

Inspection of an outstanding school: George Dent Nursery School

Elms Road, Elms Road, Darlington, County Durham DL3 7PY

Inspection dates:

5 March 2024

Outcome

George Dent Nursery School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children thrive at George Dent Nursery School. Leaders ensure that all children, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from highly effective care, support and guidance. Leaders, staff and governors share the same high ambition for all the children who attend. Children rise to these high expectations and achieve well.

Leaders and staff have a precise understanding of the needs of young children. Whatever their starting points, children receive exceptional support through their learning and play. Highly skilled practitioners bring the curriculum to life. Children are happy and enthusiastic in their learning. Children's behaviour is exemplary. It is supported by clear routines and expectations set by the whole school team. Children are very well prepared for their next steps in education.

A wide and rich range of diverse experiences adds to the offer of this school. Children are proactive in protecting the environment. Leaders make carefully chosen links with a local theatre and a ballet company to enrich the curriculum further.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Many parents reflect on the significant progress their children make when attending the school. The school actively involves parents in school life through a range of opportunities such as dedicated nursery rhyme sessions.

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

The curriculum is highly ambitious for all children. Leaders have used their research-based understanding of child development to design a bespoke curriculum. The curriculum enables children to learn through engaging in well-thought-out activities. The activities help children develop new knowledge and skills. Leaders and staff focus on the individual learning journeys of the children. This enables the school team to support children very effectively. Staff use their knowledge and understanding well to support children to make

the small steps of progress needed to be successful. This helps children make the progress leaders have planned for. Children demonstrate their knowledge and understanding through the interactions they have with adults and each other.

Communication and language are at the heart of the curriculum offer. Adults carefully foster language and vocabulary with the children they interact with. Adults model how to communicate effectively. Children use these skills when they work together on different activities. Staff supported language development well as children made garlic bread with garlic they had foraged for themselves. Children articulated clearly why the garlic is safe to use and other plants are not. Carefully chosen texts further enhance the curriculum. Books like 'Oliver's Vegetables' link carefully to the activities pupils engage in. Children enjoy books. They chose to read and share stories in both the indoor and outdoor areas of learning.

Some children with SEND communicate using different resources, such as Makaton or communication boards. Adults have a strong understanding of the preferred communication methods children use. This means children with SEND make their understandings and feelings known effectively. Children use signs, symbols or other adapted resources exceptionally well to do this. Leaders support children with SEND through exemplary practice. The school uses the advice of other professionals, such as speech and language therapists, well. This means children with SEND benefit from high-quality learning opportunities alongside their peers. The support for children with SEND is a strength of the school.

Children use the carefully planned indoor and outdoor learning areas well. Adults observe children's play closely. They know when to intervene to extend children's learning. When using the large obstacle resources, adults support children to adapt the height of the planks of wood children walk along. This provides the right level of challenge and support to meet the needs of the children.

Children use their knowledge and understanding to work together effectively. They have very positive attitudes to learning. For example, during the inspection, a small group worked collaboratively to make a new habitat for worms. They supported each other through quality discussion to get all the natural resources they needed to make the new home for the worms.

Leaders purposefully plan a wide and rich offer to broaden children's development further. This includes research projects linked to ballet and movement. Children promote looking after the environment. They have completed local litter-picking activities. They also help repurpose items from within the school. Children made their own gate for the garden from recycled wood. Leaders help children to understand how to use technology safely. Children learn about managing risk. They know why they can eat the garlic leaves and how to use the fire pit safely.

Governors share the same vision and ambition for the school. They provide effective support and challenge to leaders. Like leaders, they consider the workload of the school team. Staff are very proud to work here.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 2015.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	113983
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10313231
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	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Stephen Harker
Executive Headteacher	Helen Dummett
Website	www.darlingtonnurseryschools.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- George Dent Nursery School is part of the Darlington Nursery Schools Federation. Borough Road Nursery School is the other school in this federation.
- The executive leadership team, consisting of the executive headteacher and deputy executive headteacher, lead across the federation.
- The school offers a before- and after-school wraparound offer. It also offers a holiday club.
- The school does not use any alternative providers of education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Prior to the inspection, inspectors reviewed documents on the school’s website, as well as published information about the school’s performance and previous Ofsted inspections.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these areas of learning: communication and language, physical development and expressive arts. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited provision where they observed children at different times of the day and spoke to teachers and teaching assistants. They looked at examples of children’s learning in learning journals.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors spoke with leaders, staff and a range of stakeholders including governors. Safeguarding documentation was scrutinised, including the safeguarding policies, and the single central record of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors gathered views of parents informally in person and formally through responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text responses. The views of staff were considered through the staff survey and meetings with them.
- Inspectors spoke with representatives from the governing body, those responsible for school improvement and the local authority.

Inspection team

Emily Stevens, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Roger Ward

Ofsted Inspector

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