

St Paul's Nursery School

12 St Paul's Square, York, North Yorkshire, YO24 4BD

Inspection dates 2–3 May 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.

- This is a highly valued part of the community. Parents are very appreciative of all that the nursery offers. The view of one typifies that of the vast majority: 'An absolutely fabulous nursery. My child has grown into a creative explorer!'
- Achievement is outstanding and this has been maintained since the previous inspection. Improvements have occurred in children's creativity, their understanding of the natural environment and their ability to be independent.
- From starting points similar to expectations for their age, excellent progress occurs and children's attainment exceeds levels expected by the start of compulsory education.
- Teaching is outstanding. Very imaginative approaches inspire children and extend their experiences of the world around them.
- Excellent initiatives give children a good grounding in music, an excellent understanding of nature and the capacity to make decisions for themselves. Children make excellent gains in their physical development and towards the early stages of reading, writing and mathematics.
- Behaviour and safety are excellent. Children learn to take measured risks, for example during outdoor play, and use tools safely. Parents are unanimous that their children are looked after and cared for very well.
- Disabled children and those with special educational needs, supported through enhanced provision, receive excellently managed support. At all times, their inclusion is total.
- The school promotes excellent levels of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teaching is managed extremely well. Regular checks on its quality lead to very effective strategies to develop staff skills and raise children's achievement.
- The headteacher has a crystal-clear view of the school's direction which is shared by all staff. Brave and very astute decisions have improved the school. The curriculum is linked more closely to the children's interests, assessment is more effective in identifying children's needs and staff roles have been redefined since the previous inspection.
- Although staff understand how well the school performs, and strive to improve it even more, they are not yet fully involved in the school improvement process.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching indoors and outdoors on seven occasions, joined by the headteacher for three observations.
- Separate discussions were held with the headteacher, staff and four governors. Further conversations were conducted with representatives of the Specialist Early Years team and a representative of the local authority.
- In planning the inspection, and when forming judgements, reference was made to the 42 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). In addition, reference was made to the views of parents expressed in a recent survey conducted by the school. During the inspection, six parents independently gave their views about the school.
- The opinions of 19 staff were gained by analysing their responses to questionnaires.
- An evaluation of a range of school documentation added to the inspection judgements. These included the documents relating to safeguarding, the school's improvement plan, the document that records the school's view of its performance, and information about the children's progress and attainment.

Inspection team

David Byrne, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average size nursery school. Most children access their 15 hours entitlement by attending part-time either, for the morning or the afternoon, but some attend for two and a half full days. They join the school after their third birthday and some, consequently, spend five terms with the school.
- Almost all children are of White British heritage.
- The school has enhanced provision for supporting disabled children and those with special educational needs. Thirteen children are currently accessing this provision.
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher took up post in September 2011.
- The school has achieved several awards for its work. These include the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the ICT (information and communication technology) mark. In addition, it is recognised as a provider of 'Forest Schools', an initiative to involve children in learning by interacting with the natural environment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the skills of the staff team to make a greater contribution to the process of school improvement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Outstanding provision ensures that children make rapid progress in all areas of their development. From starting points that for most are at expected levels for their age, they benefit from excellent teaching and outstanding leadership. The outcomes for most, therefore, far exceed expectations by the time they reach compulsory school age.
- Children develop essential social skills of working cooperatively and deepening their awareness of the needs of others beyond their own. Many gain great self-confidence and, as one parent put it, 'are brought out of their shell'. Children learn to persevere with tasks, to work with others and to make choices about what they learn.
- Vast strides are made in children's physical development. Outdoors they build their strength, co-ordination and sense of balance. Both in and outdoors, there are many activities that enable them to practise mark-making on a small and large scale. Children are successfully encouraged to use their imagination to create pictures in many ways and places, for example on the surface of the outdoor area, or indoors using more traditional paint and paper. They become skilled at cutting and fixing in a variety of ways. This was seen in an excellent session in which children constructed and then tested out three different 'houses' as part of exploring the traditional story of the three little pigs.
- Language and communication skills quickly develop. The wealth of opportunities provided for children to participate in role-play, share stories with adults and take books home, build up the children's skills of conversing with others and understanding the meaning of text. Staff raise the children's awareness of the sounds that letters make. Children have many opportunities to develop skills of communicating by mark-making using paint, fingers and felt tips. This gives children a good start in writing. Almost all recognise the initial sound of their name and many make an excellent attempt at writing it all.
- Promoting children's creativity, underpins all that the school does. Children gain enormous confidence through this approach. They regularly perform dance and movement. Excellent music provision enables children to sing frequently throughout each session. Children accompany themselves using percussion instruments, singing favourite songs connected with their pirate topic such as, 'Row, Row the Boat'; others choose to compose their own music in the outdoor music den.
- An outstanding aspect of the school's work is its procedures for supporting disabled children and those with special educational needs. Case studies show that this has a significant impact on children's personal well-being and academic progress. The resulting outcome is that children whose circumstances make them vulnerable make the same outstanding progress as other groups in the school.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is of a very high quality. One parent summed up the feeling of the vast majority when they stated: 'the staff provide a wonderful nurturing environment and are skilled at finding the key to open the door for learning for each child.' Inspection findings confirm that a talented teaching team skilfully generates high quality learning by combining extremely well planned play activities with small group, teaching sessions.
- A strong emphasis is placed on developing the children's confidence by releasing their natural creativity and setting high expectations for them to be as independent as possible. Children are encouraged to make choices about what and how they learn, and are enabled to reflect on their experiences. Where possible, all activities are linked to the world of the children, whether imaginary or real.
- The staff team generates in children a great desire to learn. Children arrive at each session bursting with the excitement of the time ahead of them. They are keen to share this enthusiasm

with their parents who often stay and join in for a while.

- As parents depart, children quickly get involved in the array of excellently planned activities provided. Some gravitate to the 'pirate ship role play area', quickly becoming engrossed in the very real, imaginary experiences it provides; others are keen to develop their skills for mark-making using foam; a few make a bee-line for the computers to explore the educational games they have to offer. This is much more than play, it is an excellent vehicle for children to explore the world and develop vital skills for learning in later life.
- When children move from the indoors to the outdoors, they are welcomed by a vast range of stimulating and meticulously organised resources. Children cycle vigorously, queue up for the £5 'car wash' and spend time making a soup for the pirates. Seamlessly, activities move on, so children never have time to be bored or linger. As they move from one activity to the next they sing as they go and everyone shares in the joy of musical expression.
- Staff act as a finely tuned team that is vigilant, observing, cajoling and encouraging. Any child struggling to learn is given high quality support. This excellent provision is possible because of the staff's deep understanding of the needs of each child.
- Assessment is thorough and purposeful, and is a tool to diagnose need as well as measure progress. Disabled children and those with special educational needs receive excellent support, structured in such a way that is just right for them. They are encouraged yet challenged, given scope to talk but also listened to, and constantly cared for yet rewarded for being independent.
- A particular feature of the excellent teaching is the regular exposure children have to explore the natural environment. To add intrigue and mystery to learning in the community garden, children are inspired by the 'magic key'. This opens the gate and, once inside, children set up their 'base camp' before exploring every nook and cranny. Their encounters with nature have a significant impact on all aspects of their learning, especially their personal and social development, their ability to be creative and expressive, and their language and communication skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

- Parents are unanimous that their children are safe and happy at school. This view is confirmed by the inspection findings. There is no evidence of any bullying, including bullying related to disability, special educational needs, race, religion or gender.
- Children love nursery and attend regularly; absence is rare. One parent commented that her child loved school so much they are disappointed when it is the weekend.
- Children demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. Expectations for them to tidy up, put resources away and organise themselves give children advanced levels of independence. Those staying for lunch clear their own dishes away and even help to wipe their tables.
- The wide range of activities indoors and outdoors has a very positive impact on boys and girls. A calm atmosphere is promoted which encourages extremely strong relationships. Children are confident in the staff, knowing that there is always someone to help them. They play and learn outside in all weathers. Children pull on their boots and their waterproof clothes independently to explore the watercourse made of gutters, play happily on their bikes and trikes and create sand-pies and cakes for the pirates.
- Safe risk-taking ensures that children learn how to judge what is safe for them. Children learn about safety in their work and play. They use scissors safely to cut paper, use real knives to cut their fruit and vegetables, and manage garden tools in a safe manner while digging and planting.

The leadership and management

are outstanding

- The school has maintained its momentum since the previous inspection. Under the excellent

leadership of the headteacher, the considerable strengths noted previously have been built on with a stronger emphasis on promoting children's creativity and increasing their interaction with the natural environment.

- The headteacher, supported by a strong governing body and dedicated staff team, is uncompromising in her determination to secure the best possible achievement for every child. Together, they promote equality of opportunity extremely well and plans are fully developed to tackle any discrimination. The use of data has been radically improved to enable excellent levels of equality to be secured. Analysis of the information identifies any adaptations required to meet children's needs, for example making sure that disabled children and those with special educational needs are effectively supported.
- The school's evaluation of its performance is accurate and underpinned by the headteacher's regular monitoring of teaching. The outcomes are shared with individual staff; regular discussions about their performance identify which elements of professional training are best suited to the needs of the individual and the school. Staff roles have been reviewed to better meet the needs of children. However, some staff are not yet involved enough in contributing to the school improvement process.
- The curriculum for the Early Years Foundation Stage is adapted to match the philosophy of the school. Brave decisions by the headteacher are raising expectations for the children's independence, creativity and their ability to think for themselves. The Forest School initiative and the acquisition of a grant to promote music, almost unique for a nursery school, exemplify the school's determination to widen experiences for all children. The excellent range of activities promotes excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Staff successfully involve with parents, who are vital partners in their children's education. They appreciate being able to stay for some time at the start of each session so that they can learn alongside their children. Parents are unanimous in recommending the school to others but a small minority feel they would like more information about their child's progress. Inspection findings are that there are many opportunities to do this through, for example, the excellent records of achievement, the daily contact with staff, and planned times for consultation.
- The contribution of the local authority is exemplary. It supports, advises and offers the headteacher and staff excellent opportunities to broaden their experience and secure their assessments of children. Excellent quality support is provided by the Specialist Early Years Support Team, a group of practitioners and professionals from agencies such as education, health and children's services. Its involvement with the school secures excellent provision for children receiving enhanced resource provision.
- The governance of the school:
 - Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement because they visit regularly. They are up-to-date and benefit from regular training. They are confident to question and challenge decisions and provide excellent support for the headteacher. Governors are aware of the quality of teaching and take positive decisions to maintain its excellence by using finances carefully to reward success. The governing body's support of initiatives by the headteacher to seek additional grants, for example from the Youth Music Network and also to employ a Creative Early Years practitioner for one year, has enabled significant improvements to children's achievement. Systems to check on the performance of staff, including the headteacher, are in place. Governors ensure that safeguarding systems meet requirements.

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	121266
Local authority	York
Inspection number	402015

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	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julia Hedley-Jones
Headteacher	Vicky Marshall
Date of previous school inspection	14 July 2010
Telephone number	01904 622291
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