

Northwood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101441
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307686
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Wendy Simmons

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	190
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Dean
Headteacher	Mrs Rosemary Medhurst/ Mrs Catherine McNulty
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Northwood Place Yarnton Way Erith DA18 4HN
Telephone number	020 8310 2722
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Northwood Primary School is situated in Thamesmead. It is a smaller than average sized school. Pupils' social, cultural and religious backgrounds are very varied and the profile of pupils attending the school has altered since the last inspection. This is due to housing developments in the area. The proportion of pupils who receive free school meals remains higher than average. Close to half of all pupils come from Black African backgrounds and one third are from White British families. The next largest groups are from mixed heritages, other White backgrounds or Black Caribbean heritages. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language has risen and is much higher than average. It is not unusual for children to join the school with little or no spoken English. A very high proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils' difficulties mostly relate to behavioural, emotional and speech and language development. The number of pupils that join and leave the school between Years 1 and 6 is unusually high.

The school currently has two co-headteachers. This is because the school is pioneering a succession plan where one headteacher is working towards full retirement, and works three days a week. The former deputy headteacher takes on the headship role for the other two days a week. The school has gained the Eco Award.

The school does not have a Nursery, so children join the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at the beginning of their Reception Year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Northwood is a very happy and caring school, which provides a satisfactory and improving education for its pupils. There is a real sense of community, which stems directly from the work of the headteachers, staff and governors. The co-headteacher partnership is working well and several aspects of leadership have recently become much stronger. Leaders are ambitious to make the school good in the near future; they are well on the way with this as they are implementing good plans to help the school to develop. Both headteachers are dedicated to the pupils and all senior leaders, staff and governors are very keen to do the best for the pupils. This is already leading to significant improvements, for example in provision and progress in EYFS. Pastoral care is very good.

In 2006, standards were very low. Since then, attainment, by the end of Year 6, has risen in English, mathematics and science and was average in 2008. This represented satisfactory achievement for these pupils from their average starting points at the end of Year 2. The impact of pupils joining and leaving the school throughout the year sometimes affects achievement. New pupils often join the school between Years 3 to 6 and this can alter the range of abilities in different classes. For example, new pupils are sometimes of higher ability, whilst others may have complex learning or social and emotional needs. The school is, rightly, working to ensure that the most able pupils do as well as possible; however, there is still more to do to achieve this aim. The principal reason for this weakness is that teachers sometimes miss opportunities to plan challenging enough work for this ability group.

Pupils steadily develop important skills, giving them a secure basis for the next stages of their education; this is a result of satisfactory teaching and learning. Achievement is securely satisfactory. Leaders are ambitious to make achievement good in the future. With this in mind, they recognise that there is a need to strengthen the way that they monitor and check the quality of lessons, pupils' work and their progress. Work has begun on this, with an improved procedure in place to track pupils' progress. This procedure is helpful and as a result, leaders are beginning to recognise that there is some unevenness in the rates of progress in different classes and between different subjects.

Overall, pupils experience a rounded and interesting education, which is enhanced by a good curriculum. The curriculum has been re-organised well since the last inspection, so that it is more varied. Leaders recognise the need to modify the curriculum to ease the transition for children between the EYFS and Year 1. Plans are in place to address this.

Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils are warm and friendly; they behave well and are often very enthusiastic learners. The relationships between adults and pupils are outstanding and this helps pupils to be happy at school. Staff help pupils to grow in confidence and have high aspirations for their future lives. Pupils do well in gaining a strong understanding about how to be healthy and safe. They make a valuable contribution to the wider community.

Leaders and staff have developed strong relationships and partnerships with parents and the community. This contributes much to the care that the school provides for its pupils. As one parent put it, 'Northwood is just like another home to my daughter, she is in safe hands'. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school because they like their teachers and friends; they feel supported and enjoy the activities that are provided. Pupils commented: 'Everyone is helpful and you can be comfortable with other pupils'. Pupils clearly respect each other. The school is a racially

harmonious place and pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enhances this.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The appointment of a new leader, in September 2008, has strengthened leadership very well, so that it is good. The leader's enthusiasm bubbles through all that she does, she says, 'I spend every hour I can working on ways to make it better for the children.' Since September, the accommodation has been reorganised well to ensure that children can learn in many different ways.

When children join the Reception class their skills and knowledge are usually, although not always, much lower than would usually be expected for their age. Until July 2008, standards at the end of the EYFS were too low. In particular, they had not done well enough in gaining important reading, writing and social skills. Their emotional development was also often lower than expected. Children are now making good progress and there are very clear signs that their attainment is rising very rapidly. This is a direct result of good teaching, high expectations and strong leadership. Standards are well on track to be much higher in 2009.

Activities are challenging and exciting. As a result, children learn new things quickly and have fun, as evident in the superb 'Big Bears Tea Party'. Children work well in groups and show growing independence. Adults have developed useful ways of checking children's progress. They skilfully help children to work, play and communicate well with others by placing a strong emphasis on encouraging children's speaking skills. As a result, the children are becoming more self-assured and keen to talk. Adults' clear guidance about rules, together with their sensitive approach to the children, results in children showing excellent behaviour and positive attitudes. Adults help children to explore their senses and feelings well, and this is aiding their emotional development. Good role-play activities play an important part in children's good all-round development. There is a good emphasis on learning letters and sounds (phonics) and children are beginning to apply them more to their writing and reading, although there is room for children to use these skills within the full range of activities that are provided. Children can count simply and they enjoy problem-solving, physical challenges and creative activities. They have easy access to an outside learning area and they regularly use the space although leaders are correct in noting the need to increase the range of outside learning activities.

Relationships are outstanding, children are treated as individuals and this is promoted very well through the 'Stay and Play' activities when parents come into the class for an hour every Monday morning. Welfare provision is exemplary ensuring that children are very well cared for and settle quickly and happily into the EYFS. Staff provide endless reassurance and encouragement for the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the way that leaders evaluate the quality of teaching and check the progress and achievement of all groups of learners, so that pupils make consistently good progress in all classes and subjects.
- Help teachers to plan lessons that fully meet the needs of different ability groups, especially the most able.
- Develop the curriculum to ease the transition between the EYFS and Key Stage 1.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make satisfactory overall progress in Key Stage 1; however, because of their sometimes relatively low starting points standards, in recent years, have been well below average by the end of Year 2. There are occasional exceptions to this, for example, the Year 6 pupils who left the school in July of 2008 showed average skills when they were in Year 2. In recent years, pupils' performance in reading at the end of Year 2 has been particularly weak. The school now has a more rigorous focus on this aspect of the curriculum. It has started to improve phonics and guided reading to lift standards. There have also been improvements in results in writing in the last year.

As pupils move through Years 3 to 6, their progress is satisfactory overall, although it varies from class to class and between different subjects. This unevenness is evident in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils often do best in Year 6, where they make consistently good progress in all areas. Some groups of learners do well, including those who are learning English as an additional language and those who stay at the school for a long time. However, the most able pupils should be doing better. In the last year, there has been a good focus on writing, which is helping boys to do better and this is adding the school's good capacity to improve. There remains variation in how pupils from different ethnic backgrounds perform. For example, pupils from Black African backgrounds sometimes do better overall than those from White British backgrounds.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their good attendance and their enthusiasm for learning. Pupils describe the school as, 'A kind school that welcomes new pupils'. For example, older pupils used their initiative to produce a book for a new pupil and helped him learn English. Pupils have a good understanding about different religions and cultures. For example, video conferencing gives them the opportunity to link with more than 10 international schools. They enjoy art and music. Singing and assemblies contribute much to their spiritual development. Pupils behave well and care for others, as evident in the fact that there are rarely any exclusions. Pupils know the importance of acting safely and being kindly to others. For example, they are keen to help others when acting as 'Peer Mentors' and enjoy this special status. Pupils work hard to make a positive contribution to the community. For example, they are actively involved in singing for the community and have made attractive murals for local urban walkways. They are very active in recycling. Pupils take part in many sporting activities and have great fun doing these activities. They know about the importance of healthy eating and exercise. They develop good workplace skills overall as they have secure basic skills, are often highly motivated and confident in expressing their opinions. Pupils have good ICT skills; they keenly take on responsibility. As one parent commented, 'My son's social skills have really improved; it's hard to keep him away from school even when he's ill.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In some lessons and classes, teaching and learning are good but the quality is inconsistent overall. Mostly, lessons are interesting because teachers have lively styles. Pupils' excellent attitudes and the outstanding relationships make a strong contribution to pupils' learning. Teachers make very good use of praise, which motivates the pupils and helps them to work hard and develop high self-esteem. For example, one pupil glowed with pride when his teacher praised him for trying hard with his division work. Lessons generally provide achievable challenges for most pupils. However, work is not always planned well enough to challenge the most able pupils; this prevents them from reaching higher-level skills and knowledge. Sometimes teachers use interesting resources, but there is room for far more of this to widen pupils' understanding of new things. Pupils' work in books is usually neat and pupils are beginning to develop joined handwriting, although this is inconsistent. Opportunities for them to do more extended writing are beginning to be provided. In some classes, the over-use of worksheets hampers pupils' independent thinking and their ability to record their ideas at length.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Since the school was last inspected, the curriculum has developed well. The good range of visits, clubs and extra activities contributes much to pupils' fitness and wider personal development. Pupils are keen for even more clubs and have suggested one for young authors.

A good proportion learn to play musical instruments, and pupils' singing skills are well promoted. Pupils are helped to learn about how to be safe through such activities as 'Junior Citizen'. Visits to Bewl Water help pupils to learn important teambuilding skills. The provision for gifted and talented pupils is developing well through clubs, although in lessons, there is room for more enrichment. The school is developing more investigative work in mathematics and science. Leaders recognise that the curriculum needs to be modified more for pupils in Year 1, to ease the transition for the EYFS more smoothly. Specialist staff teach sports, music and Spanish effectively and pupils value their skills. Speaking and listening skills are developing well, because staff place a strong focus on these. Activities, such as philosophy lessons help pupils to think carefully; as a result they are reflective and express their opinions with clarity. Teachers have successfully altered the English curriculum to provide materials that appeal to boys. This is leading to improvements in their writing as evident when they wrote about David Beckham's autobiography.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The very high quality pastoral support is a major strength of the school and because of this, pupils are very happy, safe and well cared for. The strong links with parents, other schools and different professionals help pupils to feel very well supported. Pupils and staff give new pupils an impressive and warm welcome. The good support from a specialist teacher helps pupils learning English as an additional language to quickly develop their confidence and speaking skills. The school places an outstanding emphasis on health, safety and child protection arrangements. Rare racist and bullying behaviour is dealt with speedily and effectively.

Attendance has improved due to leaders' effective strategies and the close working partnership with parents.

The academic guidance and support given to pupils is improving rapidly and is now good. Classroom displays give good tips to help pupils with their learning. Leaders are gathering more useful information about pupils' skills and progress. This helps them to set helpful literacy and numeracy targets for the pupils to work towards. Older pupils generally know what level they are working at and they are keen to improve. Pupils value the opportunities for them to talk about and evaluate their work. Teachers are developing the quality of their marking, so that they give pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve; however, there is still more to do on this. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported satisfactorily; they make satisfactory and sometimes good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The way that the two co-headteachers work is effective; teamwork is good and they share their skills well. They are forward thinking and very supportive of other staff, pupils and parents. As one noted, 'We are always on the quest to improve'. Leaders focus very successfully on ensuring that pupils are happy and well cared for. Leaders promote good community cohesion and go to great lengths to engage all their families. This is exemplified by the Yoruba (African language) section of the school Website and by the cultural activities led by parents. There is also a clear focus on raising standards. Target-setting is satisfactory overall, but could be more challenging for the most able pupils.

Governors hold the school to account well. In particular, they are actively involved in daily school life, are knowledgeable and work closely with staff and parents. They are accurate when they said that the school, 'Offers pupils better life chances and richer life experiences'.

The co-headteachers' evaluation of the work of the school is often good. They are working to help other leaders develop their roles in this process. Middle managers are very enthusiastic, and several are very new to their roles. They are already gaining a broad view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As this level of involvement is at an early stage, self-evaluation overall is currently satisfactory. Similarly, their role in improving teaching and learning is as yet underdeveloped. Leaders are at an early stage of reviewing pupils' class-by-class progress in different subjects, but they have made a strong start on this. Together with the improvements in the EYFS and rising standards at the end of Key Stage 2 indicates good capacity to improve still further.

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Annex A

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

09 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northwood Primary School, Erith, DA18 4HN

You may remember that two inspectors came to your school recently. Thank you for being so friendly and telling us about your school. From the moment that we walked into the school, we found the school to be a happy and caring place. You also agree and so do your parents.

Your school is satisfactory overall. This means that most things are suitable for you, some things are particularly good and a few aspects need to be better. Your school has improved in the last year because your headteachers, staff and governors have been busy trying to make it better for you. These improvements mean that most of you are now reaching the level that we expect in English, mathematics and science. You make steady progress overall but sometimes; you do better in some classes than in others. We were impressed by your behaviour and very pleased to hear that you enjoy coming to school. Well done for improving your attendance, please keep this up! We are very impressed by how you are trying to become fit and healthy. Your headteachers and all of the other teachers and helpers do a great job in looking after you. Well done for helping your community by doing eco projects, singing, making art murals and by acting as 'Peer Mentors'. In particular, we would like to say well done for showing such respect for others, congratulations for this!

Your headteachers and the other adults are keen to try to do the best they can for you. We want to help them. We have asked them to do the following things.

- Carefully check how well you are learning so that more of you can make really good progress in all classes in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Make sure that those of you who find learning easy are given more challenges and have opportunities to work on your own special activities.
- Make sure that the children in Year 1 have some activities that are more like the ones that they have in Reception class; this will allow them to do things that are more practical.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons

Lead Inspector