

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Portman Early Childhood Centre

12 Salisbury Street, London NW8 8DE

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Inspection date:

21 March 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's well-being is front and centre of everything that happens at this school. Leaders have created a welcoming and joyful environment, where children play and explore together happily. Parents and carers praise the care and guidance provided to children and families alike. Many parents described the school as 'amazing', with staff making the school feel like a 'home from home'.

Children experience a broad curriculum. Using their detailed knowledge of each child, staff work out how to motivate children and instil them with curiosity and resilience. Children relish taking part in all the wider experiences that staff plan for them, both in the nursery and further afield.

Staff teach children about how to behave sensibly and how to follow the school's day-to-day routines. For example, they show children how to find the toys that they want to play with and how to tidy up afterwards. Children learn about how to make friends, how to take turns and how to listen to adults and each other. Children who need extra help with these things are quickly identified and supported. All of this means that children learn in a calm and safe environment.

Leaders have thought about the important things that they want all children to know. However, they are still working out the order in which children should learn and practise this knowledge. This means that, at times, the curriculum does not build children's understanding logically and deeply.

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

Leaders and staff know each child's needs and interests exceptionally well. They think carefully about the experiences that children need to promote their well-being and wider

development. These experiences are routinely designed to foster children's readiness to explore new things and places. For example, children were keen to visit the local shops to buy blueberries and brown bread for their daily snack time. They worked out what they wanted to buy and how they would bring the food back to the nursery.

Parents come to the school often to join in with their children's learning and play. Once new children have settled into school life, leaders and staff organise a welcome event, where parents find out about their children's successes. Parents look forward to the twice-yearly camping trips that leaders organise for families and children.

Staff come together regularly to discuss how to support each child's development and behaviour. Families are involved in this every step of the way. They appreciate how their views and ideas are listened to and valued by staff. These regular discussions with parents play a pivotal role in ensuring that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified early and accurately. Staff are experts in making adaptations that help children with SEND to feel secure and ready to learn. For example, they support children to practise the things that they lack confidence in, such as going up the steps on the climbing frame.

The new leadership team is establishing an ambitious vision for the curriculum. This includes setting out 10 essential 'learning goals' that children should achieve by the time they leave the school. However, leaders' curriculum thinking is still developing, including in the area of communication and language. They have not fully defined the sequence in which children should learn, practise and revisit important knowledge and words. Sometimes, the design and delivery of the curriculum do not focus enough on building up and extending children's understanding logically. When delivering the curriculum, staff are sometimes unclear about what knowledge and words they need to emphasise. This means that the curriculum is not supporting children to know and remember more as well as it could.

Each day, children enjoy joining in with songs and hearing stories. Staff teach children how to listen, and encourage them to share ideas. They use resources and actions to help children to understand the stories that are shared. Leaders have identified a set of 'core books' that they want all children to experience. However, leaders' curriculum thinking does not explicitly identify how the use of these core books should support children to understand and become increasingly familiar with new words and concepts.

The new leadership team is aspirational. Its work has steered the school successfully through considerable change, including a period of time at temporary premises. Throughout, leaders have focused on maintaining the school's strong sense of community. They have also developed credible and carefully considered plans which aim to improve the curriculum while building on what is already working well.

Staff appreciate the way that leaders are open to their ideas and think about their well-being. They like the way that leaders have reduced the paperwork involved in recording children's learning so that they have more time to spend with children and families.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff have an in-depth understanding of the risks that children may face. Identifying and responding to these risks early underpin the school's strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders and staff are well trained and vigilant. They notice small changes in children's behaviour or circumstances, and find out what the reasons for these might be. When needed, leaders involve external professionals to make sure that families and children get the help and protection that they need and in a timely manner.

Leaders encourage families to ask for help when they need it. Leaders manage this sensitively, while always putting children's welfare first.

Staff teach children about how to keep safe, including speaking up if they are worried or unhappy. For example, children learn that they can say 'stop' or 'I don't like that'.

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

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

- While leaders' curriculum thinking is centred on ambitious overarching goals, they are still thinking through how children's learning should be sequenced. The design of the curriculum does not consistently ensure that children's understanding builds in a progressive, coherent and logical way. Leaders need to continue their work to develop and refine their curriculum thinking. They should especially focus on defining the sequence in which children should be taught ideas, and embed their understanding in each area of learning.
- Because some of leaders' curriculum thinking is not fully established, the delivery of the curriculum does not focus sufficiently on helping children to build their knowledge step by step. This means that children do not develop and deepen their knowledge consistently well across all areas of learning, including in communication and language. Leaders need to ensure that staff have a shared understanding of exactly what knowledge should be taught and in what order. In planning sequences of learning, they should deliberately select activities and resources which enable children to successfully learn the intended curriculum and, in turn, be fully prepared for the move to primary school.

## 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 February 2014.

## 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

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| <b>Unique reference number</b>             | 132151   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                     | Westminster  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                   | 10241873   |
| <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> | 69   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The governing body   |
| <b>Chair of governing body</b>             | Sylvie Gambell   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Amie Curtis (Acting Headteacher)                                     |
| <b>Website</b>                             | <a href="http://www.portmancentre.co.uk">www.portmancentre.co.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>         | 9 May 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005                |

## Information about this school

- The acting headteacher was appointed in January 2022.
- The chair of the governing body has recently stepped down. The current vice-chair of the governing body has subsequently been appointed to this role.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked with the local authority to open a resourced provision for up to 17 children with SEND. The provision caters mainly for children with autism spectrum condition as well as additional needs related to speech, language and communication.
- Leaders do not make use of alternative provision.
- Due to refurbishment works at its permanent building, the school was located for a period at a nearby temporary premises. It has now returned to its permanent building.

## 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 carried out deep dives in these areas of learning: communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, and understanding the world. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders and staff, visited classrooms in the provision for two- and three-year-olds, looked at examples of children’s learning, visited story times and spoke to children as they played and learned. Other areas of learning were also considered as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. They also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to parents informally and considered the responses to Ofsted’s survey for parents, including written comments. There were no responses to Ofsted’s survey for staff.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders and staff about their work to keep children safe and ensure that they behave well. They also looked at safeguarding documentation, including records of concerns about children’s welfare and the pre-employment checks carried out on staff appointed to work at the school.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation that leaders provided in relation to behaviour, the curriculum and the provision for children with SEND, including those who attend the resourced provision.

### **Inspection team**

Sarah Murphy, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Tom Canning

Ofsted Inspector

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