

Northfields Infants and Nursery School

Burley, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 4PT

Inspection dates

7–8 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- School leaders have taken successful steps to improve teaching. As a result, pupils are making faster progress and attainment is rising.
- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because teaching is good. Teachers provide a wide range of stimulating activities that engage children for long periods.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they have very positive attitudes to learning. This contributes significantly to their good progress and the harmonious atmosphere.
- Pupils have a very clear picture of how well they are doing. Teachers' marking of their work identifies what they have done well and how it can be improved.
- The headteacher is passionate about promoting reading. She is driving achievement forward well, particularly in developing pupils' enjoyment of reading for pleasure.
- The school gives pupils an interesting, creative range of topics and subjects to study. This strongly supports pupils' good learning, enjoyment of school and rising attainment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The standards reached by boys are lower than girls' in reading and writing.
- Not enough teaching is outstanding, and a small amount is not yet good.
- Pupil premium funding is not used as effectively as possible to make sure the right pupils get the right support.
- The governing body does not check closely enough on the use of pupil premium funding and whether it is improving achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, school staff, parents and the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone discussion took place between the lead inspector and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 27 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and held informal discussions with parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on the pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martin Beale, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Gillian Scobie

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is average in size.
- The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, but the proportion of pupils from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds is rising. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- An above average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for funding through the pupil premium (which is extra money given to schools for pupils in local authority care, from Forces families and who are known to be eligible for free school meals).
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Nursery and two Reception classes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement in reading and writing of boys and those eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium by:
 - making sure that in Reception, boys are directed more often towards activities that develop their writing skills
 - checking carefully on the progress of these pupils, and taking immediate action if they are falling behind others
 - ensuring that the additional funding is targeted at all those entitled to it, and checking the impact of its use on improving their achievement.
- Bring all teaching up to the quality of the best by:
 - developing the questioning skills of teachers and support staff so that they draw out, check on and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - ensuring that teachers enable pupils to learn from each other and plan answers together through discussion
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills by solving problems in their everyday work.
- Improve governance by strengthening its role in checking on the use and effectiveness of expenditure of the pupil premium funding in improving these particular pupils' achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the school with skills that are well below those expected for their age. Boys lag behind girls in literacy. In spite of their good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes, attainment is slightly below average by the time they enter Year 1. The gap between boys and girls in literacy remains, particularly in writing. This is because activities to develop writing skills are not always targeted directly at the boys who need them.
- Good progress continues across Years 1 and 2 for most pupils, including those from ethnic minority groups. Pupils leave at the end of Year 2 with broadly average attainment. Year 2 assessments rose in 2012 to slightly above average, with writing and mathematics stronger than reading. Nevertheless, boys and pupils attracting the pupil premium funding have not been attaining as well as others in reading and writing. School leaders recognise this and have implemented strategies to close the gaps, but they are not yet fully effective.
- Pupils read often and widely. They generally take a new reading book home each day and also choose a new library book each week. They are heard reading regularly by an adult in school. Parents of Reception children are invited into school each week to read with their children and are helped to understand how to read with their children at home.
- The Year 1 check for the development of phonics skills (linking letters and sounds) picked up some weaknesses that are already being tackled successfully. Sessions to develop these skills are now starting earlier in Reception and are now taking place in smaller groups of similar ability children. Additional sessions have been introduced to help Year 2 pupils catch up quickly.
- In order to increase the number of pupils reaching the higher-than-average Level 3 in mathematics, teachers provide weekly problem-solving activities. These are making a positive difference to pupils' application of their skills. However, because they are isolated activities rather than a regular part of all learning, they do not deepen the pupils' mathematical understanding well enough.
- Pupils identified with special educational needs make good progress through positive relationships with support staff and their teachers. Pupils are well supported through activities and help in class, and also when they are withdrawn for specific, personalised, individual work.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection. Almost all is now good and some is outstanding. Teachers have higher expectations of the pupils and make clear to them how they can succeed in whatever they are doing. Lesson planning now ensures that learning builds from day to day, and activities are pitched at the right level to move learning forward for everyone.
- Careful planning, high expectations and personalised support in the Nursery and Reception classes enable children to progress at speed towards their individual targets. Adult-led sessions to develop key skills are taught well, but activities chosen by the children are dominated by adults at times. This stifles opportunities for children to take the initiative, become more independent and develop their speaking skills.
- The enthusiasm of teachers rubs off on the pupils in their classes. Lessons are made interesting and exciting by well-chosen resources and stimulating activities. Relationships are warm and

welcoming, and classrooms are calm and very productive. This is because teachers and other adults praise the pupils' achievements and give them confidence that their contributions are valued, however small they might be.

- Teachers and the other adults work seamlessly as a team. Teaching assistants skilfully take the lead in many activities, such as when developing pupils' phonics skills or helping them to develop wider reading skills. They support pupils who have special educational needs well, although at times these pupils rely too much on adult help.
- On a few occasions, teaching is not quite as effective. This is usually because questioning is not used to challenge and deepen pupils' thinking and check their understanding. Too often in these lessons, answers are only taken from pupils with their hands raised. Furthermore, opportunities are missed for pupils to learn from each other by discussing with a partner their ideas and answers.
- Pupils are helped to understand how well they are doing and what they should do to improve by helpful marking. Regularly reviewed targets also show pupils where they have been successful and how to move to the next level. 'Learning Journals' for children in the Nursery and Reception classes provide a very clear record of each child's progress for teachers and parents.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Learning takes place in all classrooms without disruption because pupils are very keen to do well and please their teachers. They greatly enjoy school, as is reflected in their regular and much improved attendance.
- The strong focus on social development begins in the Nursery and Reception classes where children develop very good routines, such as choosing their own learning activities. Children in Reception become engrossed in activities and concentrate for long periods. They learn to share, take turns and celebrate other's successes. These characteristics are built on well by teachers across the school, so that pupils work cooperatively and treat others with respect and consideration at all times.
- Incidents of unacceptable behaviour have fallen and are very few and far between. Pupils say they trust adults in school to deal with any problems quickly. Bullying does not happen as far as they are concerned because 'everyone plays nicely together'. School records confirm this and, also, that any very rare, inappropriate name-calling is dealt with quickly and not repeated. The social development of pupils identified with particular needs is carefully nurtured so that they gain the confidence to participate fully in school life.
- Pupils say they feel very safe in school, which is a view very much supported by their parents and carers. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when using computers. Road safety awareness starts in Reception where children are taught to take care when crossing the road. Sessions in the 'Forest School' encourage pupils to identify and deal with risks effectively.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is ably supported by her deputy in the drive to improve the school. They can point to many successes and improvements brought about since the previous inspection. For example, pupils now make faster progress, attainment is rising and attendance has improved. Their leadership, coupled with the strong, motivated staff team and an effective governing body mean the school is well-placed to improve further.

- School leaders carefully check the quality of teaching to identify strengths and where improvement is needed. Further training is then closely matched to each teacher's targets, including coaching by experts. Formal arrangements for managing and improving teachers' performance are rigorous, and salary progression is only allowed if pupils in their classes are making good progress.
- School self-evaluation is accurate and regularly updated. All staff and governors are involved in gathering and analysing evidence. However, improvement planning is not as incisive. This is because although action is being taken to tackle the gaps identified in literacy, the school improvement plan does not provide clear targets against which success can be evaluated.
- Pupil premium funding has been used to resource the 'Nurture Group', to support the delivery of individual tuition by teaching assistants and to fund the Parent Support Worker. However, these are not always directly targeted at all of the pupils for whom the funding is allocated. Consequently, gaps between their attainment and others in their classes are not closing as quickly as they might.
- The engagement with the local authority has benefited the school's leadership and provision in the Nursery and Reception classes. It has provided challenge for school leaders and support for identifying what is needed to bring about improvement. The school has wisely bought in advice to support the successful introduction of the revised requirements for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The school places great store on the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their understanding of their place in the world is promoted through assemblies and by supporting charities. Pupils greatly enjoy topics which link subjects together and include exciting visits. A strong feature of topic work is the way pupils are encouraged to ask questions at the start of a topic about things they would like to find out. The use of the 'Forest School' enables learning to move outside and stimulates the pupils to think about the world around them.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body ensure that all statutory duties, including those related to safeguarding pupils, are met. They undertake regular training to extend their skills so that they are able to question school leaders effectively. Their training has helped them develop an understanding of the school's effectiveness by comparing the assessments of pupils' skills with other schools. Through frequent visits, including being linked to a year group, governors know what is happening in school and understand the quality of its teaching. They use this first-hand information in discussions about the overall quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, both of which have improved as a result. They have started to gain the evidence they need to understand the link between target-setting procedures for teachers and their use for recognising and rewarding good performance. The governing body has a good overview of the budget and ensures financial stability. However, it does not rigorously check that pupil premium funding is being used appropriately and effectively to improve these particular pupils' achievement.

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	117223
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	401652

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Kennedy
Headteacher	Claire Logan
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2009
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