

McMillan Nursery School

Railway Street, Nelson, Lancashire BB9 9AG

Inspection dates

11–12 July 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have been unable to sustain the outstanding quality of provision for children since the last inspection. As a result, children's progress has declined and is now uneven across the areas of learning.
- Governors are not sufficiently involved in evaluating the school's effectiveness. They have relied too heavily on the information that they receive from leaders. This has prevented them from holding leaders sufficiently to account for their work to improve the school.
- Some activities lack enough challenge to enable children, especially boys and the most able, to learn well.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that staff have strong subject knowledge, especially in phonics, writing and mathematics. This has had a negative impact on teaching and on the progress that some children, especially the most able, make in these important aspects of learning.
- Teaching does not provide enough opportunities for children to practise their speaking skills. This limits the time for teachers to assess children's language development and for children to listen to each other's views.
- Too many children miss important learning because they are persistently absent from school.

The school has the following strengths

- The newly appointed acting headteacher has quickly ensured that governors have an accurate view of the school. Plans for improvement are now focused on the right priorities and actions to move the school forward. The quality of the school is improving.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum covers all areas of learning. Children benefit from a well-organised learning environment indoors and outdoors.
- Leaders and staff make sure that children develop a love of stories. Children enjoy the rewards they receive from staff when they have read books at home with their parents and carers.
- Leaders' effective use of the pupil premium ensures that disadvantaged children develop strong social skills.
- Leaders and governors have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that governors are fully involved in evaluating the school’s strengths and weaknesses, so they hold leaders more effectively to account for the improvement of the school
 - working better with families to reduce the proportion of children who are persistently absent, so that all children attend school when they should
 - supporting staff to improve their subject knowledge and their understanding of the teaching of phonics, writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and children’s progress by ensuring that:
 - all staff provide children, especially boys and the most able children, with activities that challenge them sufficiently in their writing, phonics and mathematics
 - staff enable children to discuss their ideas and to listen closely to the ideas of others
 - teachers organise activities effectively, so that all children can participate fully and staff can check more closely on children’s understanding and progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- A series of challenges relating to staffing in the past 18 months have taken their toll on the quality of education at McMillan Nursery School. These challenges have taken governors' and leaders' attention away from the school's improvement priorities, especially in relation to children's learning. Governors' and leaders' responses to the recommendations from the short inspection in September 2018 have been delayed further by a recent period of turbulence in leadership. This has negatively affected the quality of leadership, teaching and children's progress. As a result, the school is no longer outstanding and requires improvement.
- Recently, governors and the local authority have arranged for a well-respected and highly experienced headteacher of another outstanding nursery school to become the acting headteacher at McMillan Nursery School. This arrangement is already beginning to have a positive impact on improvements at the school. The quality of education is beginning to improve.
- The new acting headteacher has quickly and accurately evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses. She has ensured that this evaluation draws on a range of information, including the views of leaders, staff and parents. Leaders' plans to improve the school are now rightly and sharply focused on improving children's outcomes.
- Following the recommendations of the short inspection in September 2018, leaders made improvements to the way that they record information about children's progress and development. However, governors' views of some children's progress, particularly that of the most able children, have been overly optimistic. The new acting headteacher has ensured that governors now have more accurate information about all children's progress, and where teaching and learning needs to improve.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff have undertaken enough training. As a result, teachers do not have the strong, up-to-date subject knowledge that they need to plan effectively for children's early learning in writing, mathematics and especially in phonics. However, leaders' focus on improving children's reading has been effective in developing children's knowledge and love of stories.
- Middle leaders are starting to play a greater role in monitoring the quality of teaching. They provide useful feedback to staff to help them to improve their work. For example, they have supported staff to improve the quality of the vocabulary that they model to children.
- The curriculum covers all areas of learning but does not fully develop children's understanding of literacy and mathematics. Leaders provide a programme of activities that enables children to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. Children develop an understanding of British values, for example by respecting the simple rules that staff have established about when to tidy up. Children understand that their views matter, for instance in helping staff select which story to share with the class.
- Leaders spend the early years pupil premium funding effectively. The extra support that they provide, including bilingual support where appropriate, ensures that this

group of children make strong progress and develop good social skills.

- Leaders ensure that funding to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is used effectively. These children make strong progress from their individual starting points. Leaders have established very positive relationships with parents and with professionals alike to ensure that children with SEND receive the support that they need.

Governance of the school

- Governors are not sufficiently involved in the process of evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have been too reliant on the information provided to them by school leaders. They have not recognised that leaders' judgements on children's progress have been overgenerous. This means that governors have not held leaders sufficiently to account for the declining quality of teaching and learning.
- Governors have worked successfully, in partnership with the local authority, to stabilise the turbulence in staffing and more recently in leadership. Records of their work indicate that they have made difficult but important decisions about how the school uses its resources to sustain the work of the school in the future.
- Governors are highly committed to the life and service of the school, which is at the heart of the community. They are proud of the school's strong reputation with local families. Newly recruited governors are strengthening the range of skills in the governing body, and governors are determined to work even better with the local authority to improve the quality of governance at the school.
- Governors are beginning to ask more searching questions of leaders about children's learning, including that of disadvantaged children. However, it is too early to see how these questions are helping to drive forward the school's improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders keep careful records of the checks that they carry out to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children. These records have been improved further by the new acting headteacher, and this contributes to the strong culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Governors and leaders ensure that staff are appropriately trained to recognise the signs of abuse and neglect, and to understand what to do if they have a concern about a child's welfare. Consequently, staff are vigilant and follow the school's procedures effectively.
- Staff provide children with activities that help them to develop appropriate regard for their own safety. For example, police and road safety officers visit the school to talk to children about how to cross the road safely. Children recently enjoyed learning how to climb safely when a climbing expert showed them how to use special climbing equipment, and to use their hands and feet carefully. Children show through their behaviour that they understand how to keep themselves safe. They use resources carefully and seek comfort from their trusted member of staff if they are unhappy.
- Leaders and governors have made important changes to how staff keep children safe

at school. They have thought carefully about how they organise staffing, so that children can move freely but safely in the setting. Parents who spoke with the inspector and those who responded to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire were strongly of the view that children are safe at the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching over time is not consistently good. Changes implemented by different leaders have not been evaluated sufficiently to ensure that they are having a positive impact on children's learning. This is especially the case when children take part in activities led by staff and some weaker teaching restricts children's progress.
- The organisation of some activities means that staff are unable to monitor effectively the extent to which children are participating fully, for example by listening carefully. Staff do not always notice when children have stopped listening and are disengaged from learning, such as when they are distracted by what is going on around them. When this happens, children do not learn successfully and do not make good progress.
- Leaders have supported staff to improve how they model language to children. Staff express themselves clearly. They use words that children, including those who speak English as an additional language, generally understand. However, too frequently staff dominate the talk that takes place and do not provide enough time for children to contribute their own thoughts and ideas. This limits the extent to which children make good use of the language they hear and restricts opportunities for them to communicate well.
- Staff do not routinely ask children questions that encourage them to think carefully or to express clearly what they have understood. Too often, staff use questions that require only simple answers. When this happens, children do not learn effectively, and staff are less able to assess children's understanding and to plan for the next steps in their learning.
- Teachers and leaders have put a lot of thought into developing children's love of stories. They have carefully selected a range of books that they know children will enjoy and will help them to remember characters and events. For example, during the inspection, children listening to the story 'The Tiger who Came to Tea' were able to answer simple questions about what the tiger ate and what happened next in the story. Such experiences help children to understand how stories work and to develop positive attitudes to reading.
- Leaders and teachers plan activities to develop children's skills in phonics. However, phonics teaching is not fully effective, because staff's expectations of what children can achieve are too low. This is because teachers lack the secure subject knowledge they need to plan children's learning properly. They are unclear how children build skills and knowledge in phonics over time. Consequently, children who are ready to learn phonics lack the experience, confidence and knowledge that they need to read simple words or to experiment with letters in their writing.
- Records of children's mathematical work indicate that teachers have used a range of activities to develop children's counting skills. Sometimes, staff provide children with opportunities to use these important skills in their play as well as in activities led by staff. For instance, children enjoy counting the beads that they thread on a string.

However, staff do not provide children, especially the most able children, with activities that challenge them to apply their skills to solve simple problems or to learn more about the features of shapes. This hampers children's progress in mathematics.

- Children who start at McMillan Nursery School with limited or no understanding of English benefit from good support that helps them to make strong progress in their understanding of language. Staff, including bilingual staff, ensure that children can participate fully in the activities on offer. For example, staff provide sensitive interpretation of tasks for children where it is needed. As a result, this group of children settle at school quickly and enjoy their learning.
- Teachers and their colleagues work effectively and inclusively to enable children with SEND to learn well. Staff use their knowledge of children's individual needs and targets so that they can provide the necessary support. This contributes to the strong progress that children with SEND make.
- Staff share important information about children's progress with their parents. They send home newsletters that keep parents informed about children's learning. Teachers ensure that bilingual staff are on hand to support families who speak English as an additional language. The small number of parents who spoke with the inspector were highly appreciative of the information that they receive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Children quickly become familiar with routines at the school. They develop confidence in using their surroundings, indoors and outdoors. However, children are less confident in speaking in the activities that staff lead, especially when many children are involved. Staff allow some children to dominate when answering questions and do not allow enough time for less confident children to formulate their ideas about what they want to say. As a result, these children demonstrate less self-assurance and eagerness to learn in these activities.
- Children have too few opportunities to listen carefully and respectfully to one another's ideas and thoughts. This is because staff are too focused on what they want to say to children and do not promote or sustain conversation or discussion sufficiently. When children try to contribute, especially boys, they sometimes shout out their answers. Children are not skilled at waiting for others to finish before they offer their ideas. When this happens, learning is more difficult for all children in the group.
- Leaders and staff know the children and families well. They rightly prioritise the establishment of strong relationships with children and their parents, because they know that this is important for children's emotional well-being in the school. These positive relationships help staff to share important information with parents daily and to be aware when children might need extra support, for example if they have been ill.
- Children learn to take care of their personal needs, because staff support them well, for example in learning how to put on and take off their outdoor clothing. Children learn to

be independent when using the toilet facilities and to wash their hands afterwards.

- Children learn about healthy lifestyles through a range of experiences. For example, children recently participated in a healthy eating week, when they learned about the importance of cleaning their teeth carefully after eating. Leaders ensure that parents and children receive useful information about the protection of skin in sunny weather, so that children can play safely outdoors at the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Following the recommendations from the short inspection in September 2018, leaders and governors have worked more closely with parents to encourage them to send their children to school regularly. However, the impact of this work is unclear. Too many children are still persistently absent. These children miss important learning time; they do not develop the good attendance habits that they need.
- Teachers have set simple rules and routines for children to follow. Children understand these rules, because staff make their expectations clear. Children know how to use resources sensibly and most contribute to the process of tidying up.
- Children use classrooms and the outdoor areas carefully and take care to avoid hurting others as they play. They know that energetic play is allowed outdoors and understand they must walk indoors. Consequently, most children move around the classrooms sensibly.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Standards have slipped since the previous inspection. Children's progress varies, depending on the quality of teaching. Staff's expectations of what some children can achieve, especially boys and the most able, are not high enough. Consequently, children do not make the good progress they need to make a strong start when they move to primary school, especially in their early writing, phonics and mathematics skills.
- Children make better progress in reading than in writing. This is because teachers and teaching assistants develop children's love and knowledge of stories well. Staff use their secure knowledge of children's literature to select a range of books which they know will appeal to children's interests. Children enjoy borrowing books to take home to share with their parents. They enjoy the reward of borrowing new books from the school when they have read several. Despite this enthusiasm for books, some children do not make the strong progress of which they are capable in reading. Their progress in reading and writing is restricted by their insecure knowledge of phonics.
- Most children make the progress that they should in their physical development. Staff plan well for developing children's gross and fine motor skills, through a range of activities indoors and outdoors. Children also progress well in aspects of their personal, social and emotional development, such as in making relationships. This is because of the warm, caring and secure environment that leaders and staff provide. However, some children, particularly boys, make less progress in developing the skills they need to manage their own feelings and behaviour.

- Progress is strong for children with SEND, because of the good support that they receive from staff. Teachers and teaching assistants support these children sensitively and plan carefully for the next steps in their learning.
- The small numbers of children eligible for the early years pupil premium make strong progress, especially in their social skills, because leaders ensure that this extra funding is used appropriately.
- Children who speak English as an additional language make strong progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in their understanding of English. Leaders celebrate the diversity of families and homes through displays on the walls throughout the school. Children who speak English as an additional language feel secure and settle well at the school.
- The attractive learning spaces that leaders and staff provide for children help them to become curious, interested and keen to explore. For example, during the inspection, a small group of children were excited to find minibeasts in the natural woodland area. They concentrated well and shared resources such as magnifying glasses to inspect the creatures more closely. This helped the children to develop their understanding of living things in the environment.

School details

Unique reference number	119095
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10087670

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	3 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sheila Wicks
Headteacher	Simone O'Connor
Telephone number	01282 612 709
Website	http://www.mcmillan.lancsngfl.ac.uk/
Email address	bursar@mcmillan.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 November 2013

Information about this school

- This nursery school provides part-time places for children from their third birthday.
- The proportion of children known to be eligible for the early years pupil premium is lower than average.
- The proportion of children with SEND is variable each year but tends to be higher than average. The proportion with an education, health and care plan is lower than average.
- Most children are of Pakistani heritage. A substantial proportion of children come from homes where English is spoken as an additional language.
- The school has been led by an acting headteacher since June 2019, to cover the absence of the substantive headteacher.
- The school has been receiving support from the local authority since autumn 2018.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching at different times of the day during the inspection. Some observations were carried out jointly with the acting headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, middle leaders, staff and governors. The inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector spoke with a few parents on their arrival at the school.
- The inspector looked at records of children's learning and at their work on display.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, minutes from governing body meetings, records of children's attendance and safeguarding documentation.
- The inspector considered the two responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 10 responses from staff to an Ofsted questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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