

Mount Pleasant Lane Junior Mixed and Infant School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117347
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379400
Inspection dates	23–24 February 2012
Lead inspector	Andrew Saunders

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	352
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Crocker
Headteacher	John Dibdin
Date of previous school inspection	10 September 2008
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Age group	3-11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Andrew Saunders

Additional inspector

Gillian Scobie

Additional inspector

Nicholas Rudman

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 23 lessons or parts of lessons taught by 13 teachers, including sessions to support pupils' physical disabilities and those with special educational needs. Observations totalled 10 hours. Members of the inspection team met with groups of pupils, teachers and members of the governing body, and spoke to parents and carers informally. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's documents for self-evaluation, systems to track the progress of pupils, records of monitoring of the quality of teaching, minutes from meetings and the 200 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

Information about the school

Located in an urban area, this school is larger than the average-sized primary school. The headteacher was appointed in January 2011. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. There are fewer pupils than is usual nationally who speak English as an additional language. The very large majority of pupils are from White British heritage; a broad range of other heritages are represented. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below average. These pupils include those with a range of physical disabilities, speech and language difficulties, moderate and complex learning needs and autistic spectrum disorder. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery class and two Reception classes. The school meets the current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school has been awarded the Healthy School award and the Activemark.

There is a Children's Centre on the school site, and a private company runs a club before and after school; these were not inspected as part of this inspection.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. The headteacher has quickly gained an accurate view of the work of the school and worked with senior leaders to continue to lead improvements to teaching so that the good progress of each pupil is promoted further. The school is not outstanding because progress in writing is not yet consistent across Key Stage 2.
- Achievement is good because pupils' work is accurately evaluated and closely monitored so that support is provided quickly where progress slows. As a result, progress in reading and mathematics is particularly strong. Progress in writing, while good by the end of Year 6, varies across Key Stage 2.
- Good teaching is typified by lessons which are delivered by confident, knowledgeable teachers, who ensure that tasks provided accurately match the learning needs of the pupils. Occasionally, the teaching of writing is less effective during Key Stage 2, when teachers focus on the tasks pupils do rather than what it is they should be learning during each lesson. At times, pupils rely too much on adults to keep a check on their progress and make sure they have identified the next steps in their learning.
- Behaviour is good because pupils are keen to learn and help each other to do their best. They like working in teams and are enthusiastic about the topics they study, because of the way the curriculum has been sensitively developed. They also like the opportunities they have to reflect on their learning, and on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their development, which is well provided for.
- Leaders across the school have a clear vision of how to bring about further improvements in the school's performance in order to improve outcomes for pupils, and are demonstrating well their ability to share and implement this.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of progress in writing across Key Stage 2, within a year, by:
 - ensuring pupils know precisely what skills or knowledge they should develop during each lesson

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- developing the independence and persistence of pupils in tackling their own next steps of learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

During most of the lessons observed, pupils made good progress because teachers know what pupils can already do and provide them with tasks that take them on to the next steps in their learning.

When children join the school in the Nursery, they typically have skills and knowledge which are appropriate for their age. The excellent resources and skilled support of the adults mean that children quickly establish good skills as learners and make good progress, which continues through the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. While progress remains good across Key Stage 2, it is not always as consistent in writing, although this improves as pupils move through the school. Some pupils rely too much on the teachers to indicate what they need to do next and do not always put these things into action in later work.

The teaching of reading is given a high priority and good partnerships with volunteers, parents and carers mean that pupils have developed good skills by the end of Key Stage 1, and are confident readers. As they continue through the school the emphasis on reading for enjoyment is evident and they have a wide experience of different authors and genres. By the end of Year 6, pupils typically reach levels of attainment which are above average, particularly in reading and mathematics. They are typically two terms ahead of national figures in mathematics and reading, and a term ahead in writing. Attainment in writing is improving because of the school's strategies to tackle this. For example, teachers encourage pupils where they have been 'chameleons' by being willing to change their work for the better, and pupils have good opportunities to write extended pieces of work. Almost all parents and carers think that their children are making good progress, particularly in their communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills, and inspectors largely endorse this view.

Pupils with physical disabilities are well supported by well-trained adults to ensure they participate fully in each lesson and make the progress they should. Similarly, where pupils have wide-ranging learning and behavioural special educational needs, these are identified accurately and good provision means these pupils make similar, good progress to their peers. The school closely analyses the progress of all groups of pupils and, where they identify differences, these are picked up quickly and strategies implemented to bring about improvements. For example, the school found that some girls were not performing as well as boys in mathematics, and quickly set up a scheme for older, more confident girls to support those who were younger and less confident with the subject. As a result, progress has improved and is now as good as that of the boys. There are no significant differences related to pupils' ethnic heritage.

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Quality of teaching

The teachers have developed an exciting curriculum which engages the pupils in interesting learning. For example, pupils in Year 4 particularly enjoyed learning about time because they were developing a schedule for a visit to a theme park. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge and enthusiasm to bring the lessons alive. As a parent said, 'I used to have to ask what they were doing at school but now it comes tumbling out because of the creative curriculum.' Lessons are well planned because teachers make good use of the information they have about how well children are achieving.

In the best lessons, exciting content is matched by challenging tasks and good opportunities for pupils to help each other to make progress and develop their skills. Year 6 pupils enjoyed using a 'freeze frame' to develop ambitious vocabulary around the emotions of a character in a story. Teachers make good use of a wide range of strategies to involve all pupils in thinking about their learning. For example, pupils in Year 3 enjoyed presenting an assembly they had developed themselves, summarising the learning they had done in their topic about Roald Dahl, one of their favourite authors. These opportunities to reflect on their learning, alongside thought-provoking topics chosen, mean that teachers promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils well. A recent focus for the school has been to improve the effectiveness of marking in books through providing opportunities for pupils to make changes to their work. Where this is used well it is helping pupils consolidate their good progress, but it is not always implemented consistently. Occasionally, the statements used to focus the start of the lesson are not clear enough and some pupils are unsure what new skills or knowledge they should have developed in their writing during these lessons.

The use of teaching assistants is good and they are an effective part of the teaching team, helping to establish good relationships between adults and pupils. Effective deployment of staff is particularly evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where all the adults use good questioning to help children extend their thinking. Teachers provide extensive opportunities for children to develop their skills and knowledge within realistic contexts, and make the most of the ideas and interests of the children to extend their learning. The school has established a systematic approach to teaching the linking of letters and sounds (phonics) which is delivered consistently across the school, supporting the development of confident readers. Almost all parents and carers said that there was good teaching at the school and that they could readily approach staff with any concerns. Inspection findings endorse these views.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is good and, because it is consistently rewarded, pupils understand the systems to help them remember the high expectations of the school. Consequently, the values and ethos of the school are promoted well, pupils are keen to make a positive contribution and behaviour in lessons supports good learning. Discussions with pupils and school records show that this is typical of behaviour over time.

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Inspection findings were in line with the views of almost all parents and carers who considered that behaviour was good, although a few said that some lessons were disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils themselves do not think that lessons are disrupted, other than very occasionally, and are understanding of those who find it more difficult to keep within the expectations of the school. Pupils actively support each other in remembering what they should be doing and particularly enjoy opportunities to work as a team. They appreciate the clubs and activities available, as well as the trips and visitors, which help to bring the curriculum alive. For example the 'Mad Science' is popular, as is the eco-club. The residential trip for Year 6 pupils is a highlight they look forward to. Their positive attitudes towards school and their determination to achieve well are demonstrated in their above-average attendance. Pupils are aware of different forms that bullying might take, such as cyber-bullying, but are confident that if it ever happened, it would be sorted out quickly. They said they felt confident they could speak to an adult if they were worried and that they would be listened to sensitively. They are well trained in helping to keep themselves safe. Pupils with physical disabilities and those with complex special educational needs are helped to participate fully in all aspects of school life because of the emphasis on equality. Pupils are proud of the achievements of all members of the community.

Leadership and management

Together with other senior leaders, the headteacher ensures that there are reliable systems to collect and analyse data about how well pupils are achieving. Key areas for improvement have been accurately identified and strategies put in place to address these. For example, effective professional development for teachers means that specific approaches are used consistently so that opportunities for writing have improved, and girls' confidence in their ability in mathematics has increased.

Leaders and managers at all levels take seriously their responsibility to promote equality and tackle discrimination, so that all pupils, whatever their needs, have the best possible opportunities to succeed. Consequently, pupils' attitudes towards those with physical disabilities and complex special educational needs are highly inclusive. The development of a creative approach to providing a broad and balanced curriculum has proved particularly successful and recognised by pupils and parents and carers alike. As a result, communication, reading and mathematics skills are well developed across the curriculum and pupils' different learning needs are met; wider opportunities for writing are the focus of recent improvements. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported. The Early Years Foundation Stage is particularly effective because it is well led; consequently, children develop the early skills and attitudes they need to thrive as learners.

Members of the governing body know the school well because they go to great lengths to find out about what is happening there and establish the views of pupils, parents and carers and the staff. They have a good grasp of the progress data and provide appropriate challenge alongside their staunch support for the school. Along with leaders at all levels, members of the governing body ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are robust and meet statutory requirements. The accurate self-

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evaluation of the school, coupled with the improvements since the last inspection in teaching and achievement, demonstrate that the school has good capacity to sustain its positive performance and bring about further improvements.

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



27 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mount Pleasant Lane Junior Mixed and Infant School and Nursery, St Albans, AL2 3XA

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We were impressed with the way you enjoy your learning and you told us the teachers make sure that lessons are fun. Many of you told us how much you enjoy coming to school; as a result your attendance is impressive.

We have judged that your school is a good school. There are many things that are done well. The headteacher has quickly found out what is going well and what needs to be improved. Together with the other teachers he makes sure that your school has good systems to find out how well you are learning. Teachers use this information to make sure that they give you work that is just hard enough, and that you get extra help if you need it. The teachers know a lot about the subjects they teach and work well together with other adults to check you are making good progress.

Even though it is a good school, the headteacher and other leaders want to improve it further. We have asked them to help you achieve as well in writing as you do in your other work by doing the following.

- Make sure teachers start all lessons with a clear sentence about what you need to learn. You can help by checking whether you have done this, at the end of the lesson.
- Help you to work by yourself more, especially working out what you need to do to reach the next steps in your learning. You can do this by trying not to rely on the teachers too much to tell you what you need to do next.

Above all – continue to enjoy your learning and playing a positive part in making your school such a wonderful place to be part of.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Saunders
Lead inspector

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