

Northfields Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117223
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338969
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Lois Furness

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Paddon
Headteacher	Claire Logan
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 16 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, parents and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including: the school improvement plan, records of pupils' progress, teachers' planning and assessments, information on pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, safeguarding documentation and 43 parent questionnaires.

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

- children's attainment on entry to the Nursery and at the end of Reception to gain an accurate picture of their progress
- if the declining trend of attainment by the end of Year 2 had been halted and attainment is starting to rise
- the learning and progress of boys, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and more able pupils, and how well the curriculum is adapted to their needs
- the impact of monitoring and evaluation on ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching
- the adequacy of safeguarding arrangements.

Information about the school

In this smaller than average school, the vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average but this is steadily increasing year-by-year. Early Years Foundation Stage provision consists of a part-time morning and afternoon Nursery class and two Reception classes; one for children starting in the autumn term, and the other for children starting in the spring term. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. The school holds a number of awards including Healthy Schools, Artsmark and Hertfordshire Quality Mark status.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Northfields Infant and Nursery School is a happy, harmonious community with notable strengths in the care, guidance and support it provides for its pupils, especially for the steadily increasing numbers of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Comments such as, 'The staff care not only for the education of our children, but they actually care about each child as an individual,' reflect how many of the parents and carers appreciate this aspect of the school's work. The Early Years Foundation Stage provides children with a good start to school life, and it is here where children first start to develop their good attitudes towards learning. Good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins the school's work and helps to explain the good relationships, and why the school is a cohesive community. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous, resulting in pupils who feel extremely safe whilst in school, and who have a good understanding of what is meant by an unsafe situation. Another significant strength is pupils' outstanding behaviour, which helps to create a positive school ethos. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with pockets of good practice throughout the school. Strengths include good use of praise, pupils eager to learn and the deployment of teaching assistants to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who make good progress in their learning. However, although attainment is broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2, progress is not consistently good. Planning is not matched well enough to all pupils' needs and activities do not firmly build on the learning of previous lessons. As a result, some pupils, particularly the more able, do not always make the progress of which they are capable and attainment could be higher. Expectations are not always high enough in terms of the amount of written work and presentation is sometimes untidy. Also, not all staff are confident in the teaching of writing skills. Pupils are becoming more involved in knowing what they are expected to learn, and how to achieve success in their work. Marking helps them to know why their work is good and how to improve. There is good practice evident especially in Year 1, but this practice is not consistent in all classes. The quality of self-evaluation is adequate, and the leadership has an accurate view of strengths and areas that could be made better. However, although actions are implemented, these are not always sharp enough to raise standards and achievement. A range of monitoring and evaluation activities are in place but these are not regular enough to ensure all staff consistently implement agreed actions, so improvements will be made more rapidly. Governors also do not challenge the school sufficiently well about attainment and pupils' progress. However, the success of actions to halt the decline of attainment in Year 2, the improving attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the good teaching evident in Year 1 and pupils' enthusiasm for learning, show the school's

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sound capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils attain as highly as they can by:
 - using assessment information more rigorously to ensure activities meet the range of pupils' needs, especially the more able
 - planning activities that ensure day-by-day progression in learning
 - improving subject knowledge in the teaching of writing.
 - Develop consistency in the quality of teaching by:
 - raising teacher expectations in terms of the amount of work completed by pupils and of their presentation
 - consistently involving pupils in knowing how to succeed in their work
 - ensuring marking follows the agreed policy, indicating clearly to pupils why work is good and the next steps of learning.
- Sharpen up monitoring and evaluation procedures by:
 - leaders checking on a weekly basis that agreed actions which focus sharply on raising attainment are acted upon by all staff
 - governors becoming more involved in challenging the leadership about pupils' learning and progress.
- About 40% of the school's whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may
 - receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5
 - inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The quality of learning, seen in lessons, confirmed that relative to their starting points, pupils make satisfactory progress. However, as a result of more effective teaching, progress is better in Year 1 than in Year 2, as teachers use assessment information more effectively in this year group. Tasks here are matched well to pupils' needs and lessons maintain a brisk pace. As a result, pupils are productive and make good gains in knowledge and skills. In Year 2, teachers do not always expect enough of pupils, and more able pupils are sometimes given tasks which they complete too easily. In writing in particular, subject knowledge is not secure and lesson planning does not show how pupils' writing skills are to be developed. Even so, the decline in attainment noted over the last three years has been halted and the attainment of pupils currently in Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly in line with that expected for their age. However, there is limited evidence of higher attainment.

Pupils enjoy learning, tackling their activities with enthusiasm and interest. Their behaviour is excellent, and even when work is too easy or too hard they try their very best. 'I love learning and hard work,' said one Year 1 pupil as he eagerly explored

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numbers which when added together made 36, for example. Pupils are aware of the benefits of regular exercise, and the importance of eating healthily. They show great enthusiasm when taking part in sporting activities and when speaking about how they grow their own vegetables for the harvest festival. Pupils say they feel safe in school, there is no bullying and staff will always help them. They competently explain how to cross the road safely, why it is important to have regular fire drills, and why they should not speak to strangers. Pupils are keen to help others, and make good contributions to school life as play leaders and school councillors. The work they do to support the Christmas and Summer Fairs helps them to develop their enterprise skills. By supporting charities at home and abroad an understanding of citizenship is developed. This is evident in assemblies where good attention is given to helping pupils to get along well with each other, and know right from wrong.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good relationships with pupils and use praise well to boost their confidence and raise self-esteem. This results in pupils very willing to answer questions,

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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welcoming opportunities to talk through their ideas together. However, the quality of planning lacks detail about exactly what teachers expect pupils of different abilities to learn, notably in writing. Leaders have worked with staff to highlight the importance of involving pupils through the sharing of learning objectives and of criteria about how to achieve success in their work. As yet, these strategies are not used consistently by all staff. There are pockets of good practice, but the quality of marking is variable, and at times is merely cursory, stating 'good' with no explanation of what is good or the extent to which objectives have been met. Teaching assistants make an effective contribution to the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school provides a broad curriculum for its pupils, linking subjects together to make learning more meaningful. Information and communication technology is used well and visitors such as the police, the fire service, local authors and musicians help to enrich pupils' experiences. Clubs, such as sports clubs, and links with other schools and outside organisations help to extend learning. However, the curriculum does not provide enough opportunity for pupils to develop their writing skills nor does it ensure enough challenge for more able pupils.

Care, guidance and support are strengths of the school. Support for pupils who may be vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is high quality and sensitive. The nurture class and the lunch-time club are particularly effective in providing a safe haven for pupils needing additional support. All staff play their parts to the full in ensuring that children are cared for well. Pupils benefit from effective links with other agencies that provide specialist support. Links with the pre-school and the school to which most pupils transfer are good which ensure a smooth transition to and from the school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher strongly promotes a caring ethos in which every child is valued. Her vision is shared well and there is a strong team spirit with all staff working hard to improve provision. Senior leaders know the school's strengths and areas for development through regular monitoring and evaluation activities. Nevertheless, they have too rosy a view of some aspects of the school's performance. This explains why school development planning, although it focuses broadly on the right issues, does not give sufficient attention to raising attainment and improving achievement. Also although

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actions are identified and agreed by staff to be implemented, this is not checked upon rigorously enough by those with leadership responsibilities. Consequently some weaknesses, such as inconsistencies in marking, remain. The supportive governing body meets its statutory requirements, but is not yet sufficiently challenging the leadership about the achievement of pupils.

The school is successful in promoting links with parents and carers. Many parents welcome the open door policy of the school with many especially praising the way the Early Years Foundation Stage staff help their child to settle. The school is inclusive, seeking always to treat all pupils fairly and equitably. However the progress of all pupils is not even throughout the school. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous, with vigilance from all adults ensuring that children are safe and secure. The school is a harmonious and cohesive community and children from all backgrounds get along well with each other.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's skills are below what is typical when they enter the Nursery, especially in their language and personal development. Good induction arrangements ensure they settle quickly and as lesson observations show, these young children rapidly become happy, eager learners. Children feel safe and progress is good. Although in 2009 by the end of Reception, attainment was above average except in creative development, attainment in 2007 and 2008 was broadly average by the end of the Reception year. The weakest skills when children start at the school are found amongst boys, in their personal, social

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and emotional development, and in their speaking skills. These areas are a major focus for planning and this is rewarded by clear gains in children's learning. An effective and interesting curriculum is well-planned and resourced, and teachers make very good use of all adults. When early special educational needs are uncovered, extra support is quickly put in place. Planning ensures all areas of learning are covered and a system of regular on-going observations and assessments support the tracking of children's progress which is regularly recorded and shared with parents. Even so, when children's interests move down a certain route the planning is flexible enough to support this new learning. For example, the children's recent interest in farm animals led to a parent bringing a live chicken into school, and a resulting visit to a local farm. Good leadership and management are demonstrated throughout by the improving provision and rising attainment.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are supportive and all those who responded to the questionnaire agree the school keeps their child safe helping them to lead a healthy lifestyle. Almost all are happy with their child's experience at Northfields, noting their child enjoys school and is making sufficient progress. Almost all think the school keeps them well informed about progress. The inspection found that although progress is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the progress of other pupils was not consistently good in Key Stage 1. A few parents did not think the school dealt effectively with unacceptable behaviour, and did not take sufficient account of parents' suggestions and concerns. The inspection found no evidence to support these concerns, as the behaviour seen was exemplary and the headteacher provided two instances of how the suggestions of parents have been recently acted upon, for example, by increasing the number of after-school activities.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northfields Infant and Nursery School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 43 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 187 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	72	11	26	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	28	65	15	35	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	22	51	20	47	0	0	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	51	20	47	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	58	16	37	2	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	51	19	44	2	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	51	19	44	2	5	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	42	21	49	2	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	52	20	45	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	51	15	35	2	5	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	44	18	42	1	2	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	23	53	17	40	2	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	58	17	40	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 November 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Northfields Infant and Nursery School, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 4PT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school. It was delightful to talk to so many of you and we enjoyed our visit very much. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found out about your school. We judged that you go to a satisfactory school and that there are some good things about it. These are some of the things we liked most:

- your behaviour is excellent and your parents and carers should be very proud of you
- your understanding of how to keep safe is also excellent
- in the Nursery and Reception classes you make good progress in your learning and you are all so eager to learn
- teaching assistants make sure that those of you who sometimes find learning difficult make good progress
- by the time you leave in Year 2 you attain standards that are similar to those which are found in most schools
- the staff in school look after you well.

You make satisfactory progress as you move from the end of the Reception to the end of Year 2. However, at the moment you make better progress in some classes than in others and some of you could do harder work. We have asked for the following things to happen:

- make sure all of you by the end of Year 2 attain as highly as you can
- the quality of teaching is consistently good
- your headteacher, other leaders and governors check more often that you are all making the progress you should.

Once again, thank you for answering our questions. We wish you all the best in the future and hope you enjoyed the Christmas Fair.

Yours faithfully

Lois Furness

Lead inspector

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