

Acacia Nursery

Cecil Road, Leytonstone, London E11 3HF

Inspection dates 1–2 March 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Inadequate |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- All aspects of the nursery’s provision have improved rapidly since the last inspection. Secure foundations have been laid to ensure that improvements are sustainable in the future.
- Children make good progress, especially in speaking and listening, where their starting points are lower. Older children are well prepared for starting reception class at school.
- Outcomes are especially strong in physical development because so many activities help children to practise these vital skills.
- Children’s personal, social and emotional development are promoted strongly. Children enjoy excellent relationships with adults.
- Adults provide a high standard of care and welfare for children throughout the day. Safeguarding systems and procedures are well known, understood and implemented consistently.
- The executive headteacher wants only the best for all the children. She is supported exceptionally well by the head of school and other leaders.
- Governors provide strong support and challenge to the school’s leaders. They have set out a clear vision for the nursery’s future as part of the federation.
- The nursery is vibrant, colourful and stimulating. Staff plan interesting and exciting activities that ensure that children are encouraged to explore the environment and to solve problems for themselves.
- Parents’ confidence in the nursery is growing, as demonstrated by the increase in the number of children attending. Leaders and staff provide a range of events and courses to encourage parents and community to visit the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of observations and assessments of children’s day-to-day learning is inconsistent.
- Not all staff make effective use of assessment to plan future activities that will speed up children’s progress across all areas of learning.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality and consistency of adults' assessment of children's learning to ensure that:
 - observations and records, both in self-chosen activities and in focused sessions, are clear about what children have learned and how their learning can be developed further
 - staff use their evaluations of children's learning to sharpen planning so that activities accelerate children's progress across all areas of learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The executive headteacher is hugely ambitious for the children. Her strong belief that disadvantage is not a barrier to achievement underpins her relentless drive for improvement. She sets high expectations of staff and children alike. It is this drive and determination that has been behind the rapid progress from special measures.
- The substantive head of school is growing into his leadership role and supporting other staff to develop their leadership roles. His clear steer for staff to improve their practice is often demonstrated through his expert model of interaction with the children. His analysis of teaching quality is accurate and thoughtful. Regular monitoring of the quality of provision gives staff helpful feedback on the quality of their teaching and interaction with children. Training, coaching and mentoring for staff has been the cornerstone of the improvement to teaching since the last inspection. Through shadowing and observing each other, staff are developing their practice and are increasingly reflective about what works for the children and what does not. More importantly, they are increasingly able to analyse for themselves why activities have, or have not, worked as expected. Much has been done to improve assessment practice, although some staff record what has been done rather than what children have learned.
- Children's outcomes are monitored carefully. Detailed analysis of children's progress over time and the levels at which they work in each area means that any gaps in learning for individuals or groups of children are identified and rectified quickly. Interventions, including those for specific children who attract pupil premium funding, are arranged accordingly. In a similar way, where information suggests that outcomes in an area of learning are weaker across the nursery, staff change the focus of the activities provided. For example, there is a current focus on activities that promote learning in mathematical development, notably shape, space and measures. This is because analysis of children's outcomes at the end of the autumn term showed this area to be weaker.
- Additional funding from the pupil premium grant is targeted effectively to provide some general support, such as a storyteller, and specific programmes of support for individuals and groups of children. Much support is focused on developing children's speaking, listening and understanding skills.
- The curriculum is broad and stimulating. Covering all areas of learning, there is coherence in the way activities are devised to support a number of key skills and knowledge at the same time. Taught through a range of topics that engage children's interests, the curriculum encourages children to explore their world and to begin to understand their place in it. The curriculum provides a firm foundation for future learning through the strong focus on children's personal, social and emotional development together with communication and language development and physical development. Older children are introduced in a systematic way to the key literacy and mathematical skills which will help them make the transition into Reception classes in local schools.
- A more recent, but significant, development, is the work that leaders are doing to strengthen partnerships with parents and the wider community. During the inspection, for example, approximately 60 mothers came to celebrate Mother's Day and stayed to make a card with their child. Baby massage and toddler groups operate at the school, as well as English classes for adults. All signal the leaders' message to the community that the doors of Acacia are open to them.
- Parents who have known the school for some time recognise the significant changes and improvements to the provision. Several noted the greater focus on what the children are learning and the efficient way the nursery runs. They welcome the regular chance to meet their child's key person to discuss their child's progress and enjoy looking through the topic books that record their child's learning over time.
- The local authority has provided considerable support that has been much appreciated by leaders and staff. Meetings to challenge leaders and governors about the school's progress, held every six weeks, have kept everyone on track. Funding to improve the building and upgrade resources has made a huge contribution to improving the environment for children's learning.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Strong governance has contributed significantly to the school's rapid improvement. The combination of drive, ambition and high expectations with expertise and experience of supporting schools in a similar situation has ensured that the federation's governors have kept their eye on the target. They have provided clear vision and strategic direction for the future of the nursery as part of the federation. Their tenacity in securing funding has helped to ensure financial viability. The rising roll is now helping to ensure financial security for the future.

- Governors are rigorous in questioning and challenging the school’s leaders. They know the school well. Regular visits focus on key actions from the improvement plan and governors check out for themselves the veracity of what leaders are telling them.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are vigilant about supervising children during activities and there are robust systems to assess the risks of the different activities on offer. Systems to check the health and safety of staff and children include meticulous monitoring of incidents, accidents and children’s behaviour. Leaders, including governors, have made sure that staff are aware of their duty to keep children safe from the risks of possible harm from radicalisation and extremism. Staff have received regular training on safeguarding to help them feel confident in understanding their roles and responsibilities. Systems for staff to identify and report any concerns about the children are thorough. The school has robust procedures to track and follow up children’s absences.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- A significant strength of the nursery is the quality of the relationships between adults and children, especially between the child and their key person. Adults are sensitive in the way they support children when they are upset. They are gentle but firm as they lead and coax the youngest children who are still learning how to behave in the nursery. The breakfast club provides children with a healthy snack, and the supportive environment with its purposeful activities promotes a calm start to the day.
- The physical environment is bright, vibrant and stimulating. Adults change resources regularly to ensure that there is always something fresh and new for children to explore while keeping familiar favourites available too. At times, adults deliberately limit resources, such as the tricycles, to encourage sharing and to discourage those children, in this case boys, who might choose to do little else if they could.
- Structures and routines are well established, so children learn about the pattern of the day and begin to conform to expectations. As numbers of younger children grow, movement into group activities is not always calm to provide a positive end to the session. Staff are reflecting on how to maximise these learning times without making too many changes to established routines.
- Adults plan activities that are well thought through to provide a range of skills and opportunities. Activities are especially successful in promoting knowledge and skills from several areas of learning at once. For example, at the water play children were learning that no matter how hard they tried they could not push the toy ducks under the water and keep them there because they bobbed back up to the surface. They were also learning to count as the adult challenged them by adding and hiding some ducks.
- Around the nursery many skilful interactions prompt children to think for themselves, solve problems or learn new physical skills such as cutting fruit with a knife or rolling dough into a ball. The level of interaction and engagement is especially high in the outdoor area as adults support children to challenge themselves physically. As adults play alongside the children they are adept at introducing new ideas or new words. They respond intuitively to the children as they ask questions to establish what the children understand about what they are doing. Adults frequently make a note of this learning in order to build on it at a later stage.
- Children’s topic books show the wide range of activities they experience across the seven areas of learning. Observations and assessments of children’s learning are frequent. Many are precise and detailed, but the quality is uneven overall: some are descriptive about what the children are doing and not clear about what the children are learning in order to plan what they should learn next.
- The decision to teach some focused sessions to groups of older children has been successful in presenting children with the methods and approaches they are likely to encounter in school. Adults have high expectations for what children will learn at these times but do not adapt the planned activity as the session progresses to cater for the different responses from the children. Leaders expect adults to evaluate the children’s learning in these sessions so that they can plan precisely for the next session but the regularity and quality of such evaluation is not consistent.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school’s work to promote pupils’ personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Children are happy to arrive at school. They follow the established routines such as finding their name

and registering their presence. Few have trouble leaving their parent and most set off eagerly to explore the activities on offer. Some forget to say goodbye to their parents in their eagerness.

- The majority, especially older children, are clear about their choice of activity and stick at the task for some time, demonstrating a level of concentration beyond what might be expected for their age. They select resources for themselves. Many persevere and persist in their chosen task. For example, a boy tapping wooden shapes onto a board kept trying, even though the drawing pin kept popping out of the shape. A few younger children find it hard to make a choice for themselves and are guided by staff to an activity.
- Across the nursery children are developing strong relationships with others. They play together, harmoniously for the most part, sharing resources and taking turns. Older children frequently support younger ones through, for example, taking them by the hand, leading them to an activity and showing them what to do.
- The youngest are developing secure emotional attachments to their key person. The self-confidence of older children is developing strongly. They are confident to approach and talk with unfamiliar visitors, engaging them in their imaginative play.
- Care routines are well established, recorded and communicated to parents. Parents are pleased with the way that their children settle in nursery and the way that their children are looked after.
- Health and safety are paramount. Routines, policies and procedures are followed consistently. Children learn about healthy snacks of fruit, which they cut for themselves. They are taught to use tools safely. The outdoor area with its range of physical challenges supports children to take risks in a safe environment.
- Adults help children to keep themselves safe in the nursery through the sensitive way they explain their expectations and help children to express their feelings and communicate their needs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of children is outstanding.
- The oldest children who have been at the setting the longest behave exceptionally well. Staff have worked hard to secure improvements in behaviour since the last inspection, with a range of strategies and support. Records show that the number of incidents has declined dramatically and the improvement in the behaviour of some individuals is remarkable.
- The school is growing quickly, with a recent influx of two-year-olds which has shifted the balance and the dynamic in the setting. The youngest two-year-olds who are new to the setting are supported sensitively to meet staff's expectations.
- In focused group times older children are attentive and keen to participate. They sit well, listen and respond positively to adults' directions and requests, waiting patiently for resources to be passed around.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- The school's information shows that children are making good progress overall. Children's progress is stronger in some areas of learning than others. Staff have made adjustments to planning for activities.
- Where individuals and groups of children had lower starting points, they are making accelerated progress and catching up. Disadvantaged children are catching up well, as are those who may need support with aspects of their learning. Children with higher starting points are making typical progress at least and often good progress. Girls generally perform better than boys, but there are signs that boys are catching up.
- When children start at nursery, their skills in speaking, listening and understanding are typically weaker than might be expected for their age. Staff give good attention to these aspects of communication and many children benefit from speech and language therapy. Children that speak English as an additional language are gaining confidence to communicate in English as they join in repeated phrases and actions from familiar stories during group times.
- Children's knowledge of mathematics was identified as a weaker area and staff are tackling it through changing the emphasis in the curriculum and through focused sessions with specific teaching. Older children are learning to count objects accurately and identify or write the correct numeral, but they are less confident at saying which number comes before or after.
- Older children are learning skills that will help them adjust to Reception classes when they leave at the end of the academic year. For example, some of the most-able children use their knowledge of letter

sounds to build three letter words that rhyme – such as cat, hat, rat – and write the words correctly. The youngest children are learning to settle into the nursery’s routines and to follow the expectations of staff. They play alongside older children, watching them and then copying what they do.

- Across the nursery, provision for children’s physical development is strong. Outcomes reflect this focus; most children, regardless of gender, background or language, manipulate and handle a variety of small objects, and have good control of tools such as knives, scissors, hammers and tweezers. Body strength and large muscle control develops well, with numerous opportunities to climb, balance, swing and roll down the slope in the outdoor area.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 103030 |
| Local authority | Waltham Forest |
| Inspection number | 10012884 |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Nursery |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 2-4 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 107 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Graham Moss |
| Executive Headteacher | Maureen Okoye |
| Telephone number | 020 8558 4444 |
| Website | www.acacianursery.co.uk |
| Email address | maureenokoye@davieslane.waltham.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 29–30 January 2015 |

Information about this school

- Acacia Nursery School is similar in size to other nursery schools nationally. It has places for up to 60 children in the morning and 60 in the afternoon for children aged three years and over. It also has 24 part-time places for children aged two and over. The school offers wraparound care for a small number of children from 8am till 6pm.
- Currently 62 three-year-olds attend part time and 10 attend full time. Forty-five two-year-olds attend part time, with numbers rising almost daily.
- Nineteen children have been identified as needing some additional support to meet their learning needs. The majority have speech, language and communication needs.
- The school receives funding from the pupil premium grant for 30 children aged three and over.
- A large proportion of children, around three quarters, do not speak English as their first language. Somali, Bengali and Portuguese are the main languages of two-year-olds, with Persian, Farsi and Urdu the main languages of three-year-olds.
- When the school was inspected in January 2015 it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, the school was inspected on two occasions. At the previous monitoring inspection leaders and managers were judged to be taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.
- Since the previous inspection, three staff have left and been replaced. The number of children attending the nursery started to fall. From February 2015, the local authority arranged for senior staff from a local federation to provide leadership. The interim head of school, who joined the nursery at that time, took up the post permanently from January 2016.
- In June 2015, the governing body was disbanded and the nursery became part of the Davies Lane and Selwyn School Federation. The executive headteacher leads all three schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on a number of occasions, at different times of the day and for varying lengths of time. This included two focused teaching sessions for small groups of children. All observations were carried out jointly with the executive headteacher and/or the head of school.
- The inspector held a number of meetings with senior and middle leaders and other staff. She met members of the governing body and had a discussion with the local authority's consultant, who has been supporting the school.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school, including information linked to: attendance, behaviour, teaching and learning, supervision and performance management, development plans, minutes of governing body meetings and a number of documents relating to safeguarding. She looked at the school's information on children's learning and progress and checked a sample of children's topic books.
- Not enough parents had completed Ofsted's online survey – Parent View – to provide an overview of parents' views. The inspector spoke with several parents as they collected their child or settled their child at the start of day. She spoke with approximately 25 of the mothers who attended the Mother's Day breakfast or lunch.

Inspection team

Jane Wotherspoon, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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