

Northwood Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123995
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	314775
Inspection date	3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Jarrett
Headteacher	Jennifer Lawrence
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2005
School address	Keelings Road Northwood Stoke on Trent ST1 6QA
Telephone number	01782 234637
Fax number	01782 234427

Age group	4-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school is situated in an area where there is some economic deprivation. This is reflected in the much higher than average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. More than a quarter of the pupils are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds and a very large majority of these do not speak English at home. The school is in an informal federation with the adjacent nursery and the two schools are to be amalgamated. Since the start of this term, the headteacher of the nursery has been acting headteacher and an existing member of staff is acting deputy headteacher.

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 despite the problems suffered over the last year in establishing consistent leadership. The provision for pupils has not suffered. Parents appreciate this and say such things as, 'The teaching and support my child get are fantastic.' Pupils make good progress through the school as a result of good teaching which focuses on building key skills in literacy and numeracy.

Children in the Reception classes make good progress in their learning and by the time they start in Year 1, many of them have reached the expected levels, particularly in their language, mathematical and personal development. This good progress continues through the school and, by the time they leave, pupils reach comfortably above average standards. This has been the case for some years.

Relatively few pupils are working at the higher levels. This is because teachers do not always provide a wide enough range of work to suit the differing abilities of pupils in their classes. For example, although pupils are grouped by ability in mathematics, sometimes most do the same work, which some find relatively easy. This also happens in the Reception classes where, for instance, there are times when all children focus on the same sound or number, whether or not they have already learnt it. In addition, although there is a good learning area outside for Reception children, which is used well for their physical development, this is underused for other areas of learning.

Throughout the school, pupils' personal development is given a high priority. This is demonstrated by the very high levels of care shown by all staff. Parents value this and say such things as, 'The staff really care for the children and I have peace of mind knowing that my child is safe in school.' These levels of care result in pupils' cooperation and good behaviour. They willingly take on positions of responsibility, such as playground buddies, and carry these duties out effectively. They say that they enjoy these tasks and feel safe in school. The care shown is particularly notable for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are supported very well and are able to take part in all the school has to offer. The care for those who do not speak English at home is also very good and these pupils are quickly able to play a full part in lessons.

'My child is full of what has gone on at school and always has a smile at the end of the day.' This is typical of comments made by parents and indicates pupils' enjoyment of school. This is because there are interesting and varied activities for them. In particular, they enjoy many visits and visitors and a large number take part in the wide range of after school clubs.

The acting headteacher, ably assisted by the acting deputy headteacher, has already built a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have established good teamwork in the school and plans are already in place to address the areas for improvement noted by the inspection. With the amalgamation and the consequent settled leadership, the school is in a good position to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children start in the Reception classes, they have levels of skills and knowledge below those expected for their age. There is a particularly strong emphasis on their personal, social and emotional development and children settle quickly into their new surroundings. This is also

helped by the strengthening links with the adjacent nursery and the way that parents are included in the induction process. Those who are a little shy or reluctant are helped to fit in and take part well by the teaching assistants.

Children make good progress due to the emphasis that teachers put on developing their skills, particularly in language and mathematical development. However, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for children to choose their own activities or investigate and children spend relatively long periods sitting listening. In addition, the outside area is not used sufficiently for learning other than for physical development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers always provide a variety of work to meet the needs of the full range of pupils' abilities in their classes.
- Improve the curriculum in the Reception classes, to make full use of the outdoor area across all areas of learning and to ensure that children have more opportunities to explore for themselves and make independent choices.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards, by the time pupils leave, have been comfortably above average for some years. This shows good progress as children enter the Reception classes with levels of skills and knowledge below those expected. Standards in mathematics have not been quite as high as those in reading and writing in past years. However, in conjunction with the adjacent nursery, expertise has been brought in and standards rose in 2007 to be as high as those in reading. The proportion of higher levels gained has not been quite as high as expected, largely due to pupils not always being given appropriate work to extend them.

Pupils who do not speak English at home are supported well and given a clear programme for learning English. The success of this is seen in the standards they achieve at the end of Year 2, which are almost as high as those of their classmates. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also supported well and given clear plans for their learning, which enable them to make good progress relative to their abilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development has a high priority in the school. The end result is pupils who behave well and get on with each other. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy, playing safely and making healthy choices at lunchtime, for example. Pupils make a good contribution to the running of the school, through taking on positions of responsibility and serving on the school council, for example. They are also involved in community events, such as the local Big Breakfast.

Preparation for their future is good, as they are making good progress at developing basic skills and they have opportunities to be involved in an enterprise project. However, their skills of independence are not sufficiently developed, either in class or in other activities around school. Attendance is a little below average, and the school has plans to put in place further measures to improve it.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Children in the Reception classes and pupils in Years 1 and 2 enjoy their learning as good relationships have been established between all adults and youngsters. Good use is made of praise to encourage pupils to give of their best. Interactive whiteboards are used well to interest pupils and they enjoy using these. The main area for development in teaching is for teachers to ensure that they always provide a broad range of activities to suit the differing abilities of the pupils in their group. This is also the case in the Reception classes. Sometimes, pupils have to spend too long sitting on the carpet when they could be better employed working on specific tasks.

Teaching assistants play a valuable role in classes throughout the school. In particular, the support they provide for pupils who do not speak English at home is effective in enabling these pupils to take a full part in lessons. Teaching assistants also provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they make good progress relative to their abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is sufficiently broad and there are some good links made between subjects. However, planning does not always take into account the range of abilities in classes or groups. The curriculum is made more interesting with visits and visitors and theme weeks, some of these in conjunction with the adjacent nursery. Pupils also enjoy a wide range of after school clubs and activities. There is a good programme for pupils' personal, social and health education, which is one of the main reasons for pupils' good personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The high levels of pastoral care demonstrated by all staff are much appreciated by pupils and their parents. Pupils feel safe and confident and parents say such things as, 'Staff are always there to help, no matter how small or large the problem.' The good links with parents ensure that parents feel very comfortable approaching school to discuss any issues. Child protection procedures and risk assessments are robust.

There are good systems in place to check regularly on the progress of children in the Reception classes and pupils in Years 1 and 2. However, there is no overview of how this progress relates to progress they might have made in past years. This means that managers do not have a clear picture of progress through the school. Pupils are set targets for improving their work. However, they do not always understand how to achieve them and as a result they do not always have the desired impact.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Self-evaluation, in which all staff have been involved, is accurate and leaders and managers have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Monitoring is thorough, even in the period when the school has been without permanent leadership. The school improvement plan sets clear and appropriate priorities for development, though it is in need of renewal as most targets have been achieved. Informal monitoring by the current leaders has set challenging targets for improvement.

Governors have been supportive through the difficulties and have taken appropriate strategic decisions, including reducing a considerable financial deficit so that the school is now running a balanced budget. Governors share the determination of the current leadership to raise standards.

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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
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	2

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?	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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 the learners' needs?	2
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?	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

4 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northwood Infant School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 6QA

Thank you very much for welcoming Mrs Furness and me to your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and hearing you tell us all about your school. We are not surprised that you enjoy school so much as it is a good school.

- We think these are the best things about your school:
- You make good progress, especially in literacy and numeracy, because your teachers make sure you learn well.
- You behave well, get on well with each other and work hard.
- All grown ups look after you really well and you feel safe.
- Your acting headteacher and other teachers have good plans to make the school even better.
- You make a good start in the Reception classes as the teachers make sure that you are learning well, particularly your letters and numbers.
- We have told your teachers that they need to improve the following things:
- Some of you find your work too easy and are not given work that is difficult enough, while others find their work too difficult.
- In the Reception classes, you are not allowed to choose your own activities often enough and the outside area is not used to help you learn.

Keep working hard. We are sure that you will do your best to help the teachers improve your school.

Yours sincerely

John D Eadie Lead inspector

4 October 2007

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Keep working hard. We are sure that you will do your best to help the teachers improve your school.

Yours sincerely

John D Eadie
Lead inspector