

Ditton Nursery School

Dundalk Road, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 8DF

Inspection dates 23–24 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- The school's effectiveness has declined in the last 16 months. The headteacher and members of the governing body have not improved teaching and learning.
- There is not enough good or better teaching to help all children to achieve well. There are too few opportunities for children to learn in a small group with their key person. Children in both classrooms do not get an equal amount of teaching from a qualified teacher.
- The targets set for staff are not specific enough to lead to improvements in teaching and learning.
- Leaders have a weak understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. As a result, the way staff interact with and question children has not improved since the previous inspection.
- Leaders do not have enough contact with other schools to check that their own view of the school's performance is accurate.
- The checks made by leaders and the governing body on the progress made by different groups of children are inadequate. Leaders also have a weak understanding of how much progress nursery-aged children are expected to make.
- Children's behaviour and safety in some activities require improvement. Staff do not always manage behaviour well because they are not given enough guidance by leaders.
- Too many staff have low morale and limited confidence in the school's leaders. They told the inspector that their training is not good enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Classrooms and the outdoor area are of a good size, attractive and resourced well.
- Individual children's learning is recorded well in their files and used by some staff to help plan teaching.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning and teaching in three nursery sessions and spoke to children. Some teaching was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, five members of the governing body including parent governors and a separate discussion was held with the Chair of Governors. Other meetings were held with members of staff and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector looked at a number of documents, including safeguarding policies and procedures and children's files. He also looked at school records of the quality of teaching, records of staff targets and training, self-evaluation and the school's development plans.
- There were no responses available to the online Parent View survey at the time of the inspection. The inspector spoke informally to a number of parents.

Inspection team

Tim Vaughan, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized nursery school.
- The school was first opened in 1942 and moved into the current premises in May 2004.
- The school is on the same site as Ditton Children's Centre, a phase one children's centre designated in October 2005. There is also an early years setting on site, Ditton Early Years Centre. Neither the children's centre nor the early years setting were part of this inspection.
- The two classrooms and outdoor area are shared with staff and children from the on-site early years setting, a provision managed also by the headteacher. These staff work with all children at various times of the day.
- Almost all children are White British.
- The proportion of children who receive extra help from school staff because they have been identified as having special educational needs (school action) is below average. The proportion who are supported by external specialists because of their needs (school action plus) is below average.
- The school achieved a Halton Healthy Schools Award in July 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and children's achievement by working with all staff to make sure they:
 - ask questions that can be answered in different ways and ensure that these encourage children to participate in an activity
 - encourage children to think by talking to them about what they understand, know, are finding out or trying to do
 - physically get down to children's eye level in order to better involve them in play and investigation
 - review how the daily routine can best promote good learning, including opportunities for staff to meet daily with their allocated children for a short group time
 - understand the characteristics of effective learning as described in the Early Years Foundation Stage framework
 - observe teaching and learning in an outstanding nursery school.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring that leaders listen to, consult and involve staff more in the development of the school
 - gathering feedback from staff about the work of the school and making sure staff understand decisions that are made
 - improving formal observations of the work of teachers and nursery nurses by giving them clear, precise and challenging feedback about how to improve their teaching and children's

learning and then checking that improvements are made

- setting goals for teachers and nursery nurses that are clearly linked to learning and teaching and are specific, measurable and achievable
 - ensuring that sufficient time during staff training and leadership meetings is spent discussing how to improve teaching and learning and deepening understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework
 - establishing links with outstanding nursery schools to support leaders in improving the work of Ditton Nursery School
 - ensuring that children in both classrooms benefit from being taught for equal amounts of time by a qualified teacher
 - ensuring that leaders and the governing body understand what progress to expect of three- and four-year-olds and evaluate the progress made by different groups of children during their time at the school.
- Improve the governing body' knowledge of the nursery's work, its strengths and weaknesses so that they hold leaders closely to account for their performance
- Improve children's behaviour by ensuring that all staff:
- supervise children well when they move around the school and ensure that children do not run around indoors
 - are given clear guidance about how to support children to behave well.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Although in the past, children at Ditton have achieved well in relation to their starting points, this is currently not the case. This is because of weaknesses in the quality of teaching. Leaders are not clear enough about what groups of children are capable of when they start in the school and how much progress they have made by the time they leave.
- Children are curious about the environment and are interested in the world about them. Good use is made of the garden area to help children become even keener investigators.
- Staff recognise that children have weaker skills in mathematics than in other areas of their development. Consequently, staff take adequate opportunities to talk about number, sorting and describing shapes in games, class discussions and when playing with the children.
- All children have good opportunities and support to climb, cycle, pull, run and throw in the outdoor area. Consequently, they are making good progress in their physical development, most noticeably boys in their ability to ride two-wheeled bicycles.
- Observations during the inspection indicate that the progress of disabled children and those children with special educational needs is sometimes not as good as other groups of children. This is because staff do not always ensure that these children are benefiting from attention and talk from adults.
- Children enjoy rhymes, listening to stories and looking at the good range of books in the classrooms. Staff make good use of opportunities to help children to be aware of print on labels, bags and signs. However, not all opportunities are used to help more-able children understand the sounds that letters make.
- An adequate range of opportunities is provided to develop early writing skills including a pretend shop and materials such as chalks and clipboards outdoors. Children make good use of these opportunities to practise writing. However, some activities, such as those using tracing paper over dot-to-dot work cards and the colouring of stencilled flower cut-outs are undemanding and do not help children to learn.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There is not enough good teaching to ensure that all children make good progress. There are too few occasions when children can learn in a small group with a person who understands them well.
- When teaching is good, staff support children sensitively and extend children's thinking through talk. For example, a nursery nurse supporting children who were playing outdoors with a cardboard box listened carefully to children's ideas. Her comments inspired the children to play at being in a space rocket and travelling on a journey together. Her skilful support enabled more-able children to progress well.
- In activities where teaching requires improvement, staff do not take part in children's play and investigations and they do not get down to children's eye level. At these times, staff do not ask questions that can be answered in different ways and encourage all those in the teaching group to take part. In addition, not enough staff use the sort of language that will inspire the children to think and answer questions.
- Off-site trips and celebrations of festivals such as harvest and Diwali support children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development adequately. Stories are used appropriately as a means of introducing new learning such as about helping others.
- For the majority of their day in school, children have a good length of time to become deeply involved in their learning both indoors and outdoors. This means that they can explore, find out and experiment. At other parts of the day, for example when they spend ten minutes outside before snack time, valuable time for learning is wasted.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Staff do not always set clear boundaries for children's behaviour. This means that when indoors some children run around too much and become boisterous. Although the behaviour policy has recently been reviewed, staff do not receive enough guidance from leaders about how to support children to behave well.
- Children are willing to help in school but staff do not always ask them to. For example, children do not get enough chance to share out the cups at snack time or tidy the classroom at the end of the session.
- Children know how to take sensible risks in their play and know how to stay healthy by washing their hands. There is no record of discrimination or bullying between children. This is because the school places a strong emphasis upon children being friendly to one another and mixing well together.
- While attendance is not compulsory for this age group, the current level of attendance is only 80%, which although low is the highest it has been during this school year. The school actively promotes the habit of coming to school promptly and regularly as important, but as yet with insufficient impact. Absences or regular lateness are followed up carefully.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- The leadership of teaching is inadequate. Records of the headteacher's observations of teaching contain generalised comments rather than evaluating whether the teaching is improving children's learning. Observations of teaching do not give leaders a realistic view of what learning is typically like in the school. Too many staff say that the feedback from lesson observations does not help them to improve their teaching.
- The management of staff performance through setting individual objectives for teachers and nursery nurses is inadequate. This is because goals are not always clearly linked to learning and teaching nor are they specific, measurable and achievable. Levels of teachers' pay are not matched by the quality of their teaching, because their teaching has been judged too generously.
- Weak aspects of learning and teaching are not recognised and so are not being challenged by leaders. This is because not enough time during staff training and leadership meetings is spent on improving teaching and deepening understanding of the guidance in the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. In addition, leaders have not made sure that children in both classrooms spend the same proportion of time with a qualified teacher.
- Too many staff told the inspector that training, including that provided by the school, is having a limited impact upon their teaching.
- Staff lack confidence in the leadership of the school. They are anxious and morale is low because decisions about timetabling for children and staff, links to the on-site private nursery and other issues are not managed well by leaders. Staff want the school to improve but weaknesses in how they are challenged, trained and supported make achieving this difficult.
- Leaders take too few steps to evaluate the progress of groups of children. In addition, they do not have a good enough understanding to judge whether children are progressing well. This means that leaders do not have an accurate view of the school's performance.
- Because of the previous success of the school, support from the local authority has been light touch. Most recently this has been to support the governing body with staff recruitment. Leaders have not made good enough use of expertise from outside of the school to appraise the quality of teaching and to challenge the leaders' evaluation the school's effectiveness. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning has declined since the previous inspection and leaders and the governing body have not recognised this.
- Safeguarding meets requirements and causes no concern. Appropriate checks on adults are carried out to safeguard children and the welfare of children is monitored closely.

- Parents are broadly supportive of the school but several commented that the school is not good at communicating with them or involving them in their children’s learning. There is no school website for parents to view.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is committed to seeing the school improve and is making more frequent checks on the work of the staff. Governors ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the performance management of the headteacher and that safeguarding requirements are met. They undertake training for their roles and discuss financial matters regularly. However, members of the governing body are too dependent upon the headteacher for their understanding of the quality of teaching, progress by groups of children or teachers’ pay. Their view of the school is over-optimistic and they do not have a sufficiently clear understanding of what the school needs to do to become better. Members of the governing body are unaware of the decline in the school’s effectiveness since the previous inspection, or that staff have low morale and limited confidence in the leadership of the school.

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	110957
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	421589

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	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve McCulloch
Headteacher	Linda Bowles
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2011
Telephone number	0151 4244687
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