

Inspection of Mill Hill Nursery School

Torpin Hill Drive, Doxford Park, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR3 2PJ

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Children flourish at Mill Hill Nursery School. Children are excited at the start of each day. They are eager to see their friends and to make a start on their learning activities. Children new to school settle very quickly. This is because staff provide the utmost care and reassurance. They are skilful in supporting children who need a bit more help in managing their emotions. There are highly positive relationships between staff, parents, carers and children.

Children receive an exceptional curriculum offer. They enthusiastically use technology in the 'digital atelier' space, creating videos and animations. Through the forest and coastal schools, children experience the awe and wonder of nature. They learn an array of social skills and help each other.

The Nursery is a lovely place to learn. The learning spaces are purposeful and inviting. Children look after the high-quality resources. They delight in working with each other and adults. Children behave impeccably and become engrossed in their learning.

Staff have clear expectations and make sure that all children achieve highly. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are extremely well supported. Staff use every opportunity to develop children's speech, language and communication by engaging them in high-quality talk.

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

Adults in school show a passion and determination in creating a positive difference for children. Staff have a deep knowledge of how young children learn. This is shown in the high-quality learning environment that has been created and the very ambitious curriculum. The school strives constantly to learn from academic research on early years. Staff are highly reflective on their practice and continually improve the school's offer. For example, through partnership working with a local university, staff have revised the mathematics curriculum. Children benefit from being taught a rich mathematical vocabulary. Many talk confidently about properties of shapes and tessellation using technical language. The school is very successful in making sure children are ready for their transition to Reception class.

Developing children's communication and language is a priority. Adults often build children's language through talking about what they are doing. For example, modelling speech, repeating phrases back to children and introducing new words. Staff are experts in using Makaton signing and symbols in their everyday communication. This supports all children and particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to communicate.

Staff take the time to get to know each child exceptionally well. They expertly use this knowledge to move children on in their learning. They also note if and when a child needs a little extra help. They work closely with many different agencies and

specialists to give the right help at the right time. Children with SEND are fully included in the life of the school. They have tailored provision which is specially adapted to build on their interests. This makes a difference and, consequently, children with SEND blossom.

Children enjoy the quieter time when they come together in their key worker groups. They are confident in talking to one another and expressing their thoughts. Adults engage children in high-quality, diverse texts. They use puppets and resources to bring the stories to life. Even the youngest children are engrossed during story time and have favourite books. They are keen to share their views and explore what they see and hear.

As much as children enjoy quiet and calm stories, they also fully immerse themselves in getting active and being creative physically. They enjoy acting out parts of the stories they know in the theatre space. Children know many songs and rhymes by heart and sing these with great expression and actions. In the studio space, they make representations of characters through drawing and painting. The choice of resources provided helps them to develop fine motor skills.

Children relish taking on the responsibilities that they are given, for example operating the camera for videoing or interviewing 'people who help us'. All took part in the 'Great British Beach Clean' with gusto. Children learn about democracy through voting, choosing the book they would like their key worker to read to them.

The governing body offers high levels of support and challenge. Governors are very aware of what happens in school. Leaders encourage staff at all levels to further their professional development. Members of staff do take on additional responsibilities, but leaders are mindful of workload and provide time for them to complete tasks. The school contributes to several learning networks to further the development of early years provision across the region.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	108752
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10289984
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	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Co-Chairs of governing body	Beth Dunn and Vicki Wynn
Headteacher	Sarah Dixon-Jones
Website	millhillnursery.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 July 2022

Information about this school

- This school is part of the Inspiring Foundations Federation. This consists of Mill Hill Nursery and Houghton Community Nursery School.
- Both schools in the federation are led by the headteacher, deputy headteacher and leadership team. They work across the two school sites.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the continued impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. Meetings were also held with class teachers, including the early career teacher, and some support staff.
- The lead inspector met with members of the local governing body and the school improvement partner.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives into communication and language; mathematical development; personal, social and emotional development, and understanding of the world. For each deep dive, the inspector looked at curriculum planning, conducted joint lesson visits with leaders, spoke with children about their work and looked at learning journals.
- Prior to the inspection, the lead inspector reviewed documents on the school's website, as well as previous Ofsted inspection reports.
- Inspectors observed children's behaviour in classrooms and around the school. They spoke with children about their views of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- As well as speaking to parents at the school gate, inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspectors took the views of staff into account through a number of meetings as well as their responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mary Cook, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Deborah Ashcroft

Ofsted Inspector

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