



# Northhill CofE VA Lower School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 109621  
**Local Authority** BEDFORDSHIRE  
**Inspection number** 288452  
**Inspection dates** 30 November –1 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Patricia Cox

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>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	Bedford Road
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Northill, Northill
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9		Biggleswade, Bedfordshire
			SG18 9AH
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01767 627215
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	67	<b>Fax number</b>	01767 627452
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Tudor Fox
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Liz Simpson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 April 2001		

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<b>Age group</b> 4–9	<b>Inspection dates</b> 30 November –1 December 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 288452
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The pupils in this rural first school are mainly of White British heritage. About 8% of pupils are from Traveller families, although the proportion varies between classes. Nearly all pupils have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is an average proportion with statements of special educational needs. The pupils' family backgrounds include a very wide range of socio-economic circumstances. Children enter the school with extremely wide levels of attainment, which vary significantly from year to year. Many pupils have attainment well above that expected while others have poorly developed skills.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

This is a good school, where pupils achieve well. Parents are very supportive of the school and positive about what it offers. Boys and girls, and those with learning difficulties, achieve equally and the school works exceptionally well with the Traveller families to ensure that their children achieve as well as they can. Children do well in the Foundation Stage, whatever their attainment on entry, and most reach or exceed the targets for their age by the time they enter Year 1. Throughout the school, pupils attain standards that are often above those expected for their age, and sometimes exceptionally high, particularly in reading and writing. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's very good leadership has ensured that all in the school work as a very close team, committed to ensuring that pupils do as well as they can. The staff are beginning to develop their revised leadership and management skills, but are at a relatively early stage. They undertake these new roles enthusiastically and there is good capacity for improvement. The school has an accurate understanding of its own effectiveness. Planning for development is good, identifying accurately the areas where improvement is needed and setting out appropriate action. Consequently, work has already begun to tackle the shortcomings in mathematics, where standards are not as high as in English. The headteacher checks the impact of initiatives regularly but improvement planning does not show explicitly how this is carried out. Consequently, it is not clear to others how this will be done.

The pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding and they thoroughly enjoy their time in school, becoming mature and thoughtful individuals, who take responsibility very well. Behaviour is very good overall, and that of the oldest pupils is exemplary. The Year 3 and 4 pupils' thoughtful and imaginative writing reflects their excellent spiritual development. The standards the pupils reach, and their responsible attitudes and ability to work very well together prepare them extremely well for the next stage of education and their futures lives. Teachers and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together and use interesting and varied resources and methods to stimulate pupils and encourage them to do their best. They know their pupils and their abilities well and match work to their needs. There are outstanding methods for assessing individual pupils' attainment and progress, so that those who need support receive it rapidly. The school provides a good curriculum that supports the pupils well in understanding how to stay safe and healthy. There is a good range of activities outside the school day that contribute well to the pupils' thorough enjoyment of their time in school.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in mathematics so that they more closely match those in reading.
- Develop the leadership and management roles of all staff so that they take a greater part in the direction of the school.
- Make explicit how the progress of initiatives will be monitored and their effectiveness evaluated.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, so that in many years standards are above those expected for their age. Pupils build well on this good start in Key Stages 1 and 2. Standards have usually been at least similar to the national average, and were well above in 2003 and 2004. Results in reading and writing have tended to be better than those in mathematics, and were in 2006. At the end of Year 4 in 2006, standards were exceptionally high in English, where pupils made good progress. Standards were similar to those expected in mathematics and progress was satisfactory. Pupils' writing is particularly thoughtful, but presentation of their work is untidy. Pupils are articulate and talk confidently. However, there are weaknesses in their ability to use their mathematical knowledge to solve problems.

The school works closely with the Traveller families to promote their children's progress, but this is necessarily affected by the periods they spend travelling, when some do not attend school in their other bases. Analysis of test results shows that these pupils make good progress when in school. When their test results are excluded, those of the other pupils are usually above average and often well above. Attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the previous inspection, and is now above the expected level.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral and social development is also outstanding. Spirituality pervades the life of the school and pupils have a keen sense of fair play. Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good and demonstrate the caring ethos of the school. Pupils say that there is very little bullying and if it occurs it is dealt with effectively. Cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils have a very good understanding of many cultures, through subjects such as art, music, religious education (RE), history and geography, but their awareness of life in a multicultural society is less well developed.

Behaviour is outstanding; most pupils are sensible and considerate around school and in the playground. The school is a central part of its community and pupils are actively involved in it, often through the local church. The school council plays a major role in many of the decisions that are made, for example about the after-school clubs. There are excellent strategies for taking the views of all pupils into account. Attendance is satisfactory and has improved considerably since 2001. The attendance of most pupils is good and the school works exceptionally hard to ensure that the Travellers attend regularly when they are in the area. These pupils are integrated exceptionally well into the school community and are valued for what they bring to it.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Staff use the outstanding assessment information to group pupils by ability, often working with many groups because of the wide range of age and attainment in each class. Tasks are usually matched well to pupils' needs. The more able are challenged with activities that stretch them to help achieve their potential. Those with learning difficulties have good support that enables them to make good progress. Staff use a variety of interesting resources to stimulate the pupils and ICT is used well to support teaching in other subjects. Because relationships are very good, most lessons have a good pace, although the younger pupils are sometimes allowed to chatter when they should be listening. Staff involve pupils well in measuring their own progress and check their individual achievement. However, marking is not entirely consistent and does not always have an impact on subsequent work.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum is planned carefully to develop the children's skills and knowledge in all the areas of learning, and particularly their language and social skills. Through the rest of the school, the environment and locality are used well to support learning and to make it more interesting. Visits and visitors enliven the topics. The school is exploring how to link subjects more closely together through the topics. The size of the hall limits its use for physical education (PE) but the school has developed the outside area well to counter-balance the shortcomings. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme supports pupils' personal development well, so that they have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and eat well. There is a very good range of activities outside the school day.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school carries out all necessary checks on adults who work there. Child protection procedures are rigorous and all staff have had training. Pupils say that they feel completely safe, that they trust all adults and there would always be someone they could confide in if they were distressed. Those who need particular support or cause concern are identified early and good intervention strategies used. The school works particularly well with the Traveller community and the support systems ensure that they take as much benefit as possible from what the school offers while in the area. Links with other agencies are very good and support the progress of pupils with particular needs very well.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good overall. There is a commitment from all in the school to do their best for the pupils. The school is self-reflective, and is not complacent. A good range of information is used to monitor the effectiveness of provision and the headteacher has a very good knowledge of the strengths of the staff. They receive good support to improve their practice and performance management systems are used well to promote the school's priorities. All staff have many responsibilities and are undertaking their revised roles with developing understanding. Equality of opportunity is promoted particularly well. The school works extremely well with parents to promote pupils' learning, and takes their views into account well. Governance is good; governors have good knowledge of the school and challenge the leadership to maintain improvements. The school manages its resources exceptionally well and provides good value for money.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 December 2006

Dear Pupils,

Northill CofE VA Lower School, Bedford Road, Northill, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, SG18 9AH

Dear Pupils

Thank you for the time you spent chatting to me and for showing me your work. I really enjoyed the time I spent with you last week and thought you might like to know what I found out about your school.

I think you're very well behaved and you obviously enjoy your time in school. I'm not surprised - I agree with you that it's a good school and that you do well while you're there. I was very impressed by your reading and writing, especially the poems that the Year 3 and 4 pupils wrote. But I think you could do more to improve your handwriting and the way you set out your maths work. Your maths isn't quite as good as your reading and writing so you might work harder with that, and think harder about maths problems. Your teachers help you learn well and give you work that is usually just right for you - not too hard or easy. The school gives you some very interesting things to do and asks you your opinion a lot. I could see that you've taken a lot of notice of the ways to keep yourselves fit and healthy.

Mrs Simpson and the staff make sure that the school runs well and that everyone knows how well each one of you is doing. Those of you who need extra help get it so that you can do as well as you can. The staff are working hard to learn some new skills in taking charge of subjects and I've asked the school to help them to do that. They have a good plan to make the school better but haven't written down how they will make sure the plans are working. So I've asked them to write that on the plan so that everyone can see how it will be done.

Thank you again for the way you looked after me while I was with you, and my best wishes for the future - I'm sure you'll all be very successful.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Pat Cox

Lead Inspector