

**This document was archived in July 2017
because it is no longer current.**

Improving from satisfactory: Highters Heath Nursery School

URN: 103134

Local authority: Birmingham

Date published: 3 July 2013

Reference: 130174

Brief description

Highters Heath Nursery School has improved over the past five years and continues to improve. This case study is an analysis of the story so far. It is one of a set of 10 that have been published to support the survey report: *Getting it right first time*.

Overview – the provider’s message

‘Learning through training and developing a spirit of professional enquiry is embedded in the culture of this school. Staff have developed an approach that emphasises a questioning dialogue, reflection and adult engagement in sustained shared thinking with children. The engagement of the whole-school community including parents and carers, children and the governing body is helping to ensure that continuous quality improvement is embedded and sustained. Observations, assessment and monitoring of teaching and learning promote high-quality teaching which is enabling children at Highters Heath Nursery School to make good and outstanding progress.’

Staff meetings and training opportunities are sharply focused on improving learning and teaching and promoting the characteristics of effective learning.

Observations of children and assessment data are used to analyse the impact on learning. Close analysis of data enable us to raise aspirations, review performance and develop a well-focused school improvement plan.

Staff performance management is now closely linked to the school improvement plan.

Claire Quinlan, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

Background

In 2005-06, the new headteacher inherited a number of issues relating to the quality of teaching, children's achievement and leadership and management. These were confirmed by Ofsted inspectors during an inspection in June 2006 when the school was judged satisfactory overall. Over the next three years, achievement, teaching and learning, and leadership and management improved and the school was judged good in an inspection in July 2009.

When Claire Quinlan became headteacher in January 2011, the challenge was taking these improvements further. An [Ofsted inspection](#) in September 2011 judged that overall effectiveness and the capacity to improve further were good.

Sustaining improvement

Over the past two years, the pace and depth of improvement has increased through a range of strategies:

■ Improving the environment

The physical environment of the school has been improved and the old war-time buildings have a modern, comfortable appearance. 'It's about the enabling environment – it's the canvas that everything is built from', says Claire. 'If people have a good quality learning environment they will perform better.'

Everyone is held accountable for improvement. Staff are encouraged to understand the reasons for changes and to be 'asking why, asking how, asking open-ended questions to one another and making time to listen to one another'. The headteacher communicates her strong belief that the staff can achieve their aspiration to become outstanding. She encourages this by celebrating the progress made by individual staff as well as the whole team, recognising achievement and 'giving people opportunities and rewarding (not always financially)'. The contribution of both nursery nurses and teachers to the work of the school are highly valued. Those with the highest qualifications and levels of pay are challenged and expected to take a lead role in learning and to exemplify outstanding teaching.

■ Headteacher involvement

The headteacher regards herself as the leader of learning in the school and as such ensures that she maintains a first-hand knowledge of children and of the quality of teaching. She is often seen talking to children around the school, formally and informally, and observing staff teaching. She intentionally models a 'questioning commentary' in front of staff. Staff comment that Claire is always visible in the school and governors recognise that she models good practice with staff. Her expertise and sensitive leadership have meant that staff have broadly welcomed the challenge which she has brought to the school.

■ Developing effective partnerships

With local authority support being reduced, the school has sought the support of other schools. The headteacher says that the most beneficial links so far have been with Early Years Teaching Schools in another local authority as part of a project about the

characteristics of effective learning, and with another maintained nursery school in looking at the new Early Years Foundation Stage framework.

■ **Effective training**

Staff are provided with time to think and talk together about their work. The Head frequently challenges staff to consider the impact of what they do. Meetings focus on what children are learning and staff think together about how learning and teaching can be improved. All staff have time out of the classroom to help them with their own learning. Each initiative or project is evaluated carefully to identify the impact upon children's learning.

The headteacher has developed a good knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework through training, networking with other early years colleagues and reading widely about research into child development and early learning. Staff report that her knowledge helps them to improve their self-evaluation and to think about how they can move practice forward. 'Staff see when I come into school enthused about something that I have read and want to share', says Claire.

■ **Tracking children's achievement and well-being**

One of the most significant improvements has been the clear focus on children's emotional well-being and the extent to which children are involved in their learning. This approach is enhanced by careful tracking of children's achievements throughout their time at the school. Staff get to know children in their own groups very well. The whole staff team discusses the progress being made by individual children as well as those from target groups such as children born in the summer.

■ **Performance management for all**

All staff are formally observed and given feedback about their strengths and areas for improvement. Targets link to school priorities as well as to data about children's achievement. Data about how well children are doing are used to challenge all staff about their expectations and to look at the barriers to learning for children.

Provider background

[Highters Heath](#) is an average-sized nursery school. Nearly all of the children are White British. A small proportion of children are disabled or have special educational needs.

Other examples published in this set

[Blagdon Nursery School and Children's Centre](#)

[Baldon Nursery School](#)

[Childminder 510228](#)

[Garstang Pre-School Nursery](#)

[Southwater Village Hall Pre-School](#)

[Newstead Children's Centre](#)

[Our Lady Star of the Sea Nursery](#)

[Witton Gilbert Nursery](#)

[Wheatley Hill Community Nursery](#)

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice