

Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100097
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	335486
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Wendy Simmons

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	0–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ann Jefferson
Headteacher	Ms Theresa Lane
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited the nursery, the childcare provision and some of the extended services such as the crèche and after-school activities. In total, 29 different learning activities were observed; the inspector focused in greater detail on ten of these. Further to this, meetings were held with six governors, the headteacher, senior staff, and three middle managers including those responsible for managing child protection and safeguarding. The inspector looked at a sample of the children's work as seen in their 'Special Books', displays and from assessment records. Other documentation was also scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation evidence, the Centre Development Plan and child protection and care information. Altogether, 64 parental and carer questionnaires were received and analysed. Informal discussions with children and parents contributed to the evidence gained. The inspection looked in detail at the following:

- how girls and boys are helped to achieve equally well in their mathematical, reading and writing skills
- what makes the teaching and learning of children's speaking, listening and personal development possibly so good? This focused especially on those learning English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- whether leaders are fully accurate in their self-evaluation about the overall quality of teaching and learning and how well middle managers and governors are developing their roles
- the quality of partnership with parents
- the quality of the school's safeguarding and child protection arrangements.

Information about the school

Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre was the first open-air nursery to be established in England almost a century ago. Learning and care provision is carried out in six 'shelters'; this is the original name given to the spaces used as classrooms and learning spaces. Other than the nought to under three year olds, the children are able to move freely between shelter activities. The setting provides for the needs of children from a very wide range of social circumstances; a high proportion is in receipt of free school meals. The children's centre is culturally diverse; the largest groups of children come from Black African, White British, Caribbean and mixed race heritages. Half of all children speak English as an additional language and in total, 24 languages are represented. Close to a half of all children are often at an early stage of learning to speak English when they join the setting. The school has a high proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These children's needs most often relate to language, communication or, more occasionally, physical difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. A small proportion of children are 'looked after', which means they are cared for through formal legal arrangements with the social services. The school and childcare provision provide many different services for parents, carers and children.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The children's centre provides a superb and outstanding start to children's early education. Parents value the work of staff and often comment about it being a wonderful place. Inspectors agree with them. The children show a joy for investigation and learning through play. The principles of the reformers Rachel and Margaret McMillan, nearly 100 years ago, remain at the core of this setting's success. Relationships are exemplary and help children to be happy, gain confidence and behave outstandingly well. Children's achievement is very impressive and has improved from good at the time of the last inspection to outstanding.

Highly effective leadership drives developments forward. Leaders are passionate about showing ambition to do the very best for the children. They know the setting's strengths and areas for development very well. Self-evaluation about the quality of teaching and learning is extremely thorough and this in turn helps children to achieve as well as possible. Governors' skills are being strengthened, as several are new to the post. In particular, plans are in place for training them so that they can deepen their knowledge of how well the children are doing. This is currently ongoing. Nonetheless, the overall quality of self-evaluation is very impressive because it feeds into the improvement plans well. There are outstanding links with parents and carers which contribute greatly to children's progress and good community cohesion. The centre's leaders are constantly looking to improve the provision. For example, using the special action research project, known as 'The Listening Project', makes a significant impact on children's language and personal development. Overall, there is an excellent capacity to improve.

Children from the age of 3 months to 4 years of age benefit from a superb range of activities. When combined with the very good teaching, children thrive and are very well prepared for their future lives.

Staff go out of their way to make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those learning to speak English and any looked after children are as happy and successful as other children. This is a highly caring place to be where children are treated as individuals and equality of opportunity is prioritised. A minor weakness was observed in care in that the main kitchen door was left open too much and children could possibly have gained access; otherwise the attention to safety, security and safeguarding is good. As one parent noted, 'Staff are welcoming, supportive and always ready to talk to parents.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the governors' role in evaluating the work of the setting by:

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- helping them to understand the skills that children have when they arrive
 - helping them to know what children can do by the end of the Nursery
 - ensuring that they understand exactly how much progress children make in all six areas of learning so that they can ask insightful questions about children's achievement in the drive to remain outstanding in the future.
- W1. Welfare-required action for childcare provision
- Make sure that the school kitchen is inaccessible to children at all times.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children**1**

Children have a real sense of personal ownership in all they do and they are proud of their efforts. Children were thrilled to share their 'special books' with one of the inspectors and confidently spoke about why they enjoy being at Rachel McMillan.

Children make outstanding progress in learning new things; their achievement is excellent. From the children's often lower than expected starting points, they develop very quickly and most reach the expected level for four year olds by the end of the Nursery. Moreover, many exceed this level. Girls and boys do equally well in all areas of learning, including their mathematical development, reading, writing and wider communication skills. Leaders keep a very close eye on this, so that they adapt activities to make them exciting for both girls' and boys' interests. Staff constantly look for imaginative ways to engage children and this helps children to become engrossed in what they do. Children develop confidence, self-esteem and an ability to play harmoniously with others. They socialise very well with children from many different cultural backgrounds and they thoroughly enjoy investigating new things. For example, one child matched all of the fallen autumn leaves to a picture chart, so learning their names and then looking for the same trees in the garden.

The skilful way that adults model language, ask questions and engage children in informal conversations, has a very positive effect on children's speaking and communication skills. This is evident for all children, especially those who are learning English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Because children have the freedom to choose activities for themselves, their levels of enjoyment are high; this helps them to persevere and naturally socialise with others. As governors so rightly said, 'Children have a freedom with independence that breeds confidence. It is a stepping stone for children to be ready for the future.'

Staff go out of their way to help children build a very good knowledge of the world in which they live. They grow, harvest, cook and eat foods that they have grown, as evident in the cooking of vegetable pasta; and this helps them to really understand about how to be healthy. As one child put it, 'It makes us strong with health inside me.' Adults make sure that children have plenty of healthy snacks and meals. Throughout the setting, including extended day care, children have plenty of opportunities to develop physically when they run around, develop agility and enjoy the fresh air. They are helped to make a significant contribution to the community by taking part in an art exhibition at the National Maritime Museum, by growing herbs in a local community

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garden and by doing many musical and singing activities locally.

Children attend regularly but often suffer from the normal early childhood illnesses or sometimes take longer holidays so that they can see their families in other countries. This is why attendance is average when compared to the national average.

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Children's attainment ¹	2
The quality of children's learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
Children's behaviour	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Children's attendance ¹	3
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Children are nurtured and given the guidance and support needed to make the most of their time at the setting. The outreach services, such as that provided through the family worker and the excellent childcare services, really enhance the partnership with parents. Children are very well cared for at all times overall.

The ongoing assessments about children's progress are detailed, as seen in their profiles and in their 'special books'. Adults' awareness of best early years practice is very good and staff are highly reflective. They eagerly took part in a recent Interaction Research Project. This involved working with other speech professionals in the community. As a result of analysing a video about their teaching and learning, staff have become more

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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attuned to looking for children’s reactions to what they are doing. This allows them to interject at the correct time with questions and vocabulary, thereby engaging the children in conversations which encourage thinking, learning and communication; this is exemplary practice. Adults make sure that children’s conversations and observations are recorded regularly in what are called ‘learning stories’. These are supported by photographs and displayed in different ways to help children to see their progress. Sometimes, this is in big book format, which is an excellent way to give reading a real meaning to children. Reading and writing are well promoted, although occasionally there are a few missed opportunities to spontaneously use books and letters and sounds in some play activities. However, children love to listen to stories, write and engage in make-believe play.

Teaching is very high quality overall because it is rooted in a stimulating curriculum and in encouraging children to have enquiring minds. For example, children delighted in exploring water. The skilful discussions with children helped them to cooperate to find out how water flows along tubes. This then led to further experimentation to make a real hose pipe for a fire person to use as part of an imaginary game. Children screeched with delight as the water spurted out. Again, adults interjected by modelling language to explain what was happening; children were engaged in this activity for more than 30 minutes. Younger children were equally absorbed and learnt to work cooperatively when harvesting and washing tomatoes. At first they were quiet but then skilful questioning and listening helped the children to talk about the feeling of the tomatoes and explore how some sink and float, comparing their size. In the end they delighted in seeing the stalks as spiders in the water!

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is dedicated to the children and very earnest in her commitment to providing a very high quality early years curriculum and care for them from three months to four years. This vision is clearly communicated to, and shared by, staff. It is clear that the needs of the individual children are central to the ethos of the setting and are embedded in the way that adults work with children on a daily basis. At the core of their work, leaders promote equality and good community cohesion.

Systems, procedures and documentation are well organised. Parents feel part of the

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organisation and take an active part in their children’s learning and progress. Leaders’ work with families and other agencies promotes children’s learning, development and welfare outstandingly well. Safeguarding procedures are good and plans are in place to further develop adults’ knowledge this term, so that they are constantly kept up to date about current best practice and requirements. The staff questionnaire sums up the way in which this is a happy and successful place. Adults are 100% proud to be a member of staff. They note such things as, ‘It being an honour to work here’.

Leaders and staff are passionate about evaluating their work. They are ambitious to drive improvement in all that they do. Monitoring is rigorous and very focused on improving teaching and achievement. As one teacher explained, ‘We reflect on our practice and define what we would like to improve.’ The Listening Research Project demonstrates outstanding leadership, especially by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. At the moment, leaders are working on cutting-edge provision to help parents to be even more involved in their children’s learning, especially through the ‘Learning Stories’ work. Research projects are shared with other educational practitioners locally, nationally and internationally. The capacity to improve is excellent. Governors’ skills are being strengthened, as several are new to the post. Currently, they are very involved in promoting and checking that children are safe and enjoy being at Rachel McMillan and have the building and resources to ensure outstanding provision. A major building project is underway to make a new shelter and to create a sensory garden. They have embraced the idea of being a ‘Forest School’. This means that a dedicated area of land is devoted to investigation activities in a wooded area. Governors have a broad view about how well children achieve but would like to deepen their knowledge of how well the children are doing. For example, they will be fully equipped then to ask really insightful questions about children’s performance. Plans are underway for this and this is important in ensuring that the setting continues to remain outstanding in the future.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents have very positive views of the setting. They unanimously agree that their children enjoy being at Rachel McMillan. They say that their children are safe and they are kept well informed about what goes on and their children’s progress. All speak highly about the leadership and agree that the quality of teaching is impressive so that their children make quick progress and are well prepared for the future. As one parent commented, ‘I feel confident when I drop my son in – it’s a lovely school’, while others wrote about the ‘superb start’ and ‘very good progress of a child with special needs’.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Rachel McMillan Nursery and Children's Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 64 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 120 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	57	89	9	14	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	46	71	18	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	73	19	29	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	47	73	17	26	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	51	79	14	21	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	59	24	37	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	53	28	43	2	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	38	59	23	35	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	36	56	25	39	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	39	60	19	29	3	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	57	23	35	4	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	44	68	19	29	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	52	81	13	20	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of children. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



17 September 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre, Greenwich, SE8 3EH

Thank you so much for helping me to have such a lovely time when I visited you. I agree with you that yours is an excellent children's centre.

I can see why you enjoy the activities so much as you have lots of exciting things to do. I enjoyed watching you playing and working. I was especially pleased to hear you talking to the adults and using new words and playing so nicely with the other children. You are learning lots of new things and this is fantastic and the grown ups call this 'outstanding'. Your mums, dads and carers told me that you are looked after very well and I agree that this is great.

Well done for behaving so amazingly well. You are friendly, kind and try to help each other and you work together very well. I noticed this when you were playing with the water, picking and washing tomatoes and when you were making up games together. I could see that you like running around and doing lots of exercise – keep this up and well done for eating lots of healthy food.

Your teachers and all of the adults do a great job and they want to do even better for you. I have asked them to carry on with their fantastic ideas. I want some of the new adults who help the school (we call them governors) to do the following:

- Get to know exactly how well you all do.

Thank you for showing me your 'special books', I was thrilled to talk to you about what is in them.

Yours faithfully

Wendy Simmons

Lead inspector

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