

Dorking Nursery School

Address: West Street, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 1BY

Unique reference number (URN): 124912

Inspection report: 14 April 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 ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Children are consistently well prepared for the next stage of their education. They make impressive progress in their physical, personal, social and emotional development and acquire firm foundations in early reading, writing and mathematics. Children also make notable progress in the development of spoken language and learn to express preferences and opinions with increasing confidence. This is the case for all children, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other children with barriers to their learning.

High-quality provision for disadvantaged children ensures that these children make similar progress to their peers. Importantly, developmental gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers consistently narrow over time in communication, language and physical development.

Leaders have taken prompt action to minimise the impact of variations in the quality of staff's discussions with children. This has ensured that children continue to make significant gains in all areas of learning during a period of rapid growth and development in the school.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders maintain a nurturing and harmonious culture in which all children feel valued and respected. Classrooms are busy and happy places for children to play and learn, both inside and out. Staff ensure that all areas of the school are well organised so that children can move safely and freely between activities. They demonstrate increasing ability to sustain concentration.

Leaders and staff demonstrate consistently high expectations of all children. They provide regular staff training in understanding children's behaviour. As a result, staff are very knowledgeable about how to support children to behave well and do so skilfully and effectively. Clear expectations and routines contribute well to children's sense of security and wellbeing. They learn the importance of being kind to each other. Children get along well with others and behave extremely well. This ensures that they are increasingly well prepared with the attitudes and skills to support them in the next stage of their education.

Children's enjoyment of school means that they need little encouragement to join their friends each day. Leaders work proactively with families to promote the importance of regular attendance. They monitor children's attendance carefully and work proactively with parents, carers and agencies to support children's attendance.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders' commitment and determination to ensure that all children achieve well shine through in this highly inclusive school. The care and attention given to the needs of individual children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are instrumental in ensuring that all children achieve well. Leaders demonstrate a

consistently positive approach to helping children to overcome barriers. They work closely with specialists and agencies, as well as parents and carers, to identify children's needs and starting points precisely. Leaders provide valuable training to support staff's knowledge of how to support children with SEND.

The difference the school makes to children's learning and enjoyment of school is palpable. Leaders check children's progress regularly, adjusting support appropriately as needed. Children's interests are always central to any decisions made about the school's provision. For instance, the school's highly successful 'special class' has been specifically developed to support children's individual needs. Leaders use additional funding thoughtfully so that children who are disadvantaged are supported very well. High-quality support and the school's inclusive practices make a significant contribution to reducing barriers to learning. Parents use phrases such as 'miracle workers' and 'life-changing' to describe the impact the school has had on their own and their children's lives.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders and governors are determined to provide the very best education for all children, regardless of ability or background. They put children's interests at the centre of every decision they make. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and have prioritised developments appropriately. For instance, they have taken concerted and effective action in the past year to ensure that children continue to achieve well as the school grows and develops. Leaders have been very effective in maintaining a cohesive staff team during this period of rapid growth for the school. Ongoing high-quality training continues to strengthen staff's knowledge of the curriculum and to increase their expertise in delivering the content effectively. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They are highly appreciative of the school's role in supporting their children's learning and development.

Governors ensure that they meet their statutory duties effectively. They provide robust challenge and support for school leaders. Governors use a wide range of well-established activities to support them in their governance roles. For instance, leaders and governors commission external reviews of aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding and the quality of teaching. They use audits and reviews very well to inform their understanding of the school's performance and to identify priorities for development.

Leaders combine high expectations with warmth, support and good humour. They provide excellent role models for staff and lead by example. Staff share leaders' values and are committed to playing their part. They are overwhelmingly positive about working in the school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

The school's personal, social and emotional development programme is consistent with the early years foundation stage educational programme. The content contributes very well to all children's development, including disadvantaged children.

Classroom activities are routinely adapted to reflect and encourage children's interests. This contributes very well to children's enjoyment of school. The promotion of children's

independence starts from an early stage. Staff respect children's wishes and preferences so that children develop confidence and independence. Children learn about their changing bodies and are taught simple steps to help to keep themselves safe. The school provides parents with advice about online safety at home. Little by little, children learn to make choices and take increasing responsibility for their own wellbeing. For instance, they know how to put their coats on before going outside and understand the importance of washing their hands after using the toilet.

Snack times and lunchtimes are used very well to promote healthy eating. The school provides a range of healthy snacks and drinks. The school uses family service at lunchtimes effectively to promote positive eating habits and good table manners. Children tuck into their lunch with gusto, using cutlery with increasing control to eat independently. Staff are always on hand to make sure that children are eating safely and to provide a helping hand when needed.

Children are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They are taught about fundamental British values in an age-appropriate way. For instance, they learn about the importance of democracy through activities such as voting for stories in group times and are encouraged to understand that others may have different views. Staff use discussions, celebrations and stories to encourage respect for different family patterns, cultures and beliefs. Children learn about the local community through a range of activities, such as visits to a local care home.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of both the curriculum and teaching. They ensure that children benefit from a broad, balanced and ambitious curriculum, including early reading, writing and mathematical skills. Staff use traditional nursery rhymes and fairy tales well to teach children about story structure, rhythm and rhyme. Children choose from an extensive range of high-quality books. Supporting the development of children's communication and social skills is central to the school's work, so that children can join in with activities and play with other children with increasing confidence.

A well-considered training programme ensures that staff are equipped with the subject knowledge they need to deliver the curriculum successfully. As a result, much of the teaching is highly effective. Staff adapt activities well to ensure that all children can access learning successfully. They are skilled in capitalising on children's interests to engage them with a wide range of activities, while also encouraging them to try out something new. However, sometimes staff are unclear about precisely what they want children to learn through each activity. As a result, opportunities are missed to build children's knowledge and understanding of key vocabulary and concepts consistently well.

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

Children love their time in this happy, busy nursery school. They arrive full of beans and excited to see their teachers and friends. Staff welcome them with friendly smiles and words of encouragement. They establish warm and nurturing relationships with children and provide kind, sensitive and skilful support for those who need a bit more reassurance. Children grow rapidly in confidence and self-esteem because they feel valued and heard.

Staff provide a wealth of carefully considered activities which are designed to capture children's interest. This means that children are keen to get started when they arrive and are soon engrossed in what they are doing. Their enjoyment of all that the school has to offer means that they attend very well. Indeed, sometimes they are reluctant to leave school at the end of their session!

Children behave extremely well. They learn how to play with others and are kind to each other. Staff model the good behaviours they expect of everyone, such as sharing, turn-taking and saying 'please' and 'thank you' and children follow their lead. Staff sort out any behaviour issues with care and sensitivity. Parents and carers have absolute confidence in the school to take good care of their children.

Children learn extremely well. They make impressive progress across all areas of the curriculum. Leaders consider children's individual needs and starting points carefully. They work closely with parents and agencies to ensure the right support is in place, including for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these children, along with others with barriers to their learning, also make very positive progress. Many parents were keen to tell inspectors about the significant progress their children have made since joining the school, and rightly so. Children are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff know the precise learning focus of each activity so that interactions with children are used consistently well to develop and reinforce key knowledge and vocabulary.
- Leaders should maintain their focus on ensuring consistently strong standards across all areas of the school's work.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Andy Whitehouse.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other members of staff. They also spoke with a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector met with members of the board of governors, including the chair.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school has a specific class for 10 children with specific special educational needs and/or disabilities which is operated and managed by the school.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

Headteacher: Donna Harwood-Duffy

Lead inspector:

Julie Sackett, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Linda Appleby, 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 14 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

112

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)

7.3%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.

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

11.61%

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

20.54%

What does this mean?

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

Location deprivation

Close to 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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