

Inspection of an outstanding school: Appletree Nursery School

Milking Stile Lane, Lancaster, Lancashire LA1 5QB

Inspection date:

6 July 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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children are happy and safe at this nurturing nursery school. As they arrive, they find their name cards to mark themselves as present. Children are eager to begin their play.

Leaders and staff have high expectations of children's learning and behaviour. Staff set up the classrooms and the outdoor areas to encourage children to engage in their learning. For example, children were keen to work together to build a bridge and they noticed that they needed two more bricks to complete it. Generally, children learn well. However, they do not develop their knowledge of vocabulary as well as they should.

Children aim to please staff. They know that if they try their best, staff will reward them with stickers to add to their star charts. Leaders have introduced golden rules to foster children's positive behaviour, such as having kind hands. Leaders and staff monitor children's behaviour closely and they are quick to resolve any incidents of bullying.

Leaders provide children with a variety of experiences to support their wider development. This includes opportunities after school to engage in food tasting and arts and crafts. During the day, children benefit from outdoor learning sessions in the woodland area. They visit the neighbouring school to engage in physical activities. Children learn about deep breathing and develop a sense of calm during yoga sessions.

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

During a time of significant change in leadership, governance and staffing, leaders have focused sharply on improving the quality of the early years curriculum. They make sure that children receive a broad and ambitious education. Typically, children achieve well.

Overall, leaders have identified the small steps of content that children should acquire in each area of learning. This helps staff to know what information to teach and when they should do this. However, in some areas of learning, there has been less focus on determining the most important vocabulary that children should know. This means that, over time, some children do not learn and understand as many words as they could.

Leaders and staff work closely together to implement well-chosen activities to deliver the curriculum. This helps children to achieve their next steps in learning. Staff understand how young children learn and develop. During independent play, staff interact warmly and positively with the children. Nonetheless, some staff do not make use of opportunities as they arise to support children's learning through play. Occasionally, this hinders how well some children learn and develop.

Leaders are fastidious in their approach to detecting any additional needs that children may have. This allows them to identify children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) quickly and effectively. It also enables leaders to get these children the timely support that they need. Leaders work closely with external professionals, and with parents and carers, to support children with SEND to access the whole curriculum.

Communication, language and literacy are priorities for all staff. Throughout the day, staff immerse children in singing, nursery rhymes and stories. They read and sing with animation to make books exciting, including by encouraging children to use props to retell familiar stories. Staff regularly assess children's communication and language development. They use this information to provide targeted support for children who need this extra help. Children can choose books from a lending library to share with their parents at home. Leaders know that closer monitoring of this will help all children to benefit more fully from this initiative.

Children settle quickly into nursery life. They learn routines from the beginning when they start in the classroom for two-year-old children. This helps them to have a strong sense of belonging. Generally, children engage positively in adult-led activities, and during their own self-initiated play. They behave well and follow instructions from staff. When a small number of children struggle with regulating their own feelings, staff support them sensitively and effectively.

Staff nurture children's self-care skills and their growing independence. For example, they encourage children to help to tidy toys away. Children eat healthy foods and learn how to use cutlery at lunchtime. Staff teach them about the wider world. For example, children travel on different modes of transport to places, such as the beach. They learn about the lifecycles of different animals and insects. Children discover festivals throughout the year. Leaders have firm plans to extend children's appreciation and understanding of cultural differences even further.

The newly federated governing body fulfils its role well. Governors understand their statutory duties. They work closely with leaders and provide the support and challenge required to aid continual improvement. Leaders support staff's well-being and are mindful of their workload. Staff feel well supported by leaders. They told inspectors that the school is a happy place for all.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture at Appletree Nursery School. They have introduced robust systems to record and monitor any welfare concerns. Leaders make sure that all staff have annual child protection training and that staff's knowledge is up to date. This means that staff identify any issues quickly. Leaders work well with external professionals to get children and families the timely support that they need.

Safeguarding is well covered in the curriculum. Children learn how to keep themselves safe. For instance, before they play in the outdoor area, children help the staff to identify potential risks.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In one or two areas of learning, leaders have not identified the specific vocabulary that children should learn and when this should happen. Over time, this hinders how well some children acquire language and how well they build their understanding of new words. Leaders should identify the most important vocabulary that children should learn to help enrich children's communication and language skills.
- Some staff do not provide enough opportunities for children to deepen their learning during independent play. This means that, from time to time, some children do not learn as much as they could. Leaders should support staff to recognise opportunities to extend children's thinking and understanding while they play and engage in different learning activities.

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 2016.

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	134991
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10211015
Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	65
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Nick Harrison
Headteacher	Lucy Naylor
Website	www.appletreenurseryschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The nursery school is part of The Willow Tree Federation, which is a collaboration with a neighbouring primary school.
- A new headteacher and chair of governors have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school offers provision for two-year-old children.
- Leaders provide an after-school club for children.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into communication and language (also taking account of early reading), mathematics and physical development. For each deep dive,

inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders and visited lessons. They spoke with staff and with children about their learning, and looked at samples of children's work.

- The lead inspector observed some children sharing books with familiar adults.
- Inspectors reviewed school policies and procedures, including those relating to safeguarding. They scrutinised documentation, such as the single central record and staff's training. Inspectors discussed safeguarding with governors, leaders and staff.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders of the school. The lead inspector met with a group of governors and had a conversation via telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. They also spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors met with parents at the beginning and at the end of the school day. There were no responses to Ofsted Parent View to consider.
- Inspectors observed how children behaved around the school, including outdoors and at lunchtime. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey to consider.

Inspection team

David Lobodzinski, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sandra Hamilton

Ofsted Inspector

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