

Abercromby Nursery School

Falkner Street, Liverpool, Merseyside L8 7QA

Inspection dates 12–13 July 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a school that places a high value on the individual language and culture of each child, family and member of staff. Everybody is considered important.
- Children at the school benefit considerably from special experiences such as gardening and 'forest school' activities. They develop a love of being outdoors, growing fruit and vegetables and exploring nature.
- Through good teaching, both indoors and outdoors, children quickly and successfully make progress with their learning. Abercromby gives children a confident, happy start to their education.
- Children's behaviour is excellent. They learn to value deeply their school garden, their families and their friends. They love going to school.
- The headteacher leads the school with passion and commitment. The headteacher and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and where further improvement is required.
- The governing body gives the school's leaders a good level of support and challenge.
- Mathematics teaching is strong because leaders carefully develop the expertise of staff. Children enjoy activities and are becoming confident mathematicians.
- A strong focus by staff on promoting communication and language is making sure all children, including those who speak English as an additional language, get the skilful teaching they need.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The accuracy of new assessments of children is not consistent across staff.
- Some school targets for improving teaching are not precise enough. Leaders and other staff cannot be sure that desired improvements in children's learning are being achieved.
- Some arrangements to review children's progress – particularly of the most able children – are too complex and time consuming. Leaders do not have access to the detailed information they need.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the arrangements for moderating assessment judgements so that information is consistently accurate.
- Set more precise targets for improving teaching that focus upon the measurable impact of teaching upon children's progress.
- Make sure information about children's progress includes timely, clear analysis of the progress made by groups of children, including the most able children, in each area of learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher leads the school with passion and has created a very positive culture where all children, families and staff are valued and feel involved with one another. The deployment of nursery nurses in lessons and the roles of middle leaders to support colleagues – much improved since the previous inspection – now bring strength to the work of the school. Staff feel their skills are used profitably. Leaders tailor training and other professional development carefully to the needs of individual staff.
- The headteacher makes sure the school works closely with other schools and early years settings locally. These links are enhancing the knowledge and skills of Abercromby staff while sharing their successes, such as in mathematics teaching, more widely. Engagement with the local authority is strong and brings much-valued, regular external insight to the quality of teaching and learning at the school. The headteacher has made sure staff are confident in discussing and debating the school's improvement with one another. They are looking forward to working with the new headteacher next term to help the school move further forward.
- Carefully planned work with children on values is helping them to be prepared fully for life in modern Britain. The school's respect for children's heritage, food and language models respect well. Children care deeply about Abercromby Nursery. For example, as one child said, 'Remember if you see something on the ground – just pick it up'. Discussions with children about the difference between right and wrong mean children are unafraid to say what is right.
- The school curriculum at Abercromby is designed thoughtfully, with a keen emphasis on gardening, 'forest' activities, communication and language, personal development and mathematics. Full use is made of the expertise and resources of the school's governors and parents to enhance the opportunities offered to children. Much attention has been given to broadening children's experiences, with memorable recent visits to an art gallery, a local theatre and to take a trip on a ferry across the River Mersey. These activities are helping to improve children's communication and language skills along with their knowledge of their city.
- Additional funding received by the school is spent sensibly. For example, pupil premium funding spent on bilingual storybooks for a home-loan scheme means that parents now find it easier to read stories to their children at home. This initiative complements the successful work of staff to use bilingual books regularly within classrooms.
- The school presents much information very clearly for parents in wall displays and information leaflets around the school. Parents say they feel well assisted in how to support their children at home.
- Internal reviews of the school are regular and detailed. This work has given the headteacher clear information from which to set the right priorities for the school as it moves forward. Planning for improvement is much better than at the time of the previous inspection. Nevertheless, the headteacher acknowledges that some targets set for staff do not identify clearly how the school will measure the precise impact of the improved practice on children's learning. This shortcoming makes it difficult for the school to be sure that all teaching is as successful as it can be.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors know the school in detail. They are passionate in their commitment to Abercromby Nursery. The governing body has a clear understanding of the key strengths and priorities for improving the school. Governors discuss and debate improvement regularly, for example by inviting staff to present reports to meetings of the governing body. Governors engage closely with the local authority for the good of the school. Together they set and review clear targets for the headteacher. The governing body makes sure the school has clear arrangements for reviewing the work of teachers and nursery nurses.
 - Governors do all they can to bring extra resources and help to the school. They advocate assertively for the school. For example, the governing body is liaising successfully with the city council and builders to ensure minimal impact from a building project adjacent to the school site. At school events, such as the end-of-year graduation of children, governors are very visible. During the inspection, they helped set up and welcome the families arriving, along with the appearance of a seven-foot tall dinosaur.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has adopted a policy set out by the local authority to make sure practice and procedures are clear and up to date. Staff know what to do if they have concerns about a child or adult. They understand their responsibilities within the 'Prevent' strategy.

Messages about safeguarding are prominent around the school and make clear the responsibilities of all staff plus the procedures to follow. Messages about internet safety are shared with parents regularly and taught to children through stories. Visitors to the school are checked thoroughly and given clear safeguarding information to read on arrival. The school premises are kept safe. Leaders are vigilant about keeping a check on any possible concerns about children or families. Staff have positive links with other professionals. Records are kept confidential and secure. Staff, leaders and governors are properly trained in safeguarding. Arrangements to check the suitability of new and existing employees meet requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Over the past year, leaders have evaluated the quality of teaching in mathematics in detail and focused sharply on what needs to be improved. As a result, teachers and nursery nurses are now highly skilled and confident in teaching mathematics. For example, activities to promote children's understanding of number are extensive and mathematical mark-making is now a successful part of teaching. Ongoing review has meant the staff are now focusing strongly on providing even more teaching of shape, space and measures.
- Staff use questions carefully and successfully to prompt children to think, talk and solve problems. For example, during the inspection a nursery nurse challenged children expertly to predict and review how far a toy car travelled through a tube and along a number line. Her good preparation meant she then reinforced discussions with meaningful opportunities for children to record their findings on a tally chart. In another example, a teacher read the story of 'The three billy goats gruff' to a class. By adding in questions to the children such as 'How did you know that?' she quickly prompted them to look even more closely at illustrations. Questions involving words such as 'why?' and 'if' prompted children to think deeply.
- A key strength of the school is the use of the outdoors for teaching. Strong teaching has been achieved through staff undertaking extensive training to use the 'forest' area. The school's 'forest school' activities are immensely popular with children. Parents specifically refer to choosing the school for this aspect of the curriculum. Activities were described by one parent as 'Playing, doing sports, having fires and toasting marshmallows'. 'Forest school' activities are well planned by staff and include a carefully considered range of activities each week. It is not uncommon for an Abercromby child to 'love being outdoors in all weather' said one parent.
- The high-quality school garden is used very successfully to teach children to care for fruit and vegetables and other plants. Passionate voluntary work by a school governor to teach children is having a significant and positive impact upon children's skills and knowledge. Children are taught to appreciate the ethics of caring for food that is grown and not being wasteful. As one parent described it, 'children learn to respect food'. Throughout the year children flourish through their learning in the garden. Activities include, for example, cutting and cooking rhubarb from the garden for a crumble to be eaten in school, or making buckwheat pancakes outdoors on a winter's day.
- Teaching is tailored increasingly well to the needs of different groups of children. For example, some teaching of mathematics, phonics and drumming is grouped by ability. School information shows this mix of approaches is improving children's learning rapidly. Children know they are learning to their benefit. As one child said, 'Abercromby is the best. It teaches me everything and I can go to primary school now. I can do skipping, running, scissors, singing, jumping, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten – numbers.'
- Staff tailor their language and expectations carefully to the needs of most able children. This helps these children to grow rapidly in their skills and achieve very well. Their high levels of confidence and language skills were reflected by the comment of one child who said of school, 'I like the dinosaurs, the trucks and the cars. I love the drumming ... and the best thing I like is the children.'
- Much work by staff is first-rate and makes a clear and positive difference to children's learning. Recent steps to check the accuracy of assessment judgements through moderation with other local schools are helping staff to maintain high expectations of what children can achieve. Nonetheless, leaders are aware of some variation in the quality of new assessments of children made by staff.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote children's personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Children often start Nursery with low personal, social and emotional development, and staff make it a daily priority to encourage children in their efforts. Much attention is given through time with individual children to enhance how children feel about themselves and their lives, as well as activities in groups. Consequently, children develop high levels of self-confidence and self-awareness. One parent recounts how she was anxious about a matter at home and her child told her that doing some yoga would help. The child explained that she had learned yoga as a relaxation technique at Nursery.
- Children are taught to take appropriate risks such as climbing to the tree house or balancing on climbing apparatus. Staff are supportive and watchful. Accidents are minor and few, fully recorded and shared properly with parents.
- Children have an excellent understanding about keeping themselves safe. For example, they know how to use a wide range of gardening tools sensibly because teaching them this important knowledge is thoroughly considered and organised by adults. Children know how to change seats safely while sitting at the Nursery campfire.
- To ensure the safety of children and adults, the school has trained all staff in paediatric first aid and in how to use a defibrillator when a person is suffering cardiac arrest. All parents who made their views known during the inspection said they feel their children are safe at school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of children is outstanding. Children listen fully to adults and respond very positively to boundaries they are given. A typical comment from a parent about the approach taken by staff was, 'You never hear a raised voice here'. Children at Abercromby have a highly developed awareness of how to behave. Staff acknowledge children's behaviour positively, for example displaying a statement alongside a picture of a specific child saying, 'came to nursery with a smile' or 'sat and listened to story'.
- Abercromby Nursery School is an oasis of calm. Much thought has been given by staff, governors and leaders to the quality of the entrance areas, furnishings, lighting and background music. This makes the premises immediately pleasant for children and families when arriving at school each day. The well-organised, well-tended garden adds to the appeal of the premises. Children want to come to school. They respect their school and staff. Children say the school is 'happy', they 'have fun outside' and 'we all play together and share – we don't fight'.
- While attendance is not compulsory before statutory school age, attendance is currently good and improving. The school tracks every absence carefully and has identified that absences are linked mostly to family holidays and illness of the child or parent. Information is shared regularly with parents to promote children's high attendance as important for success at primary school.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Staff make good use of information from parents and the school's assessments to plan support for individuals and groups of children. This means the most able children are identified and supported quickly. As a consequence, these children are developing more advanced mathematics and language skills. The same careful approach to assessment means children who need extra help to catch up with others are also supported quickly by staff. As a result, the gaps between their achievements and those of their peers are narrowing.
- Children arrive at Abercromby Nursery at age three with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. In particular, their abilities to understand language, communicate and relate to others are not highly developed. As a result, staff make sure children have many opportunities to develop their personal, social and emotional skills. Children leave school as keen, self-assured learners, ready to tackle the next stage of their education with confidence.
- Staff are alert to the needs of the small number of disadvantaged children in the school. These children are helped to move on quickly in their ability to use language, for example, and show their ideas in exciting roles such as pretending to be superheroes.
- Children's understanding of their immediate environment is prospering because staff and governors make excellent use of the school garden for teaching. Children develop high levels of respect for the environment, animals and one another. Leaders have already identified that children's understanding of

the wider world is not as strong. Nevertheless, successful steps have been taken this year to broaden children's insights into the world beyond school.

- Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. They make small but individually significant steps forward in their learning while at the school. This is because staff always work closely with parents and make links with other professionals where extra support is required.
- Children develop a love of books and are keen to learn new sounds and words. Staff give much attention to these aspects of learning through stories, rhymes and conversation every day. Parents are thrilled with their children's increased passion for stories. Children's writing skills grow rapidly while at the school because teaching helps them learn to make marks and write their names confidently.
- Parents are highly satisfied with their children's progress at school. They told the inspector the headteacher, teachers and nursery nurses are successful at supporting the individual needs of children and their families. They indicated that this support has improved children's home lives as well as their skills and their ability to learn. Typical comments from parents include, 'children at Abercromby develop rapidly' and, 'all of my child's needs are met – educational, physical and emotional'.
- Two thirds of children in the school are at the early stages of learning English. A large number of children speak Arabic and school leaders have identified that children are also at an early stage of developing in their first language. This means these children start school less skilled and confident in their communication and language. Although they make slower progress than other children, good teaching is helping bilingual children to develop the grasp of English they need for continuing their learning at primary school.
- Teaching and children's achievement in mathematics has become a notable strength of the school this past year. Children are benefiting greatly from a wide range of daily mathematics activities, both indoors and outdoors. They have developed confidence and enthusiasm for mathematics and are increasingly recognising mathematics in their play, stories and gardening activities. Many children are able to compare height and length and solve simple mathematical problems. Those children who speak English as an additional language are increasingly able to recognise and name numerals in more than one language. The most able children at the school compare complex sets of objects or compare the faces of dice accurately.
- Leaders, staff and the governing body use information with increasing precision to review the progress of different groups of children in the school. For example, reviews of the school show that children attending for five terms before moving to primary school make faster progress than those attending for three terms. Staff and leaders are debating frequently within the school and with other schools how to identify when children are making the very best progress. Nevertheless, the school's arrangements to review the progress of different groups of children and different areas of learning are too complex. This means it is not always easy for leaders to find out about the progress made by a group of children across each area of learning. In particular, it is difficult for leaders to compare the progress of the most able children with the progress made by other children.

School details

Unique reference number	104507
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10002679

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.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue King
Headteacher	Sara Robb
Telephone number	0151 709 5114
Website	www.abercrombynurseryschool.co.uk
Email address	abercromby-ao@abercromby.liverpool.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 March 2013

Information about this school

- Abercromby is an average-sized Nursery school with a long-established and extensively planted garden.
- The Nursery serves a diverse local community. Twelve different languages are spoken by children at the school and 63% of the children speak English as an additional language. The most frequently spoken languages are Arabic and English.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about governance and about pupil premium on its website.
- A small number of children in the school are eligible for pupil premium funding. This funding is provided to support children who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.
- Children attend the school for between three and five terms depending on their date of birth and admission date. Each child has a key person who is either a teacher or a nursery nurse from the staff team.
- The school coordinates networking, support and training for a wide range of local schools and early years settings.
- A new headteacher has been appointed to start at the school from September 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed a range of teaching indoors and outdoors. Almost all observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- On the second day of the inspection, children did not attend normal lessons. They attended an end-of-year graduation event with their families and HMI observed some of this special celebration.
- During both days HMI spoke with children. He also considered the views of 13 children collected by staff on the first day.
- HMI spoke with parents on both days of the inspection and reviewed 15 written comments given to the school for his attention. There were no parent responses available through the online Ofsted questionnaire Parent View.
- HMI considered displays of children's work and information provided by the school for parents in the foyer, corridor and classrooms. He considered examples of children's 'learning journeys' and records of their progress with staff and leaders. He reviewed a number of floor books to take account of the quality of teaching over time and the progress children make.
- HMI considered a range of information including: reviews of how well the school is doing; plans for the future; documents about the care and protection of children and the school's own reviews of the quality of teaching.
- HMI considered the written views of six staff who responded to an Ofsted survey and spoke with four nursery nurses and three teachers.
- HMI met with five members of the governing body, two representatives of Liverpool local authority and the future headteacher of the school.

Inspection team

Tim Vaughan, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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