

Inspection of an outstanding school: Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre

McMillan Street, Deptford, London SE8 3EH

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 January 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children love coming to this historic nursery school. From the moment they arrive, they engage in exciting play in the garden and in the classrooms. Children are happy in this safe but challenging environment. They learn about managing risks and keeping themselves safe. Children delight in skipping, running, jumping and climbing. In keeping with the aims of the school's co-founder, Margaret McMillan, they feel 'life in every limb'.

The recent staff restructure has helped the school to balance its budget. But it has interrupted some planned improvements to the school. Leaders know that there are shortcomings in a small number of areas. However, they have maintained high expectations of what children should achieve. Consequently, children are curious and motivated learners who behave well. Staff teach them to share, take turns, pass food to each other at snack times, and say 'please' and 'thank you'. Staff sort out any disputes between children quickly and calmly.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive. One parent summed up the comments of many, saying: 'Staff provide the perfect balance of freedom and safety, a beautiful place for kids.'

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

Leaders, governors and staff are committed to ensuring that every child gets the best start to their education. Staff are experts in how young children learn. They continually introduce children to new ideas and vocabulary across the curriculum. For example, a group of children were building a spaceship with large blocks in the garden. The adults helped them to count down correctly from 10 to one before blast-off. They talked with

children about what they expected to see in space, and whether there would be life on the moon. They encouraged children to talk about the different shapes of the blocks and suggested words like 'triangle'.

Staff use picture cards to help children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) understand and join in with activities. Staff carefully select books to develop children's love of stories and reading. Children regularly assemble with instruments to sing songs. During forest school sessions, children gather round the campfire to sing and drink hot chocolate. These magical times instil a deep love of music, songs and rhymes.

Children relish using the exceptional nursery garden. They learn to take risks safely, and keep going when they find something difficult, like climbing trees. Children behave well. They play and learn together in a caring and purposeful environment. Staff intervene skilfully to make sure that children learn important knowledge and skills through play. Children develop their strength and coordination. For example, they learn to make dough, roll it, cut it, and make marks on it with tools.

Children learn about patterns and shapes by engaging in hands-on activities. For example, they copy patterns made with large blocks. However, some staff have gaps in their knowledge of the mathematics curriculum. This is because they have not received relevant training following a staff restructure and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, some staff do not make sure children have a secure knowledge of numbers and counting.

Staff know children very well and develop excellent partnerships with parents. Leaders have developed a system to identify what children know and can do when they start in the nursery. However, this system sometimes lacks precision. In addition, when children with SEND join the nursery, leaders do not set out promptly the strategies and resources needed to meet their needs.

Attendance is low. This is partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic and other illnesses. However, leaders do not systematically analyse attendance information, and consequently do not have high enough expectations for attendance.

Governors have helped the school to achieve a balanced budget by restructuring the staff team. Leaders take care of staff and help them to manage their workload. Staff are proud to work in the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. This is because all staff have in-depth knowledge of every child and family, and have been trained to recognise the signs of abuse. Consequently, they are quick to notice and report concerns.

The school follows all appropriate recruitment procedures. However, governors need a tighter procedure for checking that these systems are in place.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- When children join the nursery, some school systems lack precision. This includes procedures for establishing children's early starting points and the identification of strategies to support children with SEND. This means that children do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders must ensure that these systems are secure so that there is greater clarity about what children know and can do on entry, and that children with SEND are supported effectively as soon as possible.
- Some of the staff development activities have been delayed. As a result, some staff are not as clear as they need to be about what children should learn and when they should learn it. Leaders should put in place an effective programme of professional development and feedback, so that all staff can implement the agreed curriculum.
- Leaders do not analyse attendance information to see patterns and trends. As a result, they do not systematically challenge, or offer support to, parents whose children are not attending regularly. This means that attendance is low. Leaders must put effective procedures and plans in place to secure improved attendance.

Background

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

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in November 2012.

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.

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

Unique reference number	100097
Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	10255534
Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	166
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jonathan Sanders
Headteacher	Rachel Hogarth-Smith
Website	www.rachelmcmillannursery.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children’s Centre is a maintained nursery school for two- to five-year-old children. Children attend either part time or full time.
- The school has a breakfast club and after-school provision.
- The school has a higher-than-average proportion of children who speak English as an additional language.
- The school currently uses one alternative provider. This is for children with significant speech and language difficulties.
- Leaders completed a staff restructure in the summer term of 2022.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in communication and language, physical development and mathematics. For each deep dive, he discussed the curriculum with

leaders, visited classrooms and the garden, spoke to staff, and talked with children. The inspector also considered the curriculum in other areas of learning.

- The inspector reviewed documentation related to safeguarding and looked at the school's single central record of staff suitability checks.
- The inspector spoke to a range of staff about their views of the school, and considered their responses to the confidential online staff survey.
- The inspector took account of the responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey. He also had informal conversations with some parents.

Inspection team

Julian Grenier, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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