throughout the school is outstanding and the quality is never less than good. Many of the same strengths in teaching are found throughout the school because practice is very consistent and teamwork exceptionally strong.
- The staff all have high expectations for the children and are highly skilled in asking questions to draw out their ideas and develop their language and communication. A bilingual teaching assistant supports the many children whose first language is Polish, and the staff work closely with a speech and language therapist to develop specially tailored activities for children who join with limited language skills.

- Throughout the school, in-depth communication takes place between staff and individuals or small groups of children. Staff show children how to deepen their play and push them to think and to talk about their decisions. For example, in the 'block room', a teaching assistant asked if a boy's tower was 'high enough', whether he was going to put any more bricks on it and after he knocked it down, 'what happened to it'.
- The teaching of early literacy skills is exemplary. Teachers use pictures of objects from a story they have read to the children, such as pieces of fruit from the story of *The Hungry Caterpillar*, to get the children to talk about the story and retell it in detail. Sessions on letters and the sounds that they make are matched precisely to the stage of development of each child, and linked closely to practical experiences so that children learn without 'realising' the experience is more than a game.
- The teaching of disabled children and those who have special educational needs is highly skilled. Teachers use language very precisely, backed up by pictures and practical resources so that children can both hear and see the meaning of a word. By using timetables that consist of a sequence of pictures, staff make sure that children are clear about what is going to happen. In an excellent 'play and sing' session, staff worked as a seamless team, each concentrating on an individual child to provide a series of practical and sensory experiences that kept all the children fully absorbed.
- Staff regularly meet to discuss children's progress and work together to plan activities. Key workers know each child in detail and the children are carefully grouped so that learning is matched closely to the next stage in their development. Resources and activities indoors and in the outdoor area are carefully chosen to provide a balance across the different areas of learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour is excellent and the school provides a happy, harmonious place for children to play and learn. When children arrive, they immediately get involved with activities and remain focused and interested throughout the session. Their behaviour is outstanding because they enjoy the activities so much and learning holds their full attention.
 - Staff are highly skilled in managing children's behaviour and in bringing out the best in them. They make expectations very clear and sessions are carefully structured with well-established routines. Children quickly learn to take turns and to help in various ways.
 - The children are highly focused during sessions led by adults, and they play absorbedly when choosing activities for themselves. Both two- and three-year-olds concentrate on activities for a lengthy period of time and try very hard. They quickly become motivated learners who know they can succeed with a task if they give it their full attention. In all activities, staff encourage children to be as independent as possible by giving exactly the right amount of support and direction.
 - Children get on extremely well together and staff promote very positive relationship, making sure there is no hint of discrimination towards any groups. The children cooperate very well with one another and learn to negotiate and make decisions together as part of their play.
 - Children feel very safe and are clearly confident to express themselves. They show a very good awareness of safety for their age. For instance, when getting ready to go outside, they talked
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about the importance of being careful because it was an icy morning and they could slip and bump their heads.

- The staff provide excellent training and guidance for parents in managing their children's behaviour at home. The support for children and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable is exemplary.
- Children are very happy and thoroughly enjoy all the activities on offer. Most attend very regularly and the staff do all they can to make sure that they do so.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school has remained outstanding over many years because leaders are always looking for ways to develop and improve the provision. The headteacher and other leaders are passionate about providing only the very best. Their attention to detail is excellent and they make sure that their high expectations are shared by all the staff.
- Senior leaders are rigorous in managing the staff's performance, and closely checking the work of teachers, key workers and teaching assistants. With a very stable and experienced staff, excellent teamwork is well established and there is an outstanding clarity of purpose to the school's work. Staff have a deep understanding of children's needs and their level of motivation is exemplary. This is why so much of the teaching is outstanding and it ensures that all children have equal opportunities to make rapid progress.
- Leaders are accurate in their judgement about the school's effectiveness and identify the right priorities for development. Information about children's attainment on entry, half-yearly and when they leave, is analysed in detail by the headteacher and senior leaders to check children's progress, to identify trends, inform decisions about group work and to shape improvements.
- The quality of day-to-day learning experiences is matched very closely to the needs of different groups of children, with a strong focus on developing communication, language and literacy skills, counting and an understanding of mathematics. These experiences are strengthened by wider projects, often stemming from children's own interests, and by visitors who extend their horizons.
- A wide range of equipment and activities, indoors and out, promotes children's learning exceptionally well, though this does not yet include 'treasure baskets' in the room for two-year-olds. The promotion of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Children's personal development, instilling in them a belief in themselves, together with care and respect for others, underpins everything that the school does.
- School staff work very closely with children's centre staff and other agencies to meet the needs of children and their families. Parents are highly satisfied with the school's work, describing it as 'wonderful', the staff as 'fantastic' and the support as 'second to none'. They are kept well informed by half-termly meetings and reports on their children's progress, and conversations with staff when they deliver or collect their children each day. However, they are not told frequently what activities they could do with their children at home to help with their learning, and they are not encouraged to make a full contribution to the ongoing record of their children's development.
- The local authority rightly provides light-touch support to the school in recognition of leaders'

ability to maintain high quality. Advisory support is available on request and the school benefits from working with other early years settings through networks established by the local authority.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body provides outstanding support and challenge for senior leaders and has a thorough knowledge of all aspects of the school's work. Governors' visits and other checks on the school's work are highly focused, and many governors bring valuable expertise to their role. The governing body knows that this is a centre of excellence, and key governors have a thorough understanding of how children's progress compares with that in nursery schools nationally. They are clear about the quality of teaching and are kept very well informed about the management of staff performance, though in their own words, 'There has not been any underperformance here for many years.' Governors keep a tight control on the school's finances and make sure that statutory requirements are met, including those for safeguarding children.
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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	110598
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	401137

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	2–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hazel Kenyon
Headteacher	Kay Dimelow
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2010
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