

Northhill CofE VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109621
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337336
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

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

Type of school	Lower
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend Frank Coleman
Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Simpson
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2006
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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

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of time observing learning, visiting 11 lessons and viewing five teachers and practitioners. The inspectors held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, which included the school's analysis of pupils' progress, the school's improvement plan and also pupils' work. In addition, the responses of 37 parents' and carers' questionnaires were analysed and their comments taken into account.

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

- The effectiveness of the school's processes to promote good attendance
- how well the curriculum has been developed in order to meet the needs of pupils
- the extent of the staff's contribution to the monitoring and evaluation processes.

Information about the school

Northill is much smaller than most lower schools and is over-subscribed. It serves the local village though almost half of the pupils travel from nearby villages and towns to the school. Most of the pupils are of White British heritage and there are a few from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is about half the national average. Most of these pupils find learning hard. There has been a significant turnover of staff since the previous inspection.

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Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

Northill provides a good education for its pupils which fully reflects its Christian ethos and enables them to achieve exceptionally well. There is a very strong atmosphere of care and support with all the adults ensuring that the pupils feel extremely safe and the needs of each individual pupil are met. Parents are delighted to have chosen the school and almost all are supportive of the school. Their views are encapsulated by the parent who wrote, 'I could not ask for a better school for my children. They love school and I am proud to say that my child attends Northill.' Clear sighted and determined leadership by the headteacher, with strong support from staff and governors, has ensured that the school has maintained and built on its strengths found in the last inspection. The school provides a very cohesive community with positive and strong relationships throughout. Links with the village are satisfactory, but the school has yet to ensure that it promotes community cohesion effectively beyond the village. The school recognises that wider links, across the United Kingdom and globally, are currently under-developed as a result of senior staff identifying that there is a need to enhance pupils' understanding of cultural diversity. Rigorous checks on pupils' progress and comprehensive systems for monitoring strengths and weaknesses in teaching ensure that the school is successful in identifying accurately the key priorities for improvement. Capacity for sustained improvement is good.

Pupils make good progress because they receive consistently good teaching. The school's decision to teach pupils in separate year groups within the two classes is paying dividends because the quality of support from teaching assistants is excellent. More able pupils benefit from challenging tasks in class while those who find learning hard receive excellent support. The careful matching of task to individual need ensures that all pupils achieve exceptionally well. Pupils have a great love of school and learning. They tackle tasks enthusiastically and take a pride in their work. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what a healthy lifestyle entails. They respond enthusiastically to the many and varied opportunities the curriculum provides for sport and exercise, including those that are offered as after school activities. Attendance has been low in the past due to the persistent absence of a few pupils. However, the number of persistent absentees has been reduced. As a result of the school's good efforts, attendance has been lifted to broadly average levels. However, even better attendance is hampered by some pupils having occasional day absences.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- By September 2011 to lift levels of attendance to meet the local authority’s target set for the school by:
 - reviewing the school’s policy for attendance;
 - establishing systems that reward pupils’ good attendance
- implement plans to raise pupils’ appreciation of community cohesion beyond the immediate community.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Progress is good in both classes with pupils showing good application to learning and they are keen to succeed. For example when Year 1 pupils were investigating different seeds they worked outstandingly well when looking for differences between the seeds using magnifiers. All pupils were able to spot differences and the most able could hypothesise about why the bean seeds were different from flower seeds. Tasks are invariably carefully matched to pupils’ age and ability and this enables all groups of pupils to succeed and achieve exceptionally well. Children enter Year 1 with skills and abilities that are above expected levels and they make good progress in each year group. Attainment is above average by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, and by the time that they reach Year 4, attainment is high with the most able Year 4 pupils already reaching standards expected at the end of Year 6 particularly in reading and mathematics.

Pupils respond well to responsibility and they enjoy taking on jobs whether as monitors, school councillors or buddies for younger children. School councillors proudly explain how they make a good contribution to the organising of fund-raising events and choosing charities to support. By the time that they leave the school, the pupils are developing into mature and responsible young people who have high levels of confidence and self esteem. Behaviour is excellent throughout the school and older pupils show a strong sense of responsibility and awareness of the need to set an example for the younger ones.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	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	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1

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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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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Lessons are characterised by a positive climate for learning, excellent relationships and a strong sense of purpose. Planning is usually based on detailed assessment of pupils' achievement and adapted to take account of their prior learning. Although teachers invariably outline lesson objectives, they do not always make clear what pupils have to do in order to be successful in completing a task.

There have been positive developments in the curriculum since the previous inspection. Adaptations ensure that it is closely geared to pupils' needs and interests. A good range of themes are studied and because these frequently focus on the immediate environment or are connected to aspects of the village, they capture and engage the pupils' interests. A good range of support programmes ensure that pupils who find learning difficult have any gaps in their understanding closed. There is a strong and appropriate emphasis on teaching core skills while pupils' horizons are successfully extended through a wide variety of enrichment activities and visits out of the school.

All the adults care for pupils exceptionally well and levels of support are outstanding. However, more could be done to encourage pupils to raise levels of attendance. There are close links with the local authority to support any pupils that are persistently absent but everyday procedures are not as comprehensive as they might be.

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?

All the staff share high aspirations for the pupils' personal and academic development. Even though there have been changes in teaching personnel since the previous inspection excellent leadership from the headteacher has ensured that

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provision and standards have been maintained. The staff work closely together as a team and morale is high. Staff take joint responsibility for contributing to the good monitoring and evaluation processes and although both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 class teachers are new to the school, they have already developed a good understanding of what the school needs to do to further strengthen provision. Every effort is made to ensure that pupils have an opportunity to succeed whatever their circumstances or background. This commitment to equality of opportunity means that any potential discrimination is tackled well.

Governors support the school well and are committed to its further improvement. Statutory requirements are met and there are good and robust arrangements to ensure that pupils are protected and their safety and welfare assured. However, at present, the governors are over-reliant on the headteacher for information. Current plans to extend visits to the school are well founded. There are close and positive links with parents who benefit from staff who are responsive and receptive to any suggestions for improvement that they may have.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children have skills that are above those typically found when they start school. An exciting learning environment offers a good range of stimulating experiences appropriate to the children’s varying levels of understanding. As a result, children make good progress in all areas of learning to reach standards that are above expected levels at the end of the Reception Year. Children make particularly good progress in their personal and social development. This is because the staff create a positive and warm ethos which encourages the children to feel safe and secure. Children respond positively to the opportunities for them to take responsibility and

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this too helps to accelerate their personal development.

Staff place a suitably strong emphasis on developing the children’s language skills. A good balance between adult led and child initiated activities enables children to develop a positive interest in learning. Many work at independent activities for a sustained period, showing good concentration and a willingness to learn. The outdoor area is used well to promote skills particularly in their physical and creative development. In addition, the children enjoy growing plants and vegetables. The staff’s good understanding of how young children learn linked with their methodical and well-conceived planning ensures that all the necessary areas are covered. Good leadership has ensured that all requirements to promote the children’s welfare and learning are met. There is a strong emphasis on checking children’s progress by making good and sustained observations. This information is used well to inform future planning of activities. Staff are aware that the development of individual learning diaries would enable them to gain a broader picture of each individual’s child’s progress.

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 and carers are positive about all aspects of the school’s work. The overwhelming majority are happy with the quality of their children’s experiences. All feel that teaching is good, that the school helps their children to have a healthy lifestyle and they are prepared well for the move to middle school. In addition, all parents said that their children enjoy school. Inspection findings confirm these views. Most of the written comments on the questionnaires were positive and there were no issues that needed to be explored during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northill CoE VA Lower 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 37 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 67 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	62	14	38	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	81	6	16	1	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	57	11	30	4	11	1	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	68	7	19	4	11	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	25	68	10	27	2	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	68	8	22	3	8	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	59	15	41	0	0	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)	19	51	18	49	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	57	13	35	3	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	59	13	35	2	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	54	12	32	4	11	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	27	73	9	24	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	49	26	49	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 all 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 pupils' 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.

Monday 1 March 2010

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Northill CofE VA Lower School, Biggleswade, SG18 9AH

I really enjoyed meeting you and listening to what you had to say about your school. I enjoyed listening to all your positive comments about your school. I was particularly impressed to hear Leopard class rehearse 'Super Trooper' for your concert last Saturday. I hope that it went as well as the rehearsals did! Yours is a good school and this letter is to tell you what we found when we visited.

- I can understand why both you and your parents and carers told me that you enjoy school and learning, because all the adults look after you well and make sure that you are happy and safe and enjoy your time at school.
- Your headteacher is doing an excellent job and, together with the staff, she makes sure that your school runs smoothly and well.
- You work hard, behave outstandingly well, and your teachers make sure that you make good progress by making lessons interesting. Teachers also give you a good range of things to learn and do.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and what you need to do to be healthy.

Even in a good school like yours, there are things which could be improved. I have asked your governors and headteacher to do two things. First, that those of you who do not attend well enough should do so to make sure you benefit from the good education your school gives you. Attendance has been lower than in most schools though it has got better and is now broadly average. I have also recommended that your headteacher and governors make much stronger links with some other schools that are different to yours perhaps in a nearby town, and also you develop links with some schools overseas.

You can really help towards the first item by making sure that you attend school regularly. I hope that you will all keep on working hard and continue to enjoy your time at school.

Yours sincerely

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector

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