

Purwell Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117224
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338970
Inspection dates	20–21 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Canham

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	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tania Hawkins
Headteacher	Richard Cano
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons, observed seven teachers and held meetings with governors, staff, and a group of pupils, and talked with pupils in lessons. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, lesson plans, safeguarding arrangements, school development planning, minutes of governing body meetings and pupils' work. Inspectors also scrutinised the 66 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from staff and a sample of pupils.

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

- The extent to which higher expectations of academic performance, especially in mathematics, are increasing the level of challenge.
- The degree to which developments in assessment and tracking have increased the rigour of monitoring and extended the accountability of staff and within governance.
- The extent to which the leadership team, and the governing body, are influencing the school's direction and ensuring sustained performance.

Information about the school

Purwell is smaller than most other primary schools. The large majority of pupils are from families of White British heritage. Other pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average and in some year groups as high as 44%. The range of special educational needs includes speech, language and communication, and behavioural, emotional and social needs. The school has achieved Healthy Schools status. There have been a significant number of staff changes since the last inspection.

The community room, located on the school site, is not managed by the school's governing body and was not included in the 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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It provides a caring and supportive environment that places a high priority on enhancing pupils' self-esteem and raising achievement within a harmonious school community. Such positive features are reflected in many aspects of pupils' well-developed personal qualities, including their interest in what they do and their sheer enjoyment of learning. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community. They also have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school.

The tenacity of the school's leadership team is the key factor in driving improvement. Systematic monitoring and rigorous tracking systems have been established. As a consequence, governors and school leaders have a clear understanding of where the school is now and of the improvements needed, although assessment information is not systematically analysed in sufficient depth to assist school planning. Nevertheless, the school is well placed to move forward.

The push for highly effective teaching is evident in the continual review of classroom practice. Detailed assessment procedures support successful teaching, which engages pupils and motivates them with interesting activities. Consequently, pupils are progressing well in lessons that are, typically, pitched at the right level and lift pupils' interests. Recent improvements to performance levels, especially in English, reflect the good progress, effective teaching and the range of rich learning opportunities in a creative curriculum. On occasion, however, planning is not used as well as it could be to match activities to pupils' differing needs and consistently stretch the more able. Nevertheless, larger proportions of pupils reached the higher levels in the most recent national assessments and tests for pupils in Year 6 reflecting good progress overall. Intervention work, including well-tailored support for individual pupils, is successfully supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and others from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Pupils' good personal outcomes are reflected in their considerate behaviour and involvement in the many activities that support the smooth running of the school, including helping to run sports activities during lunchtimes. Popular clubs and after-school activities provide pupils with many opportunities to develop confidence, and refine their creative and performance skills. Through the school's good links with outside agencies, local schools and the community, pupils thrive on participating in singing events and sponsoring local charities, for example.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching is consistently good or better by ensuring staff always provide challenging tasks that are pitched at the right level particularly for the most able pupils.
 - Strengthen the monitoring role of senior leaders by using assessment information more effectively to guide whole school planning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Children join the Nursery with below expected starting points and make good gains through to the end of Reception. In Years 1 to 6, pupils' enjoyment of learning, as seen particularly in their eagerness to become fully involved in lively and well-paced activities in English, mathematics and physical education, is characteristic of lessons. It also reflects the good pace of learning across the school, although it is uneven with some differences between year groups, and in some subjects. Pupils work well in small groups and independently of the teacher, and show determination in getting the tasks right. In English, they write imaginatively and with enthusiasm when given the opportunity to work creatively, using different techniques used by poets. Pupils also show great satisfaction in completing the tasks and explaining the reasons behind their answers, in mathematics, for example. There are no significant variations in the rates of progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and others from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Attainment is above average, as indicated by the results of the most recent national tests and assessments for pupils in Year 6. Pupils currently in Year 6 are on course to reach higher attainment levels than last year's cohort with particular strengths in English, and especially writing. The school exceeded its combined targets for English and mathematics.

Pupils say they like coming to school because they feel secure and they are listened to in the supportive environment. These positive attitudes are evident in their above average attendance. Pupils also say that they enjoy the opportunities to express themselves creatively in activities such as art. Their good levels of understanding of living healthily are evident in the way they talk about the importance of eating different kinds of food and the need for regular exercise. Pupils are considerate towards each other, polite and courteous, and willingly take on responsibilities to help with the day-to-day running of the school. The school council provides good opportunities for pupils to represent the views of others and help make decisions regarding sports equipment, for example. Eco-monitors manage the daily recycling of paper and the school choir performs at community events. Supported by the school's projects to encourage enterprise, pupils' personal skills are developing into important qualities for when they leave school.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	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	1
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	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?

Good subject knowledge and well-paced activities are key strengths of teaching. Incisive and probing questioning often gives pupils opportunities to think about their work and reflect on the answers. Topics, such as those that encourage imaginative writing and link different subjects, successfully capture pupils' interest and hold their attention.

Consequently, pupils willingly become interested in their learning and want to find out more for themselves. Working in pairs and small groups, pupils are eager to check spellings and discover the meanings of words. However, just occasionally, activities do not expect enough from pupils, particularly the most able. Typically, assessment procedures are used effectively to guide lesson planning and constructive marking helps pupils to understand what they need to do to improve.

Attractive and informative displays, enhanced by the use of a flat screen in the school hall, give an insight into the richness and diversity of the curriculum. The curriculum provides a carefully considered balance between basic skills in English and mathematics and the development of pupils' performance skills in subjects such as physical education and music. The school has rightly started to plan a programme to improve pupils' mathematical skills further, building on the current strengths in reading and writing. The teaching of Spanish adds an extra positive dimension. Pupils are given opportunities to reinforce their learning and develop skills through topics that link different subjects. The curriculum is supported by a well-planned programme for personal, social and health

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education. It is also underpinned by the very effective use of information and communication technology, which provides good opportunities for independent learning and gives pupils access to a wide range of resources. Pupils' learning experiences are further enriched through residential trips, popular clubs in which pupils grow their own vegetables, and visits to places of interest including the National Gallery.

The good support for pupils' personal development and pastoral care is recognised and much valued by parents and carers. Attention to pupils' health and well-being is reflected not just in opportunities for physical activity, but also in the provision of healthy school meals. Individualised programmes of support are made for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement, covering a broad range of personal and learning needs. Individual achievement is effectively managed through improved tracking of pupils' attainment and progress. Targets are realistic but challenging. Evaluations lead to well-timed interventions, which reinforce pupils' literacy skills and build confidence.

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?

Since the last inspection, the headteacher, with close support from governors, has strengthened the senior leadership team and sharpened the focus on key priorities. These changes have led to a systematic approach to monitoring and an acute awareness of the route the school needs to follow for sustained improvement. Effective collective leadership has developed a school that is committed not only to strengthening each pupil's confidence, but also to raising achievement. Secure systems have been established to ensure that this ethos is maintained even through staff changes. However, information from analyses of school data, including results from national tests, is not being used systematically to refine school planning. The promotion of equality and approaches to tackling any form of discrimination are good. As a result, groups of pupils make similar progress, although there are some limitations for a very small proportion of more able pupils in a few classes.

Governors are visible in the school and the governing body readily challenges the school's work. The governing body ensures that policies are systematically reviewed and resources are closely targeted at educational need. Attention to pupils' safety is integral to the school's work and safeguarding procedures are securely established. Local services and agencies are used well to enhance the safety and well-being of pupils experiencing difficult circumstances and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Community cohesion is strongly promoted within the school and in the local community. The school demonstrates a thorough understanding of local needs and challenges through

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its action plan and evaluation. The school provides a number of opportunities for pupils to understand about people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of the United Kingdom and beyond. Parents and carers are supportive of the school, although they do not always play an active part in school events.

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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision is well managed and caring staff have successfully established a calm and welcoming environment in which children are nurtured and cherished from the start. The range of children's needs varies considerably, but they settle quickly, are eager to learn and make good progress. They make particularly good progress in social development and language and communication, but slower progress in calculation. Procedures ensure that staff have accurate and reliable information about children's progress. This information is used to pitch planning at the right level. However, the school recognises the need to refine assessment procedures so that they are more manageable. Support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for those who are more vulnerable, is good.

Children listen attentively and chatter enthusiastically about their work. The school makes effective use of the indoor and outside areas, which provide a wide range of stimulating activities. Children happily move from one activity to another. Adults give closely-targeted support to activities directed by the teacher as well as those which children choose for themselves. Questioning is often used well to probe children's understanding and capture their interest. Themed topics ensure all areas of learning are covered, with a particular focus on early reading, writing and number skills.

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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:	
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

An above average proportion of the school's parents and carers returned the questionnaires. The very large majority of responses were positive. A few of the written comments expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. These included positive remarks about the caring and supportive environment and the quality of staff. However, a very few questionnaires recorded reservations over a small number of issues. These included changes in staffing and behaviour. These reservations were not reflected in the very large majority of comments. The inspection found evidence to indicate that staffing is more settled than previously. Behaviour is good and pupils generally respond well, although there is room for improvement in a very small number of classes.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Purwell 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 164 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	45	36	55	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	45	36	55	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	24	36	39	59	2	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	32	34	52	8	12	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	38	37	56	3	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	36	33	50	7	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	39	32	48	5	8	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)	21	32	33	50	5	8	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	36	32	48	2	3	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	9	41	62	9	14	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	15	42	64	5	8	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	15	23	39	59	7	11	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	42	35	53	2	3	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

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.



22 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Purwell Primary School, Hitchin, SG4 0PU

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school and thank you for making us feel so welcome. This letter is to tell you about some of the things we found while we were with you. Yours is a good school where you feel safe and benefit from good care and support. You told us it is also a place where you want to be, make friends, and enjoy taking part in the many interesting clubs and exciting activities.

Here are some other important things about your school:

- you make good, and occasionally outstanding, progress in lessons
- you attend regularly and respond enthusiastically to lively and interesting activities
- you make an outstanding contribution to the smooth running of the school and contribute successfully to local events
- those in charge of the school are making improvements that are helping you to make faster progress
- you have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating.

To make things even better for you, your school has been asked to:

- help you to make faster progress, especially those of you who learn quickly, by giving you more challenging activities all the time
- ensure that those in charge of the school keep an even closer eye on how you are doing.

We wish each one of you every success in your future education and hope that you continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now. You can all help the school by continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham

Lead inspector

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