

# Northhill CofE VA Lower School

Bedford Road, Northill, Biggleswade, SG18 9AH

**Inspection dates** 13–14 November 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well at the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics because teaching is good. In Key Stage 2, they continue to make good progress, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Teachers use teaching assistants well to support pupils in their learning.
- Adults have clear expectations of behaviour. Pupils respond well and consequently behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school.
- Both staff and pupils uphold the values promoted by the school, and show mutual respect.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in the school, and their parents agree.
- Recently, governors have undertaken an in-depth audit. They now have the skills to challenge leaders to improve the school's performance, which they do well.
- Senior leaders routinely and rigorously check the performance of teachers and the progress of pupils. They quickly identify where support is needed and take effective steps to provide it.
- The school supports the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of its pupils well, supported by good links with the church.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always move pupils onto more challenging activities when they have mastered the tasks set in lessons.
- Standards in reading in Years 3 and 4 are not as high as in writing or mathematics. Pupils in these year groups do not have enough opportunities to extend their reading skills.
- The outside area available to the Reception class is not used well to support children's learning.

## Information about this inspection

- Learning in classrooms was observed on five occasions. All lessons were observed with either the Head of School or the federation headteacher. On three occasions, both senior leaders were present.
- A group of pupils from Year 2 were heard reading.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, other members of the school staff, a group of pupils, three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and with parents on the playground. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector examined a number of documents provided by the school. These included records of governing body meetings, the school's information relating to the performance of teachers and the progress of pupils, records of behaviour, and the school's improvement plans and its evaluation of its work. Information relating to attendance and safety was also scrutinised.
- The 48 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) were analysed, as were the eight responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Jill Thewlis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Northill is much smaller than the average-sized lower school. Children in Reception attend on a full-time basis.
- Since the previous inspection, it has entered into a 'soft' federation with a nearby middle school. This means a federation headteacher oversees both schools, but there is a Head of School based at Northill.
- Only one member of the teaching staff remains from the previous inspection.
- About 4% of the pupils are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding from pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority. This proportion is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, at around 14%, is also below average.
- As this is a lower school, there are no government floor standards setting the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

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

- Improve teaching and raise standards, especially in reading, by ensuring that:
  - pupils, especially in Year 3 and Year 4, are encouraged to extend their skills in more challenging reading activities
  - teachers move pupils onto more challenging activities within lessons as soon as they are ready
  - activities in Reception make full use of available space to promote children's learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The senior leaders set a good example to other staff and to pupils. They have high expectations for the whole school community. Leaders check the progress of the pupils regularly. They identify where support is needed and ensure that it is swiftly provided. Consequently, pupils do not fall behind in their learning.
- The local authority has assisted in the improvements made to the governing body.
- The new national curriculum links subjects together into topics. Pupils enjoy this because the topics are new and exciting, and this helps their learning and progress.
- The spiritual, moral, cultural and social skills of the pupils are developed well. The strong school ethos is reflected in well-planned assemblies where pupils have opportunities to reflect. There are good links with the church. The school is working towards achieving the 'Values mark.' There is a new value each half term, currently it is forgiveness. Pupils understand this and say that if they fall out, 'We forgive each other.'
- Pupils have wide opportunities to take part in musical events and learn to play a range of instruments. The school choir recently sang in St Albans Cathedral. The school has made a link with a school in India. There is regular communication between the schools. Pupils also take part in 'Global days.' Each class becomes a different country, work is rotated and pupils learn about the culture of that country.
- The sports premium funding is used well. Pupils have more opportunities to take part in sporting tournaments. Some have become so interested in particular sports that they are taking them up in their spare time. For example, following an after-school golf club, several pupils have joined the local golf club. The purchase of additional equipment promotes physical activity at play time and lunch time. Training is enabling staff to teach high-quality physical education lessons. Pupils have been trained as play leaders, encouraging them to take on additional responsibility and developing their leadership skills.
- All pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed. The new leader responsible for special educational needs has made a good start in identifying pupils' needs and liaising with other professionals to ensure they receive the best support and do well. Good use of the pupil premium to provide extra help means that the very few disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their classmates. Pupils learn about other cultures, and this helps to ensure there is no discrimination.
- The performance of all staff is regularly checked. All teachers, including the Head of School and Federation headteacher, have individual performance targets that are linked to pupils' achievement and staff pay rises.
- Parents receive a good range of information about their children's achievement through regular reports and discussions, and seeing the pupils at work. The school holds information evenings to discuss teaching methods with parents. 'Wrap-around care' has recently been introduced to help hard-to-reach and working families with child care.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - As a result of a recent review, governors have received extensive training. This has enabled them to more fully understand their role. Meeting records show that they challenge the senior leaders with pertinent questions, such as why attainment in reading in Year 4 had dipped in 2014.
  - Governors have a good knowledge of the school's performance, and its strengths and weaknesses. They receive regular, detailed reports from senior leaders about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, and have a clear understanding about the relationship between staff performance and pay. They are unequivocal that no pay rise would be granted unless performance warranted it. Regular visits to the school give them first-hand information about teaching and learning, and the outcomes are reported back to the whole governing body.

- Governors have a good understanding of how the pupil premium and sports funding are spent. Reports from the headteacher identify the impact this funding has had on eligible pupils' achievement.
- The governors manage the finances of the school well. They make sure it is solvent, and that safeguarding arrangements are effective and meet all current national requirements.

## **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Through strong promotion of values, pupils quickly develop an understanding of the difference between right and wrong. They understand that their behaviour has consequences. Staff apply the clear behaviour policy consistently well. Pupils know the rewards and sanctions, and say there is no bad language or racism.
- Pupils enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. Pupils are keen to learn and apply themselves to the tasks set. Consequently, there is minimal time loss in lessons. Work in books is neat and well presented.
- Pupils show respect for each other and for the adults who work in the school. Pupils are polite and friendly. The school environment is clean and well cared for; there is no litter. The whole school community show they are proud of their school.
- Good use of equipment to promote physical activity at playtimes and lunchtimes encourages pupils to cooperate and collaborate with each other, and develop good teamwork skills.
- The school is working hard to encourage the pupils of hard-to-reach families to attend school more regularly. Holidays are not authorised. A range of rewards are used well to encourage good attendance. Pupils arrive punctually to school and to lessons. There have been no exclusions in recent years.
- Relationships within the school are good. Pupils say, and their parents agree, that they feel cared for. They know whom to turn to if they are concerned or worried.

### **Safety**

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils have a good understanding that bullying is persistent and directed at one person. They understand how to keep themselves safe when using technology and in other areas of their lives; for example, when crossing the road. Pupils were clear that there was no bullying. School records and parents support this view.
- Pupils say there is no racism in the school and this is supported by the school's records. Bad language is not evident on inspection and there are no recorded incidents of pupils using bad language.
- The school fencing is robust. Visitors are thoroughly checked before moving out of the reception area. Consequently, pupils and their parents are confident that the site is safe and secure.

## **The quality of teaching** is good

- The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. Teachers mostly adapt activities well to match the abilities of the pupils.
- Teachers mark books regularly. Pupils know what they need to do to improve their work and this helps them to make good progress.
- Homework is issued monthly and pupils are able to choose from a range of activities. Pupils are also expected to learn weekly spellings and to read at home daily. Parents like the homework, and say it encourages families to work together.

- The very few disadvantaged pupils have the support they need to do well. Similarly, pupils who have special educational needs have effective support. Consequently, these pupils make good progress. The teaching assistants are used well to support learning. They engage well with pupils and ask challenging questions to make pupils think hard.
- The pupils say work is mostly neither too easy nor too hard. Occasionally, however, teachers do not move pupils onto more challenging activities when they have clearly understood the task set, and this holds back the progress of some pupils.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to apply their skills in mathematics to problem-solving activities. This particularly helps the most able pupils to achieve the higher levels in their work.
- Pupils have many opportunities to write in different subjects. Errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling are corrected. As a result, pupils realise that the use of good English is important in all forms of writing.
- The teaching of phonics (the link between letters and the sounds they make) has been reorganised and is now more effective. Additional staff training has led to pupils currently making better progress.
- Pupils enjoy reading. In the words of one pupil, 'It is fascinating.' Pupils are able to apply their phonic skills to decode unfamiliar words. However, in Year 3 and Year 4, they do not have enough opportunities to develop more advanced reading skills. Consequently, attainment and progress in reading in Key Stage 2 are not as strong as in writing and mathematics.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- Pupils make good progress in all year groups, from Reception through to Year 4. In 2014, all pupils who left the school were well prepared for the next stage of their education, having all achieved or exceeded nationally expected levels for progress and attainment.
- Children enter the Reception class with skills and abilities that are broadly typical for their age. They make good progress in Reception and Years 1 and 2. Although comparisons in standards are not always statistically significant in such small schools, the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 is improving and was well above the national average in all subjects in 2014, reflecting good progress. Mathematics was the strongest subject.
- Work in books shows that pupils continue to make good progress in Year 3 and Year 4. Progress in reading is not as rapid as in writing or mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in the Year 1 phonic screening check improved in 2014.
- The most able pupils make good progress because they are usually stretched by the work set. Senior leaders have provided more opportunities for pupils to practise the skills learnt in English and mathematics in other subjects, and this is also helping more pupils to reach higher levels in their work.
- There were no pupils supported by the pupil premium in the school at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2013 or 2014. The few disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs who are currently in the school are making good progress in line with other groups, because they receive effective support.

### **The early years provision** is good

- Children enter the Reception class with skills and abilities in line with those typical for their age. They make good progress, because the teaching is good. More children than found nationally achieve a good level of development. Consequently, pupils enter Year 1 ready to continue learning and with no gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- Leadership and management are good. The leader, who is also the Head of School, ensures that children

are taught well. She has been instrumental in developing the outside area into an attractive space. Pupils are encouraged to make their own choices, and do so because resources are easy for them to find.

- Staff give children clear guidelines about behaviour, and as a result they behave well. Expectations are high and routines are established. The area is safe and secure. The children are happy and this helps to build their confidence and encourages them to make good progress.
- Children show that they can persevere. They help each other. For example, when working on a computer, one child was unsure how to access the program so his friend helped him.
- The staff do not yet make full use of the new outside space to support learning, for example, by encouraging pupils to explore and investigate through well-prepared resources, in the way they do indoors.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	109621
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	448399

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

<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	64
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Simon Bryant
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mandy Reddick (Federation headteacher)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25–26 February 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	01767 627215
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