

Python Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133389
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LA
Inspection number	316108
Inspection dates	4–5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Wendy Moakes
Headteacher	Mr Robert Burns
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Kirklington Road Rainworth Mansfield NG21 0JZ
Telephone number	01623 464164
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized primary school. Many, but not all, pupils live in areas that are socially and economically disadvantaged. A very small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds; very few are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. One in four of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is more than in many schools. Several have autistic spectrum disorders and others have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. When they start the Reception Year, the skills of many children are below national expectations for their age. The school provides accommodation for, but does not manage, a pre-school playgroup and an after-school club. Python Hill achieved the Healthy Schools gold award in autumn 2007. Through the 'Wider Opportunities in Music' initiative, all Year 4 pupils learn to play a brass instrument. The headteacher joined the school in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Python Hill is a satisfactory school with good features. The school is improving quickly as new initiatives begin to take hold and staff and pupils grow in confidence. Although standards at Year 6 are below average and have been for a number of years, pupils make satisfactory progress from their starting points. However, the school has rightly recognised that this position is not good enough. The recently appointed headteacher is doing a first-rate job and improvements made since he took up his post have been remarkable. He has accurately pinpointed the school's weaknesses and attacked them determinedly and systematically. The headteacher has also made sure that strengths, such as the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have continued to flourish so that these pupils make good progress. Nevertheless, inspection findings confirm that, overall pupils are not reaching their full potential, especially in English and mathematics. The oldest pupils, in particular, have large gaps in learning to make up, particularly in writing.

However, describing how he felt about the school, one pupil commented, 'It's really fun and it's interesting to learn new stuff'. This encapsulates the way in which the good leadership and management are transforming this school. The quality of teaching is good and as a result, pupils' progress is beginning to accelerate; moving on from its current position of satisfactory. For example, as pupils' spelling improves progress in writing is speeding up. Teachers choose activities well in order to motivate pupils and enable them to build on what they already know, understand and can do. They measure pupils' learning carefully and they take these assessments into account, for instance, when grouping pupils for lessons and tasks. Each pupil has individual targets to reach but there is scope to use target setting more consistently to motivate pupils to learn. However, pupils are now trying to do their best. Their very positive attitudes are helping to equip them for their lives beyond school even though their academic standards currently prevent them from being well prepared for secondary school.

The school has correctly focused on structuring the curriculum so that it is more relevant to pupils and encourages them to work hard. For example, a weekly afternoon of activities such as music, cookery, swimming and drama increasingly enables pupils to enjoy themselves, develop a variety of skills and to form relationships with pupils of different ages. This and other innovations are helping to ensure that the curriculum, which is now good, contributes effectively to improving the rate of progress made by pupils. There are clear indications that improvements made to the curriculum and resources are already having a positive impact on pupils' personal development. Pupils are now well aware of the components of healthy lifestyles and they take part enthusiastically in physical exercise, during lessons, at after-school clubs and in their spare time when using the super new playground equipment and multi-use games pitch. Very clear and high expectations, well-established routines and extra support for those who need it form part of the successful strategies promoting good behaviour. Pupils feel safe in school because they receive good care, guidance and support. Their conduct in lessons and around the school is good. They are starting to take some responsibility for their own safety, for example, by learning about the dangers of taking drugs. Pupils follow the examples set by staff and support each other and their community. For instance, a group worked together to raise funds for the school by making and selling greetings cards.

All staff, governors and members of the new senior leadership team share the headteacher's commitment to moving the school forward. Senior staff are increasingly influential but some lack expertise in relation to monitoring the school's performance. This limits the school slightly

in its ability to delegate responsibilities fully and involve leaders at all levels in evaluating the school's work. Nevertheless, innovations are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' achievement and personal development. No wonder that one pupil stated firmly 'I am proud of my school!' Although the school currently gives satisfactory value for money, indications are that it has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress, though they do not all reach the expected levels by the end of the Reception year. They struggle particularly with writing. Staff are tackling this weakness by carefully teaching skills such as forming letters and by offering interesting activities that encourage children to write. For example, in the 'pet shop', one child voluntarily made marks in a notebook to indicate that she had sold a rabbit. This activity took place in the superb, recently transformed outdoor area. Staff are increasingly discovering new ways to exploit its potential, although it is not yet used to the full to promote all aspects of learning. Staff work together well. They provide a good balance of activities led by adults and opportunities for children to follow their own inclinations. The accommodation restricts children's independence because it prevents them moving freely from one area to another. Exciting plans to remedy this are in place. Improvements to teaching, the curriculum and systems to assess children's learning are beginning to impact on children's learning. Consequently their rate of progress is accelerating. Staff look after children well. Increasingly positive links with the playgroup, which shares the outdoor area, contribute to the good arrangements to help new children to settle in quickly. Parents are welcomed and encouraged to work in partnership with the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement in English and mathematics.
- Develop the skills and expertise of leaders and managers so that all can equally contribute to monitoring and evaluating the school's performance.
- Make full use of pupils' individual targets in order to help them learn.

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

Overall, achievement is satisfactory. Although results of national tests at Year 6 and teacher assessments at Year 2 in 2007 were below average, outcomes showed a measure of improvement on the 2006 results, particularly in mathematics. The school has focused its efforts on improving attainment in mathematics. Standards are now rising because pupils are more knowledgeable about basic facts. They no longer need to spend much time on simple calculations and as a result are able to move on faster and tackle harder work. The same strategy is being used effectively to raise standards in English. For instance, Year 6 pupils are increasingly writing more complex prose because they have been taught to use a wider range of punctuation and to structure their writing much more effectively than they did when in Year 5.

Boys and girls progress at similar, mostly satisfactory rates. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially those with the most significant needs, achieve well. On average,

they meet around three quarters of the targets in their individual education plans, indicating that these pupils make good progress. The very few pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Under the direction of the headteacher, initiatives to promote pupils' personal development and well-being have been successful. Pupils report that they enjoy most lessons, but tend not to like writing. Older pupils feel that the school has improved significantly over the past year or so. 'It's bright and cheerful now.' Although they acknowledge that a few boys are sometimes 'naughty', pupils consider that behaviour is good and that bullying is not a problem. Attendance is broadly average. Most pupils are very keen to get to school early so they can start work. They raise funds for charities and the school council meets regularly. Its members' views are considered, for example, when playground resources are purchased. Pupils have a strong sense of responsibility and are quite capable of playing a more significant part in helping each other and staff. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are quick to consider others. For example, children in the Foundation Stage were anxious to make sure a new child had a part in their Christmas performance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Adults are very encouraging, give pupils the confidence to 'have a go' and recognise and reward effort. Teachers always give pupils time to talk about their work and explain their reasoning. In this way, they help pupils to organise their thoughts in order to improve their writing. Topics are chosen to appeal to both boys and girls. Teaching assistants are high calibre and make strong contributions to teaching and learning. Lessons are planned carefully and pupils are always made aware of what they are to learn. Very occasionally, work for the highest attaining pupils is not difficult enough. Teachers do not habitually refer to pupils' individual targets, during mathematics lessons, for instance. This means that opportunities are missed for pupils to assess how well they are learning and for staff to check that work is pitched at the right level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A number of elements have strengthened the provision for literacy and numeracy. For example, pupils attempt to solve mental arithmetic problems at the start of each day. For English and mathematics, classes are composed of pupils working at broadly similar levels. These arrangements are helping to ensure that lessons meet the needs of all pupils. More creative planning has significantly enhanced pupils' enjoyment. For example, subjects are linked when possible, to provide interesting contexts for learning. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders benefit enormously from spending each morning in the 'Learning Zone' where they follow structured programmes and develop their social and communication skills. Music is one of several strong aspects of the curriculum, with excellent opportunities for pupils to learn to play instruments. Professional sportsmen coach pupils in a number of areas and older pupils use the physical education facilities of a local secondary school. Visits and visitors contribute

frequently to learning and personal development. Pupils value the after-school clubs but would like the range to be extended beyond sporting activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The arrangements to safeguard pupils are thorough and effective. For example, staff are regularly updated about child protection procedures and health and safety issues have very high priority. Potential hazards associated with the school site, resources and visits are assessed scrupulously and suitable steps are taken to minimise risks. Particularly vulnerable pupils receive good quality support. Those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have structured opportunities to express their feelings and to learn crucial skills such as cooperating with others. Strong links with external agencies complement what the school provides. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Systems to track pupils' progress are still quite new. They have already highlighted pupils whose learning needs extra support and enhanced staffing is enabling them to receive an additional boost. Marking is usually encouraging but does not always tell pupils what they need to do in order to reach their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a clear vision of the excellent school he intends this to be and is working tirelessly to achieve this. He has ensured that all concerned with the school share his determination to provide the very best for each child. While much has been accomplished, there has not been time for the improved provision to show its full impact on standards and achievement. Although there is considerable experience and knowledge within the school's workforce, responsibility for monitoring the school's performance falls chiefly to the headteacher. The school recognises the need to involve the whole team even more fully so that strategies to maintain strengths and remedy weaknesses can be agreed quickly. Nevertheless, self-evaluation is rigorous and leads to improvement because senior leaders check that points for action are carried out and agreed policies are fully implemented. Support from local authority advisers and consultants is welcomed and used to the full. An innovative partnership with another primary school is already reaping benefits, for example, through sharing judgements about the quality of pupils' work. Governors provide practical support, are prepared to take difficult decisions and are increasingly involved in monitoring the school's performance. Parents have confidence in the school and the number of pupils on roll is beginning to rise.

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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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 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	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?	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.

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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

06 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Python Hill Primary School, Rainworth, NG21 0JZ

Thank you for being so friendly and polite when the inspectors visited your school. We really enjoyed our short time with you and now I need to tell you what we found out about Python Hill.

You told us how much you enjoy school and we can understand why. You have lots of interesting lessons and activities. Like you, we think the Tuesday afternoon 'ELSA' sessions are great. You should be very proud of your good behaviour and the way in which you try so hard to do well in lessons and clubs. We know that you feel safe in school and this is because the staff take such good care of you.

The older pupils told us that they have noticed that the school has improved in the last year or so. We agree that it has. We were amazed to see the photos of the Foundation Stage outdoor area before it was transformed. You are learning faster now, because the school is working so hard to enable you to do better in English and mathematics. Like your teachers, we think you should be reaching higher standards and we have asked the school to make sure you improve. We have asked the teachers to remind you more often about your targets and how you can reach them. We are sure that you will play your part by continuing to try as hard as you can, especially with your writing.

We judge your school to be satisfactory at present, but it has many good features. Your headteacher is the main reason why the school is getting better all the time, because he is determined to give you the best possible education. We have asked him to let the staff take on more tasks, such as planning new ways to improve the school.

We want to send each one of you our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Rosemary Eaton

Lead inspector