

# Inspection of a good school: Mill Hill Nursery School

Torphin Hill Drive, Doxford Park, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR3 2PJ

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Inspection dates:

5 July 2022

## **Outcome**

Mill Hill Nursery School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a section 5 inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Leaders and staff have created a magical environment at Mill Hill where children are encouraged to be creative and curious. Staff plan exciting, inviting opportunities which take account of children's interests. Children experience a wide range of stories, rhymes and songs which help them to develop an impressive vocabulary. Children sustain their concentration over extended periods of time, fascinated by their learning. They are prepared extremely well for their next steps in education.

Expert staff invest time in getting to know children well. Parents and carers appreciate these strong relationships. Children feel safe and secure to step out of their comfort zones and take risks in their learning. Children's behaviour is excellent because staff model their high expectations. Children play well together. The school is full of their laughter and smiles. Children show care and concern for one another. They are taught well to begin to understand and manage their emotions.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about their children's experience at Mill Hill. Many comment on the high degree of confidence they have in the staff and the significant progress their children have made. Families particularly acknowledge the excellent work of staff in supporting children who have spent a significant proportion of their young lives within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's attendance is extremely high because they and their parents value the high-quality education on offer.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have developed and embedded a highly ambitious curriculum across all areas of learning. With staff, they have carefully considered the knowledge and skills that they want children to acquire by the end of their time in the 'den' and the main Nursery. Much

time is devoted to understanding children's interests. Staff take these into consideration when planning teaching activities. However, teaching remains firmly focused on ensuring children learn the specific knowledge and skills set out clearly in curriculum plans.

Leaders have invested significantly in developing the expertise of the staff team. New staff have an extensive induction period so that they are well prepared to support children's learning. Staff are given freedom to explore areas that interest them and then share their new-found knowledge with others. This has led to significant improvements in staff's practice. They are experts in children's early development. Staff perfectly judge when to give children time to think and when to guide and facilitate children's thinking through well-chosen questions and suggestions. Assessment is well used to check that children are gaining and retaining the knowledge and skills set out in the curriculum.

Leaders have developed new curriculums to support children's communication and language and the foundations for early reading. They have set out, for example, the books, rhymes and songs that they want children to know. Children experience a wide range of traditional tales, such as 'Red Riding Hood,' alongside more modern, classic stories, such as, 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea.' Staff bring stories to life and enthuse children to join in with the language and actions. Careful consideration is given to the ambitious vocabulary that children will learn. Staff embed this vocabulary cleverly into their teaching. Children are confident to use the new words they have learned. Children demonstrated this to inspectors, talking about their 'under the sea' topic, using words such as 'ocean' and 'pollution' with understanding.

There are strong relationships between school and home. This is particularly the case for children who do not make the progress that staff expect, and for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders take time to listen to parents, meeting regularly with them to review children's needs. This shapes the support children receive. Leaders closely check to assure themselves that children with SEND are making the same excellent progress as their peers.

The school is calm and orderly. Children go about their business with purpose. They know what is expected of them because staff have established clear routines. Children take turns and wait patiently while others take time to give an answer. At social times, such as lunchtime, children sit together happily and sensibly. They enjoy the responsibility of serving their own food and eat independently, safe in the knowledge that staff are on hand if needed.

Staff care deeply about their work and are a cohesive team. One commented, 'this place melts my heart in terms of the support and love I get from amazing colleagues.' Staff feel valued and trusted by the headteacher and other leaders. They know that their well-being is a priority and that consideration is given to their workload.

Governors know the school well and are regular visitors, checking on aspects of the work of the school. They ask questions of leaders to make sure that decisions are in the best interests of children. While improvements in the school since the last inspection have been considerable, some of leaders' written improvement plans lack precision in setting

out the actions to be taken and the timescales involved. This hampers the extent to which governors can use the plans to evaluate the effectiveness of leaders' work.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are knowledgeable about potential safeguarding risks. They provide regular training and take steps to assure themselves that it is fully understood by staff. All are alert to the signs that might indicate a child is at risk of harm and to the risks that are particular in the school's locality. Staff engage appropriately with other agencies to seek the right help and support for children and their families. Leaders have carefully planned a curriculum to help children to stay safe. For example, they are taught that it is ok to say 'no' to things that make them uncomfortable and what to do if a stranger approaches them.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- While leaders have secured notable improvements in the school, written improvement plans lack a sharp focus on the steps to be taken and the timescales in which they will be secured. This limits the usefulness of the plans as a tool for governors to hold leaders to account. Leaders should ensure that written improvement plans more precisely define the progress governors should expect to see at key points across the year.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2013.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## **Further information**

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	108752
<b>Local authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10227130
<b>Type of school</b>	Nursery
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 5
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	147
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Mrs Terri Nugent
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Sarah Dixon-Jones
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.millhillnursery.org.uk">www.millhillnursery.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	28 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- A new headteacher has taken up post at the school since the previous inspection.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Children aged from two to three years are taught in 'the Den.' Older children are taught in the 'main Nursery.'

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders, including those responsible for the curriculum, children with SEND and safeguarding. Inspectors met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and held a meeting with the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into these areas of learning: communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, spoke to staff, visited lessons and

talked to children about their work. Inspectors also considered aspects of the school's work on early mathematics and literacy.

- The inspection team discussed safeguarding with a wide range of staff, including those responsible for this aspect of the school's work. Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records and the checks on the suitability of adults to work with children.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through discussions during the inspection and by reviewing the responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey.

### **Inspection team**

Claire Brown, lead inspector

Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Zoe Westley

Ofsted Inspector

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