

Norton St Nicholas CofE (VA) Primary School

Norton Road, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 1AG

Inspection dates 5–6 December 2012

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils do well and make good progress. By the end of Year 6, they reach levels in English and mathematics that are above those expected for their age.
- Staff have high expectations and promote pupils' speaking, listening and thinking skills well.
- The teaching of reading is good. Pupils read widely and enjoy books.
- The school is a happy place where pupils thrive. Behaviour is good, pupils feel safe and attendance is above average.
- The school has good systems for checking how much progress pupils are making and identifying those who could do better.
- Leaders ensure staff training is linked well to the school's priorities and this leads to improvements in pupils' achievement and in the quality of teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress in mathematics is not always as good as it is in English.
- Pupils are not always clear how to improve their work or what they are working towards.
- The teaching of letters and sounds is better in some classes than it is in others.
- Further links with parents and carers are developing.
- Systems for checking the quality of teaching are not leading to enough outstanding teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons or parts of lessons, of which two were joint observations with the headteacher. Eleven members of staff were seen teaching.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, school leaders and staff.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons about their work, looked at their books and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors took account of 34 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and written responses, and spoke to parents and carers during the inspection.
- Inspectors analysed responses from 16 questionnaires completed by school staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at progress and attendance data, improvement plans, evidence of the monitoring of teaching, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Vivienne McTiffen, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Raymond Biglin

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for whom the school receives additional income (the pupil premium) is well below average.
- The school meets the government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery and Reception class.
- The school runs before-school and lunchtime clubs which are managed by the governing body.
- Since the last inspection, the school has experienced significant staff and leadership changes. The headteacher was appointed in May 2011 and the deputy headteacher joined in September 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure all pupils do as well as they can across the school by:
 - sharing existing good practice in marking and target setting so pupils know what to do to make their work better
 - giving pupils more chance to solve problems, carry out mathematical investigations and use their mathematics skills in other subjects
 - establishing a more consistent approach to the teaching of letters and sounds.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - ensuring systems for checking the quality of teaching have a sharper focus on raising it to outstanding and provide detailed feedback to staff so they know how to improve
 - involving parents and carers more fully so that they understand the work of the school and how to support their children's learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Nursery or Reception class with skills that are in line with those expected for their age. They make good all-round progress so, by the time they enter Year 1, they are well prepared for the next stage of learning.
- Pupils make a good start in learning about letters and sounds. In the Reception class, children learn in small groups where work is matched to their ability. This good practice is not consistently used in Key Stage 1 classes to ensure all pupils do as well as they can.
- Pupils read keenly because the 'Bug Club' provides books they find interesting and enjoyable. Boys' reading levels, identified by the school as needing improvement, are rising. By the end of Year 2, attainment in reading is above average and, by the end of Year 6, it is well above average.
- Pupils write widely in English and other subjects. They share ideas before writing and use grammar and punctuation well. Since the last inspection, there has been a marked improvement in the numbers of pupils making better than expected progress in writing.
- In mathematics, more pupils reach higher levels than nationally but the school's data show that rates of progress in mathematics are not always as good as those in English. Pupils add, subtract, divide and multiply numbers competently but do not always have enough chance to solve problems or take part in mathematical investigations.
- Pupils develop good skills that support their learning. For example, in a history lesson, they discussed and evaluated the differences between primary and secondary sources of evidence. They worked well together and made good progress in developing research skills.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their starting points. Those at all levels of support receive extra help which enables them to take small steps in their learning. Pupils' confidence in their ability increases and this helps them to do well in working towards their individual goals.
- Additional funding for the small number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals provides extra adult help and resources. Spending is well matched to what individual pupils need in order to raise their achievement and promote their well-being. As a result, their rate of progress is catching up with that of their classmates.

The quality of teaching is good

- Relationships are good and pupils' contributions and efforts are valued. The focus on speaking, listening and thinking is strong. Teachers enable pupils to share ideas, voice their opinions and explain their reasoning.
- Teachers teach confidently because their subject knowledge is good. They are enthusiastic and keen for pupils to succeed. Well-paced lessons mean that there is no time wasting. Plenty of work in groups and with partners develops pupils' social skills well.
- Teachers often link subjects together. For example, Year 6 pupils used the Second World War as

a starting point for writing poetry. In Year 3, history and drama linked learning about the Anglo-Saxons. In contrast, the use of mathematical skills in other subjects is not planned well enough.

- Teachers' good marking and target setting helps pupils to improve. During the inspection, outstanding teaching set high expectations of pupils when they checked their writing against their targets. Pupils said it really helped them know how to do better. However, this good practice is not found in all classes.
- In the Nursery and Reception class, a good balance exists between adult-led activities and those children choose for themselves. Because adults are allocated to small groups of children, links with parents and carers are strengthened and children settle quickly. Carefully compiled 'learning journals' clearly show children's progress.
- Teaching assistants provide valuable support for all abilities but especially less-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Work with individuals and small groups helps to tackle pupils' specific difficulties and successfully builds their skills.
- The teaching of reading is an area of strength. Recent spending on books is paying off and standards are rising. Well-resourced reading areas promote pupils' interest, and home and school reading records involve parents and carers in supporting their children's achievement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils say they are happy at school and talk keenly about their learning. They know their views are taken seriously and report that 'everyone gets a say'. Attendance is above average: very few pupils are persistently absent or late.
- Strong pastoral care creates a harmonious school community where pupils get on well together. They value the support they receive from adults, reflected by this comment from one pupil, 'Teachers are nice, funny and caring'. Pupils say they feel safe in school and know who to speak to if they have a problem.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils respond well to the school's systems for promoting good behaviour. They are tolerant of a very small number who find behaving well more difficult, and the school's logs show that these pupils make marked improvement over time.
- Pupils recognise different forms of bullying and appreciate the guidance they get. One pupil commented on how 'talking about it makes it better'. Bullying incidents are very rare and thoroughly recorded. Issues are discussed during assemblies and in lessons, helping pupils understand how to handle any concerns.
- Pupils accept responsibility willingly by helping one another and taking on little jobs around the school. They take their roles seriously and approach them with maturity. They are interested in learning about others and have a good understanding of different faiths and cultures.

The leadership and management are good

- Good achievement and teaching have been maintained since the last inspection. The headteacher is strengthening leadership roles although the checking of learning in mathematics is not as strongly developed as in English.

- The school is making in-roads in identifying and tackling any underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics. This, together with ways in which additional funding is used to close gaps in performance, shows commitment to equality of opportunity.
 - Training given to staff helps to develop their teaching skills well and matches the needs of the school. The headteacher is determinedly raising the expectations of all staff over what pupils should achieve, leading to improved teaching and rates of progress.
 - Effective local authority support helps the headteacher and governors build expertise and leadership skills through relevant training. As a result, the school's picture of how well it is doing is accurate and plans for improvement are realistic.
 - Although there is already some outstanding teaching, systems that leaders use to check the quality of teaching do not focus sharply enough on raising it to consistently outstanding. Feedback given to staff is not detailed enough to help them understand how to improve.
 - Leaders ensure that the school provides a good range of subjects and experiences for pupils. Partnerships, trips and clubs add to their enjoyment, enhancing learning and cultural understanding. Taking part in performances and links with the local church promote pupils' spiritual and social development well. Leaders' strong focus on moral development is reflected in pupils' good behaviour.
 - Children in the Nursery and Reception class experience a good range of activities. Strong emphasis is placed on building good personal, social and communication skills. Outdoor areas are used well for all ages to share resources and work together.
 - The headteacher has quickly established positive links with parents and carers, effectively summed up by one parent's comment, 'You need never wonder where he is: on the playground, meeting and greeting, helping the young ones, friendly and helpful.'
 - The new leadership team is at an early stage of finding more ways to help parents and carers understand the school's work and how to support their children's learning. The early morning 'Drop Off Club' and the Nursery 'Lunchtime Club' provide valuable extra facilities for parents and carers and their children.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved considerably since the last inspection, especially in how well governors check the school's work. As a result, governors have a clear view of how well the school is doing. The governing body makes good use of expertise within its ranks. Governors are fully aware of strengths and weaknesses and are committed to moving the school forward. They value the efforts of all staff and have a good understanding of the quality of teaching. They understand how teachers' pay links to the effect of teaching on pupils' progress. They are involved in arrangements for managing teachers' performance and decisions about staff development. Governors keep careful control over the way money is spent, including pupil premium funding. They have a very clear view of the effect of spending on pupils' achievement because they look at progress data regularly. Governors have a strong focus on making sure everyone is included and that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.
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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	117442
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	403322

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Taylor
Headteacher	Stephen Cowdery
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2008
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