



# George Dent Nursery School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 113983  
**LEA** Darlington  
**Inspection number** 289770  
**Inspection dates** 16 May 2006 to 16 May 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mrs Gianna Ulyatt

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Nursery	<b>School address</b>	Elms Road
<b>School category</b>	Maintained		Darlington
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 5		County Durham, DL3 7PY
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01325 380802
<b>Number on roll</b>	150	<b>Fax number</b>	0000
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Cllr Steven Harker
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	1 February 2002	<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Judith Pullen

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Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 5	16 May 2006 - 16 May 2006	289770

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. In the course of the inspection visit, the inspector observed the daily work of the school by visiting all teaching areas, both indoors and outside. The inspector met with staff and children and conducted paired observations. The report was assisted by evidence from the school including policies, self-evaluation schedules, assessment information and school development documentation. Discussions with children, governors and parents, alongside the 121 questionnaires further assisted the writing of the report.

## Description of the school

George Dent Nursery School is situated close to the town centre of Darlington in a generally affluent area with the majority of children coming from professional families. Most children are white-British. Around 12% of children are from a wide ethnic mix; very few are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties is well below average. The school is well involved in networking with local schools. During the last 10 months there have been major changes to teaching staff and school leadership. The nursery has been established for many years and is the second oldest in the country.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

George Dent Nursery is an outstanding school. The reason for its success is that it never stands still. The school is always looking at more interesting and exciting ways to present learning opportunities to children. Consequently the curriculum is always evolving and the nursery is an exciting and challenging learning environment for all its children. Parents are thrilled with the provision and one remarked that '...there is a magic about the place'.

Children's progress and achievement are second to none. When they first enter the nursery, they are already achieving above what is normally expected of three and four year-olds. All staff work very hard to quickly get to know each individual child so that the firm foundations can be built on. Children are very enthusiastic about what the nursery has to offer. By the time they leave, the majority speak in complex sentences and have interesting conversations with adults and with each other. They love listening to stories and enjoy writing messages to friends and wrapping up pretend gifts. They learn about numbers during practical and meaningful activities, such as counting the pieces of ribbon used in their creative work. They talk excitedly when they see the blossom falling from the trees, in the nursery garden, because they say it looks like snow. They show great care and attention towards the guinea pigs and tadpoles and spontaneously water the seedlings every day.

Children handle small and large equipment with increasing control and enjoy weaving ribbon through the garden fence to make a beautiful piece of creative work. Children who have learning difficulties, or who do not speak English at home, thrive in this caring environment where vigilant staff attend to their individual needs. Children's concentration levels are high and they are very motivated to succeed. One child spent ages making a model of a pirate ship, with scraps of materials, and explained in great detail what each part represented. Another child painted a beautiful picture selecting the colours and paintbrushes carefully. Others helped an adult to dig the soil in the garden ready for planting.

Children behave in a mature and sensible way. Their personal and social skills are so well developed that they freely discuss with staff which school they will be going to in September and muse about what it might be like. They are interested in all aspects of natural life, carefully handling worms they find in the garden and examining seeds they are nurturing. Children enjoy themselves in this happy learning environment and have established friends who gather together and dress up to play games such as 'rangers' under the trees.

Children have a healthy lifestyle in the nursery. They choose when they want to have a drink and a fruit snack and clearly explain that 'milk makes our bones strong'. They talk about washing hands after using the toilet to 'get rid of germs'. In the home corner, children prepare a pretend meal with food they have made from hardened dough, explaining that 'vegetables are good for you'.

Children are encouraged to treat all equipment and resources safely. They ride tricycles around the edge of the garden and know they have to stay on the track so as not to

hurt anyone. At the same time they are encouraged not to be fearful and the very youngest children often ask an adult to stay near them while they climb up the very high slide.

The ethos of the nursery is child-centred and children are totally involved in what is going on. Adults encourage children to be independent and to take responsibility. On one level staff expect children to dress themselves when putting on their overalls and wellingtons before going outside to play. On a higher level they keep children fully informed about what is going on, to the extent that one child engaged the inspector in conversation and said '... my dad has had one of these in his school, so how well are we doing?'

Adults make sure children are supported when making choices. In this way they become confident, independent learners. Opportunities for collaboration are well planned: when two children were wrapping up a parcel, one asked the other to hold the tape steady while she cut it.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding because staff have a deep understanding about how young children learn. They plan an extensive range of activities, but are quite prepared to be led by the children if their interest goes in another direction. Every activity has a clear purpose, such as when children were cutting up and smelling exotic fruit after reading 'Handa's Surprise'. Adult interaction during small group activity is sensitive yet encourages children to think very hard at the same time. Children made egg and cress sandwiches for the planned picnic with cress they had grown themselves. One child was asked to explain why they made some sandwiches with no cress and why some only had butter in them.

The quality and range of planned activities, both indoors and outside, are rich and varied. This means that no matter what the child's interests are, there is a planned activity available. The nursery is currently giving strong emphasis to information and communication technology, and children were ordering the life cycle of the frog on the computer inside the nursery, whereas outside they were using the programmable toy and learning how to make it move and turn in different directions. Visitors including the local minister regularly come to the nursery to share music and stories with children.

The levels of care the nursery offers are very high because staff give great attention to every child's individual needs. They are very vigilant especially when children are involved in vigorous play outside. They make detailed assessments of what children know and understand, but the system they use is very time consuming. Staff monitor the way children access the activities so they can improve those that children rarely go to in order to make them more challenging.

Leadership and management are outstanding because everybody is involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the nursery. Regular staff meetings are used to discuss the impact of activities on children's learning. Children are asked to comment on which activities they like best and why. The views of parents are also taken into consideration and appropriate changes are made. The outcomes of these important discussions form the direction of the school development plan.

The school embraces innovation and has strong links with the community. Local childminders meet in the school where they have additional training and opportunities to share their experiences and to access school resources. The school is also involved in research projects that look at ways different children learn, as well as topic projects with other schools in the borough.

Parents are very much involved in the work of the nursery and say they 'feel a strong sense of belonging'. Some help out on a regular basis. Most manage to have a quick word with staff every day and support the school at fairs or by making up 'storybags', which are loaned out to them so they can enjoy books at home with their child.

Governors too are actively involved in the school. They are knowledgeable and have been very supportive during the current period of changes in leadership and staffing. They give freely of their time and are willing to use their skills and expertise to keep the school moving forward.

The school is very modest when it judges its overall effectiveness as good. This is indeed an outstanding school. It is not only one of the oldest in the country, it is also among one of the best.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

- Children reach standards that are well above those expected of four year-olds in all six areas of learning
- Children of all abilities improve in their knowledge and understanding at an accelerated rate
- Children's speaking and listening skills are exceptionally mature
- Children's social development is particularly outstanding.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

- Behaviour is excellent because children are enthusiastic and motivated to learn; they are actively engaged throughout the session
- Children feel safe and secure in this caring environment
- Children engage visitors in conversation with great confidence and self-assurance
- Children collaborate well in their play, negotiate ideas and come to acceptable conclusions.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

- Parents say children love their teachers
- Staff encourage, praise and support children throughout the session

- Staff stimulate children through captivating activities
- Staff support and encourage children's choices and use these to lead them into new learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

- The quality and range of activities on offer is breathtaking
- The school openly welcomes visitors to share their skills with the children
- The school analyses its work in each area of learning in order to generate new ideas
- Children are expected to become independent and confident learners.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

- Staff are totally committed to the care and protection of all their children
- They know each child very well and challenge them as they play
- Parents are kept up to date through regular contact.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

- The school is very clear about what it wants to do next and how it intends to do it
- Developments since the last inspection have been extensive
- The school welcomes all children and actively seeks support for them when necessary
- The school has a fantastic outdoor area which is used to full advantage everyday
- Resources are extensive and used very well to promote learning for all children.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	1	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	NA
Learners are educated about sexual health	NA
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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Miss Judith Pullen

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16 May 2006

Dear Children,

I have just had a fabulous day in your nursery. I was thrilled to talk to you about the things you were doing. I hope you had a good picnic and thank you very much for the egg and cress sandwich. It was delicious!

You are very lucky to go to such a wonderful nursery. I love your garden and I can see how much fun you have playing outside. Can you remember how the blossom looked like snow? Some of you are very brave, climbing up the high slide. I enjoyed watching you planning how you were going to play 'rangers' among the trees and the tents were great to crawl in to. The weaving on the fence made a super pattern and it was lovely to see so many of you having a go. The seedlings you have planted are growing so well because you look after them carefully.

I know you do very well in your nursery and most of you speak in a very clever way. You certainly enjoy listening to stories. I know you have many friends and it is good to see you all playing so nicely together so that no one is left out.

Your teachers are very proud of you because you are becoming very grown up. They too enjoy watching you and writing good things about you while you are playing so they have lots to tell your parents. Sometimes they write too much!

I hope you will continue to enjoy your time in the nursery. I hope those of you who are leaving enjoy your new school, but do not forget the good friends you have made at George Dent. I know those of you who are staying will welcome the new children and show them round because they might be quite shy at first.

With very best wishes,

Gianna Ulyatt

Lead inspector