

Ditton Nursery School

Dundalk Road, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 8DF

Inspection dates 5–6 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Ditton Nursery has improved quickly and is now a school that you would want to send your children to. From their different starting points children make good progress.
- The outdoor space is extensive, well equipped and includes many exciting features. As a result of good teaching outdoors, children achieve well in the development of their imagination, creativity and in their understanding of the world.
- Children achieve particularly well in their physical development and in their number and literacy skills. This, in part, is because children have access every day to skilled teaching by adults.
- Children's behaviour is good and has improved significantly over the year. Staff teach them clear boundaries and expectations, including how to manage their emotions.
- Children's attendance and punctuality have improved. Their safety is now good because of improved security, improved systems to protect and keep children safe, and because staff have taught children safe practices such as taking care with equipment.
- Leadership, including governance, is good. The headteacher has transformed the nursery into one that invests in staff training and acts on advice and guidance from other schools and professionals. She has been instrumental in improving teaching and, as a result, achievement has improved significantly. There is now a good system to assess and track children's progress.
- Governors are highly skilled and have detailed and accurate knowledge about the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Adults sometimes miss chances to widen children's vocabulary and improve children's speaking skills.
- Achievement in shape, space and measures is not as good as it is in number.
- There are not many opportunities in the year to learn about other countries, different families or cultures.
- There is a difference in quality between children's learning journals which is not always ironed out through existing checking systems.
- When leaders check on the quality of teaching, they sometimes miss the link between teaching and its impact on children's progress.

Information about this inspection

- I met with five members of the governing body, two representatives of the local authority and an external school improvement partner. I also met with the assistant headteacher to discuss developments in assessment and tracking of children's learning and progress.
- I met with the headteacher throughout the two days to discuss progress since the previous inspection and issues around leadership and management.
- Together with the headteacher, I observed two short sessions at the start of the day led by two of the teaching assistants and learning taking place outdoors on both inspection days. We also observed a teacher-led session in phonics (the sounds that letters represent in words) and a teaching assistant-led session in mathematics. With the assistant headteacher, I observed teaching in one of the afternoon mathematics sessions.
- I took into account the views of parents and carers from the school's surveys and questionnaires in addition to my conversations with parents and carers in my previous visits to the school.
- I looked through a range of school policies and documents including those relating to the care and protection of children. I scrutinised a selection of the children's learning journals; some minutes of the meetings of the governing body; and the data which chart the progress children make from their starting points.

Inspection team

Allan Torr, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized nursery school. Ditton Early Years Centre houses Ditton Nursery School and a local authority day care provider. Ditton Children's Centre is on the same campus. Neither the children's centre nor the day care were part of this inspection.
- Almost all children in the nursery are White British. As this is a nursery school, there is no pupil premium or sports premium from the government. No child is educated off-site in alternative provision.
- There was no child at the time of the inspection that had an identified disability. There are a few children with special educational needs at a stage called school action, which means the school is checking on their progress and providing teaching to meet their needs. The proportion of children at school action is below average; the proportion of children who are supported by external specialists because of their needs (school action plus) is also below average.
- The headteacher started at the school at the beginning of September 2013. A teacher and an experienced teaching assistant have been on long-term absence, the teacher for three months and the teaching assistant for nine months.
- Children start at the nursery at three different points in the school year. Most children stay for either the morning or the afternoon session. A few children stay all day and spend half of their time at the nursery and the other half at the early years centre.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise children's achievement to be outstanding by making slight adjustments to teaching so that:
 - adults take every opportunity to extend children's vocabulary and their speaking skills
 - adults have the training they need to teach phonics to the most able children
 - the outdoor environment enables children to make better progress in their knowledge and understanding of shape, space and measures
 - children have a few more opportunities to learn about different families, cultures and countries.
- Improve leadership to be outstanding by making slight adjustments so that:
 - learning journals, and other systems to record assessment, are checked more frequently so that they are all high quality
 - the governing body regularly evaluates the impact of its actions on improving the school and on meeting all of its roles and responsibilities
 - leaders' checks on teaching have more focus on the impact of teaching on children's achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- From different starting points, which are typically below those expected for three-year-olds, children make good progress and achieve well. By this time in the summer term, almost every child has attained the level of development and skill that they should for their age. Except in phonics, the most able achieve well in all areas of learning.
- In particular, children achieve very well in the areas of moving and handling. For example, children skilfully balanced on a sit-on digger, tilting slightly backwards to generate leverage to lift sand with the digger's bucket in order to put the sand in a tyre. At the same time, they coordinated with two hands the lifting mechanism and swung the digger round to put the sand into another place. The high-quality equipment indoors and outdoors enables children to achieve well in making small movements such as when using scissors, pincers and tweezers and in different types of writing and drawing.
- Children develop quickly in their negotiation of space. For example, children concentrated for a sustained time on dribbling golf balls around a course with a golf putter. They skilfully managed their own positioning with directing the ball around the space.
- Children make good progress in their communication, language and literacy. They learn to recognise, read and sound out letters including those in three-letter words. They can tap out rhythms and rhymes using instruments, voices and their bodies, for example clapping to denote a word that rhymes with another word.
- The most able children do not achieve as well as they could in their knowledge of phonics and this, in part, is because adults have not been trained for many years in how to teach sounds and phonics at this level. Despite this, most children achieve the level of development they should for their age in reading, writing and in communication.
- All children learn to appreciate a wide range of books and they are read to every day.
- Children's achievement in mathematics is good, particularly in number and counting. They learn to recognise numbers to 20 by playing a variety of games and joining in songs, rhymes and practical activities. They have learnt that counted objects can be written as a number and they can confidently count and find numbers on a number line. One lower-ability boy for example was guided by an adult to confidently count to 12 by placing his finger on one counter at a time and referring to a number line.
- Children's achievement in the learning area of shape, space and measures is not as good as it is in number. There are not many chances outdoors, for example, for children to explore or think about pattern, shapes, comparing objects for size, weight or capacity.
- Children's achievement in their understanding of the world is a strength. They have a good understanding about how to care for and look after animals as well as how animals grow. They learn first-hand about simple life processes such as feeding, drinking and the need for shelter.
- There is little difference between the achievements of any group of children. Equality of opportunity is a high priority and any barriers to learning children may have or potential aspects of discrimination are tackled well. Boys achieve as well as girls, those with special educational needs achieve well and there is not much difference between children that are born in the summer and those that are born in the autumn.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved significantly in a year. Many things have contributed to this improvement, including:
 - every child is taught literacy and mathematics every day by a teacher
 - the appointment of a highly skilled teacher to cover for long-term absence
 - staff training in the Early Years Foundation Stage, in how to teach phonics; how to ask questions to enable children to make progress and in how to plan activities that are based on

children's needs

- making sure activities outdoors are well-designed to help children make progress and adults join in with the activities to take children's learning on further.
- Adults' questions have improved significantly over the year. The questions are now much more open-ended which means children have to try to explain or put more detail into their answers rather than just answering with one word. Some adults however miss the opportunity to correct or improve children's spoken English for example by improving their pronunciation of words, their clarity of speech and their forming of different sentences. Similarly there are sometimes missed chances to improve and widen children's vocabulary.
- The outdoor area lends itself for children to develop a good understanding of the world around them. They observed seven chicks hatch from eggs and three of them grow into hens. They know and understand about growth, and about how to take care of and look after animals. In one area of the playground, for example, there are wooden logs called 'log dogs'. They are housed in a kennel and have leads to be taken for a walk by the children around the outdoor area. One log dog was looking dry so a girl filled a dog bowl from the outdoor tap and carried it carefully to the kennel for the log dog so it had access to water.
- Adult interactions with children have improved. They are now at eye level with children when they speak and they pose questions or ideas that take children's learning on. In the woodland area for example a group pretended to have a camp fire. Following a suggestion from an adult, a boy got up and fetched a pan from the mud kitchen and pretended to cook with it for the rest of the group. In another example a girl wanted to reach a windsock which flew from a tree. The adults asked questions that made a group of children think about how to solve the problem. They rolled tyres across the playground and skilfully piled them on top of one another to allow a girl to climb up, balance against the tree and reach the windsock.
- Adults, through their suggestions and ideas, have taught children to be imaginative, creative and independent. For example, in a phonics lesson linked to a book about sea creatures, the teacher filled an empty bucket with water and skilfully stimulated children to imagine what creature they might see in the bucket, thus teaching them the concept of imagination.
- Individual parts of the nursery morning or afternoon are stimulating and engaging. Staff have been trained in the art of storytelling and this has clearly paid off. The intonation and expression in staff voices are better, which means children often sit in rapt attention, agog at what might come next.
- The main aspect that needs improvement is the teaching of higher-level phonics. Staff have not been trained recently enough, which means new sounds and letters are not introduced in a systematic way for the most able children. However, lower-level phonics, typically taught to three-year-olds, is taught well. Outdoors, for example, there is an exciting sound board built by the Chair of the Governing Body, which is used well to tap out rhythms and sounds. He has also built other parts of the outdoor area which have improved provision such as the mud kitchen and the water wall.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The children's behaviour is good.
- Children's behaviour and attitudes have improved significantly in the last year and are now good. From the very start of the session they settle quickly, self-register, and wait patiently to move into key worker groups. The structure of the day has had a benefit in making sure children do not spend the whole session playing aimlessly, running around the unit or misbehaving.
- Children are attentive and engaged in lessons, in part because teaching has improved but also because adults' use of voice and expression has improved, making children keen to listen. As a result, children want to learn and to know what comes next. An adult, for example, as part of a story about a rainbow fish, used pauses well and lively storytelling, which meant children concentrated throughout and made progress.
- Adults manage well the children who are at an early stage of development in controlling their

emotions, feelings and behaviour. In one example a boy took himself off from the rest of the children to work at another table and with highly skilled behaviour techniques the teacher immediately involved him back into the teaching group so that no time was lost in his progress.

- The school's work to keep children safe and secure is good. Children are escorted from room to room by adults and any child off task or not learning is quickly brought back into the group. On very few occasions children played unsafely, for example by throwing sand or getting themselves soaking wet under the outside tap.
- The vast majority of the time children are aware of safe working practices. One girl for example, chose different scissors and took care in cutting and manipulating the paper so as not to cut anything other than the paper. A group of children took great care when building a tower of tyres.
- Children have a good understanding for their age of self-care, in particular the need for hand washing and hygiene.
- There is no record or example of any bullying, intimidation or children using unkind words about others.
- Although attendance is not compulsory, it has improved significantly since last year. Parents and carers who bring children in late have been told clearly that their children are missing out on learning, but also of the need to develop habits that will get them ready for school.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has transformed this school from one that was failing a year ago into one that is clearly good. She has galvanised the staff team and governors to make significant improvements to children's attendance, behaviour, safety and achievement. Similarly she has made significant improvements to how well the school keeps children safe, to raise staff's expectations and professionalism, to meeting staff's training needs, and to learn from best practice elsewhere.
- Parents and carers have also noted the improvements. One comment, typical of many, read: 'Since the last inspection I've noticed a huge improvement in our nursery. My son thoroughly enjoys coming here and I've noticed how he is much more keen to attend and how much he talks about his key worker and all the activities he has been doing.' Another parent wrote, 'Since September I have seen some great improvements. The staff seem a lot more approachable and helpful... The Facebook page is a great idea and makes me aware of events planned. The new dropping-off and picking-up procedure has improved security.'
- Protecting and keeping safe are a high priority. Staff are vetted well to check they can work with children and a large number of governors and leaders have been trained on safe recruitment of staff. There are good policies and procedures in place to protect children, such as no private mobile telephones allowed in the nursery, and appropriate restrictions on the use of social media and the internet. Health and safety and safeguarding are standard parts of every staff and planning meeting.
- The whole staff have high expectations of children and a clear vision for the future; they are more open to external and internal scrutiny. Ditton Primary School, for example, frequently sends staff to work with staff in the nursery and to observe the children who may transfer to Reception. A senior leader from Ditton Primary has joined the governing body and is taking an active part in checking the nursery's assessments.
- There is an innovative coaching system to manage and improve adults' teaching, whereby staff film themselves teaching and reflect on what they need to do to improve.
- Senior leaders monitor the work of the nursery well. They make frequent visits to classes and to lessons, and they check on the quality of children's work and the accuracy of the staff's assessment. Sometimes, when they visit lessons however, they miss the link between teaching and its impact on children's progress.
- Learning journals are a way of capturing in a folder the level of development each child has reached throughout the year through examples of their work, quotes of what they said in a

conversation or photographs of them involved in an activity. The journals have improved significantly. However, there is a difference in quality between some journals. For example, some have many spelling and grammar mistakes, others have none. Some have all of the forms completed in detail, identifying what each child needs to learn next; some do not. The existing quality assurance systems have improved the quality of the journals but have not yet ironed out all of the inconsistencies between them.

- There have been some good and innovative ideas that other schools could learn from; for example, 'magic moments' sheets that parents and carers complete with observations of the children at home, to be included in the learning journals, and 'chatter boxes', which are boxes with resources inside aimed at improving children's speaking skills.
- The curriculum enables children to achieve well. It is well balanced because it meets the children's needs as well as their interests. In previous years there have been very few trips, but in this last year children have visited a reindeer and have been on a farm visit. There have also been some notable visitors, including the Widnes Vikings.
- The curriculum and teaching has developed children's spiritual, moral and social development. Children, for example, have learnt how to look after each other and how to look after animals. They have learnt about the Chinese New Year and completed activities linked to the event. There are, however, not many opportunities for children to learn about different families, different cultures or different countries.
- The local authority has provided excellent support to the school, which has had a significant impact on the school's improvement. Two senior and highly skilled and knowledgeable officers have joined the governing body and have shown the way in how to support and challenge the school. The authority arranged for a nationally renowned early years specialist to provide external reports and advice to the school. The authority has invested resources to enable the website to be operational and in a Wi-Fi system so that the school can use tablet computers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have good oversight of the school. They have a good understanding about the quality of teaching and its impact on children's achievement. They also have a good oversight of performance management systems and are taking difficult decisions to make sure staff are accountable. They meet frequently and are actively involved, for example the Chair of the Governing Body has created many innovative and high quality activities such as the sound board, the water wall and the mud kitchen.
 - Governors are much more open to external advice and no longer take only one piece of evidence when making their decisions. They have used the advice of a National Leader in Governance, reports from external consultants and reports from the local authority. For the first time, governors have full access to the school's information about children's skills and the progress they make. They discuss the findings in the data and have become proactive in requesting changes to how the data are represented.
 - The website meets statutory requirements. Other welfare requirements and statutory duties are met. Governors do not yet systematically check each of the regulations and requirements although there are plans to do so in the next year. Governors do not evaluate their own impact or set up action plans to improve the work of the governing body.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110957
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	441698

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barry Quinn
Headteacher	Jenny Kennedy
Date of previous school inspection	23 April 2013
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