

Inspection of an outstanding school: Highfield Nursery School

Chesterfield Drive, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 6DW

Inspection date: 19 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 next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children at Highfield Nursery School are happy to come to school. As soon as they join the nursery, they are encouraged to follow daily routines, for example sitting down to eat a snack, listening to stories and joining in with rhymes. Children have confidence to explore the wide range of indoor and outdoor learning and play opportunities provided for them.

Children are safe. They talk and play with each other in the classrooms and the gardens. There are no incidents of bullying. If children need support with their behaviour, the school's policy of 'connect not correct' helps them to learn by watching and listening to the adults around them.

Activities such as forest school, and going to the theatre and the seaside provide the children with opportunities to have first-hand experiences of learning beyond the classroom. This helps them to make links with their learning to deepen their understanding. Parents are encouraged to take part in these community events so the whole family can be involved with their children's learning.

Parents highly recommend the school due to the personalised care and attention their children receive. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are fully included in the school.

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

Leaders have designed a 'story book' curriculum as a starting point for all areas of learning. Other areas of the curriculum are woven through the stories that are chosen. Staff guide children to make connections between the stories they learn. This leads to children engaging with meaningful discussions and leading creative role play. The current

curriculum plans are not detailed enough in all areas and teachers have some choice of the content they teach. This leads to some variation in the learning experience that children receive in class, including with key vocabulary. The language children need is not systematically taught. As a result, opportunities for children to excel in their learning are not as consistent as they could be.

Leaders have ensured that staff are skilled in their understanding of the physical needs of the children. Leaders have carefully considered the arrangement and provision of both the inside and outside environments to make the most of physical activities. This includes how large and small-scale movements are planned into children's learning. Where adults notice that a child is falling behind with their physical development, extra provision is put in place, for example the use of 'development movement play' sessions that sometimes include the parents.

The youngest children in the 'butterflies' room are quickly introduced to the routines of the school. Attentive adults listen and model language so that, for example, children know how to move safely between activities, or understand when coats and hats are needed.

The behaviour of children during child-led session times and during snack and lunchtimes is calm and purposeful. Leaders have chosen for pupils to meet together in mixed-age groups to ensure a sense of belonging. However, this can sometimes have a negative impact on learning for some children in direct teaching sessions. Younger children in these groups can struggle to stay focused and older children can be distracted from their learning. This can also divert staff time and attention.

Children with SEND are identified quickly and sensitively. Parents are included at all stages and support is put in place for children to be able to access all areas of the curriculum. Staff have been well trained to meet the needs of children with speech and communication needs, and physical and emotional needs. Learning targets for children with SEND are appropriate and reviewed regularly. Outside agencies work alongside staff and parents to help improve the outcomes for children with SEND.

The wider development of children has been well considered by leaders. There are opportunities for children to experience festivals and other cultures through visitors and trips.

The staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire were unanimously positive about working at the school and appreciate how leaders take account of their well-being.

Governors visit the school and support leaders and staff with their well-being. Nevertheless, they are not precisely challenging or holding leaders to account for the quality of education. They do not currently have sufficient understanding to check that the curriculum is having the ambitious impact they intend.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are skilled at noticing any signs that may indicate that a child is at risk of harm. All concerns, however small, are recorded and followed up suitably and promptly.

The necessary checks for adults working in school are in place on the single central record. Staff know the families well and provide further support as needed. Staff have close links with the children's centre staff. They work together to support and signpost families to other services.

Children are taught to keep themselves safe and are aware of dangerous situations.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not clearly identified the precise vocabulary or concepts they want children to learn across all areas of the curriculum. Consequently, there is some inconsistency in the quality of what is taught and what children learn. Leaders must ensure that all staff know the important content that needs to be taught and in what order. This is so that all children achieve the best they possibly can.
- The pedagogy of how children learn best has not been considered well enough to meet the needs of all children in adult-directed sessions. Consequently, the behaviour of the younger children is having an impact on the learning of the older children. Leaders must review how and when staff introduce new concepts and knowledge to children so that all children can learn well.
- Governors' monitoring of the curriculum is not robust enough. Consequently, governors are not able to confidently assure themselves of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. Systems need refining so that governors can accurately evaluate the impact of the curriculum, and take effective action where improvements are needed.

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 April 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.

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	124525
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10241548
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	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sally Evans
Headteacher	Ruth Coleman
Website	www.highfield.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher has been in post since 2019.
- The school operates a breakfast and after-school club for children that attend the school.
- The school admits children from the age of two years old on a part-time and full-time basis.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school is an associate research school with the Unity Schools Partnership Trust Research School.

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, the SEND coordinator and four members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice- chair. The lead inspector also met with the school improvement partner from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and language, physical development and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some children about their learning and looked at samples of children’s work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other areas of learning.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors talked to the headteacher who is the designated safeguarding leader, spoke to staff, looked at documentation and scrutinised the single central record.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including the school self-evaluation and improvement plan, school policies and minutes from governing board meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed the 34 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted’s online parent questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and considered 29 free-text responses from parents during the inspection. Inspectors also considered 22 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. There were no responses to Ofsted’s questionnaire for children.

Inspection team

Isabel Davis, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Sharon Waldron

His Majesty’s Inspector

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