

Palace Wood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135106
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	360694
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Coussins

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	389
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoffrey Garrett
Headteacher	Denise White
Date of previous school inspection	15 May 2008
School address	Talbot Road Maidstone ME16 0HB
Telephone number	01622 750084
Fax number	01622 753474
Email address	office@palacewood.kent.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 20 lessons and 16 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other staff with leadership responsibilities, pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of school documentation including the school's self-evaluation form, monitoring records, the school's improvement plan, pupils' progress records and safeguarding procedures. Questionnaires from 97 parents and carers were received and analysed.

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

- How well the school has improved the learning environment, and helped pupils' to become responsible and reflective learners and make a contribution to the school community.
- The rate of pupils' progress to determine whether teaching is sufficiently challenging to raise attainment for all pupils.
- The effectiveness of the work of senior leaders and managers in driving improvement and securing consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and progress across the school.
- How well the curriculum meets the needs and interests of all groups.

Information about the school

Palace Wood is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average as is the proportion who are learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Their needs relate mainly to speech, language and communication and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There is a Nursery and breakfast and after-school clubs on the school site. These are managed by a private provider and therefore are not included in this inspection. The school has gained several nationally recognised awards including the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the Healthy School award. Since the amalgamation of Palace Wood Infant and Junior schools in January 2007, there has, and continues to be, significant disruption to the senior leadership team through staff changes and long-term sickness.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Palace Wood pupils are confident, polite and friendly and care for each other in this inclusive, cohesive school community. They enjoy coming to school, which is reflected in their above average attendance, and have positive attitudes to learning. One parent wrote, 'Both my children thoroughly enjoy going to school. The school has a lovely friendly family feel about it and I know the children are looked after well.'

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and not surprisingly, pupils behave well. Good relationships between pupils and adults reflect the good care, guidance and support provided. Pupils feel safe because they know how to take care of themselves and know that any incidences of inconsiderate behaviour will be dealt with effectively. They have a good understanding of the need for regular exercise and a healthy, balanced diet to keep fit and well, as recognised by the Healthy School award. They enjoy the responsibilities they are given and feel their views are valued and that they have a voice in the school.

Children's good start to school in the Early Years Foundation Stage is a strength of the school. They make good progress from starting points that are at the expected level for their age. Progress throughout the rest of the school is satisfactory and by the time pupils leave, attainment is average. In English pupils do best in reading, which has been a focus for the whole school and in the provisional 2010 test results the proportion reaching the higher Level 5 improved considerably from the previous year. Pupils' skills in mental mathematics, which previously held back overall progress in mathematics, have improved as a result of the school's focus on this area. Leaders and managers are aware that given pupils' starting points and the good progress made early on, the rate of progress in all subjects needs to be accelerated to ensure they reach their full potential and raise attainment.

The quality of teaching is typically satisfactory and occasionally is better when teachers have high expectations. Teachers do not always make the most of pupils' good behaviour and attitudes by affording them sufficient opportunities to be active, independent learners. Pupils are sometimes expected to listen to their teachers for too long and lessons lack challenge. As a consequence the pace of progress is too slow in some lessons and learning is not always memorable.

The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further. Self-evaluation procedures are satisfactory and provide a clear picture of where the school is working well and the areas for improvement. Recently introduced meetings between class teachers and senior leaders help all staff to be accountable for and focus on pupils' progress. However, school improvement plans, including subject action plans, are not sharply linked to outcomes for pupils' attainment. Monitoring is effectively focused on improving learning and progress, which was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report, although

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inconsistencies between the systems and processes used by different leaders reduce its potential impact.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to raise attainment in English and mathematics, ensure that teaching enlivens learning and is consistently good or better by:
 - pacing lessons well so that pupils have enough time for independent learning
 - raising expectations and providing appropriate challenge to accelerate pupils' progress.
- Ensure there are consistent systems and processes for monitoring, evaluating and improvement planning across the whole school so that the impact of the work of leaders and managers has a sharper focus on outcomes for pupils' attainment and progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enjoy and take their responsibilities seriously. The school council, the head boy, head girl and their deputies and prefects are proud of their contributions to the school community, for example suggesting a ramp at the entrance to help parents and carers with buggies and the development of playground facilities including a bicycle shed to help promote healthy lifestyles. During the inspection a small group of Year 2 pupils were selected to be 'helping hands'. One said, 'I'm very excited and really proud to be chosen.' In a Year 1 lesson pupils developed good concentration skills through fun activities and circle time which very effectively promoted responsible, reflective learning and opportunities to develop good communication skills. Pupils' good attitudes and behaviour and their ability to work well together make an important contribution to their enjoyment of learning. For example, in Year 6 pupils said they really enjoyed their English work on Macbeth and were particularly engaged when they worked in groups doing role-play activities to help them appreciate the language of Shakespeare. Their active learning resulted in good progress and good-quality writing. Pupils' personal skills and the level of their basic skills prepare them adequately for the next stage of their education.

During the last two years there has been a dip in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels in the national tests at the end of Year 6, particularly in mathematics and writing, because there has been some underachievement where pupils have not made the progress they should. Inspection evidence, however, shows that the school is overturning this underachievement and pupils are making satisfactory progress and achievement. For example, in Year 6, school information on pupils' progress show that over half the pupils have already met or exceeded their end-of-year target for writing. Pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties and those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties make similar progress to their peers because their needs are identified at an early stage and effective support is provided.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum promotes pupils' enjoyment and makes a notable contribution to their good personal skills including their ability to work well together. Teachers plan activities well and often link subjects to make learning relevant and meaningful to pupils. The work the school has done to achieve the Basic Skills Quality Mark ensures that information and communication technology is used effectively to support learning and pupils said that the use of interactive whiteboards helps them understand things more clearly. The curriculum is enriched well to extend pupils' experiences and broaden their interests and it satisfactorily meets their needs in promoting progress in literacy and numeracy. There are examples of good teaching where expectations are high, learning moves on at a good pace and, as a result, pupils make good progress. This is inconsistent across the school, however, and too much teaching fails to inspire pupils and does not enliven learning. There are lessons where pupils have to sit and listen to their teachers for too long. As a consequence there is a lack of challenge and pace and so pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Marking is usually regular and, at its best, gives pupils pointers for how to improve their work and targets to achieve, which is a notable improvement since the last inspection. Pastoral care is a strength in the school. One parent wrote, 'The pastoral care at Palace Wood is second to none.' Effective arrangements at all stages ensure that there is smooth transition for pupils moving through the school and there are good links with secondary schools to support pupils, parents and carers for the move into Year 7. Adults work successfully to include more

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vulnerable pupils so they are able to participate in learning and make satisfactory progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders promote equal opportunities and tackle any discrimination satisfactorily. Pupils' differing needs to enable them to participate in school life are met effectively within the school and through effective partnership with external agencies. Partnerships with local schools and appropriate agencies are well established, enrich the curriculum and contribute satisfactorily to pupils' well-being through well-targeted support.

Despite considerable disruption to the senior leadership team over the past two years that has limited the pace of school improvement, leaders and managers, including the governing body, are ambitious for the school. They are aware that the momentum that has resulted from recent developments needs to be sustained to raise attainment, further accelerate progress and develop a more strategic overview of the key areas of the school's work. The headteacher's drive to successfully improve the learning environment is appreciated by the pupils who said they feel happier and valued to have, for example, new furniture in their classrooms. Systems and processes for monitoring are not consistent across the school and this reduces the impact they have on whole-school development.

Leaders have developed the school as a cohesive community in which pupils show tolerance and respect for others. The school has satisfactory procedures to promote community cohesion with strengths in its work in the local community. There is work to develop the international and national dimensions of community cohesion through celebrating and learning about other cultures and faiths in the curriculum, but the impact of this work is not evaluated. The school successfully engages parents and carers, for example with the development of a parents' room in school for formal and informal meetings and a range of communication channels. One parent commented, 'Any suggestions I've made have been given consideration and taken seriously.' The governing body is clearly committed to and supportive of the school. However, it lacks rigour in more effectively monitoring the impact of all aspects of the school's work especially in relation to community cohesion.

The effectiveness of safeguarding requirements is good. The school has clear well-established policies that are well known by all staff and applied across all aspects of the school's work. Staff appointments and vetting procedures are thorough and recorded carefully. Parents, carers and pupils confirm that the school keeps pupils safe.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children clearly enjoy learning and their achievement is good. They exceed the goals for their learning in all areas by the time they move into Year 1. They do particularly well in writing, calculation skills and physical development. There are good links with parents and carers and with other nurseries including the Nursery on the school site. This means there is a smooth transition into school that helps children to settle happily and quickly get used to routines. One parent wrote, 'The school's involvement pre-school and various welcome events along with the phased timetable, meant my child's transition was completely painless.' There are very positive and trusting relationships with adults and activities are well planned for the range of children's abilities and interests. Teaching is good and support staff make a good contribution to children's learning. Children develop well as active and creative learners and teachers' good questioning skills successfully extend children's thinking and learning. There is a good balance between activities directed by adults and those where children can make their own choices. This helps children develop confidence and independence. They start the day by taking responsibility for hanging up their coats, storing their water bottles in the right coloured crates and enjoy the jobs they do such as taking the register to the office. Behaviour is good. Adults ensure that there is a safe, caring environment and provide activities that help children develop a good awareness of how to stay healthy and safe. They did not need prompting to wash their hands before making healthy pizzas as part of their work on Italy and at lunchtime a group agreed that 'we need to wash our hands to make sure we don't eat germs because they would make us sick'. The outside area is well planned, used well to support learning and contributes significantly to children's good physical development. The team is well led. Assessment of progress is carried out very thoroughly and regularly by all adults and enables them to keep track of where children are and plan the next steps in their learning.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2
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

A small minority of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Of these, almost all agree that their children enjoy coming to school and all feel that the school keeps children safe and encourages them to lead healthy lifestyles. The main concerns from those who responded were related to progress and how effectively the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. The inspectors found that overall progress is satisfactory and improving, although they endorse some parents' views that over the past two years some pupils have not been making the progress of which they are capable. Behaviour is good and the school has effective systems to deal with any inconsiderate behaviour should it arise. The inspectors fully endorse parents' and carers' positive views about the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Palace Wood Primary 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 97 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 389 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	61	37	38	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	66	68	31	32	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	36	37	49	51	8	8	4	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	24	44	45	22	23	7	7
The teaching is good at this school	37	38	41	42	11	11	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	38	48	49	9	9	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	52	54	43	44	1	1	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)	36	37	38	39	7	7	3	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	30	47	48	16	16	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	22	44	45	22	23	6	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	31	43	44	13	13	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	20	21	51	53	17	18	4	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	41	41	42	7	7	3	3

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



5 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Palace Wood Primary School, Maidstone ME16 0HB

On behalf of the inspection team, I am writing to thank you for being so friendly and polite when we visited your school. Your school is satisfactory overall. This means that some things are good and some things need to be better. We agree with you, your parents and carers that Palace Wood is a caring and safe place to be where everyone looks after you well and you look after each other. You told us how much you enjoy coming to school and well done for attending so regularly. We were impressed with your good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Well done for understanding how to stay fit and healthy. The children in the Reception classes get off to a good start to their school life.

We have asked everyone in your school to do the following important things.

- We want all your lessons to be as good as the best ones. To make sure this happens, we have asked the teachers to give you enough time to work independently and to plan work that is just right for each of you.
- We want you to do better in your English and mathematics work by the time you leave school. To do this, you need to work hard and make faster progress in your learning. We think you can do this because many of you are already starting to learn more quickly because teachers are expecting more of you. We want them to carry on with this and for all teachers to expect the very best from you.
- We want all the people who lead and manage your school, including the governors, to make sure that they use the same approaches to check on everything the school does so they can make clear plans for improving Palace Wood and your attainment and progress.

You can help the school to improve by continuing to come to school regularly, working hard and doing the very best you can.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins

Lead inspector

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