

Margaret McMillan Nursery School

Address: Hornsey Rise, Islington, London, N19 3SF

Unique reference number (URN): 100384

Inspection report: 12 May 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders consistently emphasise the importance of regular attendance to parents and carers. They reach out to parents on the same day if their child is not in school and offer different kinds of support to parents who are struggling. Attendance figures are affected by a small number of parents who take holidays during term time. Leaders work with staff to ensure that children are happy at school and want to attend each day.

The school's philosophy for managing behaviour is based on positive reinforcement. Staff emphasise kindness and working together, and children are encouraged to use 'gentle hands' when interacting with each other. Bullying is rare; when concerns arise, staff act quickly. There is widespread use of visual resources to ensure that the behaviour system is accessible to all. For example, staff show the children drawings which illustrate the different ways children can say sorry, such as a handshake, a hug or a high five. Children are also given different strategies to help them regulate their behaviour and are provided with special spaces in the classroom where they can go to calm down. Behaviour is harmonious and children work and play happily together. When things occasionally do go wrong, staff are skilled at diffusing any problems.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have an inclusive vision for the school, and this is clear in daily practice. Staff identify disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff then put plans in place to effectively address a range of barriers to learning and wellbeing.

Leaders ensure that they access and use advice and support from specialist professionals when needed. Adaptations offered include one-to-one support from additional adults and the use of calming areas or sensory rooms to help children manage their feelings. Leaders also ensure that all staff widely use visual resources to support learning for all children.

Staff praise the various types of training they regularly receive to ensure that they can effectively support all pupils' needs. Leaders carefully track and review the impact of support at regular meetings. This helps leaders to respond swiftly and make adjustments to provision when needed.

Additional funding, such as pupil premium funding, is successfully used to enhance access to the curriculum and wider experiences for disadvantaged children. Leaders check that this money is having a positive impact on pupils' education and wellbeing. Leaders ensure that pupils known to social care (or previously known) are supported appropriately.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders are passionate about children's personal development at the school. From the moment children start at school, staff focus on helping to develop each child's character. Children are taught to respect one another and consider each other's feelings. They learn to

work collaboratively and take turns while enjoying the different activities. Staff also teach children to be resilient when something goes wrong and to persevere in their learning.

Leaders have woven different texts throughout the curriculum to enhance children's learning. For example, staff use traditional tales, such as 'Little Red Riding Hood', to help children understand 'stranger danger' and how to keep themselves safe.

Children are taught to respect the differences between people. They learn about and celebrate different religious festivals, focusing as well on what religions may have in common. Leaders use carefully chosen texts well to help children reflect on the diverse school community. In December, the school holds an international food festival where families can share and enjoy foods from their different cultures.

Children's learning benefits from a huge range of different visitors to the school. Through theatre performances, author visits and parents talking about their work, children's curiosity and confidence grow. Visits to a local bus garage and bakery bring their learning to life in ways they can see and remember. Children also learn about healthy eating and are encouraged to eat a range of different foods. They use apples from the trees in the outside area to make different dishes.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Children at the school typically achieve well. They generally develop the knowledge they need across the areas of learning as they progress to the next stage of education. Most children develop a love of stories, songs, and rhymes, and many talk confidently about familiar tales. In their play and routines, children count, compare quantities and recognise numbers, drawing on what staff have taught them.

Children with additional needs, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, receive the support they need to make progress from their starting points. However, at times, some staff do not support children to achieve as well as they could. For example, in some cases, they do not offer suitable chances to develop rich language. This means that some children do not progress and achieve as well as they could.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is broad, interesting and covers all areas of learning. Learning is designed to build on what children already know. Leaders have an accurate knowledge of the curriculum and teaching across the school. They know where things are working well and where further refinements are needed. Leaders provide staff with regular, effective training across different areas to enhance their teaching.

Children with additional needs receive effective support. Staff ensure that children can access all learning opportunities. For example, visual resources, such as timetables, are

naturally woven into learning and used by all children.

Children enjoy a wide range of interesting activities, both in focused groups and during free-flow play, moving between activities indoors and outdoors at their own pace. There is a clear focus on developing children's language. In many cases, staff are effective at developing and modelling the use of rich language. For example, staff encourage children to join in with songs and rhymes and discuss a recent story they read about an enormous turnip. On other occasions, these chances are missed and staff concentrate more on supervising what the children choose to do.

Leaders are passionate about allowing children to follow their own interests in their learning. Staff are often effective at supporting this and enhancing children's knowledge and skills. At other times, staff do not use opportunities to further develop children's learning, such as providing a wide range of activities or building on children's experiences as they explore.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders know their school well and understand what they need to do to improve the school's offer further. They clearly prioritise areas for improvement and work effectively with staff to ensure they receive the training they need. For example, they provide training to help staff recognise opportunities to teach mathematics in everyday situations.

Leaders ensure that staff have high expectations for all children, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff provide skilled support to children with additional needs. Children generally leave the school as confident and happy learners, well prepared for their move to Reception classes.

Staff are typically very positive about their experiences at the school. They enjoy a well-planned range of training, and particularly value how it has helped them support pupils with additional needs. Most staff say leaders make them feel valued and take their workload and wellbeing into account when making decisions.

Governors know the school very well and are dedicated to continuing to help improve it in different ways. They fulfil their statutory duties, including those relating to safeguarding, and check that pupil premium funding is used to make a difference to disadvantaged children. Parents and carers are hugely positive about the school. Above all, they praise the caring staff and the support for children's individual needs.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Children benefit from a warm and caring start to the school day. They are welcomed into their classrooms and then begin exploring and enjoying a wide range of interesting activities. Children feel safe and staff ensure they are kept safe. Children can name a member of staff who would help them if they were worried about anything.

Leaders have created a broad and interesting curriculum that covers the 7 areas of learning. There is a clear plan to ensure that children are well prepared to move into Reception by the

end of their school journey. Children enjoy their learning. They can talk about what they have learned, and staff generally engage and interact with children to further explore and advance their knowledge and skills.

There are warm and respectful relationships between staff and children. Staff work skilfully to develop very positive behaviour across the school. If there are any behaviour issues, staff explore children's feelings and the impact of their actions, and resolve any problems swiftly. Attendance is a clear priority for leaders, who check it closely and respond quickly when concerns arise.

Leaders have created an inclusive community by being flexible and responsive to the needs of all children. Barriers to learning are swiftly identified so that the right support is put in place for each child. Children, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, successfully make progress from their starting points.

Children's learning is enriched in many ways. They visit local parks and shops, celebrate religious festivals and special days, and learn to respect the differences between people.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to develop staff expertise so that teaching is consistent across all areas of learning and children secure their knowledge over time.
 - Leaders should ensure that all staff develop children's use of rich language consistently across all areas of learning.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Geoff Elliot.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and senior leaders. They also held meetings with the members of the local governing body and a representative from the local authority during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Headteacher: Karen Smith

Lead inspector:

Eleanor Ross, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Rutinderjit Mahil-Pooni, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 12 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

81

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

22.2%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

1.23%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

22.22%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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