

Northowram Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107486
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	309408
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Walsh

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	460
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gary Byrnes
Headteacher	Mrs Katy Brierley
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2004
School address	Baxter Lane Northowram Halifax West Yorkshire HX3 7EF
Telephone number	01422 202704
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is very low. Although the school has Dyslexia Friendly Status and a small number of pupils with complex needs, the overall proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has gained the Artsmark Silver accreditation, ICT Mark, Activemark, Healthy Schools Award and Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that has strengths in the way it promotes pupils' personal development and good provision in the Foundation Stage. Parents typically comment on the school's 'caring approach' and say that 'Staff are friendly and accessible.' Many mention that communication between home and school is very good.

The school's active partnership with others enhances the range of activities available to pupils; for example, links with the local high school extend the provision for sport. The curriculum is satisfactory overall but arrangements for enrichment and nurturing creativity are good. A wide variety of clubs from gym, dance and chess to flower arranging greatly enhance pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. They like school and this is reflected in their good attendance. A typical comment from a child was, 'This is a school full of friends.' Pupils make an active contribution to the school community through their involvement in the school council, 'Eco Warriors' and the gardening club. The good attention paid to personal, social and health education ensures that pupils are well informed about how to stay healthy and safe.

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are above average. However, too few pupils attain higher levels at the end of both key stages. The progress of the more able pupils is not rapid enough. Gains Writing is a weak aspect of pupils' progress in Key Stage 2. As a result, by the end of Year 6 pupils' writing is still not technically accurate and this depresses standards in English.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and there is a significant amount of good teaching in Key Stage 1. However, the quality of teaching is variable in Key Stage 2 with considerable differences in teachers' expectations and the pace of lessons. This results in pupils' inconsistent progress. Teachers' marking does not always tell pupils how to improve their work and the use of learning targets is variable. Good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps these pupils to develop well personally, although academic progress is generally satisfactory.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The headteacher's leadership is instrumental in making sure that there is a positive and supportive atmosphere in the school. This means that pupils who may face challenges, including those that arise from learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are able to feel happy and settled in school. Even though the school knows its overarching strengths and weaknesses, some of its self-evaluation is too positive. This is because judgements are not always based on the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, and the robust analysis of data. As a result, the school does not always know enough about the causes of its weaknesses. Many aspects of health and safety are monitored well on a day-to-day basis but more formal risk assessment is not always sufficiently rigorous. The school's satisfactory capacity to improve is illustrated by continuous improvement in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start Nursery with skills mostly above those typically expected for their ages. Children are confident and articulate. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage and in 2007 children entered Year 1 with skills that were above expectations and well above in some areas such as their personal, social and emotional development and writing. Good teaching, combined

with a wide range of activities, ensures that children enjoy their time in school and learn very effectively. A supportive atmosphere results in happy, settled and well cared for children. A good focus on linking sounds and letters helps to promote children's reading and writing. A good range of activities outdoors promotes pupils' learning well, especially in the Reception class. Parents are very pleased with their children's progress typically saying that their children enjoy school and that 'The variety of activities is wonderful.' Children who are at risk of falling behind in their learning are identified early and supported well. The good induction process helps pupils to settle quickly into school. Assessment is best in the Reception class where it is very thorough and used to plan activities that move on children's learning quickly. Staff work very well as a team and are well led. They keep up to date with new developments but do not always analyse data as robustly as they might to further increase standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the progress of the more able pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Improve standards of writing in Key Stage 2.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching in Key Stage 2.
- Tighten the school's formal arrangements for risk assessment.
- Ensure that the monitoring of teaching and learning and analysis of data are rigorous so that self-evaluation is accurate and the school can better plan for improvements.

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

Achievement is satisfactory and in 2007 by the end of Year 6 pupils attained standards that were above average. Pupils enter Year 1 with above average skills. By the time they reach the end of Year 2 standards are above average, but the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels is only average. Until recently, progress in Key Stage 1 was satisfactory but good teaching in Key Stage 1 is accelerating pupils' progress. In Key Stage 2 pupils' progress is uneven between classes, year groups and subjects. Although most pupils are making satisfactory progress, the more able pupils are sometimes not progressing fast enough. Currently pupils are making satisfactory progress in mathematics. Pupils in Key Stage 2 are not making sufficient progress in their writing. Their spelling is often weak and the use of correct punctuation inconsistent. The quality of handwriting is very variable.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are developing empathy towards others. In an English lesson in Year 5 pupils were able to understand the complex link between music and emotion and of the feelings of loss often experienced by older people. Pupils gain an increasing understanding of the diversity of faiths and cultures not just in Britain but also across the world. Pupils are keen to adopt healthy lifestyles and make healthy choices at lunchtime. They enthusiastically join in physical activities including dance and sport. Most pupils feel that there is little bullying and that any concerns they have are quickly attended. They feel very safe and say, 'This is a friendly school.' Behaviour on the playground can be too boisterous when pupils are not closely supervised. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to

the school and local communities through activities such as fundraising, the work of the 'Eco Warriors' and the school council but much of the initiative comes from staff. Pupils have too little involvement in decision-making. Satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy together with positive attitudes to learning indicate that pupils are satisfactorily prepared for their next schools. However, there are missed opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility and to develop their economic understanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is consistently good in Key Stage 1 but is variable in Key Stage 2. Teachers in Key Stage 1 have a good understanding of how young children learn and plan appropriately to meet their needs. Lessons in Key Stage 2 are sometimes unexciting and although satisfactory have a slower pace. Some teaching employs a narrow range of learning styles and makes limited use of resources to fully support learning. Lesson plans tend to focus on activities rather than how they are going to develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. This makes it harder for teachers to check pupils' learning at the end of lessons. The work planned does not always provide sufficient challenge for the more able pupils. Teaching assistants provide effective support for the lower ability pupils and especially good personal support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There is an appropriate emphasis on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Links between subjects are improving and these make work more interesting and relevant. For example, ICT is used well to support learning in other subjects. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons in art and design in particular and the good provision for creative development is reflected in the high quality displays of art. There is good provision for personal, social and health education. The promotion of basic skills is inconsistent in Key Stage 2 and results in weaknesses in pupils' writing. Pupils are enthusiastic about the wide variety of school clubs and have good access to many sporting opportunities. A good range of local and residential visits makes learning more relevant and fun. External accreditations reflect the strengths in the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Satisfactory pastoral care contributes to pupils' enjoyment of school and personal development. The school is a caring community where relationships between adults and pupils are usually good. Consequently, pupils feel respected and secure. Parents typically say that staff are very approachable and supportive. Child protection arrangements are in place but the formal arrangements for risk assessment are not always sufficiently thorough. Enthusiastic new management is improving the arrangements to identify and carefully monitor the progression of pupils at risk of underachievement. Positive mentoring is providing effective support for some of the most vulnerable pupils and is successfully promoting their personal development. The systems for checking pupils' progress are improving and are starting to identify where pupils are not making sufficient progress. The marking of pupils' work is good in Key Stage 1 but does

not always tell pupils in Key Stage 2 how to improve their work. The use of learning targets is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

School leaders have successfully created a school with an attractive environment and a very pleasant ethos where pupils' personal development and well-being are given a high priority. The school runs very smoothly from day to day. There are good relationships with parents, the community and other local schools, and these are used well to support learning. However, there are some key staffing vacancies, such as the leadership of basic subjects, which are slowing improvement. Although there is regular monitoring of lessons, teachers' planning and pupils' work, evaluations do not carefully assess the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Data is not used sufficiently well to aid improvements in teaching and learning and pupils' progress. These factors result in self-evaluation being too positive and make it more difficult for the school to pinpoint exactly where improvements need to be made. Governors are very supportive but they have not made sufficient checks on the school's formal arrangements for risk assessment.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	3
How well 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	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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.

Annex A

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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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	3
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

Inspection of Northowram Primary School, Halifax, HX3 7EF

Thank you for being so friendly and polite to the inspectors. We really enjoyed talking to you and listened very carefully to what you had to say. I am writing to tell you what we found out. You go to a satisfactory school with lots of good things to celebrate, including the way you grow into such delightful young people. We were impressed by your good behaviour in lessons and the way you work so hard in class, although behaviour at playtimes can be too boisterous. You told us that you enjoy school, and especially the extra activities. We liked your beautiful artwork including the lovely paintings of flowers completed by the Nursery children and the ceramic tiles with Tudor houses on. We were impressed with the work the gardening club are doing growing vegetables. It is clear that you all know how to keep fit and healthy and you enjoy your sport. Children have a great time in Nursery and Reception classes because there are lots of very interesting things to do.

Your progress is satisfactory and you usually reach higher standards than in many schools but we judge that those children who learn very quickly could make even faster progress. We also think that those of you who are in Key Stage 2 could improve the quality of your writing. You can help by trying hard to learn your spellings, always using the correct punctuation and making sure that your handwriting is as neat as possible. Teaching is satisfactory and there is lots of good teaching. We have asked your teachers to make sure that all lessons are always interesting, move along at a good pace and that marking helps you make progress.

The people who run your school make sure that it is a very happy place. We have asked them to check carefully on how well you are learning so that they can make better plans for improving the school. We have also asked that they make even closer checks on all aspects relating to your safety.