

Peartree Way Nursery School

Peartree Way, Stevenage, SG2 9EA

Inspection dates 7–8 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher, with other leaders, including the governing body, has ensured that teaching is good. This means all children achieve well.
- The staff team are successfully focused on improving every child's well-being, confidence and progress.
- Children are able to choose from a wide range of interesting activities. These help them to make good progress in all areas of learning, both indoors and out.
- The adults are very skilled at helping children to settle happily into school, so it is a cheerful, happy community.
- Children behave well, enjoy learning and feel safe and secure. They have good relationships with each other and with the adults.
- The staff are extremely successful in helping disabled children and those with special educational needs to take a full part in school life, and to make good progress.
- When children play, adults often talk to them and help them to learn more. They question them skilfully to make sure they understand.
- Some adults have high levels of expertise in particular areas of learning, and help children to make excellent progress.
- The school has very positive relationships with parents, who greatly value what it provides for their children.
- Close links with the pre-school provision on site helps many children to settle in very easily when they start school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not always challenge children to think hard about things or to extend their language skills.
- At times, not all children are fully engaged by the activities, so a few do not make good progress.
- Staff do not have enough opportunities to learn from each other's high levels of expertise in particular areas.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector made nine observations of lessons both indoors and out. These included sessions when all the children were engaged in activities they chose for themselves. Other observations were made when all the children learned together in small groups led by adults. In many of the observations, the inspector was accompanied by the headteacher. The inspector chatted informally with many of the children as they played.
- Discussions were held with staff, four members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took note of the 38 replies that were made to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and of the more detailed comments made on line by 12 parents. He also took account of the views expressed by parents who spoke to him during the inspection.
- The inspector checked a range of documentation, including records of children's progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, documentation about keeping children safe, and about how staff performance is managed.

Inspection team

Steven Hill, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides for 98 children aged three and four. Most of these attend on a half-time basis, usually in the mornings or in the afternoons. Others have more flexible arrangements, which are agreed with the school. A few children attend full time.
- Most children in the school are White British. Few speak English as an additional language.
- About 15% of current children have been identified as being disabled or as having special educational needs. About two thirds of these children receive help with their needs from agencies outside the school.
- At the time of the previous inspection, the school included a pre-school setting, Peartots, which was managed by the governing body and was included in the inspection report. Since then, the pre-school setting has started to admit children who are aged two years. Regulations require that the pre-school is now separately registered with Ofsted, and it is inspected and reported upon separately. The Nursery and the pre-school continue to have the same governing body. Peartots also provides before and after-school care, which are inspected alongside the pre-school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and children's achievement outstanding by:
 - taking full advantage of opportunities to challenge children to think hard, and to extend their speaking skills, in all their activities
 - ensuring that all children are engaged by activities and maintain concentration
 - increasing the opportunities available for adults to learn from each other's high levels of expertise in particular areas of learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has been the driving force in setting the school's tone and culture. She has welded together a strong team of staff who are focused effectively on ensuring the best possible outcomes for all children. Decisions are made in the light of their likely impact on children's personal development and progress. Progress on the issues raised at the previous inspection has been good. Consequently, governors have increased their understanding of the school and offer a good balance of challenge and support to staff.
- The school promotes equal opportunities well. This is shown in the way in which children with quite complicated needs are helped to play a full part in the life of the school. The school draws on expertise from a range of agencies and partners, as well as within the school, to tailor provision to meet all children's needs, so they all make good progress.
- Senior staff keep a careful track on the quality of teaching, and provide clear feedback to colleagues to help them improve their performance. The progress of individuals is checked regularly, and quick action is taken to help any who are in danger of falling behind.
- The curriculum gives children exciting and engaging experiences in all areas of learning. Staff prepare a variety of interesting activities outdoors and inside, which children often have free access to choose for themselves. Staff organise themselves flexibly so that, whatever activities children choose, they will get extra help and support from adults as they learn. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection and leads to consistently good progress. When children learn in small groups with adults, a strong focus on speaking, listening and early literacy and mathematics skills leads to good progress in these areas.
- A focus on developing children's personal, social and emotional development is very successful in addressing initial low attainment in this area. Children's improved behaviour, concentration and attitudes mean children are well-placed to develop their understanding in other areas of learning. The strong focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development makes a major contribution to the school as a harmonious and happy community. This helps children to be well prepared for their next school, and for their life in modern Britain.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Arrangements are effective in keeping pupils safe and secure, so that they are confident, happy and relaxed in the setting.
- The local authority has provided good support to the school. It has helped governors to improve their expertise, and assisted the school to ensure that its evaluations of children's attainment are accurate.
- The school has excellent relations with parents, and provides a variety of help for families who need it to help their children. Parents are extremely appreciative of this. The recent appointment of an experienced family support worker is helping to extend this help further. Parents value the work of the school, particularly that their children are happy, feel safe and are well looked after. One told the inspector that parents 'feel at home here. It's like leaving your children with friends.' Parents' responses to the questionnaire were extremely positive, and parents of children with special educational needs are particularly appreciative of how their children's individual needs are met, and of the progress they make.
- The school has good links with a range of other schools and pre-schools. The link with the on-site pre-school in particular, helps these children to make a very smooth transition into the Nursery. More able children often visit Nursery during their last term in pre-school. Several staff are shared between the settings which helps children feel at home when they move.
- All staff with leadership roles play a good part in checking on the quality of provision and helping their colleagues to improve their teaching. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection.

There is some good sharing of expertise by those who have particular skills, through informal discussion. A start has been made on giving staff more formal opportunities to observe each other and learn from each other's strengths. However, this is at the early stages in most cases, and plans are being developed to share some outstanding features of practice more systematically.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governance is effective and ensures that the school builds on its strengths and works well to address any concerns. Governors share the staff's focus on boosting the progress and personal development of all individuals, regardless of their ability or background. Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching through their understanding of the school's good systems to manage the performance of staff. They ensure that issues are addressed and good performance is suitably rewarded. Governors have a good understanding of how well children are doing, because they have a secure knowledge of the data that the school collects about individuals and groups. Statutory duties are met well, including ensuring that safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Children quickly settle into school and enjoy learning. They are enthusiastic and join in cheerfully with different activities. They are learning to play together cooperatively and to share materials amicably.
- Children learn to follow routines well and respond quickly to adult instructions. They like and trust the adults, so are confident in asking for help and advice if they need it, or in urging adults to join in their play. They explore the environment with interest and are curious about the many opportunities on offer.
- Children are developing a love of books and stories, and enjoy joining in key parts of well-known texts. Most sit and listen attentively when working in small groups, although some find it hard to maintain concentration if they are not actively involved. This is improving as teachers use a variety of strategies to help them focus.
- Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They show care and consideration for each other in their play, for example passing equipment to another child they can see needs it, or letting a classmate take a turn at using computer equipment.
- The school successfully provides a good education to those of the children who have considerable emotional and behavioural problems. Patient, calm but firm reinforcement of requests, and the provision of activities tailored to these children's particular needs and interests results in improvements in behaviour and as a consequence to improvements in progress.
- Many children show a lack of maturity and weak concentration when they start. Adults are generally successful in gaining and maintaining pupils' attention when needed, but at times this is not successful in involving everyone in learning.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Because children feel safe and happy, they get on with their learning and make good progress.
- Parents who responded to the questionnaire were unanimously positive about their children being safe in school.
- Children are learning to contribute to their own and other's safety and they come to realise the importance of following rules. They are successfully encouraged to take care of others, and a good balance is taken between helping pupils to manage risks (such as balancing on climbing apparatus) and keeping safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- A key strength in teaching is the way in which adults monitor children's play and judge when to intervene or join in to help learning. This is an improvement since the previous inspection brought about by strong leadership of teaching. Teachers make suggestions about how children can build on what they are doing, and question them skilfully to check their understanding and get them to think about what they are learning.
- The management of behaviour is good. Children are helped to improve their behaviour through constant, gentle reinforcement of good behaviours, and by engaging children's interest in what they are doing. This contributes well to the good progress they make.
- Adults assess children's progress well, making frequent notes which feed back into future planning, as well as adapting what they say to the needs of particular individuals to help them learn. For example, when a group were building a 'wall' with toy bricks in the sand tray, the adult realised that they had little idea how bricks in a real wall fitted together. She took them off to look at one, and when they came back they took on board what they had seen, using sand as 'mortar' and arranging the bricks in a much more stable way.
- Teachers give due attention to developing children's early literacy and mathematical skills through direct teaching, and make good use of incidental opportunities for this during children's play. Children are successfully encouraged to share books, for example, or to count how many bricks they have included in a tower.
- When adults work with small groups, they use a variety of successful strategies to help children to concentrate. The use of the voice, the teacher's own enthusiasm, and the use of practical materials such as puppets or models all help children to concentrate. Occasionally, this is not successful for some children, when activities do not hold their interest, so that progress slows.
- There is some excellent practice when staff who have particular expertise in an area, such as developing speaking or mathematics, for example, help children make outstanding progress. In such cases, careful questioning gets children to think really hard about what they are doing and helps them learn quickly. The use of specialist vocabulary, and the modelling of speech help children to make rapid progress in their speaking skills. At other times, questioning is not as searching and staff are not as demanding of children's responses, so progress is not as rapid.

The achievement of pupils is good

- All children make good progress. When they come into the Nursery, the majority of children are below the level of attainment typical of their age. By the time they leave, the very large majority are reaching age related expectations.
- In the past, there have been shortfalls in the progress of boys relative to that of girls, particularly in early reading skills. Last year, a pilot project was undertaken to improve the reading skills of those who started off with lower levels of attainment; most of these were boys. Over the course of the year, this group made more progress than their classmates, and their standards were as good as others by the end of the year.
- The more able children, who show the highest skills and abilities when they start in the school, make good progress and continue to attain higher standards than their classmates. This is because they are often challenged to excel, for example, counting up and beyond the highest number they know, rather than what is the highest number for the majority of the class.
- Disabled children and those with special educational needs progress at the same good rate as other children. They make good progress from their starting points, because the school provides specific input to help them overcome their individual difficulties, drawing extremely well on the help of outside agencies as well as its own expertise. Although standards are lower than those of their classmates, they are higher than would be expected from their starting points.

- The high level of expertise of some staff in speech and language development is a major factor in helping children with speech and language problems to achieve well.
- Children are making a good start on learning to read. They are enthusiastic about stories and many will sit together and share a book. The system of using 'core' books, which children grow to know and love, runs in parallel with specific teaching of early phonics (how sounds in words are represented by different letters) and children are already starting to recognise some initial sounds, such as that of their name.
- Different groups of children all make similarly good progress, including those from different ethnic heritages and those who speak English as an additional language.
- Some particularly good progress was observed in mathematics during the inspection. Children enjoy learning the names of shapes, for example, and some recognise 'oval' and 'hexagon' as well as 'square' and 'circle'. Children playing with interlocking magnetic three-dimensional shapes made excellent progress in their understanding as they put together complicated shapes, and responded to the demanding questioning of an adult.

The early years provision

is good

- All children in this school are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The report sections above evaluate the school's effectiveness.

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	117080
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447958

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	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bridy Speller
Headteacher	Penelope Allingham
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2012
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