

North Denes Middle School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 120973 |
| Local Authority | Norfolk |
| Inspection number | 322297 |
| Inspection dates | 18–19 June 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Roger Fry |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Middle deemed primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 8–12 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 220 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs P Hollis |
| Headteacher | Mrs N Heywood |
| Date of previous school inspection | 21 November 2006 |
| School address | Jellicoe Road Great Yarmouth NR30 4HF |
| Telephone number | 01493 842063 |
| Fax number | 01493 852011 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

North Denes Middle School is of average size and draws pupils from the north of Great Yarmouth. The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and virtually all speak English. A small proportion of pupils speaks English as an additional language. A greater proportion of pupils than found in most schools joins or leaves the school at different times during the school year. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is well above average. More pupils have statements of special educational need than are found in most schools. The proportion of pupils known to qualify for free school meals is well above average.

The school is host to a Learning Support Centre (LSC) for pupils who find learning particularly difficult, funded by the local authority (LA). There is also a Learning Support Unit, known as 'The Haven', which helps pupils with behaviour difficulties. This provision is provided by the 'Excellence Cluster' of local schools, of which North Denes is a member.

The school has won the 'Norfolk Sustainable School' and 'Healthy School' awards. North Denes participates in the 'Intensifying Support Programme' (ISP), which is intended to help the school raise standards, and is provided by the LA. The school is undergoing a reorganisation. From September 2008, North Denes will be a junior school, serving pupils aged 7 to 11 years.

At its last inspection in November 2006, the school was judged to require 'special measures'.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

North Denes is an improving school. In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. The leadership and management are satisfactory. A good feature is that the school's senior team and key subject co-ordinators provide clear guidance for the school's development. Staff know what the school has to do to improve further. Close monitoring of the school's work, such as teaching in lessons, has led to improvement in pupils' learning and in their progress. This shows the school has what it takes to continue to improve without intensive support from the LA.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and is stronger amongst those pupils who started the school at the beginning of Year 4, because their education has been continuous. Pupils in Year 7 make good progress and the challenging work for the more able has been a key positive feature. Pupils in Year 7 are on course to reach the nationally expected standards this year. Pupils' non-fiction writing skills and calculation skills in mathematics across the school are weaker and have been correctly identified as areas for immediate action. Pupils in The Haven and the LSC make good progress because of the expert support and encouragement they receive. Support staff play a very important role in helping these pupils make good progress.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The ISP approach has led to better organised teaching and pupils' improved progress. Lesson targets are clear and teachers explain what they are to pupils at the start of lessons. Teachers' summaries at the end of lessons have improved because enough time is allowed for this activity to consolidate pupils' learning. Grouping of pupils by ability into 'sets' has begun to raise standards. However, their effectiveness is still developing and the range of different abilities is not always recognised well enough within them. Consequently, work is not always set at the right level within each set to meet the full range of pupils' needs. The management of pupils' behaviour is positive, their concentration is good and they make better progress than in the past.

The curriculum is inclusive, as topics are planned for all pupils to experience together. Pupils are well cared for and receive good teaching about how to stay safe. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good because they respond well to their many responsibilities. The school council is active and pupils have a strong voice in decision-making. Pupils' ideas and suggestions have been adopted for improving the playground, re-cycling and conserving the environment. School councillors recently met the Mayor at the Town Hall to discuss their ideas about the development of the town.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' non-fiction writing skills to raise standards in English.
- Improve pupils' calculation skills to raise standards in mathematics.
- Improve pupils' progress in lessons by matching the work more closely to their abilities.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although the school does not have complete records of all pupils' standards when they entered the school, this year and last, majorities of pupils entered with below average standards. They make satisfactory progress in Years 5 and 6 and good progress in Years 4 and 7. In Year 7, assessments indicate that pupils have closed the gap with nationally expected standards in English and mathematics, and more able pupils are working on Year 8 activities. Year 7's performance this year is a major improvement over the year before. Year 6 is a lower performing year. Pupils are nevertheless making satisfactory progress from their starting points and are on course to reach below average standards in English, mathematics and science this year. The school has accurately identified that aspects of pupils' writing and calculation skills are weaker than other aspects of their work.

Teachers and support staff identified pupils who made too little progress last year across the school and have diagnosed their learning needs accurately. These pupils are now making satisfactory progress and some make good progress. Pupils at early stages of learning English make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is a calm and happy place where pupils develop good relationships with each other and with adults. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respond well to the recently improved personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. This aspect is a significant strength of the school. Pupils are proud of the Healthy School Award and know well how to keep themselves healthy through the choices they make for healthy eating and exercise. Behaviour has improved significantly and pupils behave well during lessons and demonstrate good self-discipline when moving around the school. Pupils feel safe and are confident that any bullying is dealt with promptly because adults are readily available to help them when required. In all classes, pupils' enjoyment in learning has increased and most pupils work hard, especially in those lessons where activities are exciting. Attendance is close to the national average. Pupils' levels of basic skills provide them with a sound preparation for secondary education and the world of work beyond.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Lesson planning is better organised and more is expected of pupils. Pupils typically find lessons interesting. Teaching provides practical activities and games, which they enjoy, such as a picture sorting activity in science to help pupils consolidate their understanding of the cycle of plant growth, in Year 5. Teachers and pupils engage in informative discussions, pursue ideas and benefit from exchanges of views. Pupils are grouped in sets of similar abilities in English, mathematics, and in science for older pupils. This is helping pupils' progress. There is scope to build on this, however, by giving groups of pupils within the sets different starting points for their work based on how well they have learned ideas in earlier lessons. The level of challenge for the higher attainers has improved through the introduction of setting.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Recent improvements to the curriculum have enriched the quality of teaching and learning. The clear focus on literacy and numeracy, based on the ISP, has improved pupils' progress. There is a good focus on pupils' personal development and rewarding their achievements. The school is well on with preparations for a revised curriculum ready for the change to a junior school and acknowledges there is further work to do to make stronger links between subjects. The school recently won the Norfolk 'Sustainable School Award', which is the result of a sustained effort by staff and pupils. The physical education curriculum is developing well through the school sports partnership with a nearby secondary school. Pupils who find learning difficult receive good support through well written individual education plans. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra activities, including after-school clubs and visits to places of educational interest. Lessons in Latin challenge the most able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

New pupil progress tracking systems and assessment procedures have improved the quality of guidance for pupils' academic progress. Teachers know what needs to be taught next in detail and pupils have a clearer understanding of their group targets and what they need to do to improve their work. Staff in the LSC and in The Haven give very effective support to those who have difficulty in learning or in behaving well. These pupils make good progress with their individual targets. While some pupils agree individual targets with their teachers, most of those in mainstream classes do not yet do so. Pupils learn in a safe environment where relationships are happy and supportive. All pupils receive good quality pastoral care. The school works closely with a range of outside agencies to provide for those who need extra help. The procedures sampled for child protection, risk assessments, medical and emergency aid meet requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior team has provided good guidance and used clear targets for improvement to bring about positive change. The team, initially with the strong positive support of the LA, has moved the school forward effectively. The school's current 'Raising Achievement Plan' is well considered. The major improvements to date and the well embedded process for improvement means that the school has a good capacity to improve. The leadership's written evaluations and reports on the school's work are largely accurate. The subject leaders for English, mathematics and science organise their subjects well and know what the school needs to do next.

Monitoring, such as of lessons and pupils' work, is carried out regularly by senior staff. As a result, developments in teaching are better focused on how they will improve pupils' learning. The monitoring reports teachers receive about their lessons are helpful, but they do not always make it clear what teachers need to do to improve. Governors successfully pose direct questions to the school about the quality of teaching and learning and about pupils' progress. Their written reports are helpful but do not emphasise enough what the school needs to address further. Where recommendations are made, they are well expressed and helpful.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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 | 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 | 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 | 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? | 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

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| 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 | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| 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

20 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of North Denes Middle School, Great Yarmouth, NR30 4HF

It was good to meet so many of you again and to listen to your views. This letter is to give you a flavour of what is in the full report.

Here are some of the good features of your school.

- Your school has made a lot of progress in the last two years and no longer needs extra help.
- You make steady progress from Year 4 to Year 7 in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Year 7 has done particularly well this year.
- Those of you who go to The Haven or the LSC are doing really well.
- You enjoy school because teachers and other adults care for you well and help you to learn. Many of you take part in the clubs.
- You get on well with one another.
- I know how proud you are to be the top 'sustainable school' in Norfolk.
- Your headteacher and deputy and assistant headteacher, the staff and governors work well as a team to improve your school.
- The School Council makes very good suggestions to improve the school and is very active on your behalves.

Your headteacher and I have noticed that there are things that the school can do to improve. I have asked the school to:

- Improve the range of types of writing that you are good at.
- Improve your calculation skills, so that you can answer questions more quickly and accurately.
- Make sure that you always have work in lessons that allows you to make good progress.

I hope that you will all keep on working hard, particularly in English and mathematics.

Roger Fry

(Lead inspector)