

St Paul's Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121266
Local Authority	York
Inspection number	292064
Inspection dates	15–16 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Lesley Clark

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Linda Murphy
Headteacher	Mrs Maggie Antoun
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2001
School address	12 St Paul's Square York North Yorkshire YO24 4BD
Telephone number	01904 622291
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Age group	3–4
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This popular nursery school serves a large area across the city as it is the only maintained nursery in York. There is a waiting list and so some children have three terms in Nursery whereas others have five. While the majority of children are White British, the proportion of children whose first language is not English has increased to 8%. The catchment area is mixed. The school has an Enhanced Resource Centre for 12 children referred by outside agencies because they have significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of children with learning difficulties, especially in speech and language, is above average. The nursery provides flexible 'wrap around care' arrangements over lunchtime as well as a limited number of additional morning and afternoon places for which parents pay. There have been several staffing changes in the last two years, including the headteacher who has been in post for eighteen months, after a six-month period as acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Paul's Nursery is a good school with many outstanding features. It is beloved by parents and children alike who find the staff 'cheerful, welcoming and approachable', appreciative of the delightful home-like rooms indoors and the spacious and exciting environment outside. St Paul's main strength is the way it includes everyone. It fulfils its aims to nurture 'happy, secure and confident children fostering in each individual an enquiring mind and a positive attitude towards learning.' The nursery resounds with laughter and happily chattering children as they busy themselves with their tasks.

Provision for children in the Enhanced Resource Centre is outstanding and they are fully included in all activities as well as having special times on their own. Together with the other children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, they have a rich learning experience. So do more able children whose curiosity and questions staff try their best to satisfy. This is because of the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher. The school has come on enormously over the past two years: forging links with the neighbouring primary school, reaching out into the community to extend care arrangements, extending nursery provision, improving assessment systems and involving parents more closely in their children's learning. The result is seen in improved achievement and in children's confidence and independence. This demonstrates the nursery's outstanding capacity to improve further.

Achievement for the majority of children is good. It is outstanding for those in the Enhanced Resource Centre and for others with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Sensitive teaching, including lots of sign language and repeated phrases help these children to listen attentively and to learn. A 'sensory room' provides both comfort and stimulation, helping them to feel secure and special. Similarly, more able children often achieve extremely well, flourishing as they explore the challenging activities at their disposal and learn to work with others productively. The quality of teaching is good overall. Staff initiate conversations well and almost always give children time to respond. Good organisation ensures that children always have an adult to turn to. However, sometimes, staff expect children to sit still and listen for too long and they do not always spot quickly enough when children need to be actively involved. This slows the learning of average achievers who tend to become restless or make seemingly random comments. Similarly, opportunities to learn through role play are sometimes limited because not all staff appreciate how much can be learnt through adults and children playing together, with the child taking the lead. The curriculum therefore is good, rather than outstanding, despite the extremely rich provision for children's cultural development and the wide range of interesting visitors to school.

Personal development is outstanding because children are encouraged right from the start to be independent and to take responsibility for their actions. Staff are skilled at developing children's self-esteem and helping them to make sensible decisions. The care, support and guidance given to individuals in terms of their personal care and safety are first-rate. Children are well aware of the need to be safe and understand why they have to wash their hands regularly. They enjoy healthy food and comment with interest when they sample different vegetables. They tidy up after themselves very well indeed, singing the 'tidy up' song as they do so. It is rare to hear children upset because staff are so attentive to their personal needs and the nursery is so arranged that there are quiet places for those who need it as well as plenty of space for others to run off steam. Children are extremely well prepared to go on to the next stage of their education. The assessment of children's achievements is good and gives a clear

overview of their progress, enabling staff to target different groups of children to check their learning. Records of achievement, to which parents contribute as well, give a good picture of how children are getting on both at home and school. Sometimes the 'next steps' given at the end of the more formal half-termly assessments are rather vague and do not relate closely enough to what children should learn next and so they are less useful than they might be.

Outstanding leadership and management and good, supportive governance have enabled the school to forge ahead after a turbulent time which included securing the nursery's future. The school's self-evaluation is absolutely accurate and as a result, the rate of improvement rapid. Almost all parents returned the questionnaire to express their delight in the services St Paul's provides for their children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that children spend as much time as possible learning actively and at their own pace and do not sit and listen for too long at a stretch.
- Ensure that all staff have a full understanding of how role play can be used to develop learning in many different situations.
- Sharpen up assessments so that the next steps of learning are clear, achievable and relevant to what children need to learn next.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From a broadly average starting point, children make good progress. They are well prepared for their Reception year in other schools for they gain skills that are generally above average for their age. Achievement is good in all areas of learning and in personal, social and emotional development, it is outstanding. This is because adults are tuned in to children's personal needs. This is also what helps the achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be outstanding because they are sensitively nurtured so as to bring out their best. Similarly, more able children often do extremely well because staff are attentive to their questions and foster their curiosity. Sometimes, average achievers tread water because they find it difficult to listen for more than 10 minutes at a time, especially after they have sat very well during snack time and made polite conversation.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children behave extremely well, beaming when praised. They thoroughly enjoy learning new things. They photograph each other at play and proudly show the albums where photographers as well as those who are photographed are named. Attendance is good because parents are made to feel part of the nursery, with books and 'story packs' to borrow and take home. Children show high levels of independence, pouring out their own milk at snack time, for instance. They soon learn to play with others. They try out new things confidently because the nursery routines make them feel secure. Children mirror the adults' meticulous ways; for example, when carefully scraping all the red and blue spaghetti pieces off the pots in the water tray. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and show concern for others. When a girl fell over, for example, a boy ran up and said, 'Are you OK? Oh dear! Oh dear!' Special events such as an African day, and well-read stories, arouse their sense of wonder as well as enriching their cultural and social awareness.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching quality varies from satisfactory to outstanding. Staff question effectively and help children to communicate with increasing confidence. They encourage good learning habits by praising success. Where teaching quality is outstanding, staff take the lead from the children themselves, whose learning increases as a result. Imaginative touches instantly arouse children's attention, as when a toy snake seemed to emerge slowly out of a drawstring bag all by itself and children gasped, 'Is it real?' Where teaching quality is satisfactory, demonstrations and taking turns takes a bit too long and those who are just watching lose concentration. This particularly affects average learners as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have extra support and more able learners ask lots of questions which ensure they get the attention they need.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The balance in terms of time between formal learning and free-choice activities is good. The practice of running snack time and learning time consecutively places undue demands on some children. Activities both indoors and outdoors are fun and the way the nursery is organised helps children to seek out the types of activity they prefer. While there are distinct role play areas, the provision for purposeful, creative and thought-provoking play in a wide range of imaginary or near-real situations is at an early stage of development. It is also dependant on staff with a naturally playful approach to make it work effectively. The curriculum, however, provides an outstandingly rich range of extra activities such as regular pottery lessons, learning French with Reception and Year 1 pupils after school and discovering that different countries have different words and customs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There are very few reluctant partings with parents because cheerful staff skilfully ease the transition from home to school. Care for children lies at the heart of St Paul's, ensuring outstanding provision for children's welfare. Arrangements for safeguarding children are robust. Pastoral care is excellent. Parents are in full agreement that their children are in good hands and they conscientiously note down the progress their children make at home for inclusion in the record of achievement. The 'next steps' that staff include at the end of half-termly assessments are not as informative as they should be. The systems to check children's overall progress, however, work well in terms of providing a clear overview. Weekly checks on the progress of different groups of learners in specific areas are also successful.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteachers' meticulous evaluation of provision has led to an intensive two-year programme to improve children's learning, provide extended care and to link the nursery with other providers so as to extend the range of opportunities for all learners. As a result, the

nursery is booming, children flourish and achievement is going up because of effective assessment procedures that lead to well targeted action. Careful monitoring of teaching and learning highlighted many strengths which are used to advantage in the way the provision is now organised, with an extra adult each day either assessing or helping with different groups of children. Staff work as a team and support each other well. A well thought out programme of professional development, plus training in the use of up-to-date technology, is effectively developing new ways of encouraging learning. The school is well on the way towards extending the curriculum to ensure that children are busy active learners all the time. Governance is warmly supportive and increasingly involved in all the school does. It is a measure of the headteachers' success that staff, parents and governors feel their ideas are important too. The shared commitment is tangible and gives a real buzz to the place.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I really enjoyed coming to your nursery and meeting so many of you. You go to a good nursery and everyone there takes excellent care of you. They keep you safe and make sure that you are happy and enjoy yourselves. You behave very well indeed and it was lovely to see so many smiling faces. I like the way you pour out your milk so carefully at snack time and how well you all tidy up. What fun you have too, when special visitors come, like the potter or when your teacher dressed up as an African lady. I expect you would all have liked to dress up too. Your headteacher does an excellent job running everything. She makes life exciting for you and your teachers, introducing a special computerised screen, for example, to make learning fun.

There are some things that I have asked your nursery school to do next. I noticed that quite a lot of you find sitting down and listening for more than 10 minutes a bit of a struggle, especially after you have just eaten your snack so I have suggested that this time is shortened. I have also recommended that you have lots more things to do in the role play areas and that adults play with you too. Last, it would help if the adults wrote simpler 'next steps' in your record of achievement books so your parents would be clearer about how to help you go on to the next stage of your learning.

I hope you continue to have a very happy time at St Paul's and that you show the adults what fun playing can be!