

York Road Nursery School

York Road, Hitchin, SG5 1XA

Inspection dates 21–22 November 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 make exceptionally good progress in all areas of learning. Their experiences are very well planned and engaging. They are extremely well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- Outstanding teaching and exceptional care and support bring out the best in each child. Tracking of children's learning and progress is accurate, consistent and rigorous.
- All staff have a thorough and detailed knowledge of the needs of young children. Activities are exceptionally well organised and capture children's imaginations. The highly able team of adults inspire children to learn and think for themselves.
- Children love coming to school and they thoroughly enjoy a very wide range of exciting and stimulating activities. Independence is encouraged at all times and children are able to look after themselves and make decisions about what to do next.
- There is strong provision for disabled children and those who have special educational needs. They benefit from skilled additional support, so they succeed equally well.
- Children have strong and warm relationships with the adults and feel very safe. They behave extremely well because adults make their expectations consistently clear and provide strong role models.
- The headteacher is a very skilled leader who, with her senior managers and governors, is leading the school outstandingly well. Together, they have ensured both high level teaching and exceptional achievement have been maintained since the previous inspection.
- Governors have high regard for safety and the care and guidance provided is excellent. They play an important part in driving improvements that make sure each and every child makes as much progress as possible.
- The school's continuous drive for improvement includes ensuring the provision of opportunities to link letters and sounds becomes more consistent.
- Parents highly value the nursery. They work in close partnership with staff to support their children's learning and were unanimous in their commendation of the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed children learning in a wide range of activities, including those children had chosen for themselves, others led by adults, including whole school singing and small group work. Eleven learning sessions were observed; several of these jointly with the headteacher. The inspector spoke with children about their learning and also looked at lunchtime arrangements.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at progress and attainment data, the school's development plan, curriculum plans, documentation from the governing body, notes on the checks made on the quality of teaching, arrangements for safeguarding and the promotion of attendance, as well as some of the children's 'learning journeys'.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of staff with specific responsibilities and representatives of the governing body. The inspector spoke on the telephone to a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 54 responses to the online survey (Parent View) and the results of the school's consultation with parents. The inspector spoke to a number of parents who stayed to see their children settle into the nursery as well as holding a meeting with a group of parents and carers who contributed their views.
- Questionnaires completed by 26 members of the school staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Susan Thomas-Pounce, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The nursery is of average size and provides part-time places for children in morning and afternoon sessions.
- Children stay at the nursery for a year. Most start when they are just three years of age, and leave at the age of four.
- Most children join the school in the autumn term. They attend either in the morning or the afternoon, and have the opportunity to attend the optional breakfast or after school care.
- The large majority of children in the nursery are of White British heritage, with a minority of children from a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds. A very small number of children speak English as an additional language. This varies from year to year.
- The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs who are supported through Early Years Action is in line with that found in most schools. The proportion supported at Early Years Action Plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below that found in schools nationally.
- The school shares the site with a children's centre which is managed by the headteacher and governing body. The children's centre provides a wide range of services, such as a baby and toddler drop-in group, and advice, guidance and support relating to family, maternity and postnatal matters. These services, together with the Yorkies Day Care, are subject to a separate inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the development of children's reading skills by ensuring greater consistency in the opportunities provided for them to link letters to their sounds.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children enter school with levels of development that are broadly as expected for their age. They make rapid progress owing to high quality teaching and they are extremely well prepared for moving on to full-time education in Reception classes.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make very rapid gains in their development of skills. They benefit from personalised additional support and guidance that helps them to benefit from all the school has to offer. The school is totally committed to securing equal opportunities and removing any discrimination.
- Teachers make very good use of precise assessments of individual children's progress to help them build the skills needed for their future learning. Consequently, the few children who are learning to speak English as an additional language make outstanding progress in a wide range of areas of learning.
- More-able children do exceptionally well because staff challenge them to think for themselves and to learn through solving problems. This was seen when children were busy learning how to design jewellery, threading cereal onto pipe cleaners. Much discussion took place as they made their own decisions about whether they would make necklaces or bracelets, what colour combinations they would choose and what length they would be able to make with the given resources.
- There is a strong focus on developing children's speaking skills which leads to rapid gains in their early communication skills, including reading and writing. Staff take every opportunity to engage children in conversation and promote their vocabulary. Children take pleasure in sharing stories and books with the adults during small-group sessions. An example of this was seen when the story of 'Billy Goats Gruff' was retold with small toys and actions. The children listened carefully and thoroughly enjoyed joining in with familiar rhymes, excitedly repeating out loud the parts of stories they remembered.
- Children learn to recognise writing in the many attractive labels and displays, which are regularly referred to throughout the day. They identify and write their own names when they register at the start of the sessions and make very good progress in beginning to recognise the relationship between letters and sounds to form words.
- Children are encouraged to count, practise simple calculations and solve problems for themselves and their mathematical skills often grow quickly. Their play opportunities are cleverly designed to develop their understanding of relative size, volume and weight. A wide range of activities, including throwing dice and taking turns in games, matching numbers on cards, and sorting and counting shapes, gives an excellent grounding in using everyday mathematical language.
- Plenty of planned activities in the outdoor spaces effectively promote children's physical development. They enjoy climbing on apparatus and using scooters. They quickly learn to put on their coats to keep warm in the outside areas. Children cooperate very well together and they respond extremely positively to the daily routines. They gain the confidence to make decisions for themselves as they plan what they are going to do next in their chosen activities.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The outstanding quality of teaching has been maintained since the previous inspection. There is a wealth of experience among the long-serving staff team who make excellent use of accurate assessments of children's progress to set work which enables them all to do their best. In addition, they gather information from parents to reinforce these assessments and the children's achievement recorded in their 'learning journeys' is highly valued by children and parents alike.
- Teachers promote children's independence extremely well. They involve the children very well in thinking about their own learning and how they can improve it. Both indoors and out, a bright, lively and stimulating environment tempts children to learn and develop.
- There is an extraordinarily good balance between well-planned staff-led tasks and options for children to select play activities of their own. All the activities have very clear objectives for learning, meaning that the imaginatively organised learning opportunities have a very clear purpose. Teachers and other adults ask searching questions to explore children's understanding and to develop their thinking skills.
- All resources are stored in easily accessible containers indoors and out, with clear labels and photographs of the contents. Children are successfully encouraged to make decisions about what they want to use and to tidy up after themselves.
- The staff team work extremely hard to ensure that every child experiences the feeling of success. Children working inside with an adult were observed confidently using cutlery to chop a wide range of vegetables to make a healthy soup. The highlight of the day was when they proudly sat down together later to enjoy the soup they had made, with their teachers and friends.
- Home learning activities help children to develop their skills further. All children have opportunities to borrow books to read at home. During the inspection, there was great excitement as each child was given their own book bag filled with a wide range of books that matched the children's particular interest and experiences to date.
- Children regularly share books with the teacher, following repeated phrases and identifying some initial letters. However, chances are missed very occasionally to reinforce this by linking words and phrases to alphabet cards or words on displays.
- Relationships between staff and the children are consistently positive and encouraging so that children feel very safe and readily tackle new experiences. The high levels of staff expertise, and outstanding use of resources, fully engage all children and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils is outstanding

- The high quality of relationships means that children feel very secure. They are extremely clear about everyday routines. Children understand that staff expect them to do things for themselves and they thoroughly enjoy getting on with tasks independently. They participate enthusiastically in all the activities the adults plan for them and they have exceptionally positive attitudes to school.
- Staff promote an atmosphere of positive praise and encouragement and children's behaviour is managed consistently well. Children respond extremely well to the high standards of care and

support they receive. They behave outstandingly well in the inside and outdoor areas and very quickly understand the importance of turn-taking and sharing resources fairly.

- They make excellent progress in learning to play together and to help each other put on coats and dressing-up clothes. An example of this was seen as children helped each other to put their socks and shoes on after they had washed and dried their feet following the exciting time they enjoyed earlier making footprint pictures.
- Adults consistently explain to children how to keep safe. They help them to learn to walk sensibly in the inside spaces, and to wash their hands regularly. Children use knives carefully to cut fruit and vegetables. Visits from the police and fire services help children learn how to keep safe in the world around them.
- Teachers work closely with parents to help children settle in to school life quickly and effectively. They help children with social and emotional difficulties to manage and improve their own behaviour by providing a good sense of security and offering specialist support when it is needed. The nursery is a harmonious community and all are included effectively, including disabled children and those who have special educational needs.
- Children arrive punctually. The school very strongly emphasises the importance of attending regularly and on time to enable children to benefit from daily routines and valuable learning time.
- Parents rightly say that behaviour at the school is excellent. There was no evidence of any bullying seen during the inspection and none is evident in the school's records.
- All parents who responded to Parent View or who talked to the inspector say that their children are safe and happy in school, and that they are confident about how well their children are looked after.

The leadership and management is outstanding

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, supported extremely effectively by the two senior staff and other leaders in charge of the areas of learning has been highly successful in continuing to maintain and build on the previous outstanding practice. This is achieved by accurate and rigorous self-evaluation, linked to detailed planning. The headteacher, governors and other leaders are passionate about their school and the children in it. All work together with a clear vision, high expectations and commitment to continuous improvement.
- Staff have a great enthusiasm and commitment to the education and welfare of the children. Effective reviews of their performance are linked to high quality training. All staff are involved in evaluating the school's performance and identifying ways of sustaining high quality provision and seeking areas for improvement.
- Leaders have established thorough procedures for assessing and tracking children's progress to inform the planning process and maintain children's excellent progress. The nursery works closely with local primary schools to ensure that children are familiar with other school settings. This supports children to confidently make the next steps in their education.
- Children are provided with excellent opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through reflection, celebration and investigation. There are many more opportunities than at the time of the previous inspection for children to celebrate festivals from

other cultures and religions. Many exciting visits, visitors and activities enhance the curriculum and develop children's understanding of the world they live in.

- The school enjoys extremely strong relationships with parents of children in the nursery. As a result, parents are highly supportive of the school. They appreciate how the presence of the daycare provision enables their children to access wrap-around care, which helps them as a family. Parents are unanimous that they would recommend the school to others.
- The local authority has supported the school very well at a 'light touch' level. It recognises the quality of the school's work and uses it to share best practice with other early years providers. The expertise of the inspirational headteacher is highly regarded by all connected with the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors share the headteacher's drive and aspirations for the school and the children. They have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement because they visit regularly and actively seek out information. Governors ask searching questions of senior leaders and are actively involved in evaluating the work of the nursery. They are well informed about the progress children make and of how well prepared they are to move on to the Reception classes in local schools. Governors see that targets to improve the performance of staff are reviewed carefully and that teachers' pay is linked to how well children are doing. Governors have a range of skills and access training whenever possible to benefit the work of the nursery. They ensure that financial resources are efficiently managed and know how this impacts on children's achievement. The governing body fulfils its duties very well, ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are rigorously enforced so that children are safe and protected.

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	117071
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	425188

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	117
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Routh
Headteacher	Helen Griffiths
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2010
Telephone number	01462 459127
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