

Little Paxton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110733
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	378155
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2012
Lead inspector	Joseph Peacock

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Penny Conway
Headteacher	Diane Hawkes
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Joseph Peacock

Additional inspector

Gillian Bosschaert

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspection team spent six and a half hours visiting 13 lessons and observing eight teachers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They held meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body and staff, and talked to pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school planning, assessment data and pupils' completed work. They assessed the quality of the school's documentation, including minutes of meetings of the governing body, improvement planning and policies relating to safeguarding and children's welfare. The inspectors scrutinised 91 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and those returned by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. A new headteacher started in September 2011, along with two acting deputy headteachers, who share the role for half of the week each. The school meets the current floor standards, through which the government sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The school has Healthy Schools status. The administrative base for St Neots Rural Children's Centre is located at the school and Little Paxton Pre-school sessions are held there every morning and afternoons from Monday to Thursday. Both of these settings are inspected separately.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. It has improved significantly from its previous inspection, largely as a result of highly effective leadership, management and governance.
- Pupils' good and often excellent progress is being maintained in each key stage and the cumulative effect is outstanding achievement for most pupils from their starting points. Pupils have a particularly good start in Reception because of the well-managed provision and good teaching. By the end of Year 6, attainment is consistently high in reading and mathematics. In 2011, however, no boy attained the higher level for his age in writing and so overall attainment in English was held at above average. Pupils' skills when using computers are exceptionally high.
- Outstanding teaching over time results in exceptional progress and high standards. However, during the inspection, some teaching did not challenge sufficiently the older and more able pupils who then made less progress than they could. Able boys, for example, were not 'pushed' to attain the highest possible standards in writing. The teaching for the few disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is excellent and results in these pupils making outstanding progress.
- High levels of attendance for the past three years show how much pupils enjoy coming to school. Their highly positive attitudes and excellent work-related behaviour add significantly to their progress and achievement. Pupils are adamant that they feel safe, cared for and valued.
- The headteacher provides inspirational and visionary leadership. Staff and governors work as a cohesive team to identify any weaknesses and bring about improvement. Management systems to evaluate teaching and learning are well-embedded and highly effective. The excellent management of performance is ensuring that pupils' high overall attainment is being sustained and that the school has a strong capacity to go on improving.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain and extend pupils' outstanding achievements by;
 - ensuring that there is always sufficient challenge for older pupils in the mixed-age classes

- improving opportunities for boys to attain higher skills in writing.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the Reception class with knowledge and skills that are generally below those expected for their age. Boys tend to be behind girls in early writing skills. There is a strong emphasis in all activities indoors and in the small but well-organised outdoor area on developing writing, with children encouraged to finger trace large letters and make lists using clipboards. Daily sessions to learn letters and their sounds (phonics) are effective in ensuring most children make rapid progress and are able to spell out and write simple words accurately and independently by the time they transfer to Year 1. The effective leadership and management of this key stage ensure that most children make progress that is at least good, and for some outstanding. Attainment is just above the level expected in all six areas of learning at the end of the Reception year. The gap between boys and girls in writing is not as marked, with many boys having made excellent progress to catch up.

Pupils maintain their strong progress through Key Stages 1 and 2. By the end of Year 2, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is well above average and has been successfully maintained at this level for the past four years. Pupils build well on the firm foundations laid in Reception. Most are secure in the links between sounds and letters or groups of letters due to the effective teaching of phonics. High attainment has also become the norm in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 6. While remaining firmly above average, overall standards in English are not quite so high. Improving skills for boys to enable more to achieve above average standards in writing is currently a priority. A scrutiny of pupils' work shows that writing has a high profile. Boys produced balanced arguments about graffiti following discussions and role play scenarios, for example. There is a good volume of work showing that boys experience many different genres of writing, from check lists to writing instructions. It is, however, still too soon for this early success to feed through to overall standards in English.

The achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is outstanding. Staff analyse these pupils' progress in depth and accurately identify their individual learning needs each half term. Another key factor is the highly effective way the provision is led and managed by the special educational needs coordinator, ably supported by the inclusion worker. Teachers and teaching assistants use assessment information effectively to ensure all pupils have appropriate support and challenge. The very few with English as an additional language are well supported and make better progress than similar pupils nationally.

In their questionnaires, parents and carers were very positive about the progress their children make. The vast majority of pupils agree that they learn a lot in lessons and school helps them to do as well as they can. Inspection evidence fully supports the high levels of approval and confidence expressed by parents, carers and pupils

alike.

Quality of teaching

Parents, carers and pupils agree that teaching is a strength, sustaining high standards. A typical comment from pupils was, 'Teachers support you and don't give up on you'. Inspection evidence supports these highly positive views. In examples of outstanding teaching seen during the inspection, the pace, challenge and rapport between pupils and staff enabled many pupils to make significant gains. Interesting, exciting tasks, such as a science experiment on shadows, with torches shining through different materials, or a writing task with a pirate theme performed outdoors near the model pirate boat, encouraged pupils to work hard, succeed and make valuable gains. However, in a small minority of lessons, teachers did not plan sufficiently challenging work for more able or older pupils in the mixed-age classes. As a result, the progress of these pupils in lessons seen during the inspection was not always as good as it should have been. Teachers have excellent strategies for managing pupils' behaviour and class charters outlining high expectations of conduct have a significant effect on pupils' moral and social development.

The good quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that most children make good progress. Children thoroughly enjoy using apparatus in the hall to walk the plank like pirates or create waves with a blue cloth. Their pirate ship created from a large cardboard box was a source of pride in the classroom. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make outstanding progress because their progress is frequently assessed and relevant, and additional support is provided when necessary. For example, pupils absolutely love the Sensory Circuit sessions every morning led expertly by specially trained teaching assistants. The calming effect at the end of each session removes tensions and helps prepare pupils for learning in lessons.

Staff make good use of class computers to promote reading, writing and research skills. This is a strength of current curriculum arrangements that has a positive impact on the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

'From the caretaker to the headmistress, everyone has a smile' was a typical comment from parents. It helps explain why pupils enjoy school so much and have few concerns about behaviour in lessons, which is exemplary. Pupils work exceptionally well in groups or with their partners and clearly respect one another's views and opinions. Teachers have very few problems with discipline as pupils listen attentively and are quick to respond to class instructions. Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and their willingness to work hard to complete tasks are key factors in sustaining high attainment. A small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about disruption to learning by some pupils. Inspectors found that the atmosphere for learning in lessons was almost universally excellent because adults successfully encouraged and motivated all pupils to do their best.

Excellent relationships between adults and pupils are evident in lessons and around the school. All pupils say that they feel safe and every parent or carer who

responded agrees that the school keeps their children safe. Some pupils expressed concerns about other pupils' behaviour during breaktimes but all are happy about how quickly any form of bullying or intimidating behaviour is dealt with by staff. Most incidents are very minor and do not detract from pupils' immense enjoyment of school, which is evident from their consistently high rates of attendance.

Leadership and management

There has been no decline in standards since the arrival of the new senior leadership team and there is evidence that the pace of school improvement has accelerated. Staff work effectively as a team, inspired by the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the headteacher and two acting deputy headteachers. Their strategy of 'Joined-up thinking' ensures areas to improve are identified and precise plans put in place to bring about improvement. This is followed by rigorous assessment of the progress being made on these issues, with a thorough review of the termly operational plan. Levels of accountability are high because this review involves all staff and governors. This shared responsibility and strong links between each step in the process ensure that virtually all action to bring about improvement results in success. For example, a current school priority is to further increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching. Effective performance management has already resulted in a higher proportion.

Staff are supported and challenged effectively by a governing body, which has a wide range of professional expertise. Its members regularly check all aspects of the school's work and their monitoring reports clearly areas for improvement. This challenging approach is consolidating the school's good capacity for sustained improvement in the future.

The curriculum is highly effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. This is reflected in their extremely positive attitudes, strong relationships and generally excellent behaviour. Most have a good understanding of cultures other than their own through topic work and visitors such as a steel band from Tobago. Pupils are knowledgeable about and respectful of celebrations in other religions throughout the world. Links are being developed with a school in Sierra Leone to further enhance pupils' cultural development.

The curriculum is constantly evolving. Staff modify the curriculum to ensure it remains exciting, interesting and relevant to pupils. Their success is reflected in the sustained high attainment in reading and numeracy skills and pupils' enjoyment of school. Music and using computers have a high profile and are integrated effectively into each topic. Pupils have the opportunity to learn to speak French, Spanish and Portuguese, and many attend the good range of after-school clubs.

Effective arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect the high level of care by staff. The inclusion worker does sterling work helping to promote the excellent partnership the school has with parents and carers. Those who responded to the questionnaire were almost unanimous about recommending the school to other parents.

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.



29 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Little Paxton Primary School, St Neots, PE19 6NG

Thank you for your welcome when we inspected your school. We enjoyed our time with you very much. A special thank you goes to those of you who shared your views with us. You told us that you feel extremely safe and well cared for and we found evidence to support this view in lessons and around the school.

We judged that your school is outstanding. You clearly enjoy school enormously and behave exceptionally well in lessons. Staff do an excellent job making sure no-one feels upset and everyone can enjoy school. We found that the things you learn about in lessons are very well-planned, challenging and interesting. Many of you told us how much you like your teachers and how they make learning fun. Teaching at your school is outstanding and this makes sure that you all do exceptionally well, achieving high standards by the time you leave in Year 6.

Your headteacher, all the staff and governors work exceptionally well as a team in leading and organising the school. Every member of staff is involved in arrangements to check how well you are doing and to find anything that is not as good as it should be. As a result, you make excellent progress throughout and your achievement is outstanding. In most lessons, you make full use of your excellent reading, mathematics and computer skills. However, not enough boys are achieving above average standards in writing so we are asking your teachers to find ways to put this right and plan better opportunities to promote these skills in lessons. We are also asking your teachers to make sure the tasks that they plan for older pupils are always challenging and lead to all of you making at least good progress in your lessons.

We hope that you will continue to work hard to maintain the high standards that you achieve. Your excellent attendance is a credit to you all. Congratulations on what you have achieved and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Peacock
Lead inspector

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