

Houghton le Spring Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108746
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	324826
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Lynne Read

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 (total)	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Emma Swansbury
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Bulmer
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Neasham Place Houghton le Spring Tyne and Wear DH5 8AE
Telephone number	0191 5536557
Fax number	0191 5536557

Age group	3–4
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This nursery is situated close to the town centre and serves a wide area, parts of which are socially disadvantaged. It offers three-hour sessions for children over the age of three, on a flexible basis. The school caters for children with learning and emotional difficulties and/or disabilities although at the time of the inspection, the proportion of children in this category was lower than usual. Most children are of White British heritage. Extended services include day and holiday care, as well as before and after school sessions for children aged three to eight years. Several children attend one or more of the settings, taking advantage of the all day 'wrap around' care. Together with the Children's Centre, a programme of additional support, practical help and links with outside agencies is offered to parents, carers and children from the community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding nursery school that provides excellent value for money. Parents commend the school very highly and say it has an excellent reputation. They especially praise the high standard of care and the excellent teaching. One parent commented, 'The children are made to feel very special when they walk through the doors', while others described the learning environment as 'purposeful, inviting, stimulating and fun'. Many benefits arise from the additional care and courses on offer. Children's learning is enhanced through the extended hours provision. Flexible attendance arrangements mean that sessions can be tailored to family needs. The School and Family Nurturing Programme provides practical help for families. Courses, such as 'Busy Bodies', run in conjunction with the Children's Centre, support early learning very well. Full advantage is taken of specialist agencies, for example, speech therapists and health visitors, in order to provide extended, expert help for children.

Achievement is outstanding. When children start nursery, their development varies widely. In the main, it matches expectations for the age group, although a significant proportion of children are experiencing difficulties, especially with language. The overall gain for the majority of individuals is exceptionally high. Personal and social development, including an awareness of how to stay healthy, is a major strength. Behaviour is excellent. Children share and collaborate exceptionally well for their age and thoroughly enjoy their learning. This prepares them very well for their future education and results in a very pleasant and busy nursery atmosphere. Children progress much further than expected in their understanding of numbers and shape and in working on simple calculations and problems. Language skills develop extremely well so children are confident in communicating and expressing ideas. Their knowledge of sounds and letters to support early reading and writing is good but not quite as well developed.

Provision for learning is outstanding. Tasks are based on frequent and accurate assessments of what the children know. They are focused at different levels of difficulty, according to what individuals need to learn next. Teaching also takes account of the children's interests. For example, their enthusiasm for being in the fresh air is harnessed through an imaginative range of outdoor physical, creative and investigative opportunities available in all weathers. These are complemented by an exciting and constantly changing range of indoor activities. A good balance of short, adult directed sessions and 'free choice' time encourage children to explore and become independent learners. Staff have identified the need for a more focused approach to teaching children about sounds and letters to run alongside the early reading and writing work. The school encourages parents to be active partners in their children's education. They are able to support progress at home because they are involved in setting the 'what next' goals for their children and are well informed about each week's learning programme.

The outstanding and visionary leadership of the headteacher has resulted in excellent improvement, especially in providing additional care facilities and support for families. Attention to safety issues is meticulous and welfare requirements are met fully. There is excellent capacity for the Nursery to maintain this outstanding record and to enjoy continued success.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a more focused approach for teaching about sounds and letters in order to boost early reading and writing skills further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

When they join the Nursery, children's development varies widely. For most it is broadly in line with that usually seen for the age group, although for a significant number, it is below and occasionally well below expectations. On entry many children have difficulties with communication, relationships and early reasoning and problem solving skills. Achievement is excellent, both for boys and girls. By the time children transfer to their Reception year, development is well above expectations in many important areas. Learning for those who enter at a lower than expected level is rapid and children leave Nursery well prepared for full time education. Personal, social and emotional development is excellent. By the end of the Nursery year, skills in counting, recognising numbers and solving problems are way ahead of expectations. Children become extremely confident listeners and speakers; they 'write messages' and enjoy books. Good progress is made in learning about sounds and letters but this is not as rapid as in other areas. Physical and creative development progresses at an excellent pace because children work with a wide range of materials and have an exciting selection of activities to encourage exercise and dexterity. Children with learning or emotional difficulties are extremely well supported; they make exceptional progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, are emphasised through all the school's work and are outstanding. Children thoroughly enjoy coming to Nursery; they leave their parents and carers confidently on arrival and quickly immerse themselves in the exciting learning environment. They follow the routines very well and thoroughly enjoy social occasions, such as snack time. Children sustain excellent concentration, for example, when sharing a book with an adult. Attendance is good and parents say children thoroughly enjoy Nursery. One wrote, 'my child is looking forward to a year of fun.'

Children are securely cocooned within this very safe environment. They understand the need for hygiene and take good care when manoeuvring their wheeled toys around obstacles. They know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and enjoy the fruit provided. Children plant secure foundations for their future economic well-being through a broad range of learning experiences and developing the ability to share and collaborate very effectively. They show respect for other people's feelings and offer help where needed. This supports the harmonious community feel in the Nursery.

Quality of provision

Effectiveness in promoting children's learning and development

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers have high expectations and excellent expertise; they know how young children learn best and turn challenging tasks into exciting 'play' activities. For example, children have great fun learning how to make letters and patterns using finger paint.

Staff observe and assess children's learning constantly. The information is then used to ensure that support is provided where needed. In addition, adults develop an enhanced strand to the

weekly programme of work to stretch the more able and to encompass pupils' interests. These strategies promote learning at a fast rate. Adults lead short, focused tasks to teach specific skills and then provide a varied selection of activities for children to practise and consolidate what they learn. Staff recognise that more focused time needs to be spent on teaching about sounds and letters to enhance the very good work done on early reading and writing. Extremely useful help and advice is provided in order to guide learning. Excellent support is provided in work and play and children are constantly encouraged to recognise and celebrate their own successes.

The curriculum is outstanding and packed with opportunities for children to investigate and discover things for themselves. Together with a good range of visits, this ensures that children have a wealth of experiences which help them to develop their skills and talents and expand their horizons. Children who have behavioural or emotional difficulties are offered sensitive support and are fully involved in all activities.

Staff exploit every opportunity to promote pupils' personal development. Resources are of high quality and very carefully chosen to capture children's interests and fire their curiosity. For example, the outside environment has been developed using natural materials to provide a wealth of imaginative opportunities for adventure and investigation. Staff take care to introduce characters from different backgrounds into children's stories and play and topics such as 'food from around the world' provide a wider perspective for these young children.

Effectiveness in promoting children's welfare

Grade: 1

Care and protection for children are seen as paramount and the provision is outstanding. Key workers are allocated to small groups of children so they get to know them and their families exceptionally well. This, in turn, generates a great deal of trust and underpins the very strong home-nursery partnership. There is great consistency, in both staff and routines between the care and nursery arrangements so the day flows very smoothly for those children using the wrap-around facilities. The settling in arrangements are very good and highlighted as a strength by parents. One expressed thanks to the staff for their 'patience and kindness' during the process. Links with the primary schools, together with opportunities for children to experience full day nursery education, help to smooth the transition to the Reception classes. Child protection procedures are firmly established and checks on the suitability of staff meet requirements fully. Exceptional care is taken to greet children on arrival and to ensure a safe handover to parents and carers at the end of sessions. Required policies, procedures and risk assessments are in place, robustly followed and regularly reviewed. Arrangements for first aid and handling medication are successfully established and all staff are keenly aware of individual needs, such as allergies or dietary requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and has the confidence of staff, governors and parents. Very strong teamwork and a shared vision of excellence underpin the Nursery's success. The outstanding caring ethos is created by all staff who work enthusiastically to ensure that children have equal access to all activities.

The Nursery reviews its performance constantly and uses the detailed amount of information on children's progress in order to do so. Managers and staff know where the strengths lie and act quickly where a need for improvement is identified. For example, regular meetings now enable staff to share their assessments of children's learning and ensure that provision builds consistently on prior learning.

The strong sense of pride in school is reflected in the high quality of the learning environment, very efficient administration and very good maintenance. Governance is excellent. The governors are actively involved in monitoring provision and suggesting areas for improvement. Their 'Everyone Matters Group' successfully promotes the partnership with stakeholders and the wider community to ensure that the Nursery is meeting local needs.

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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 is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
The standards[1] reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children?	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
The extent to which 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	1

The quality of provision

How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of the children in the EYFS promoted?	1

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1
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**

2 October 2008

Inspection of Houghton le Spring Nursery School, Sunderland, DH5 8AE

Dear Children

I had a lovely time in your Nursery. Thank you for showing me all the exciting things you do. I really like the way you all stay so busy, are very happy and get on with each other so well. It was good to see you put on your all-weather suits and wellies to play in the outdoor area, and you don't seem to mind about the rain! I heard a lot of laughter during the two days so I know you have fun when you are playing and working.

I think you are making excellent progress and I was impressed with your counting and the number of shapes that you can recognise. You like making interesting pictures and models and love to find out about your world. I liked the pictures and patterns you made using the computer, just like bigger boys and girls do.

I saw you enjoying books with your teachers and you are good at spotting which words rhyme. I also know that some of you can write your name – well done. Most of you though, aren't quite as confident in knowing about letters and sounds as you are in the rest of your learning. Once you go to primary school, you will need these skills for reading and writing so I suggested that your Nursery helps you to split up sounds in words and match letters and sounds. They told me that they have some fun ways of doing this so I'm sure you will enjoy it.

Your parents sent me lots of replies to the questionnaire and I was very happy about that. They think your Nursery is excellent and I agree with them. They are pleased that you have such a good time learning so many important things. What good workers you are! I think they are very proud of you.

Thank you for those lovely smiles you gave me and for letting me join in with your games and activities. I really enjoyed the conversations I had and I was amazed to see how lively and interested some of you are after a full day of learning. I think you must have good stamina (your teachers will explain that to you). I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning journey as you move into your next schools. Keep up the hard work and good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Lynne Read

Lead inspector