

Mill Hill Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108752
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	309790
Inspection date	2 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Gianna Ulyatt

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	3-5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ann Callaghan
Headteacher	Mrs Jean Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2005
School address	Doxford Park Sunderland Tyne and Wear SR3 2LE
Telephone number	0191 5535930
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the impact of relatively new leadership on the school,
- the accuracy of assessment and the achievement of different groups of children,
- the quality of teaching and learning.

Evidence was gathered from school performance data and other documentation; observations of teaching and learning; evaluations of children's activities, including how they interact with each other and within their learning environment; parents' questionnaires and discussions with children, staff and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest the school's own assessment, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Mill Hill Nursery is situated in an area where there are pockets of social deprivation and high unemployment. The majority of children are of White British heritage. The number from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. An above average proportion of children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In spite of the distance of four miles, the school has strong links with the Children's Centre in Silksworth. The school offers a range of extended services including wrap around care, breakfast and after school clubs, carer and toddler sessions and holiday clubs. Families also benefit from the multi-agency links available, such as those from the health services and family support groups.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a successful school that provides a good level of education for its children. It is an exciting place for young children. The good, clear sighted leadership of the headteacher has empowered all staff to be totally involved in whole school development. Consequently, the enthusiastic professionals work as a united team towards improving provision. The school plays a central role in the community and has made extremely important links with the primary school and Children's Centre, for the benefit of children and their families. The partnership with parents is strong. The warm welcome given to children and their carers each day provides a valuable opportunity to exchange important information. The interesting adult learning programmes provided by the Nursery are oversubscribed. Parents are wholeheartedly delighted with the school and this is evident in good attendance and by the high number of returned questionnaires containing positive comments. For example, one parent, who speaks for many wrote, 'Her knowledge has come along in wonders. Mill Hill Nursery seems to have the ability to incorporate education and having fun really well.' This comment is certainly true and is one of the main reasons why pupils make such good progress and thoroughly enjoy learning.

When children enter the Nursery, their development is generally below that usually seen for children of that age. Underpinning the success of children of all abilities and ethnicity is the strong focus on personal development. As a result children are extremely well behaved, they are enthusiastic learners and make outstanding progress in this aspect of learning. They enjoy sharing books and many write their name from memory. In mathematics children progress well, particularly in their understanding of shape, space and measure. Children's knowledge and understanding of the world is well promoted. They plant seeds, watch chicks hatch and enjoy learning through sand and water play. Children thoroughly enjoy vigorous, daily exercise outdoors. They paint, make models, sing and dance with delight and confidence. When they leave for primary school, the majority are almost at the level expected. They are well grounded in early reading, writing and mathematics and well prepared to continue their education.

Good teaching enables children to work with adults and to make sensible choices about activities they choose for themselves. Staff interact very well and enhance children's learning through active play and develop their vocabulary through challenging talk. All are sensitive to the needs and moods of very young children. Planning is good because staff look carefully at the interests and experiences children have and adapt and extend activities drawing on children's ideas. This approach helps children to enjoy learning and become highly motivated, because they are genuinely interested. The school's motto, 'Where we learn, laugh and care' is fulfilled well. Adults observe and make notes about children's learning. However, this valuable information is not used systematically enough to track the rate of individual children's progress to ensure all are sufficiently challenged.

The very good curriculum excites children and grasps their imagination. It promotes their personal development and extends their concentration exceptionally well. The recent introduction of mark making opportunities across all six areas of learning entices both boys and girls to develop early writing skills. The Nursery is now considering ways to introduce similar strategies to improve opportunities for early calculating skills. Very young children know about the value of eating fruit and drinking milk as they prepare their daily snack. They explain why hand-washing is important. They care for their environment and pick up toys that have accidentally fallen to the floor, without being prompted. Children thoroughly enjoy playing imaginative and counting games in the wooden boat fixed outdoors. They learn equally well

how to care for animals as they handle the rabbit, for example. These are some of the reasons why parents say 'My child gets upset when she cannot stay all day.'

The Nursery provides very good levels of care for its children. Most staff members are very experienced and all show high levels of loyalty and commitment to the school. Relationships are excellent and children are very comfortable with adults in this homely, caring environment. Very good care begins when staff visit children in their home prior to them joining the Nursery. Staff use this opportunity very well to find out as much as they can about each individual child. As a result, children settle well and quickly and are confident in the new environment. A major contribution to the smooth continuity of each child's day is made by the provision of care for early mornings, lunchtimes and after school in familiar surroundings and by staff who are well known to the children. Systems and procedures to protect and safeguard children are in place and well adhered to. Staff are very vigilant and well informed about protecting children.

Leadership is good. Since joining the school, following a period of threatened closure, the headteacher, with the full support of all staff, has begun to develop middle management. Morale is now high and staff are looking ahead. Therefore the school is well placed to continue to develop and improve. The school has completed a full audit of provision and has used the information to identify relevant points within the improvement plan. However, accountability within middle management to ensure the actions are carried out, monitored and evaluated, is not clear enough. Governors are knowledgeable and loyal. They question and support the work of the school. They play a full and active part in the school's work. This is a good school where children make good progress and therefore value for money is good.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

This is a nursery school, therefore the Foundation Stage is completely covered by the Overall Effectiveness section.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the valuable information obtained from observing children is used systematically to track the rate of progress so that all can be sufficiently challenged.
- Continue to develop middle management so that all are clear about their role and responsibility towards whole school improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

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?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Mill Hill Nursery School, Sunderland, SR3 2LE

I really enjoyed my inspection of your Nursery because you made me so welcome. Many of you came to have a chat with me. Some of you showed me how you dance and sing. Some of you even wrote your names for me on my special forms. What clever children you are! I loved watching you painting, cutting up fruit and stroking the rabbit very carefully. I could see some of you were fishing from the boat outside and managed to count the fish you caught. I know you have a lot of fun when learning in your Nursery and that is why you do so well.

I was very impressed with the way you care for your Nursery and the way you are kind and friendly towards everyone. Your teachers really care for you. They think of very exciting things for you to do. They know each one of you very well. Teachers often make notes about the clever things you are doing and I have asked the school to use the ideas written about you to make sure you have even harder activities to do. I have also asked that everyone becomes involved in carrying out the new ideas the school has for you. You in turn must try even harder with your activities and you must let your teachers know if you have good and different ideas for your school.

I hope you will always enjoy your time in your Nursery school and that you continue to be good, hard workers when you go to the reception class in the primary school in September.

With very best wishes

Gianna Ulyatt

Lead inspector