



Irthlingborough Infant School and Nursery

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 121832
Local Authority Northamptonshire
Inspection number 292232
Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007
Reporting inspector Helen Barter

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Scarborough Street
School category	Community		Irthlingborough
Age range of pupils	3–7		Wellingborough NN9 5TT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01933 654900
Number on roll (school)	355	Fax number	01933 654901
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Michael Fargher
		Headteacher	Elizabeth Lovett
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003		

Age group 3–7	Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007	Inspection number 292232
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Children attend this large school from Irthlingborough and surrounding villages. The majority of children are of White British heritage although there are small numbers from other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of children who have learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. Most children start in the Nursery although some join the school in Reception, usually after attending other local pre-school settings. Children's attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage (Nursery or Reception) is broadly average although a significant proportion of the younger children joining the Nursery have limited speaking and social 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 which provides children with a very positive start to their education. The school's many strengths are the result of good leadership and management and strong commitment of the headteacher and senior management team, staff and governors to providing children with the best education possible. All adults work together very effectively and keep the best interests of the children in clear sight.

After an excellent start in the Nursery, children continue to make good progress through the Reception Year because the setting is lively and well managed and ensures that parents are fully involved in their children's learning. There are excellent systems in place for tracking the children's progress. The development of their personal and social skills is particularly good and this ensures they have very positive attitudes towards learning. The adult support is purposeful without being intrusive and is firmly focused on improving children's vocabulary as a basis for future learning. The strong independence children show in pursuing their interests is a notable outcome of this provision.

Throughout the school, children achieve well because teaching is consistently good. After a dip in 2005, the school took rigorous action to improve standards in Years 1 and 2 by tracking children's progress more closely and providing 'boosters' for children of all abilities. In 2006 children reached above average standards in reading, writing and science, and broadly average standards in mathematics, at the end of Year 2. These good standards are being sustained and those in mathematics continue to improve, particularly in the number of pupils reaching the higher levels. The good curriculum provides a strong focus on developing children's speaking and listening skills in preparation for writing and means that they achieve particularly well in these areas. After a good start in the Foundation Stage, children's mathematical skills continue to be developed well in numeracy lessons in Years 1 and 2, although there is scope to extend these further through work in other subjects.

Rich learning experiences and a caring environment help children to make outstanding progress in their personal development and well-being. Children's behaviour is exemplary because they thoroughly enjoy learning and taking part in the extensive and interesting range of activities on offer. Teachers plan varied, lively lessons with hands-on activities. This motivates children to learn new skills and knowledge in a way that broadens their understanding. The school gives good care, guidance and support and is extremely understanding of the most vulnerable children and those who have complex personal and learning difficulties. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and say that they cannot praise the school enough. One parent's comment that she would not wish her child to be educated anywhere else is echoed by many others. Children are equally enthusiastic. When a boy on the school council said that the school is, 'A nice place to be and to learn,' others immediately put their thumbs up in total agreement.

The school evaluates its own practice rigorously and is highly reflective about its effectiveness in raising standards. In its quest to leave no stone unturned, leaders and managers have extremely detailed development plans in all areas of the school's work. There is scope to refine these so that the most important priorities for its future development are clearly identified and known by everyone in the school. That said, there is no doubt that the school has the capacity to carry out all its plans and to continue to go from strength to strength.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide further opportunities for children in Years 1 and 2 to consolidate their numeracy skills through their learning in other subjects.
- Refine the school improvement priorities so that everyone shares and understands the most important areas for its future development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to learning in the Foundation Stage because of good quality provision. As a result, on entry to Year 1, nearly all reach the standards expected. They make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and their speaking skills because exciting play and structured activities entice them to explore and to learn.

Children continue to achieve well in Years 1 and 2. They meet their targets and reach standards that are above average by the time they leave. Standards have improved well in all subjects since the dip in 2005. A strong focus on speaking and listening and providing children, especially boys, with exciting opportunities to write has led to particularly strong improvement in writing standards. Through greater opportunities for practical investigation, science standards have improved well, with more pupils achieving the higher levels than previously. Standards in mathematics have also improved although there is scope to raise these even further by giving children more opportunities to practise their skills in other subjects. Children with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress through careful support in lessons and in small groups. Skilled guidance for those with behaviour difficulties contributes significantly to their excellent personal development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children are happy and have very positive attitudes to school; 'School is fun, it helps you learn and do your best,' is a typical comment. The bright and stimulating learning environment helps children to feel safe. They develop a striking degree of self-confidence which stands them in very good stead for the future. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are very clear about the rules and know that if they behave well and help each other they will be rewarded through

'golden time.' Relationships are excellent and children are very caring towards each other. They have a remarkable ability to work independently and with each other. They share ideas and co-operate well together in activities such as role-play in the three bears' house and in playing in 'spaceships' in the Nursery. Children have a strong understanding of the need to be healthy and are keen to be outside as much as they can. Children willingly participate in activities such as sponsored walks to help others. The school council is very effective in raising children's awareness of safety issues through helping to improve the playground. Their attendance is as expected given their young ages and susceptibility to minor illnesses.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In the Foundation Stage, excellent use is made of the information teachers have about children's knowledge and skills to provide them with well planned, imaginative activities and careful support for their individual needs. Good use is made of the information the school collects on children's performance to plan literacy and numeracy lessons in Years 1 and 2. Literacy activities are carefully chosen to extend and develop children's skills. The focus on speaking and listening through 'talking partners' and working together in small groups is a particular strength in helping children to develop language for writing. Teachers regularly check what children have learned but sometimes miss the opportunity to extend the more able when they question children during lessons. Teaching assistants in all classes are well trained and enthusiastic in their support of learners and are skilled at dealing with those with complex needs. Good guidance from teachers ensures they know precisely what they are helping children to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The Nursery and Reception classes are stimulating places to learn because of good resources and thorough planning for all areas of children's learning. The outdoor areas are used exceptionally well and are a seamless part of the provision for learning. Throughout the school, children with learning difficulties and disabilities have a very well adjusted curriculum and there is plenty of good quality support. The school has made highly effective adaptations to how it teaches English, particularly writing. Literacy skills are extremely well promoted through work in subjects such as science. The provision for children to develop their skills in numeracy lessons is good but there are not enough planned opportunities for children to use their knowledge of number in other subjects. There are some exciting opportunities such as film making within the broad experiences provided in information and communication technology (ICT). Learning through play and exploration is a strong feature of the provision for all children and adds a significant dimension to their personal development. Good enrichment activities, such as Yoga Bugs and French, provide interesting and varied activities and help children to develop healthy bodies and enquiring minds.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Children know that nothing is too big or too small that it cannot be talked about. This caring approach helps children to feel safe and secure in school. The school has the trust of its parents and is very active in putting them in touch with external agencies when support is needed. Health and safety matters are well attended to. Systems to safeguard children are well established and, although some need updated training, staff know what to do in the event of a child protection concern.

Support and guidance for learning is a particularly strong feature in boosting children's achievement. Children know that their targets help them to improve their work and help them learn even faster. They are becoming very adept at assessing how well they have completed their work by using 'thumbs-up' and smiley faces. Those who find learning difficult make good progress because they are identified early and are well supported personally and academically. Skilled management of children with complex needs and those with behaviour difficulties enables all to learn in a calm and supportive atmosphere.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is an excellent role model and inspires dedication and enthusiasm throughout the school. She has successfully developed a very effective team approach amongst senior managers and staff. There is a high level of commitment to developing their skills of leadership and management and to giving them opportunities to develop their practice in work with other schools. Children's good achievement in the Foundation Stage and in literacy is as a direct result of strong leadership. All staff play an important role in school development; for example, the new ICT leadership is further improving teaching and learning, and provision for pupils' personal development is being further strengthened through the work towards achieving Healthy Schools Status. As a result of good self-evaluation processes and improved assessment of children's progress, the school has raised standards and brought about good improvement since the last inspection. Staff have a clear understanding about what needs to improve further and all work extremely hard to get there. There is now scope for greater clarity in identifying the main key priorities for whole school development against which staff can monitor the effectiveness of their work.

The school has strong partnerships with other schools, parents and the community and is entering a period of growth as plans are being made to provide a Children's Centre and to develop the provision of education in the community. Combined with its success in improvement since the last inspection, the school demonstrates that it has strong capacity to improve even further.

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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?	2
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	2
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	2

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	2
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

What a lovely time we had when we came to visit your school! Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming. You did a really good job in helping us to find out about all the things you learn and do at school.

You go to a good school and you and your teachers should be proud of many things. These are some of the best:

- We know that you really love school because you are extremely happy and so well behaved. You are very good at learning by yourselves and with other children. You really care for other people. You said that the school is 'a nice place to be and to learn,' and we agree with you.
- All of you learn well from the time when you start in the Owls Nursery to when you leave at the end of Year 2. This is because your teachers know just how young people like you learn and make sure you have lots of interesting and exciting things to do. I wonder if the snowman made by the children in the Nursery has melted yet?
- All of the grown-ups in the school look after you very well and want to help you as much as they can. They care for you if you have a worry or do not feel very well and help you to understand how to make your work better. It is great to see so many of you with your thumbs up at the end of a lesson because you feel that you have learned well.

Your headteacher and all the other teachers work very hard to make the school as good as it can be and to find out what they can do to make it even better than it is now. To help, we have asked them to do two things:

- Give you lots of chances to practise what you know about numbers in everything you do.
- Make sure that everyone knows just what the most important things are to make your school even better than it is already.

Goodbye children and good luck in everything you do as you grow up.