



Northfields Infant and Nursery School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117223
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290760
Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007
Reporting inspector Philip Mann HMI

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Burley
School category	Community		Letchworth
Age range of pupils	3–7		Hertfordshire SG6 4PT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462623388
Number on roll (school)	172	Fax number	01462623388
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr C Brothers
		Headteacher	Mrs S Rice
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003		

Age group 3–7	Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007	Inspection number 290760
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Northfields Infant and Nursery school is average in size and located in a residential area of Letchworth. The children's starting points in the nursery are broadly average overall but below that expected in communication, language and literacy skills. A below average number of pupils have learning difficulties and the proportion and the ethnic balance is predominantly white British. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is average. The school has been awarded Healthy School status.

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 and effective school with several outstanding features. The dedicated head teacher sets high expectations for both staff and pupils alike and leads the school very well. As a result, a very positive climate for learning has been created where every child is valued as an individual learner and encouraged to think independently. All pupils respond very well to this by demonstrating very positive attitudes towards their work and excellent behaviour both in lessons and around the school.

The overall achievement of pupils is good across the school. Standards in the core skills of literacy and numeracy are above average overall and this is balanced by equally good achievement in the creative arts. In particular, good results in writing are achieved because teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to broaden their vocabulary and write at length.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is good in many lessons with much of it being outstanding and none inadequate. However, in satisfactory lessons, the teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. The curriculum is broad and effectively matched to the needs of all pupils. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good with a strong emphasis placed on children learning through play. The level of care, support and guidance shown for all pupils is outstanding. These judgements are supported by many parents who feel that this school provides very good levels of care for their child.

Leadership and management of the school are good with some real strengths. For instance, teamwork amongst the staff is a very good feature where all make a positive contribution to school improvement. Responsibilities have been effectively delegated and subject coordinators make a very positive contribution to the school's evaluation of itself. Capacity for further improvement is good. Good partnerships have been effectively established with the community and other supportive bodies. School governance is good. The governors are fully involved in whole school improvement and monitor its work thoroughly. Taking all factors into account the school provides good value for money and capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use the good monitoring procedures to ensure greater consistency of teaching and raise pupil standards further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good across the school. Good provision makes an effective contribution to the good progress made by children throughout the Foundation Stage. This is especially so in early literacy skills and the children's personal development.

Effective teaching ensures that infant pupils achieve well to attain above average standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science by the end of Year 2. The validated 2006 results confirm a steady trend of improvement over the last three years with an above average proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 3 in writing especially. These good results in writing are achieved because teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. This broadens the pupils' vocabulary, enabling them to write with greater confidence. Boys in particular achieve well, say they find writing fun and enjoy writing at length.

There are no significant differences in the relative rates of achievement between different pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good strides in their learning overall. Those pupils for whom English is an additional language make equally good progress; this is particularly so in reading and writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their attendance is satisfactory. However, the headteacher and staff work very hard to ensure steady improvement in attendance and pupils' efforts are fully recognised in assemblies. All pupils respond particularly well to the very good opportunities offered for reflection and spiritual development. This was clearly evidenced in the assemblies observed. In one of these, 'Star Bear' and 'Star Pupil' nominees were presented with great effect and their efforts fully recognised by all present. All pupils display very positive attitudes towards school and towards other pupils because provision for personal, social and health education is very good. Behaviour is consistently very good in all aspects of school life. There have been no exclusions for some time.

Relationships are very good and reflect the excellent caring, happy learning environment. The school council takes its responsibilities very seriously. Pupils are very proud of being elected to this group which teaches them citizenship skills. They are keen to apply these life skills around the school; for example, the 'friendship stop'. These skills are further developed through fund raising activities for local and national charities. Pupils are developing a very good understanding of how to lead healthy and safe lives. The school has been awarded a 'Healthy Schools Award'.

Pupils feel safe and secure because any incidents of bullying and/or racism are sensitively and effectively dealt with. Parents appreciate the efforts made by the school to ensure that all pupils become confident, articulate children who leave the school well prepared for the next stages in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall but inconsistent in quality as it varies between satisfactory and outstanding. All teachers manage pupils well and use resources with imagination to make lessons interesting. As a result, pupils are keen to work, behave well and demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning. In outstanding lessons, teachers fully engage the interest of pupils and plan work that caters for all abilities and particularly for the most able. However, when teaching is satisfactory, for example sometimes in mathematics, it is because activities do not always fully challenge and extend these pupils because the work is too easy.

The quality of marking is good overall. In the best examples, it provides pupils with good levels of feedback and sets new targets for them to achieve. Procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress are comprehensive and used well to plan future work for them. Pupils needing extra help are identified early and supported well through focused additional sessions. Support staff are effective in helping pupils to learn and 'booster' sessions provide good levels of challenge for the most able.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good and provides the vast majority of learners with opportunities to progress well. It is broad, well matched to the pupils' needs, providing them with ample opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge through a wide range of practical and academic experiences. Teachers' plans encourage links between subjects and there is a strong emphasis on the creative arts. Educational visits off-site further extend the range of learning experiences offered. The number of extra-curricular activities is extensive and includes art and nursery clubs. All staff show outstanding levels of commitment by providing stimulating activities and enrichment outside of the normal working day through this extra provision.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are offered a curriculum that is very well planned and structured to ensure they grow in confidence. Learning programmes are effectively monitored. Booster lessons are very challenging and higher attaining pupils state that they really enjoy the work set. Parents speak very positively about the improvement their children have made since starting school. For example, one parent said, 'I have no doubt my second daughter will thrive and achieve the same as my first.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding level of care, guidance and support for its pupils. Systems for Child Protection and assessing risk are very thorough and are firmly

embedded in school practice. They are very regularly reviewed. All staff are committed to safeguarding the pupils and show an exceptionally caring attitude in their relationships with the children. Very detailed policies are in place to ensure all pupils make good progress. Individual and class targets are set and pupils show a good understanding of these challenges and procedures. Pupils that have learning difficulties are very regularly monitored, enabling them to learn successfully. In individual cases the timetable for review is adjusted to ensure each pupil's progress is maintained. Able, gifted and talented pupils talk enthusiastically about their 'booster' classes and the 'hard work' set. The school works closely with outside specialists. The skills of the staff and their expertise are shared to extend the learning opportunities for the pupils; for example 'signing classes'. These initiatives have had an excellent impact on learning, teaching skills and classroom management.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall with some significant strengths. The dedicated head teacher sets high expectations for staff and pupils alike and leads the school very well. Her vision for the school is shared very effectively with other senior managers, governors and school community. Parents comment very positively about how well the school is run. Planning for whole school improvement is comprehensive and is clearly having a positive impact on overall provision. Management responsibilities are delegated very effectively. Teamwork is very firmly established where all staff are valued and empowered to succeed. Capacity for further improvement is good and the school is well placed to be even more effective.

Systems for monitoring teaching and evaluating the school's performance are comprehensive. Pupil data is analysed carefully to raise standards and lessons are monitored regularly to improve overall provision. All senior managers are involved and findings are acted upon to bring about further improvements to the quality of pupils' learning.

The governors are fully involved in whole school improvement, ask challenging questions of staff and monitor its work thoroughly. They are very supportive of the school and take a great interest in the achievements of the pupils.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	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

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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

26 January 2007

Dear Children

Northfields Infant and Nursery School, Burley, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 4PT

I really enjoyed visiting your school and we would both like to thank you all for making us feel so welcome. It was so good to see you all working hard in the classrooms and playing happily together in the playgrounds.

It was also good to see that you all enjoy taking part in all the good things that the staff plan for you. You clearly like being at school and are keen to talk about all the interesting things for you to do with your friends. We feel that this is because your headteacher always encourages everyone to work hard and manages the school really well. The staff work very hard as a team to make lessons interesting for you. The teachers mark your work very carefully and set targets for you to work at. This helps everyone to make good progress.

All the teachers work hard to make sure that the lessons go so well and that the work is about right for you. However, sometimes the work is too easy and the senior staff are going to look for ways to help teachers make sure this does not happen. You can help the teachers by always trying to do your best and coming to school on time each day.

Wishing you all the best for the future,

Philip Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector