

Necton VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134043
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	328809
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Glynn Storer

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	163
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Debbie Smith
Headteacher	Mr Graham Steel
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Road Necton Swaffham Norfolk PE37 8HT
Telephone number	01760 722975
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Necton Voluntary Aided Primary School is smaller than the average primary school. It opened in September 2007, replacing the former first and middle schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to that in schools nationally. Almost all pupils have White British backgrounds and of the very few with minority ethnic heritage, none speaks English as an additional language. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Reception class. Children start school with wide ranging knowledge and skills but for many, attainment on entry is below that normally expected for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is about average. The majority of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties and in some year groups, the numbers of such pupils are quite high. The school experiences a considerable turnover of pupils in any given year.

The school has the Healthy Schools award and the Activemark.

A privately managed pre-school setting, the Little Oaks Playgroup, operates from the school site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Necton Voluntary Aided Primary is a good school. It has improved rapidly since its opening in 2007 and continues to go from strength to strength. It already receives strong approval from parents who commented, 'The school benefits from strong leadership and dedicated staff...Enthusiasm in school is infectious.'

Standards are rising throughout the school. From relatively low starting points, children get a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. New approaches to teaching and learning are improving children's progress, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development and in their communication and early literacy skills. Nevertheless, standards on transfer to Year 1 remain below national expectations. Standards in Key Stage 1 were exceptionally low in 2008 but pupils currently approaching the end of Year 2 have made good progress. Positive attitudes and self-esteem established in Reception, along with measures to improve learning and boost basic skills, are already paying off. Consequently, standards have risen enormously year on year. Most pupils in Year 2 are now attaining or exceeding standards normally expected of seven-year-olds in reading, writing and mathematics. Current standards in Year 6 remain below average because many pupils are still making up for historic underachievement. However, pupils' achievement since this school opened has been good. Most, including several who face difficulties in their learning, have surpassed the expected rate of progress during the last two years. Furthermore, there is clear evidence of increasing numbers of pupils attaining standards in line with national expectations as initiatives to improve teaching embed and accelerating progress, already evident in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2, feed through.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour and of their capacity to cope with demanding work are high. As a result, lessons are challenging, yet calm and purposeful. Much teaching is lively and engaging and teachers readily channel pupils' enthusiasm into productive work. Staff have strengthened assessment procedures and generally use assessment information to match work to pupils' prior attainments. Consequently, most work meets the needs of pupils across the ability range and there is well-targeted support for pupils who find learning difficult. In this respect, teaching assistants do a particularly good job. An outstanding curriculum provides regular high quality learning experiences that motivates pupils and brings the best out of them. It gives pupils frequent opportunities to make up lost ground by reinforcing basic literacy and numeracy skills through exciting work in other subjects. Strong moral values and a determination to promote community cohesion underpin all curriculum planning and result in consistently good outcomes in relation to pupils' personal development and well-being.

Care guidance and support are good overall. The school's fundamental values reflect in its caring ethos and in pupils' good personal development and well-being. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Behaviour and relationships at all levels are excellent. Pupils know how to live safely and healthily and they make a positive contribution to school and the wider community. Their improving progress in the development of basic skills and positive attitudes are a sound preparation for their future lives. Academic guidance is satisfactory, although marking is inconsistent in setting individual targets and showing pupils how to improve.

Rapid improvement results from the vision and determination of the headteacher. In just two years, this outstanding leader has introduced measures that have created the conditions in

which effective learning can take place. He has also built a strong staff team and has put in place rigorous monitoring procedures that have been instrumental in improving teaching, learning and the curriculum. Because school self-evaluation is accurate and targets are challenging, the school has a good capacity to improve further. However, leadership roles are currently restricted to a small number of staff. This places a heavy burden of responsibility on them and limits the extent to which the whole staff contribute to aspects of school management.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in all areas of learning and in their personal development. They make particularly good progress in their social skills, learning sounds and letters, and understanding of the world around them. Leadership and management are good. Consequently, children enjoy learning through an exciting range of activities linked to themes which meet their interests well. For example, as part of their learning about life in Africa they visited a zoo to learn about animals, they learnt to play African drums and compared the games children may play in Africa with the games they play in their own school. Children are very well behaved and develop good attitudes to learning. They like coming to school, and especially enjoy working with older pupils, for example during Multicultural Week. This helps them to feel part of the school's community. Adults care about pupils' welfare and assess their progress so that they can plan the next stages in their learning accurately. Writing has been identified as an area for improvement. Pupils have limited opportunities to develop their independent writing, reading and problem solving skills in the outdoor area, which is not as well-resourced as the indoor area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils understand their individual targets and that teachers' marking shows pupils clearly how to improve their work.
- Give more staff a role in leading aspects of the school's work so that management responsibilities are distributed more evenly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are rising and pupils' progress is improving rapidly. Challenging but realistic targets have effectively underpinned year-on-year increases in the numbers of pupils attaining or exceeding standards expected for their age in all year groups. In the 2008 Year 2 national assessments, standards were significantly below the national average and in writing were exceptionally low. There was evidence that some pupils had not made the progress that they should. Staff analysed the causes for this and instituted a raft of measures to improve pupils' learning and achievement that have yielded impressive success. This year, the proportion of Year 2 pupils attaining the nationally expected level for their age has increased considerably in all core subjects and in writing it has doubled. Overall standards are broadly average. Virtually all pupils have made at least satisfactory progress and, for many, progress from their starting points in Year 1 has been good. Standards in Year 6 remain below average. This is a combination of historic underachievement and of the fact that, in this cohort, over half face difficulties with their learning. Nevertheless, the proportion of above average Level 5 scores is higher and for most pupils, including those from vulnerable groups and the many with additional needs,

achievement is now good. Most have exceeded the expected rate of progress in the two years since the school opened.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in their personal development because they enjoy school enormously and say their lessons are always fun. Attendance is good. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. A broad range of exciting opportunities – for example clubs, sports activities and good links with the church and local community, enable pupils to develop a good awareness of their place in society. The school promotes community cohesion by fostering citizenship based strong moral values. Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles and their personal safety. They are consulted about school decisions, and they are aware of the needs of people who are less fortunate. Behaviour is outstanding and pupils show a real concern for one another. Pupils are polite and take great pride in their school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. One pupil said, 'We all look forward to the next day and we come in smiling'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lively teaching, high expectations and effective pupil management draw an extremely positive response from pupils in most lessons. Pupils rise to the challenge to do their best because learning is fun. Enrichment activities, such as the recent educational visit to York or the highly popular Multicultural Week, promote high levels of enjoyment and effective learning. Planning is thorough and ensures that teaching assistants play an effective role in supporting pupils' learning. Teaching is generally effective in meeting the needs of pupils with different abilities. There are, however, times when all do the same work, which does not always promote best progress across the ability range. A strong focus on developing pupils' understanding of letters and sounds is also strengthening the teaching of reading and writing skills throughout school and has been instrumental in raising standards. Occasionally, teachers' monitoring of work in progress is not sharp enough to ensure that all pupils make the best possible gains.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Providing an excellent curriculum has been a key factor in the drive to raise standards. The creative linking of subjects reinforces basic skills effectively and an outstanding range of enrichment activities, including residential visits, visitors, special events and out-of-school activities add enormously to pupils' enjoyment. Themes such as safe and healthy lifestyles permeate the curriculum. Staff integrate the use of information and communication technology into pupils' learning in all subjects. Provision for modern foreign language learning includes Spanish, German and French and exceeds that currently found in many primary schools. The headteacher and governors place a high priority on a curriculum that puts the school at the heart of the community and enables pupils to make a positive contribution. Topics that focus on aspects of local history, geography, ecology and culture give a purpose to pupils' learning and foster a thorough understanding of issues that affect the community. The curriculum also gives pupils a wider perspective by focusing on other countries, languages, global issues and world faiths as a regular part of their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is strong and parents particularly value the way that older pupils care for and support their younger schoolmates. Rigorous safeguarding procedures protect pupils and eliminate risk. The school works well with parents and other agencies to provide effective support for pupils who find learning difficult, so that they make good progress. Support staff are used well to assess and help pupils in lessons. The school sets challenging targets for pupils' achievement. While some pupils understand exactly what they need to do to improve, others are less sure because there is inconsistency in the way teachers indicate the next steps in their learning. For example, marking usually shows pupils what they have achieved or done well, but not all tells them how their work could be improved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Effective leadership, management and governance, along with a strong commitment to its fundamental values, are the cornerstones of the school's success. The headteacher's enormous drive, passion and enthusiasm for all aspects of the school's work are an inspiration for staff and have quickly gained him the respect of parents and the wider community. His outstanding leadership has united staff from the two former schools and quickly secured a strong sense of teamwork and a vibrant atmosphere throughout the school. The school promotes community cohesion effectively by taking a considered and evaluative approach to structuring the curriculum for maximum impact in this regard. The setting of challenging targets and raising achievement by providing pupils with high quality learning experiences and equality of opportunity have been successful in the drive to raise standards. Self-evaluation is accurate and governors are rigorous in holding the school to account for the targets that it sets itself. The school has come a long way in the two years since its opening. Its performance to date represents good value for money. Staff with leadership roles do a good job. The deputy headteacher provides a model of good practice in the classroom and as a leader of two major subjects. However, there is now considerable scope to distribute leadership and management roles more widely throughout the organisation and, in doing so, to spread the workload and responsibility more evenly.

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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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

15 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Necton Voluntary Aided Primary School, Swaffham PE37 8HT

You may remember that I visited your school a little while ago, along with my colleague, Mrs Walley. Thank you for making us so welcome and for taking time to talk to us and to answer our questions. We enjoyed talking to you because what you told us showed how highly you rate your school and how proud you are of all that goes on there. We particularly enjoyed your celebration assembly on Friday afternoon, and it was great fun for us to join in the drumming with your teachers and the other adults. I thought that you would like to hear what we found out about your school.

There are many good things happening in your school.

- Children in Reception get a good start to their time in school.
- Most of you are making good progress in English, mathematics and science and standards are rising rapidly.
- You enjoy school because teachers make learning interesting. You think that school is so good that 'lessons are always fun.'
- You get on exceptionally well with one another and your behaviour is excellent.
- Older pupils look after the 'little ones' and help them with their work.
- The headteacher, the staff, governors and pupils work hard to improve the school and the adults give you a real say in what goes on.

Because everybody wants Necton Voluntary Aided Primary to be as good as it can possibly be, I have made a few suggestions that should help it to improve further. I have asked staff to give you really clear advice on how to improve your work and to make sure that you really understand the targets that they set for you. You can help by remembering your targets and trying really hard to follow the advice that teachers and other adults give you. I have also asked the headteacher to give other members of staff opportunities to lead and manage aspects of the school's work, so the school continues to get better and better.

I hope that you will all continue to work hard and enjoy your time at Necton Voluntary Aided Primary School.

Yours faithfully,

Glynn Storer

Lead inspector