

Chestnut Nursery School

Magnolia Avenue, Exeter, EX2 6DJ

Inspection dates

18–19 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The achievement of children is good, has improved year on year and continues to improve.
- Due to good teaching, children make at least good and increasingly better progress, most often when receiving individual adult support and often from starting points which are below expected levels.
- Senior staff leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have taken well-considered action to successfully raise the quality of teaching and children's achievement.
- Governors have been strongly involved in bringing about these improvements since the previous inspection and play a very supportive role in continuing this into the future.
- Outstanding care and safeguarding of the children's welfare and strong promotion of the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development raise children's self-confidence and encourage them to feel safe.
- Provision to support individual children with speech and language needs, and to develop children's phonic understanding (knowledge of letters and sounds) is particularly strong.
- Children behave well; their full enjoyment of school and the staff's supportive partnership with parents and carers promotes their good attendance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- There are variations in the quality of teaching when children are taught in groups, which means that occasionally a few children are not taking part in learning or progressing as well as others.
- At times adults place too much emphasis on completing tasks rather than encouraging children to think and talk about their learning and the next steps they need to make, and this limits their progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector spent two days at the school and completed 15 observations of teaching and was accompanied by the head of teaching and learning during some of these observations.
- The inspector observed and talked with children at work and play.
- Meetings were held with with governors and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector held meetings with nursery school staff, including senior leaders, and with specialist support staff from the adjacent children's centre and federated primary school.
- The inspector took account of parents' and carers' responses evident in the school's own questionnaires in planning and undertaking the inspection. Not enough responses were evident on the online questionnaire (Parent View) to inform the inspection. The inspector also spoke informally with a number of parents and carers and took note of one letter from a parent or carer.
- The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents, including: the school's own data on children's progress, school improvement planning, leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Alex Baxter, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school, which caters for children aged between two and four years in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is broadly average in size in comparison with similar settings.
- This nursery, which has grown in size since the previous inspection, has places for 58 children, 29 in the morning and 29 in the afternoon.
- Most children attend on a part-time basis, either during the morning or afternoon sessions and some children stay for lunch.
- The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals is above average.
- The nursery is situated within an established children's centre, but is run as a setting in its own right. Since Easter 2011, the nursery school has been part of a federation with Wynstream Community Primary School to form 'The Children's Learning Partnership'.
- The headteacher of the federated community primary school also fulfils the role of executive headteacher of the nursery. A head of teaching and learning oversees the day-to-day running of the nursery.
- The vast majority of children are of White British heritage and have English as their first language. Very few children are from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of children with special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or by a statement of special educational needs is also above average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching and learning by:
 - making sure that the children's knowledge, skills and understanding developed during specific one-to-one adult supported sessions are developed with equal consistency within group activities
 - encouraging children to think and talk more precisely about what they are learning and to more frequently explore and express their ideas about the next steps they need to make to further their development across the areas of learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children achieve well from levels of skill on entry below those typical for their age, with most working at levels typical for their age by the time they leave the school. Children make excellent progress in developing their speaking and reading skills and in building the self-confidence needed to enjoy and continue successful learning.
- Children's success in developing their understanding of letters and sounds (phonics) stems from the school's highly effective approach to teaching these skills on a very regular and systematic basis.
- A strong and consistent emphasis on extending the children's speaking skills accounts for the children's equally impressive progress in this aspect. This also includes when needed for example, specialist speech therapy given on a one-to-one basis with an adult.
- Again, this excellent rate of progress covers all children across the range of abilities, including those with special educational needs, those for whom English is an additional language and those in receipt of free school meals. This is because children benefit from frequent individual adult assistance enabling any gaps in achievement to be narrowed quickly.
- This is particularly the case for example, with those children identified as having previously experienced development delay in acquiring language skills who receive specialist 'nursery plus' support and make accelerated progress.
- Children also make good progress in developing their mark making and early writing skills, happily recording their 'telephone conversations' during role play or 'writing' with coloured chalks in the outdoor area.
- All groups of children make good progress across other areas of learning, including physical development. Children also make good progress in mathematics where boys now generally achieve as well as girls representing a particular improvement since the previous inspection.
- Although generally improving well because of the stimulating range of activities provided, occasionally children's progress varies and slows. At times this occurs when a few children lose interest when taught in large groups or because their thinking skills and understanding of what they are learning are not emphasised enough when the opportunity arises.
- More children are now being admitted at the age of two years and this is helping staff to identify and tackle their needs earlier and to develop them longer, and this is leading to an increasing number of children achieving even better.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding. Much of this stems from the effective use of checks of children's progress by all staff to identify and tackle children's individual needs, which continues to drive improvement.
- As a result, areas identified for improvement by the previous inspection, including the teaching of children's speaking and reading skills, are now particular strengths.
- This is especially the case when children are grouped according to their ability and stages of development and are taught about the sounds that letters and words make. During these sessions children are focused carefully on the next steps they need to make to continue their learning and consequently many make excellent progress.
- On a few occasions, the quality of children's learning varies when they are not engaged fully while being taught in larger groups. This is because a few children lose interest in learning and lack the closer adult guidance needed to keep them focused on learning.
- Teaching is of the highest quality though, when children are given carefully planned support for their special educational needs. This includes for example, settling and raising the confidence of

the very youngest children newly arrived at school and when receiving specific 'nursery plus' support to successfully bridge gaps in their communication and language development.

- Teaching is also highly effective at times during the children's self-chosen learning activities, especially when staff respond to the children's enthusiasm by encouraging talk and creativity, for example, when children play with musical instruments or are questioned closely to extend their understanding of numbers by discussing how many segments of an apple they are eating during their snack time.
- Occasionally, children's thinking and ideas are not always extended and probed as effectively across the range of activities. This happens when adults place too much emphasis on children completing an activity rather than encouraging them to talk about what they have learned and occasionally, especially with some more-able children, about how they might improve, and this limits children's progress.
- Successful steps have already been taken to enrich children's learning by equipping each key worker, the adult responsible for a particular group of children, with the precise next steps their children need to extend their understanding, for example, in speech and language, but these have not yet been fully embedded as successfully across the full range of learning activities.
- All staff care for the children's welfare in an exemplary manner and are swift to praise children for their efforts or respond should any child show any form of distress. Staff are also diligent in communicating with parents and carers to ensure that time at school is an enjoyable experience. Joy in learning is a common feature, for example, when making pretend scones and creating 'music' using a imaginative range of instruments.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Children behave well, enjoy school and respond respectfully to the caring role models presented by all the adults who work in the school. This was the view expressed by parents and carers who spoke to the inspector and who particularly praised the close relationships between children and their key workers.
- Children make good progress in developing their independence, motivated successfully, for example, by the subtle use of the 'stirring drum' to signal 'tidy up time' and trigger the active involvement of all children in putting equipment away after use.
- Children make particularly good gains in developing their self-confidence, readily indicate their friendships and show consideration toward each other, buoyed by the high quality of the staff's guidance. This was evident for example, during cookery sessions when children happily and willingly took turns collecting ingredients to make their own apple crumble.
- Occasionally, a few children lose interest or become distracted in learning sessions, more usually when they are taught in larger groups. Mostly children are keen to learn, especially when receiving close individual attention from an adult, for example, when reading a favourite story book or on a listening walk when listening to sounds in the outdoor area.
- The children's very confident demeanour, school records and views of parents and carers all indicate that hurtful behaviour such as bullying is very rare and parents and carers interviewed were also adamant that children are looked after very well and kept very safe. One parent or carer showed the gratitude also expressed by other parents and carers by writing, 'I could not be more grateful to every member of the staff team for how they helped my son and supported myself.'
- The children's good attendance reflects the effective partnership between staff and parents and carers and indicates success in extending children's learning by frequent visits out into the local community.

The leadership and management are good

- The increased amount of good and better teaching seen reflects the determined and collaborative work of senior leaders across both schools in the federation in support of all staff, especially by the very skilled executive headteacher and the head of teaching and learning. This continues to help an increasing number of children, especially some of the very youngest children new to the school, to make more rapid progress.
- Following some staffing issues earlier this year senior leaders have restored a high level of staff morale and teamwork and promote a fully shared drive for continued improvement.
- Although now being tackled effectively, there are still a few inconsistencies in children's learning, with the strengthened focus on the next steps that children need to make not yet used with equal success across the breadth of learning activities.
- Leaders, including governors, have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. Regular checks of teaching and learning are completed efficiently, with all staff valuing and responding purposefully to the advice given. The staff's professional development and progression along pay scales are carefully considered and include targets set for their performance that are closely linked to improving teaching and children's learning.
- Checking the effectiveness of the school is a collaborative process involving all levels of leadership, including governors, often through focused learning walks, when a specific aspect is considered, for example, to improve the checking of children's progress and enhancing children's speech and phonic understanding.
- Early support for disabled children and those with special educational needs such as speech and language difficulties also reflects the school's unwavering commitment to treating children equally and eliminating discrimination. Very warm relationships between adults and children and between the children themselves and fun in practical learning activities, for example, tumbling safely around the 'soft-play' room, also strongly promote the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and enjoyment of school.
- All those working with the children, including governors, are fully checked. They follow agreed procedures and work closely with specialist agencies and parents and carers to securely safeguard children's welfare.
- Specifically 'bought in' support from the local authority has helped to support continued improvement. Currently, light touch assistance is sufficient for this good, improving school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides unwavering support to senior staff, ensuring that staff expertise available across the federation is used well to bring sustained improvement. Governors have developed their good understanding of the quality of teaching and the additional support provided for the children through regular take-up of available training and through frequent visits to the school. Through their various committees and further discussions with staff, governors make sure that considerations of teachers' performance reward good teaching, tackle underperformance and strengthen children's learning. Effective use of additional funds to lift children's speech and reading skills has narrowed gaps in achievement and reflects this determined drive to accelerate children's progress. The governing body's work in safeguarding children's welfare and making sure that specific funds for disabled children and those with special educational needs or whose circumstances may make them vulnerable meet their needs is also a strong and consistent feature.

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	113050
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	426724

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicky Peterkin
Headteacher	Tracy Hannon
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2011
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