

Northcott School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118138
Local Authority	Kingston upon Hull City of
Inspection number	339149
Inspection dates	23–24 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Pauline Hilling-Smith

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Orriss
Headteacher	Mrs G Volans
Date of previous school inspection	4 September 2006
School address	Dulverton Close Bransholme Hull HU7 4EL
Telephone number	01482 825311
Fax number	0
Email address	admin@northcott.hull.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, looked at pupils' work files, and evaluated development plans and 73 questionnaires from parents and carers.

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

- the achievement of groups of pupils of different abilities
- the assessment of pupils' communication needs and how these impact on learning
- how well the curriculum is matched to pupils' needs
- how well the leadership teams, including the governing body, are working together to improve the school.

Information about the school

Northcott is a special, coeducational, day school for pupils, aged from 5 to 16 years, who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most of the pupils are in Key Stages 3 and 4 and no pupil is in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school has a small, specialist provision for pupils with autism while the greater part of the school provides a protected environment for pupils within the autistic spectrum and who may have complex communication difficulties and a diverse range of other needs. The majority have moderate learning difficulties. However, the population is gradually changing and now includes a rapidly increasing percentage of pupils with more complex and wide-ranging learning needs. The school also provides an extensive outreach facility, supporting both primary and secondary schools across the city.

The school has gained many awards, most of which have been held over a long period, including Artsmark Gold, the National Healthy Schools Award and Investors in People. In 2008–09 it gained the BECTA Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Award and has been reaccredited by the National Autistic Society and The Charter Mark for service excellence. The school has been awarded specialist status for communication and interaction from September 2008.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Northcott is a good school with outstanding features. The clarity of the vision put in place by the new headteacher has been the key driver. The commitment of the governors and staff to the best provision for pupils is unquestionable. This has enabled the school to move forward strongly on its new pathway despite some challenges.

The behaviour of pupils is outstanding; they are appropriately friendly and polite to staff and visitors. Above all, pupils are very supportive towards each other in lessons, especially when someone needs help. Friendship is very important to pupils and this is embedded in the school's work. Parents' and carers' involvement is outstanding with parents and carers involved fully on the governing body.

Self-evaluation is good. It is based on detailed information-gathering procedures and good use of the information to give a comprehensive picture. Although the headteacher has only been in post since January 2009, she has had a positive effect on school improvement. Rapid change has taken place because improvement plans are detailed and clear and successes can be seen easily. Staff, governors and partners have worked closely together and the school has made good improvement. This gives it good capacity to continue to improve.

During their time at the school, pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress because the provision made for them encourages them to succeed. Where progress is exceptional, the work and teaching styles are particularly well matched to pupils' needs. However, although girls make good progress overall, they make less progress across school than boys, because they are mostly in the minority and are more reserved in lessons. Pupils with more complex learning difficulties, particularly in the main school, make less progress than their peers because they achieve their end of year targets too easily. Attainment in English is not as high as in other subjects. However, the changes in teaching due to specialist status are starting to raise achievement in English and for pupils with more complex difficulties. Pupils enjoy coming to school and being involved in all aspects of school life.

Governors have identified that they need to work more efficiently and in committees to be able to support and challenge the school more effectively. Leaders know that they must make plans to raise achievement in English and to ensure that the progress of girls and pupils with complex special needs is as good as that for other groups.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress in English and that of girls and those with more

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complex needs by:

- raising expectations and increasing the challenge in the targets set for them
- providing work which is more closely matched to their needs
- increasing opportunities for participation in lessons for all pupils.
- Improve governors' monitoring of the school's performance by:
 - ensuring that committees are more efficient
 - providing greater challenge to the school in implementing plans to raise achievement where these are needed.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Most pupils make good progress from low starting points. A few pupils make outstanding progress and some of these pupils attain national averages by the end of Key Stage 4. However, the numbers of pupils achieving national standards across the school shows a falling trend in line with the increase in the numbers of pupils with more severe special educational needs and/or disabilities. Achievement in science, art and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4 are strengths of the school and a few pupils achieve GCSE grades. Attainment in English is not as high and pupils are entered for lower tier accreditation. In the main school most pupils achieve a range of accreditations both in academic subjects and vocational courses, including becoming Compact graduates. Although girls and some of those with complex needs do not progress as rapidly as their peers, a few pupils with specialist communication or sensory needs in the main school make good or outstanding progress because they receive teaching from specialist teachers or speech therapists. Pupils' good progress in lessons is aided by their excellent behaviour and strong relationships.

The overwhelming majority of pupils enjoy coming to school. They particularly enjoy riding on bikes as part of learning about different ways to travel. Pupils enjoy choosing and participating in the activities which take place at lunchtime. They enjoy the social games they play after breakfast. A typical comment is, 'We don't just learn here, we have fun.' Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying is rare. A very few pupils say they do not feel safe occasionally when others' behaviour is extreme. However, inspectors saw exemplary behaviour around school and very well-mannered pupils. Pupils value the opportunities they have had to make an impact on decisions about the school's work, for example, in deciding to give a prize they had won themselves to a charity. The work of the school council is yet to develop to allow all pupils to express their opinions to the fullest extent. Pupils with more complex communication difficulties are not yet included fully as representatives on the council. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and talk confidently about the benefits of the fruit they sell in the tuck shop. Younger pupils use the 'brush bus' to learn about dental hygiene. Pupils have excellent social skills and are very tolerant of diversity within their experience, but they have fewer opportunities to extend this to include people from different ethnic backgrounds to their own. Pupils' understanding of right and wrong is

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exemplary and they take time to reflect, for example before meals.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The good and outstanding teaching is characterised by activities well matched to pupils' different and individual needs. This is based on teachers' good knowledge of their pupils. These lessons are varied and pupils are actively involved in their own learning throughout the lesson. There is also a high level of communication during partner and group work, and peer assessment and self-assessment against clear success criteria. Occasionally, lessons are controlled too much by the teacher or involve too much filling in of worksheets and so the development of independence and the level of challenge is reduced.

The good curriculum is enriched by ever-widening opportunities to be involved in interesting projects and learning out in the community. The range of courses has been

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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widened since the last inspection and pupils can now follow catering and horticultural opportunities on other sites. The specialist communication and interaction status is enhancing and developing situations within the curriculum in which these skills can be developed and practised. The curriculum, particularly in English, is matching pupils' needs more closely. This is because staff work together with colleagues from different agencies and identify new ways of developing the curriculum and promoting achievement. In some other subjects the curriculum is more restricted by the high content requirements required by the accreditation.

The school provides good care, guidance and support. Staff are committed and passionate about securing the best opportunities for the pupils. Staff are effective in creating an atmosphere which is very sociable. The good care provided is reflected in the way in which pupils display respect and sensitivity. Key to the school's success is the developing partnership work with different agencies, which is shaping provision and ensuring that the wide range of pupils' complex needs are met.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has created a successful response to the growing diversity of pupils' needs at Northcott and, consequently, the school promotes equality of opportunity well. Her visionary plan and attention to detail has secured commitment to a different school with different challenges since the last inspection. The leadership team monitors and evaluates closely the impact of the detailed high-quality planning documents and this is bringing about successful changes. For example, the change to the structure of the school day and the reshaping of staff responsibilities to mirror and develop curriculum changes are meeting pupils' needs more effectively. Leaders at all levels are developing their expertise so that they have a growing role in the process. Alterations, extensions and refurbishment of the buildings have significantly enhanced the school environment and improved the fitness for purpose of the design. The fitness suite is of very high quality and the school is rightly proud of it. The new training suite facility means that staff are able to be involved with the school's partners to good effect to develop provision and skills in line with the communication and interaction priorities for the school. The new key appointments to the governing body are highly motivated to develop their role and the teamwork of the governors. They are as yet at the beginning of the road but they are well aware of this and determined to move rapidly. Community

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cohesion is promoted satisfactorily. Pupils' understanding of Britain as a diverse community is less well developed than the other aspects. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory and meet requirements. The website and frequent newsletters give good information and engage parents and carers exceptionally well in the life of the school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Typical comments are, 'I wish my child could stay forever,' and, 'She would go at weekends if it were possible.' A small minority feel that they cannot comment about the leadership because their children have just started at the school or because the headteacher is new. Most feel that the staff are very approachable and work well in partnership with them to meet their children's needs. Very few say that the school does not communicate with them well. Inspectors could find no evidence to substantiate this.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northcott 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 inspector received 73 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 115 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	73	78	17	18	3	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	84	90	9	10	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	77	83	14	15	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	66	73	23	26	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	71	79	16	18	2	2	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	67	27	30	3	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	56	64	30	34	2	2	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)	56	64	30	34	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	63	74	19	22	1	1	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	56	68	24	29	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	55	67	25	30	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	61	71	20	23	2	2	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	72	81	16	18	0	0	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.



Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school. We thought you were very well mannered and answered our questions very clearly both in lessons and around school.

Northcott is a good school, with a headteacher and staff who want the very best for you. You make good progress because you enjoy coming to school and being involved in lessons and activities. You are proud of the school and you like the new facilities and the new way of doing work, such as playing games after breakfast club. We thought that your behaviour was excellent around school and in lessons and that this helped you to learn well. You talked about keeping healthy and safe confidently and discussed ways in which you could make sure this happens.

We have asked your headteacher, the staff and governors to do two things to make the school even better for you. These are to:

- help you to learn more quickly in English and to make sure that girls and those of you with complex needs learn as quickly as everybody else
 - make sure that governors keep a close check on the progress the school is making.
- You can help by continuing to do your best in every way.

I wish you good fortune for the future.

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