

INSPECTION REPORT

**RNIB SUNSHINE HOUSE SCHOOL
NORTHWOOD**

Hillingdon

Unique reference number: 102463

Acting Headteacher: Mrs Loraine Stewart

Reporting inspector: Mary Henderson
19827

Dates of inspection: 14th – 15th June 2001

Inspection number: 191997

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils:	2 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	33 Dene Road Northwood Middlesex
Postcode:	HA6 2DD
Telephone number:	(01923) 822538
Fax number:	(01923) 862227
Appropriate authority:	Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter French
Date of previous inspection:	February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

RNIB Sunshine House School Northwood is a non-maintained day and residential special school for pupils with a visual impairment, ages 2 – 11 years. Pupils' visual impairment varies from no sight to useful functional vision. All pupils have one or more additional disabilities, many of them severe. These may be physical, intellectual, social or emotional in origin. The intake of the school has increased from 37 in 1997 to 54 pupils on roll currently, of whom 32 are boys. The increase in roll, up to 55, is partly due to a change in the age range which raised the upper limit from 8 years to 11 years. Some pupils live a long way from the school and up to 19 pupils use the residential provision during the course of the week. The school is owned by the RNIB, which provides three of the governors. It is situated in a pleasant residential area of Middlesex. A small number of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and a few have English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

RNIB Sunshine House School is a good school. The standard of care is very good. Teaching and progress by pupils are good and have improved since the last inspection. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is good and the high standard of teamwork in each class ensures that pupils' work meets their learning needs.
- Staff morale is high because teachers and support and care staff appreciate the resources that are available to them in their work.
- The standard of care for pupils is very high. This contributes to the very good progress which pupils make in their personal, social and physical development.

What could be improved

- Uncertainty about the position of the current acting headteacher has limited strategic planning for the future and led to a reduction in the monitoring of teaching.
- The division of responsibilities between RNIB personnel, school governors and senior management restricts the ability of the school to manage the budget and develop a school improvement plan over a longer period of time.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1997. Improvements are evident in:

- the quality of teaching has substantially improved;
- standards in mathematics and science and are now at least satisfactory;
- the detailed timetables for each class and each pupil share a common format. This enables pupils' complex needs to be addressed as well as aiding their progress across the whole curriculum;
- the school development plan is clearly written with costs shown;
- the quality of monitoring of the curriculum is good. The quality of the monitoring of teaching had improved but has declined;
- subject planning has improved. There are now schemes of work which ensure whole-school planning; and
- the work of learning support assistants is better co-ordinated and more effective.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age 5	by age 11	Key	
speaking and listening	C	B	very good	A
reading	C	B	good	B
writing	C	B	satisfactory	C
mathematics	C	B	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education	A	B	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B	B		

Individual learning plans are of a good quality and show clearly where progress has been made and what targets are achieved. Class teachers review these and whole-school monitoring shows that the majority of pupils make good progress in reaching their targets. Pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Almost all pupils enjoy school. They take as active a part in lessons as possible.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good. Pupils learn to be polite, kind and respectful to each other. They are prepared to wait for each other.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is very good. Pupils show a growing maturity as they progress through the school and take advantage of the opportunities to work independently
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory. There are no unauthorised absences or exclusions. However, there is often a disorganised beginning to the day because a significant number of pupils arrive during the first lesson, rather than being in school by 9am.

The school's distinctive ethos provides pupils with a strong base for their personal development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5	aged 5-11
Lessons seen overall	good	good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

- All the teaching seen was at least satisfactory. In almost one-third of lessons teaching was very good or excellent, in over one-third of lessons of teaching was good and in just under a third of

lessons teaching was satisfactory.

- Teachers are very skilled in meeting the needs of pupils with visual impairment.
- The teaching of communication skills, including the teaching by the speech therapist, is excellent.
- Literacy and numeracy are well taught.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Teachers plan a carefully varied programme in line with the National Curriculum requirements; they ensure that pupils follow a wide range of subjects whilst also having appropriate opportunities to meet their individual mobility, communication and physical needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Individual programmes to develop communication skills are also tailored to meet the basic needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school promotes pupils' personal development very well. A new personal and social curriculum has broadened the areas covered. In addition to personal needs, pupils also receive regular effective teaching to develop moral, spiritual, social and cultural appreciation.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares very well for pupils. Many pupils require medical care and medication. Assessment and record keeping are of a very high standard. They enable the social, personal and physical needs of pupils to be well identified and met. Care plans and individual learning plans are good and regularly reviewed to ensure that pupils are making appropriate progress.

Educational provision for pupils is good. Personal development is well supported by all staff. Activities are very well timetabled to ensure all needs are met.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school has been well managed by the acting headteacher, supported by senior staff. However, the long period of uncertainty over the appointment of the headteacher has affected the leadership role in the school and has hindered planning for future developments.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The RNIB and the governing body meet their statutory responsibilities. However, there are limitations in the responsibilities of school governors. This means that they are not in a position to determine a longer-term strategy for the school or to have a more informed view of strengths and weaknesses in standards and provision.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The acting headteacher has maintained satisfactory systems for monitoring the curriculum and the number of targets met by pupils. The lack of time for carrying out some senior management responsibilities has restricted the scope for further development and reduced the amount of monitoring of teaching.
The strategic use of resources	Restrictions in budgetary responsibility has meant the governing body and senior management have very limited expertise in linking financial planning to the quality of education.

The commitment of all those attached to the school is very strong and the school is managed to the benefit of its pupils. However, the school's managers have insufficient responsibility for financial and strategic planning over the longer term.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The progress that their children make.• The respect shown to children.• The holistic approach to meeting children's needs.• The good information and support they receive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents would like more information on what their children have done each day.

The inspection team agreed with the strengths that parents identified. The quality of information is generally good.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Teaching is good and the high standard of team work in each class ensures that pupils' work meets their learning needs.

1. Teaching has continued to improve since the last inspection. It was at least satisfactory in all lessons in the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2. Over two-thirds of the teaching is good or better. In about one out of three lessons it is very good or excellent. A major strength in teaching is the teamwork between all the adults in the classroom. This focuses correctly on the pupils' individual learning programmes taught in the context of the National Curriculum. Pupils are usually clear about what is required in the lesson and, in the very good lessons, they understand why the task is being set. As a result, most pupils work hard and make good gains in their learning. They thrive in the exceptionally positive climate that nearly every adult ensures at all times. This means that they can accept being challenged with harder tasks. A Year 5 pupil used a head operated communications aid to make different coloured shapes appear and disappear on a computer screen. She enjoyed this control over her environment. Later in the lesson she was able to eye point at coloured plastic shapes to show that she remembered the names of the different shapes and the different colours and could identify them in a different context.
2. The individual learning programmes are well written and teachers use them effectively in devising work for the staff team. This ensures that, in most cases, staff make good use of time and most lessons feature a range of lively activities. A lesson on Tudor food and drink with Year 4 pupils earlier in the day still had some pupils smiling at their recollections when they were preparing for going home. All members of the staff team used this last short session to refer to instances from the earlier lesson. The whole group showed great enjoyment. Most lessons are managed at a brisk pace so that, for example, all pupils move across a range of speaking and listening activities during lessons.
3. Teachers use methods which meet the needs of pupils with a visual impairment very well and staff are skilled at developing very good communication with pupils. Pupils are helped to make use of any sight they may have as well as developing the use of other senses. Planning for lessons includes very careful timetabling to ensure that the complex learning, communication and physical needs of pupils are met. The range of additional therapy includes speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and mobility. Staff work very well together to structure the activities in a way that supports overall learning and the increasing independence of pupils as they grow. Very good use is made of a range of information and communication technology well matched to the needs of pupils. Many examples were seen of pupils using computers with adapted keyboards, touchscreens and a wide range of switches. In a language lesson, for example, two boys used head-switches to answer questions after correctly identifying the names of objects that were either felt or described to them. This was a very effective way of building up vocabulary as well as using technical aids.

Staff morale is high because teachers and support and care staff appreciate the resources that are available to them in their work.

4. Staff morale is high because teachers and support staff appreciate the good level of resources that are available to help them in their work and they use the resources effectively to aid pupils' learning. The school is situated in very well maintained and landscaped gardens. A sensory garden includes a range of different experiences. As well as contributing to pupils' learning, the school grounds also provide a very pleasant environment for the staff to work in. The wide range of experiences offered to pupils is considered outstanding by the staff and makes their own work more interesting. Staff appreciate the level of investment in resources provided by the RNIB, and the generous monetary donations to the school, both in the classroom and in human resources. Communication at all levels is good and this leads to high levels of co-operation. The speech therapist and other professionals supporting the school work well together with teaching staff.

5. Staff morale is helped by very good training opportunities. Staff consider that the range of training opportunities provided shows that they are valued by the RNIB and the school. All teachers are additionally qualified to teach visually impaired pupils or are in training to achieve the award. They also have access to numerous other courses related to the National Curriculum or teaching. All support and care staff take the externally accredited RNIB award in Care and Support, with modules related to working with visually impaired pupils. Twenty-two learning support assistants have been on a total of 72 courses since July 99. Courses taken by almost every learning support assistant include the RNIB award, moving and handling and the management of epilepsy course. Teachers also take the moving and handling and management of epilepsy courses.
6. Staff see the approval given to a very dynamic approach to teaching as a strength of the school. It recognises pupils need for much greater stimulation for learning than that required by mainstream peers. One way in which staff provide this is to inject as much humour into learning as is possible. Many examples were seen of this during the inspection, for example, a child's face lighting up during a TACPAC session, or in the swimming pool when they had, with their support assistant, scored a goal in water-polo. Overall, the ability to have fun with pupils, together with the different ways used by the RNIB to show staff that they are valued, has made a major contribution to staff morale.

There is a very high standard of care for pupils. This helps pupils to make very good progress in personal, social and physical development.

7. The school makes very good provision for the health, safety and welfare of pupils. Arrangements for child protection are good. The school is very clean and safe. Very good use is made of colour and contrast and tactile clues help pupils move round the school. There have been significant improvements in care systems and protocols since the last inspection, put in place by the very effective Head of Care. These ensure that pupils' individual needs are very well known and met by school and care staff. The improvements in keeping medical records, for example, are very important in a school where many pupils require medical care and medication. The recent report by Hillingdon Social Services noted that the "quality of care offered to the children who receive a boarding service has improved greatly since the last full inspection. At the time of the last inspection the care was good but now it is excellent." These findings are endorsed by parents of children at the school and by the inspection team.
8. The use of a common format for assessment leads to very effective planning for individual pupils. Care plans and individual learning plans are drawn up with reference to each other and there are good arrangements for the hand-over between school and care staff. The monitoring of individual progress has improved substantially since the last inspection. Record of Achievements are now used across the school, whereas formerly they were restricted to the Nursery; they provide good evidence of past work. All staff usefully contribute to the half-termly review of targets.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Uncertainty about the position of headteacher has limited strategic planning for the future and led to a reduction in the monitoring of teaching.

9. The current acting headteacher has been in post for over a year, having previously been the substantive deputy headteacher at the school. Confusion over the position of the current acting headteacher contributed to a state of uncertainty and, to a significant extent, has limited the ability to plan for the future or change current policy. For example, staff are reluctant to make further changes until they have been endorsed by a permanent headteacher. There is no acting deputy headteacher as the school chose instead to develop its base for parent and outreach support by appointing one teacher as an Early Years Development Officer. The Family Centre is developing well and has the potential to develop much further. The school has been well managed by the acting headteacher and senior staff. However, this means that one person carries most of the duties of the head and deputy. It is not clear how these responsibilities have

been prioritised but the need to maintain provision and systems seems to have taken first place. There are acknowledged difficulties in recruiting suitable new staff. The consequences of the reduction of the senior management post, in addition to the reduction of another teaching post through long term sickness, have not been evaluated. This has created uncertainty among staff and has led to the need to leave learning support assistants in charge of a class for one afternoon a week, a practice that was justifiably criticised in the previous inspection report.

10. The monitoring of teaching has declined. The quality of this monitoring of teaching was good up to a year ago. The lack of time available for monitoring and supporting both teaching and the curriculum is now a serious concern. It makes it more difficult, for example, for the school to implement the national policy on performance management, as is its intention. Although teaching is effective overall, there are weaknesses in some teachers' use of lesson time. This is mainly because some staff prolong an activity when they could consolidate it with something that involved pupils in a different way. For example, a teacher read a story about animals in a boat then went on to read another different story to the same group rather than linking the first story with an activity for pupils to do. As a result they sat for too long. It was also clear that some teachers involve support staff less actively than others. In most lessons, teachers involved all the staff in the classroom effectively in good teamwork; however, on some occasions, they did not make sufficient use of learning support assistants who were left too long in a passive role.

The division of responsibilities between RNIB personnel, school governors and senior management restricts the ability of the school to manage the budget and develop a school improvement plan over a longer period.

11. The commitment of all those attached to the school is very strong. The level of funding from the RNIB is considered generous. Responsibility for the management of the budget, overall, lies with the RNIB and governors themselves would welcome more financial and management responsibility on a par with that of governors of a maintained school. Without this responsibility, governors have been unable to develop expertise in linking the allocation of funds with planning future educational developments at the school. Discussions are inclined to centre on peripheral funding areas rather than major strategic decisions. The present situation makes it difficult to come to a firm judgement about the strategic management of the budget by the governors. Nor is it possible for the school to pursue best value. The process of decision-making within the RNIB planning cycle also leads to delays in implementation. The maintenance of the accounts by the Finance Officer and the provision of financial information is of a high order and the school manages very well the money over which it has control. Fees are worked out with very close and detailed reference to assessed needs. However, the level of fees is unrealistic and does not meet the level of expenditure. The gap each year is met by the RNIB providing a 'subsidy'. This impedes the development of longer-term planning, perhaps over three years. The inspection team strongly endorses the movement towards further financial delegation currently being considered by the RNIB.
12. Leadership within the school is made difficult by the division of responsibilities between the RNIB Education and Employment Division, governors and senior managers, several of the latter having acting appointments. Members of the governing body visit the school regularly and give strong support to staff. However, many regret that they do not have further substantial powers for monitoring standards and the quality of education. There have been delays in implementing the national performance management policy. Although their responsibilities have increased in recent years, parent governors especially do not consider they have adequate authority to act. Parents in general, whilst appreciative of the RNIB in maintaining the school, criticise the long period of uncertainty over the appointment of a headteacher. There was a lack of clarity about the powers of the appointment panel, which included governors and LEA representatives, as well as RNIB personnel, to make an appointment.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

14. In order to further improve provision at the school, the governing body and senior management team should:

(1) clarify with RNIB corporate management and the Education and Employment Division a governing body framework and terms of reference that will:

- provide the basis for longer-term strategic planning;
- resolve the position of headteacher;
- provide a settled management structure to the school; and
- strengthen arrangements for the monitoring of teaching.

(reference: paragraphs 10, 11, 13)

(2) establish, with the RNIB, a sound funding mechanism for the school and continue to implement training in further financial delegation with a view to ensuring the school applies the principles of 'best value'.

(reference: paragraph 12)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	16
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	5

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	25	37	32	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	54
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	N/A

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	8

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence	%	Unauthorised absence	%
School data	16.4	School data	0.0

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	3
Indian	3
Pakistani	6
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	29
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	8.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6.75
Average class size	9.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	37
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1,342

Financial information

Financial year	2000/01
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	£
Total income	1,427,945
Total expenditure	1,422,167
Expenditure per pupil	29,629
Balance brought forward from previous year	5,778
Balance carried forward to next year	5,778

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	54
Number of questionnaires returned	31

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	97	3	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	29	3	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	74	26	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	16	26	10	0	7
The teaching is good.	71	26	0	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	77	23	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	87	13	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	81	13	0	0	7
The school works closely with parents.	71	9	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	87	13	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	71	26	0	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	65	26	0	0	10