

Northway School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101395
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	301991
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Kay Charlton

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Stevens
Headteacher	Mrs Lesley Burgess
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	The Fairway Mill Hill London NW7 3HS
Telephone number	020 8959 4232
Fax number	020 8959 6436

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Northway is a special school which caters for pupils from a wide range of backgrounds. All have statements usually listing both intellectual and social needs, and over half of the pupils are on the autistic spectrum. On entry, an increasing number have a greater complexity of learning difficulties than in the past. Thirteen are at the early stages of learning English with the two most common home languages being Somali and Portuguese. Attainment on entry is well below that expected for pupils of this age. There are three children in the Foundation Stage. The school offers extended provision which includes a breakfast club. It provides family support services and community outreach support. The school is due to have a new building in the near future.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Northway is an outstanding school. Excellent links are established with parents who overwhelmingly speak about the provision in glowing terms. One said, 'My daughter's so happy at school and she has made tremendous progress', and another said, 'My son has had a fantastic year'. The school also has very strong links with nearby schools, health professionals and other external agencies which give high levels of support to pupils' development.

Overall, teaching and learning are outstanding and, as a result, pupils of different backgrounds and abilities achieve exceptionally well. Throughout the school, staff are highly enthusiastic; they plan and assess carefully, and make exceptionally good use of a wide range of aids to ensure that pupils are able to communicate their thoughts and feelings. A key feature of the success of pupils' learning is the way in which staff involve them in reflecting if they have met their targets and then inspiring them to want to improve in the future. Support staff are of a high quality and everyone works very well as a team. In the Foundation Stage, teaching and learning are good. These children have very complex learning needs and occasionally staff miss opportunities to fully challenge the learning of each individual. Addressing the needs of the changing nature of school's intake so that every child achieves as well as they possibly can forms a key priority within its improvement plan. The curriculum is vibrant and constantly developing. A very wide range of extra support, including therapies and counselling, is tailored carefully to each pupil's needs.

Pupils' personal and social development is outstanding and a major strength of the school. They make significant gains in developing their confidence, independence and self-esteem. All treat each other, their teachers and the environment with care and respect. They show high levels of maturity, and their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. Pupils readily turn to staff if they need support and clearly appreciate the excellent relationships that are established. The way staff care for pupils is second to none, showing total commitment to their belief that 'we are here for the children'.

Leaders at all levels, including the governing body, are committed to the inclusion of all pupils, whatever their needs, and are continually looking for ways to improve the school even further. The headteacher provides a clear vision of excellence that underpins the school's work and, with the senior team, is proactive in developing the skills of all staff. The role of subject coordinators has developed very well in recent years and they play an important role in monitoring the overall effectiveness of the provision. Governors visit on a regular basis and observe practice. They are very clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They work extremely well in partnership with the school to help drive forward improvement. Along with other leaders, they analyse data about the progress pupils make to support their decision making. They challenge the school to ensure that agreed targets are met and to be certain that resources are used wisely. The school has continued to improve since the time of the last inspection and staff are very motivated to develop their practice. The school is extremely well placed to move forward in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that, at all times, teaching in the Foundation Stage fully challenges children's learning so that every individual achieves as well as they possibly can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Overall, pupils' achievements are outstanding. The school has met or exceeded the challenging targets agreed with the Local Authority (LA) for the past five years. Although standards are well below those in mainstream schools, by the time the pupils leave all make excellent progress in relation to their low starting points when they first joined Northway. The school stresses the importance of pupils taking responsibility and thinking for themselves and, from first starting in the Foundation Stage, this has a very positive impact on their achievements. Throughout the school, pupils try hard and reach the challenging 'small step' targets that staff set for them. The strong focus the school places on communication ensures that all pupils achieve exceptionally well in this area and this especially benefits those pupils who speak English as an additional language. In literacy and numeracy, pupils make excellent progress in developing the skills they will need in later life. The school is actively working to ensure that they meet the more complex learning needs of the children in the Foundation Stage to accelerate their progress further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is a major strength and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They make impressive gains in developing their confidence, independence and social skills and this is very evident even by the end of their time in the Foundation Stage. They learn to understand their rights and responsibilities and this is exemplified well when they check if they have met the school's 'golden rules' and whether they deserve a leaf on the 'tree of success'. Pupils gain insight into their own feelings and how these affect others and make good friends. They thoroughly enjoy school and attendance rates are excellent. For many there is significant improvement in behaviour from when they joined the school. Pupils care for each other very well indeed and the school council plays an active role in making decisions that affect everyone. For example, it is currently deciding which activities will be included in sports day. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of healthy eating and say how much they like the healthy school meals. They appreciate the importance of being safety conscious and become very mature, making a particularly strong contribution to both the school and wider community; for example, when taking presents to people in hospital at Christmas time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Overall, teaching and learning are outstanding. Throughout the school, staff are enthusiastic; they make learning fun and never miss an opportunity to encourage the pupils to give of their best. They manage pupils' behaviour extremely well and a calm and purposeful atmosphere pervades the school. All make outstanding use of a very wide range of strategies to support pupils in gaining the confidence to communicate. It is second nature for them to use pictures, symbols, signs and resources, such as puppets, to ensure pupils are fully engaged and want to express their ideas. Staff make sure pupils have time to think and they listen carefully to their contributions. An important feature of the success of pupils' learning is their very active

involvement in reviewing whether they and their classmates have met their targets. The reflective and sensitive way in which they do this and recognise each others' achievements is a joy to behold. Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage are good and, as a result, children make good progress during this year. Staff provide a safe, secure and caring environment and the children's personal development is excellent. In the main, they ensure that children are challenged in other areas of learning as well but this is not consistent at all times.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is excellent. All aspects of the Foundation Stage and National Curriculum are in place as appropriate and they are tailored well to pupils' needs. Action research projects, such as the one about 'Commotion in the Ocean', inform decisions about the ways in which the curriculum might be modified, for example by placing a key focus on visual learning. Every opportunity is used to support pupils' personal development and very careful attention is given to the development of their skills in communication, literacy, numeracy and in information and communication technology. There is an impressive programme of enrichment which includes a very wide range of therapies, counselling sessions, weekly planned visits out of school, rich and varied arts and sports activities as well as extra-curricular activities such as the choir. The school's excellent links with others play an important part in ensuring that the curriculum is vibrant and constantly developing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Exemplary care, guidance and support are provided, based on the excellent relationships between pupils and staff. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and reviewed on a regular basis and staff show commitment to ensuring very high levels of care at all times. At breaks and during out-of-school activities, they are vigilant and conscientiously implement the school's procedures. They give generously of their time and take note of what the pupils have to say and help them to appreciate the need to think through situations for themselves. Support for pupils' academic progress is excellent and is based on a secure understanding of the needs of each pupil. Clear individual targets are set and the ways in which these are used plays a crucial part in helping pupils to know what they need to do to improve. The school involves parents very effectively in its review procedures and in helping them to support their child's learning at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides a very strong lead and a clear vision that drives school improvement. Her detailed understanding about what constitutes high quality teaching and learning is a noticeable strength that underpins the work of the school. The senior team provide models of excellent practice in class, and other staff appreciate their 'hands on' approach in key developments. Leaders at all levels are proactive in their roles and, as a result, all of the issues raised at the last inspection have been addressed with significant improvements having taken place. The school has very thorough and robust systems to inform its own self-evaluation which have ensured that its targets have been met. The programme of monitoring and evaluation is extensive and not only includes staff at all levels and governors,

but takes account of the views of parents and pupils so that there is real clarity about where improvement is most needed. The governing body is discerning and holds the school to account and, as a result, it acts as an important catalyst for school improvement. It is open to ideas and provides very good opportunities for parents to express their views. It has been very effective in ensuring that the school is part of a programme to provide a much needed new building.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northway School, London, NW7 3HS

Thank you for your help when I came to inspect your school on 14 and 15 June 2007. You told me that you enjoy school very much. You think that everyone is very friendly and that the staff help you to learn a lot so that you make excellent progress. I agree with your view that it is an outstanding school.

I could see that you try hard and reach your targets both to do with work and behaviour. You all think very carefully whether you have done your best and I could see that you are very keen to improve further. I was glad to see so many people get leaves and apples to stick on the 'tree of success' showing how well you are all doing. You care for each other very well indeed and your behaviour is excellent. The school council does a good job, for example when deciding which activities should be included in this year's sports day. Teaching is outstanding. Staff make learning fun and they use pictures, signs and symbols very well indeed to help you understand things. They organise a wide range of extras, like the visit to Paradise Park, which I know you enjoy. All of the staff care for you and you know you can go to any adult if you need help.

In order for the school to improve even further it is important for the staff to be sure that, at all times, the very youngest children in school do as well as they possibly can.

Yours sincerely

Kay Charlton (Lead Inspector)