

# Northlands Infant School and Nursery

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114995
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	378977
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 December 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Selwyn Ward

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	221
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mike Smith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Young
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 January 2007
<b>School address</b>	Winifred Road Basildon SS13 3JQ
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, who visited 15 lessons taught by nine teachers. Inspectors spoke with staff, parents and carers, members of the governing body, groups of pupils and a local authority adviser. Inspectors looked at: samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, attendance records, school policies and procedures, the school website, leaders' monitoring records, school planning and risk assessments. Inspectors attended the pupils' Christmas production. They also analysed the questionnaires received from 35 staff, and 48 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Are boys and girls making similar progress throughout Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?
- Is the school doing all it can to minimise absence rates?
- To what extent are partnerships with parents and carers contributing to pupils' personal development and progress?

## Information about the school

This school is similar in size to the average primary school. Most pupils are White British. The percentage of pupils from various minority ethnic backgrounds has risen since the last inspection but it is still below average. The same is the case for pupils learning English as an additional language. The percentage known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, with needs mainly for moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and speech and language delay. The headteacher was appointed in September 2010. Northlands Infant has Healthy Schools status. It operates a breakfast club at the start of each day.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

This is a good school. It is well run, with parents and carers voicing especially positive views about the impact that the headteacher has had in further raising expectations and accelerating pupils' progress. This has resulted in strong improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where children now make good progress to come much closer to the levels expected for their ages by the end of the Reception Year. Attainment is average in the Year 2 assessments, and this represents good progress and achievement in relation to pupils' low starting points. Changes to the curriculum, including the introduction of outdoor learning through the 'forest school' and books chosen to stimulate the interest of boys as well as girls, have been successful in narrowing what was previously a wide performance gap, where boys' attainment lagged a long way behind that of the girls.

The staff and leadership team all share the ambition of the headteacher and governing body to drive through further improvements at this school. They have had notable success in building a much more effective partnership with parents and carers, including those whose circumstances have made it difficult to support their children's education. This has paid dividends in the improvement in rates of attendance which were previously poor and which are now securely in line with the national average. The systems for pupils' care, guidance and support are features that stand out at this school, as do the extremely well-developed arrangements for assuring pupils' safeguarding. These have been driven by a governing body with an exceptionally thorough approach to its responsibilities. Leaders' and the governing body's success in securing change for the better, coupled with the accuracy of school self-evaluation, show this school's good capacity for sustained improvement.

Throughout the school, relationships are good. Pupils work hard because they like their teachers and are keen to please them. This contributes also to pupils' good personal development. In turn, pupils' consistently good behaviour, their enthusiasm in lessons and their growing thirst for knowledge contribute strongly to their good progress in lessons. In planning lessons, teachers generally make good use of assessment information to match activities to pupils' different capabilities and learning needs. This is especially strong in English and mathematics, but it is not always the case in other subjects. Opportunities are sometimes missed in these other subjects for pupils to apply their key skills. Pupils benefit from clear guidance through marking and their individual targets, and they are increasingly involved in assessing for themselves how to improve their work. The scope for this self-assessment is limited, however, on those occasions when the 'learning objectives' shared with pupils at the start of a lesson set out the task to be carried out, rather than what the

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pupils are expected to learn.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the learning objectives set out at the start of each lesson are always sharply focused on what the pupils are expected to learn.
- Match work in all lessons to pupils' different capabilities so that it is always appropriately challenging, and gives them opportunities to further develop their literacy and numeracy skills through their work in other subjects.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' average attainment in reading, writing and mathematics represents good progress in relation to their low starting points. In previous years, boys have done notably less well than girls. In 2010, for example, the gender gap was the equivalent of more than a year's progress. Initiatives to better engage the interest of boys and more effective interventions to boost their performance have proven successful in greatly narrowing this gap. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are also helped to make good progress, performing better than pupils in similar circumstances in other schools. The small number of pupils who are learning English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress. This is because they benefit from sharply-focused provision, closely tailored to their individual learning needs and based on careful, and frequently updated, tracking of how well they are doing. A key factor in pupils' good progress is the teachers' success in making learning interesting and fun. During the inspection, teachers built on the excitement of the morning's Nativity production by combining literacy with religious education as pupils produced their own accounts of the Nativity using 'storybook' language. All eagerly applied their writing skills in describing the pictures that they sequenced to represent the main events in the tale.

Pupils have a good appreciation of the need for a healthy diet and regular exercise. They know a great deal about how to keep safe, including when using the internet. Their knowledge of social networking websites, and the risks they pose, transcends their years. Pupils enjoy the various opportunities they have to take on responsibilities, including as play leaders and school councillors. These go beyond those available to pupils of similar ages in all-through primary schools. Pupils also go out into the local community, for example to sing carols at a local old folks' home. Pupils take a growing interest in the wider world. In a lesson comparing aspects of Christianity with Hinduism, their keen questioning surprised even the teacher, and set her the task of reading up in more detail for their next lesson. Pupils' key skills and their now average attendance prepares them appropriately for the next stage of their education.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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<b>Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils’ behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teachers know the pupils well and plan lessons that keep them interested and involved. Pupils’ attention only begins to wane on those rare occasions when lesson introductions go on for too long and they have to sit for a long time listening on the carpet. Teachers have high expectations of what the pupils can do, and pupils rise to the challenge. This is especially the case in English and mathematics lessons, where work is most carefully matched to pupils’ different capabilities. Behaviour is managed well, with children of all ages eager to earn ‘bumblebee’ rewards. As a result, pupils move between activities without fuss, which contributes to the good pace of learning. Throughout the school, pupils are encouraged to share ideas with their ‘talk partner’. This helps to keep every child actively involved, but teachers do not always maximise the impact of this strategy in developing pupils’ listening skills. This is because pupils are asked to report back to class on what they told their partner rather than what their partner told them.

Parents and carers comment positively on the memorable learning experiences that their children eagerly tell them about at home. The introduction of themed topics has helped to better motivate boys. The ‘forest school’ is another recent innovation that has enthused both pupils and staff. It has lent itself to a plethora of uses, including as a site for pupils’ tent and shelter constructions as part of their team-building activities. Pupils have a good understanding of how well they are doing because teachers give them continuous feedback on their work, including the ‘next steps’ they need to take to improve.

What particularly stands out at this school is the high quality of the arrangements for

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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meeting the needs of pupils in potentially vulnerable circumstances. The recent employment of a member of staff with a dedicated brief of supporting families has already had a dramatic impact on several pupils’ lives. Action to help families living in overcrowded accommodation or facing eviction has helped to create a more stable home environment for potentially vulnerable pupils and removed barriers to learning. Action to improve attendance has shown equally impressive success. Attendance has climbed to 94.3%, in line with the national average, from the exceptionally low figure three years ago of 90.6%. Parents and carers express their appreciation of staff who ‘go the extra mile’ to support children. A parent of a child with food allergies wrote to praise the lengths staff had gone to cater for his needs: ‘They changed food supplies to reflect what he can eat. If he does have a reaction, I am informed and reassured promptly. He is cared for and all the staff have been trained to assist him.’ The breakfast club provides a healthy, happy start to the day for those children who attend.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher, leadership team and staff have a shared vision for moving the school forward and can point to some key successes in improving provision and outcomes for pupils. Among these is the success in promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination, narrowing the gender gap and tackling barriers to learning so that pupils from all backgrounds make good progress. At the heart of the improvements has been leaders’ regular monitoring of lessons and pupils’ work, celebrating what works well but also looking out for inconsistencies and areas for development. This has had a strong impact because leaders are rigorous in following up points for development to ensure that action has been taken and policies properly followed. Also key to this school’s rapid improvement has been the growing strength of the partnership with parents and carers. Leaders have been innovative in devising ways of better involving parents and carers, to equip them to support their children’s learning at home. ‘Topic teas’ and coffee mornings have brought more parents and carers into school, including some of those who have previously been reluctant visitors. There are also regular ‘Fathers’ Fridays’ and ‘Mothers’ Mondays’ where parents and carers are specifically invited in to share in and support their children’s learning.

Governance is outstanding because the governing body is scrupulous in ensuring that all school policies and procedures are kept fully up to date. It meets often in joint

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session with the governing body of the neighbouring junior school, finding joint efficiency savings through shared resources and helping to smooth transition and continuity as pupils move from Year 2 to Year 3. Its members visit regularly, with a specific focus, writing detailed reports on what they find. It is the governing body's rigour in regularly auditing the single central record of adults' qualifications and suitability to work with children that helps to take safeguarding arrangements way beyond the basic regulatory requirements. It is rare to see governors as actively involved in this fine scrutiny. Safeguarding arrangements also go beyond those routinely seen because they extend to the pupils, who, for example, initiate discussion of risk assessment when planning activities in the 'forest school'. Pupils describe how they wanted to swing on a log suspended from the branches of a tree but checked first to make sure that it was strong enough.

The school's promotion of community cohesion follows on from a comprehensive audit of provision. It has resulted in pupils taking a growing interest in the wider world as well as their immediate community. They enjoy learning about other faiths and ways of life around the world, for example through their participation in a Basildon schools' initiative for each class to 'adopt' a country to research. The school functions as a friendly, harmonious community where children from different backgrounds mix and get on very well together.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

'I am very pleased with my daughter's progress. She has learnt so much more in her first term than I expected. Every day she comes home with a new song and she has learnt about food, weather, expressions, etc.' This comment from a very satisfied mother summed up the views of the great majority of parents and carers, who are



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very pleased with the start their children get off to in the Nursery and Reception classes. In this well-run provision, children benefit from a good balance of adult-led activities and those they choose for themselves. Both year groups have spacious classrooms and attractive outdoor areas. These are used well, including to stimulate boys’ writing, in recognition of the fact that boys’ language and communication skills on entry have generally been behind those of the girls. Staff keep a careful track of each child’s progress and these are attractively presented and shared fortnightly with parents and carers through *Learning Journey* journals that also incorporate photographs and examples of children’s work, including some they select for themselves.

Assessment is not always used to ensure that children always benefit from activities enabling them to build on what they have already learnt. Nevertheless, the improving provision and the increasingly effective assessment of children’s progress, coupled with the close working partnership with parents and carers, have driven a steady rise in attainment. Children now leave the Reception Year with attainment that is close to that expected for their ages. This represents good progress in relation to their relatively low starting points.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

**Views of parents and carers**

The views expressed by parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive. A small minority of parents and carers would like more account taken of suggestions and concerns, although several parents and carers wrote to praise how responsive the school had been to points they had raised. Inspectors commended the school’s success in strengthening communication with parents and carers, and particularly those who need extra help in supporting their child’s learning.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northlands Infant School and Nursery to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 48 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 221 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	37	77	11	23	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	35	73	12	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	33	69	11	23	2	4	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	63	15	31	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	65	15	31	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	31	65	15	31	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	35	73	9	19	2	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	44	18	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	30	63	15	31	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	58	15	31	1	2	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	50	18	38	3	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	32	67	13	27	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	34	71	12	25	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 8 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



12 December 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Northlands Infant School and Nursery, Basildon SS13 3JQ**

Thank you for welcoming us when we came to visit your school. I particularly enjoyed the Christmas performance of *Whoops-A-Daisy Angel*. I am recommending that the headteacher awards each of you a 'bumblebee' for such good acting and singing, and for listening so attentively while others were performing.

Many of you told us how much you enjoy school. You also told us how proud you are to be at Northlands Infant. We could see why. Yours is a good school. It is well run and you benefit from good teaching that helps you to make good progress. Even though quite a lot of you start school with fewer skills than others, you reach the levels expected for your age by the time you leave at the end of Year 2. In the past, the boys have lagged a long way behind the girls, but we were pleased to see that the boys have been catching up. One of the reasons boys are doing better now is because you are finding the topics and your lessons much more interesting.

We were especially impressed with all the work that staff do to look after your welfare and keep you safe. They work very closely with your parents and carers, and it was good to see how much this has helped to improve your attendance. That is important because there is always a risk of you falling behind whenever you miss school. It was good to see how well you all get on together and how well behaved everyone is in lessons and around the school. That all helps to make your school such a happy, friendly place to be.

Your headteacher, governing body and staff are all keen to make your school even better. With this in mind, we have made some suggestions that could help you make still faster progress in lessons. You can all help, too, by continuing to do your very best and by telling your teachers any time you find your work too easy or too hard.

Thank you again for being so friendly and helpful on our visit, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward  
Lead inspector

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