

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Houghton Le Spring Nursery School

Neasham Place, Houghton le Spring, Tyne, and Wear DH5 8AE

Inspection date:

11 February 2025

Outcome

Houghton Le Spring Nursery School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff are highly ambitious for the children they serve. They have designed a curriculum which is carefully tailored to children's needs. Very well-trained staff guide each child on their journey of progress. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported exceptionally well. Children are well prepared for their next steps in education.

Staff have created a learning environment that, in the words of one parent, 'captivates and enchants'. They support children to become more independent and to sustain their concentration. Equally, they learn to manage their feelings and cooperate with others. They play happily together. They have warm and positive relationships with the adults who care for them.

Staff plan excellent opportunities for children to widen their experience of the world. Visits to the park and a community farm, as well as learning in a forest area and by the coast, help children develop teamwork skills and build resilience.

Parents and carers are typically extremely positive about the education their children receive. One parent, summing up the views of many, stated, 'We feel so very welcome and part of the Houghton family, so very thankful staff place the children's hearts at the centre of all they do.'

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and staff constantly review the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of their changing cohort of children. They actively seek out best practices, encouraging staff to explore evidence-based research to decide the best approaches to help children succeed. This has led to improvements across all areas of learning, including in mathematics, where staff have benefited from external expertise to enhance their subject knowledge.

The development of children's communication and language is given high priority. Staff are experts in engaging children in meaningful conversations and discussions. Staff model language well, encouraging children to try out new vocabulary. Leaders have carefully selected the stories they want children to know and enjoy. Story times excite and engage children. Staff use props to capture children's interests and encourage them to join in with refrains.

Staff know children exceptionally well. They use this information to plan next steps for each child. The impact of this is particularly striking in relation to children's personal, social and emotional development. Staff provide the right opportunities to help children to begin to manage their own behaviour. When children find it tricky to control their feelings, adults are patient and kind. They model the language that children need to resolve the problem. Children respond to this extremely well.

The support for children with SEND is excellent. Staff have detailed knowledge of every child. Provision is highly inclusive. The curriculum and teaching are adapted successfully to meet children's needs. Staff use Makaton to communicate with children or visual prompts to support their understanding. Staff receive training so that they can support children with significant medical needs to be fully included. The strong practice in the school is being shared more widely, with leaders providing advice, support and guidance to other schools in the local area.

The curriculum for children's wider development has been strengthened. Children relish engaging in large-scale play, which they access outdoors. They are encouraged to take well-managed risks and to take responsibility for their safety. They are involved in deciding whether it is 'too slippery' to use the climbing equipment and are keen to warn others not to get too close to the fire pit. Since the previous inspection, leaders have built regular visits to a local park, farm and other outdoor settings into the curriculum. These well-planned opportunities help children to develop their knowledge of the natural world and increase their confidence and independence.

Leaders value their partnership with parents. Parents are regular visitors to the school and have opportunities to review what children have been learning. Most parents who expressed a view during the inspection are extremely positive about communication with the school. A very small number feel this could be strengthened.

Governors know the school well. They speak with parents and staff to check on their views of the school. Staff are highly invested in the school. They appreciate the professional development opportunities available to them. They feel extremely well

supported by the senior leadership team. Throughout, there is a determination to continually improve the school, so that children are given the best start possible to their educational journey.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour, or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in October 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	108746
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10320350
Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Co-chairs of governing body	Vikki Wynn Beth Dunn
Headteacher	Sarah Dixon-Jones
Website	www.houghtonnurseryschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a separately registered early years provision for nought- to three-year-olds on site. This provision did not form part of this inspection. It has been inspected separately by Ofsted. The inspection report can be accessed on Ofsted's website.
- The school is part of a hard federation with Mill Hill Nursery school in Sunderland. There is a shared governing body across both schools.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other members of staff. Inspectors also held meetings with representatives of the governing body and the local authority.
- Inspectors spent time with children and staff, visiting teaching sessions and observing children's learning. Inspectors talked to staff and children about their learning.
- Inspectors reviewed curriculum documentation and plans and provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors spoke with parents and took account of the views of parents and staff through Ofsted's online inspection surveys.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, and parents; talked with children and reviewed curriculum documentation and safeguarding records.

Inspection team

Claire Brown, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Deborah Ashcroft

Ofsted Inspector

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