

Vernon Terrace Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121920
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314148
Inspection dates	2–3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Alison Grainger

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	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Evans
Headteacher	Jacqueline Lapsa
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Vernon Terrace Northampton NN1 5HE
Telephone number	01604 633894
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Since the previous inspection, the school has changed from a lower school into a full age range primary school. Pupils are from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. A high percentage of pupils have English as an additional language and many are at an early stage of learning English. There is a lot of movement of pupils in and out of the school other than at the usual times of joining or leaving. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has a unit for pupils who are hearing-impaired and who have statements of special educational need. Pupils attending the unit spend most of their time in classes with other pupils of the same age. They have specialist staff supporting them for part of their time in school. On entry to the Nursery, there is a wide spread of individual attainment. Many children begin with skills that are lower than expected for their age. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had been in post for a year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate. Standards are exceptionally low and pupils' achievement is inadequate because teaching and the curriculum are unsatisfactory. Teaching and the curriculum are pitched at much the same level for all the pupils in the class and not varied according to the pupils' differing needs. Teachers' expectations of the standards all pupils are capable of attaining are too low.

While pupils who are hearing-impaired have their needs met satisfactorily when supported by specialist staff, they are adversely affected by the weaknesses in mainstream provision at other times. Children get off to a sound start in the Nursery. They make good gains in some important areas of their learning, particularly in the development of social skills and in their use of language for communication. Standards start to rise while children are in the Nursery, but this is not sustained in Reception to the end of Year 6.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. The vast majority of pupils behave well, move sensibly about the school and are courteous and polite. They are starting to make a valuable contribution to the school community through the new school council. Pupils willingly undertake the activities set in lessons but do not take real responsibility for their learning because academic guidance is weak. They are not given clear enough information about how they can improve their work. Although most pupils enjoy school, particularly seeing their friends, the attendance rate is very low and there is too much lateness in the mornings.

Care, guidance and support for pupils are inadequate. As well as weaknesses in academic guidance and support, the school is unable to show that it meets all of the government requirements for safeguarding. Nevertheless, there are some positive features to the pastoral care. Pupils are sure that they have someone to whom they can turn should they have worries or concerns. As a result of sound advice, pupils have a satisfactory understanding of how to stay safe and healthy.

Leadership and management at all levels are inadequate. Self-evaluation has not identified the full extent of the school's weaknesses. Although the headteacher has recognised that the school must improve and has started to take some of the right action, improvement is not being driven with enough urgency. Staff and governors are keen to work together to make the necessary changes but the roles of staff with responsibilities, such as subject leaders, are underdeveloped. The school agrees with inspectors that it must more rigorously analyse how its provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, influences pupils' progress. The school's progress since the previous inspection is inadequate.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 4

Provision in the Foundation Stage is inadequate overall. It is satisfactory in the Nursery where there are some good features. In the Nursery, continual interaction between adults and children does much to develop language skills, confidence and self-esteem. In both the Nursery and

Reception Year, supportive relationships help children settle quickly in school. However, activities in the Reception Year are not closely enough matched to children's needs and do not focus sufficiently on how children can learn through play and practical exploration. Sometimes, children have to listen to adults for too long. There has been no secure and accurate tracking of children's progress and attainment from entry to the Nursery to the end of Reception although this is starting to be addressed now. There are signs that Reception provision has already improved in some respects as a result of the local authority's support. However, the school's leadership of the Foundation Stage is inadequate.

What the school should do to improve further

- As a matter of urgency, fully implement government requirements for safeguarding.
- Improve pupils' progress and the standards they attain in all subjects.
- Ensure that teaching and the curriculum are closely matched to all pupils' needs and that teachers' expectations of all pupils are high enough.
- Provide all pupils with clear guidance that helps them to improve their performance and to take more responsibility for their learning.
- Work more closely with parents to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality.
- Rigorously analyse the influence of provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, on pupils' progress and involve subject leaders fully in this.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards are exceptionally low and pupils' achievement is inadequate. The steady progress children make in the Nursery is not built on adequately in the Reception Year to Year 6. Many pupils are doing less well than they should and underachievement is evident among all groups of pupils. At the end of the last school year, there was a sharp dip in standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Decline was also evident in the skills of children leaving the Reception Year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils have a sound understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Despite the lack of engaging teaching, pupils' behaviour does not deteriorate in lessons. Almost all pupils behave sensibly about the school and in the dining hall. They describe behaviour as 'OK' but some are concerned about boisterousness on the playground. Almost all pupils enjoy the social aspect of school, such as being with their friends.

Pupils have a satisfactory awareness of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise. They also have a secure understanding of road safety. Older pupils know about the dangers of smoking and drug abuse. Through the new school council, pupils have helped to make improvements to the school environment and have been involved in choosing a new school uniform. While pupils' personal development and well-being are just adequate overall, the attendance rate and punctuality are well below average. Pupils are not sufficiently prepared for the next stage of their education because they do not develop enough responsibility as learners and basic skills, such as in literacy and numeracy, are weak.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Inadequate teaching is the main cause of pupils' underachievement. One pupil commented that, 'It's boring when the teacher talks for too long and you want to get actively involved.' A parent said, 'Children of above average intelligence just have to blend in as long as they achieve the national average.' These comments sum up the main weaknesses in teaching. Teaching is not matched to pupils' needs. Expectations of pupils are too low, not only for the more able pupils, but also for other groups of pupils. Too little account is taken of the specific needs of pupils new to learning English. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, including those who are hearing-impaired, do not always get an acceptable level of support in lessons. Pupils are passive participants who simply sit and listen for too much of the lesson and often 'switch off'.

Although teaching is weak overall, there are examples of satisfactory teaching. Some good features are evident in the Nursery. Relationships in lessons are positive and some teachers provide pupils with clear explanations. When specialist staff teach hearing-impaired pupils in small groups there is adequate challenge and match of activities to the pupils' interests.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum is not well enough matched to pupils' needs and interests. It does not do enough to develop pupils' skills of independence and initiative although this is an area that is supported well in the Nursery. There are too few opportunities for pupils to develop skills in speaking and listening in Reception to Year 6. Not enough attention is given to problem solving in mathematics or to practical and investigative science. Too few opportunities are provided for pupils to develop skills in reading, writing and mathematics across the curriculum. Little use is made of computers to support work in various subjects although resources have recently been updated with a view to improving this.

Reasonable attention is given to pupils' personal development through personal, social and health education. A good variety of visits broadens pupils' experiences. Although the school is increasing its range of clubs, it remains more limited than in most primary schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

The school is unable to show that all government requirements for safeguarding have been undertaken. For example, some aspects of central record keeping lack all the required detail.

Its monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress is inadequate and it is unsure about the accuracy of some of its data. Steps are being taken to rectify this shortcoming, as the school starts to implement a new system for tracking pupils' progress. Even so, academic guidance is poor. Pupils are not told clearly enough how they can improve their performance or what they are already doing well. Some pupils say that they have targets to aim for but they cannot remember what they are. Attendance data is not analysed adequately and the implementation of the race equality policy is not monitored.

Relationships between adults and pupils are generally positive. This is particularly evident in the Nursery. Staff working with hearing-impaired pupils have particularly good relationships with pupils and their parents. Liaison between the specialist staff and outside agencies is effective. Although the school welcomes all pupils, arrangements for identifying the needs of those who enter the school late, including those at an early stage of learning English, are unsatisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The headteacher has the confidence of staff and governors. They say that teamwork has improved significantly over the last year. As one parent commented, 'The morale of the school has improved.' However, leaders and managers at all levels are not sufficiently driving improvement. Even at a senior level, there is not enough focus on taking the necessary action swiftly to improve pupils' progress. Subject leaders are not adequately aware of the quality of provision in their subjects and how this influences pupils' progress. Governors are supportive and are just starting to explore how they might challenge the school's senior leaders. As the chair of governors observed, 'We are not there yet. We have just set foot on the path and there is much to do.'

Effective action has been taken over the last year to improve the physical environment of the school and, for example, to ensure that pupils have good quality lunches. There is commitment to improvement as seen in the school's willingness to work with local authority consultants. However, capacity to improve is not being demonstrated and the main causes of underachievement are only just starting to be tackled. The school agrees that the pace of improvement needs to accelerate. It acknowledges that this requires more searching analysis of the effectiveness of provision leading to swift action for improvement.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Vernon Terrace Primary School, Northampton, NN1 5HE

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school. We found out that you have a new school council that is helping to make improvements and helped to choose your new school uniform. We thought that you looked very smart in the new uniform.

Most of you behave well and are polite. You feel that the adults in school are approachable and will help you if you are worried. Children are helped to settle in well in the Nursery and Reception Year.

We found that there are some important things that the school needs to improve. We know that the adults want to make sure that the school provides you with a better education. Here are the things that we have asked them to do in particular:

- Help you all to make more progress so that you do as well as you can in the different subjects.
- Make sure that teaching and all the activities are at the right level for each of you so that work is not too hard or too easy.
- Tell each of you clearly how to improve your work so that you can be more responsible for your learning.
- Work with your parents to improve your attendance and punctuality.
- Look carefully at how well the school helps you to learn so that changes are made when necessary.
- Make sure that they carefully check on all the adults who work with you.

You can help by always doing your best, by behaving well and by being kind and considerate to each other at all times. Thank you once again for your help.

Yours faithfully

Alison Grainger Lead inspector