

Newton Longville Church of England Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110440
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325150
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jane Wotherspoon HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tessa Haddon
Headteacher	Mrs Krys Kuzminska
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 September 2005
School address	School Drive Newton Longville MK17 0BZ
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The inspectors visited 14 lessons, and held meetings with staff, governors and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's development plan, governors' minutes, statutory policies and procedures, and the school's tracking information showing pupils' attainment and progress. They analysed the 50 questionnaires returned by parents and looked at the results of the school's survey of parents' and pupils' views.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the rates of progress of different groups of pupils from year to year
- the level of challenge in lessons, and how well teachers use assessment to improve learning and to set targets for pupils
- how well the school identifies and meets the specific needs of individuals
- how well provision in the Reception class capitalises on children's starting points
- the extent to which all leaders and managers are involved in evaluating performance and planning for improvement.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than average. Numbers are rising again after a period of falling rolls, and uneven class sizes reflect these changes. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is small but unevenly spread through the school. Similarly, the proportion identified as having learning difficulties is broadly average, but there are more in some classes than in others. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. A small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. A very small number are looked after in public care. The number of pupils who join or leave the school at times other than the usual is higher than in most schools.

During the inspection, the Reception class was taught by a long-term supply teacher. Pupils in Year 4 were away from school on a residential trip to a local field study centre.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Parents think so, and so do pupils. A high level of care and support for all pupils underpins the positive ethos that permeates the school. There is a strong sense of shared values. Relationships are of the highest order, and so pupils learn in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Support for pupils with social and emotional needs is first-rate, helping them to overcome barriers to their learning and giving them the chance to succeed. Good links with a range of external agencies support the school's work in this area.

Pupils make a satisfactory start to school life in the Reception class. They are well looked after but parents are, rightly, concerned about the continuity in their learning as a result of staff illness. Senior leaders and governors are fully aware of the improvements that are needed to planning, the environment and the structure of the day for Reception children. They have detailed plans with well-considered actions to effect improvements.

Across the rest of the school, pupils achieve well. Standards are above average by the time they leave the school. Weaknesses in pupils' writing skills have been tackled rigorously and although this is still a weaker area, there are signs that actions are having a positive impact on improving their rates of progress. Pupils enjoy school a great deal and talk enthusiastically about their lessons. They especially love practical tasks and all the lunchtime and after-school activities. Teaching is responsive to pupils' needs and based on a thorough knowledge of pupils as individuals.

Action to overcome weaknesses identified at the last inspection has been concerted. Many areas of the school's work are stronger, and improvements have been secured in pupils' standards, in teaching, in the curriculum, and in systems for tracking pupils' attainment and progress. The latter provide a secure basis for setting challenging targets for individual pupils. However, there is scope to use the data better to judge whether or not the school's actions for improvement have had the intended effect. Leadership at all levels is sufficiently secure to give the school a firm platform for future improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to make better progress by:

- using assessment information to plan activities that meet the needs of different groups and individuals, and that are based on sharp learning objectives
 - establishing an environment that enables children to be more active and independent in their learning
 - structuring the day to provide continuous learning opportunities and activities that link together to make learning more meaningful.
- Strengthen systems for rigorous evaluation of the impact of policies and actions taken by the school, ensuring that:
- all sectors of the school community are involved in this process
 - better use is made of whole-school analysis of data.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

2

The school's analysis, and evidence from lessons seen, show that pupils make good progress; there are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils. Those with learning difficulties and behaviour difficulties are supported effectively in class to ensure that they can participate in all activities. Specific programmes to help them catch up are particularly successful so that, often, they reach the standards expected for their age by the time they leave school. The small numbers of looked after children and those from minority ethnic groups are fully integrated in lessons and do as well as their peers. The standard of pupils' work is good, with many working at levels higher than expected for their age. Reading skills are particularly strong. Writing remains a weaker area and continues to be a focus for improvement. Pupils are articulate, with excellent speaking and listening skills. Results in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science have been above average for several years. The dip in results in 2008 reflected the needs of the particular year group, who nevertheless made good progress during their time in the school. Predictions for 2009 show that standards are likely to be above average.

Learning in lessons is good for several reasons. In the main, pupils are:

- interested in what they are learning, with older pupils in particular becoming adept at checking their own work and rectifying any errors
- keen, enthusiastic about learning, and hard-working
- aware of their targets and of how to improve their work
- attentive, demonstrating high levels of concentration.

Importantly, impeccable behaviour and the ability to cooperate in pairs and teams contribute substantially to the positive ethos for learning.

Pupils are friendly, well mannered and self-assured. They are good ambassadors for the school they love. With a well-developed understanding of personal safety, both in and out of school, pupils are certain that they are safe in school. Those who spoke with inspectors were in no doubt that bullying is not an issue because 'most children help each other and look after each other'. Older pupils are mature enough to resolve minor arguments for themselves, but they know that adults are on hand if necessary. Pupils' very positive responses to the school's many opportunities for

physical activities give them a strong understanding of healthy lifestyles. The school council is highly influential in representing the views of all pupils. It manages its budget effectively to make agreed improvements, such as to the stock of books in the library. Pupils are selfless, have a strong empathy for those less fortunate than themselves, and frequently donate sums from fund-raising to national charities. They also support a project in the Philippines.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

Teaching builds on and extends pupils' learning effectively. Teachers take care to plan relevant links between subjects, so that pupils can use their skills in different contexts. They plan practical real-life experiences and draw on a good range of different activities outside of school, too numerous to mention, that add interest to pupils' learning. Lessons are planned thoroughly, taking account of the different needs and abilities of the pupils. Just occasionally, teachers need to be sharper about the activities they provide for pupils with different needs, to ensure that the most able are challenged, and the least able supported. Lessons frequently start with a quick recall of previous learning and a clear explanation of the focus of the lesson. Good class management and organisation are underpinned by strong relationships that give pupils confidence. Inspectors observed effective paired and group work but, at times, teachers directed the lesson too much and missed opportunities for pupils to talk about their work together. Questioning pupils in different ways to assess their understanding is a weaker aspect of teaching that the school has been working hard to improve. Giving pupils opportunities to assess their own work is a feature that is developing well, and which is firmly established in classes of older pupils. Teachers' marking of pupils' written work is effective in telling them how to improve. Not surprisingly, all these features give pupils a strong sense of what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how to get better at it.

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

A new system for tracking pupils' progress and for setting challenging targets has much potential for raising standards even further. Staff now check pupils' progress towards meeting their targets every half term, to quickly identify where pupils might be falling behind. Pupils are appreciative of the targeted support and help that the school provides to meet their particular needs. Several spoke confidently to inspectors about the positive impact it has had on their lives and on their learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior staff have made an honest and accurate assessment of the provision in the school, based on thorough monitoring of teaching and learning, and of the progress that pupils make. Half-termly discussions between senior staff and teachers about the progress that their pupils make help to raise expectations. The pace of improvement since the last inspection has not always been as quick as it might have been while the school has undergone changes in the structure of middle leadership, and during periods of staff absence and illness. Nonetheless, the school has improved in many areas. Reorganisation is now complete, and the drive for improvement is not reliant on senior leaders. The school development plan contains a range of appropriate actions, although criteria by which the school can measure the success of its actions are not sharply focused on outcomes for pupils.

In many ways, governance is good. Governors help to shape the direction of the school, and challenge it about aspects of its performance. They have been especially active in turning around the budget, which had been in deficit as a result of falling rolls, and in supporting the school in its management of personnel issues. Policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are thorough. There are clear procedures for maintaining health and safety, and robust systems for checking adults who work in the school, including those who do so as volunteers. Other statutory policies underpin the school's work and, for example, demonstrate its commitment to equal opportunities. However, governors are not sufficiently rigorous in evaluating the impact of their statutory policies on outcomes for pupils, which is why governance is judged satisfactory. The school's audit of its community is a positive start to formalising much of the good work that it does to extend pupils' learning about communities within and beyond school, thus promoting community cohesion. There is more to do to analyse community issues and to formally evaluate the impact of the learning experiences it provides. Governors are fully in touch with the views of parents and pupils through regular surveys.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
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Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	3
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The current group of children in the Reception class has a good level of skills, knowledge and understanding for their age. This is not always the case, as each year is slightly different. Generally children make satisfactory progress, but they could be doing even better given their starting points. Children's personal, social and emotional needs are met well, and they are making good progress in this aspect of their learning. Despite instability in staffing, routines are well established, and children are settled and calm. Behaviour is exceptionally good. Children are attentive during whole-class sessions but they spend too long in such activities. This limits the time that they spend in active learning. The balance between whole-group and independent activities is not quite right. The day is broken up into blocks of time on specific activities that are punctuated by playtime on a barren playground with the rest of the school's pupils. This does not allow for continuous learning through play, and does not allow sufficient time to pursue their chosen activities.

Staff make useful observations, and collect evidence of children's learning and development. This systematic approach is developing well, but staff miss opportunities to identify what children should learn next. Session planning lacks detail; learning objectives are not always sharp, and activities are not sufficiently different for children of different abilities. Staff take good account of children's interests when planning activities for them to choose. Activities are generally well conceived, but there is no system to check what children choose and to ensure that they have a balance. Provision is overseen by a senior leader, who is setting clear goals for improvement and has a detailed and well-thought-out action plan to improve provision when staffing stabilises.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are generally very positive about the school's work, and have few major concerns. Parents are confident that their children enjoy school and are well looked after. However, several were not entirely positive about how well they are informed of their child's progress, or how well they are supported to help their child at home. Parents raised a concern about the state of the playground. Inspectors have been assured that it is due for resurfacing in the very near future. Other comments have been addressed elsewhere in the report.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



25 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Newton Longville Church of England Combined School,
Newton Longville, MK17 0BZ

My colleagues and I were delighted to meet you when we came to inspect your school. You are polite, well mannered, and a credit to the school and to your parents. Thank you to those of you who came to meet us to tell us your views of the school. You told us that the school is good, and that staff look after you well and give you all sorts of interesting work to do. We agree with you. You think that staff are good at explaining things to you. You are right.

We were especially pleased to see such excellent behaviour. Together with your positive attitudes, this helps you to learn well in class. You told us that you enjoy working with partners or in teams, and we saw this in some of the lessons we observed. You are clearly keen, and interested in taking part in all that the school provides for you. You already achieve well, but your knowledge of your targets and of how to improve your work is helping you to get even better.

It is good that you feel safe in school, although we have noted your concern about the playground. Your positive response to 'Huff and puff' and 'Wake and shake' sessions will help to keep you fit and healthy. Your strong relationships with each other, and your high regard for one another's welfare, mean that yours is a happy, caring school. We were impressed by the way the school council works to improve things for you, and also by the way that you do your part to improve the lives of others through raising funds for charities.

We have asked the school to improve the activities provided for the youngest pupils in the Reception class. Also, we want staff and governors to make sure that they check what effect all their policies and plans have on you and your learning. We know that you will continue to work hard to play your part.

Best wishes

Yours faithfully

Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector

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