

Fir Tree Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123071
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	359356
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Alison Grainger

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynne Pebworth
Headteacher	Nilofer Khan
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by a total of six teachers. Meetings were held with staff, governors and pupils. An inspector spoke informally with parents and carers at the end of a school day. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at its documentation, including development plans, records on pupils' attainment, progress and attendance, and the information it provides for parents and carers. They also scrutinised pupils' written work. Account was taken of the 85 parental questionnaires received.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of teaching, in particular how well teachers respond to pupils' learning needs in lessons and through marking.
- The effectiveness of the curriculum in promoting pupils' progress in writing, mathematics and information and communication technology.
- The extent to which pupils develop independence, initiative and understanding of the diversity of modern society in the United Kingdom.
- The rigour and effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation to ensure improvements are made.

Information about the school

Most pupils attending Fir Tree Junior School are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, as is the percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has been operating a system of streaming by ability. Currently, there are three streamed classes for pupils in Years 3 and 4 and three streamed classes for pupils in Years 5 and 6. This system of organising pupils into classes is scheduled to change in September 2011.

The present headteacher joined the school as acting headteacher in September 2010. This appointment became substantive in April 2011. The school gained the Oxfordshire Bronze Award for Primary Languages in 2011.

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

Fir Tree Junior School provides its pupils with a satisfactory education. Its warm and welcoming atmosphere is greatly appreciated by parents and carers. As one commented, reflecting the views of many, 'I'm always welcomed into school by very enthusiastic and helpful staff.' Another observed that the school includes different nationalities well. Pupils say that they feel safe at school, free from bullying, and that they have an adult to whom they can turn should the need arise. This positive ethos contributes to pupils' good attendance, as does their enjoyment of the wide range of clubs, visits out of school and project work.

Pupils make satisfactory progress and attainment at the end of Year 6 is broadly average. The satisfactory quality of teaching and the curriculum is sufficient to maintain pupils' present rate of progress, but not to increase it. There is some good teaching which, based on higher expectations, results in a high level of challenge and rapid progress. This strong teaching is characterised by a sharp focus on meeting all pupils' learning needs and includes well-paced activities. Not enough teaching is of this high quality. In many lessons the pace of learning is prevented from being better than satisfactory as too much time is allocated to activities or whole-class sessions rather than to helping individuals to improve their own learning.

Guidance to pupils to help them to improve their work is also satisfactory but not good enough to move learning forward at a speedier rate. Pupils who met with inspectors said that they would like to be given more individual advice to help them to take greater responsibility for their learning. A positive development this year, supporting learning well, is the opportunity for pupils to evaluate their success in meeting the learning objective during a lesson.

Although there are strengths in the curriculum, some features require improvement. There are limited quality opportunities to write at length in English and other subjects or for pupils to apply and develop their mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum.

After a period in which attainment was not good enough in relation to pupils' starting points and capabilities, positive changes have been taking place. As one parent noted, 'A change of emphasis over the last year favouring learning is evident and very welcome.' As a result of this shift in focus, alongside maintenance of established strengths, the school's progress since its last inspection has been acceptable. Recent developments and broadly accurate self-evaluation show that the school has the necessary capacity to increase its effectiveness. Nevertheless, the headteacher recognises that, if the vision of Fir Tree as a good school is to be realised, the pace of improvement has to speed up. In particular, the monitoring and evaluation of how effectively teaching supports learning is neither frequent nor rigorous enough to promote rapid, rather than satisfactory, improvement. The roles of

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teachers with leadership responsibilities have started to develop this year but these roles are not contributing fully to raising standards and improving progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that, by November 2011, teaching is making a good contribution to pupils' learning and progress and is raising attainment by:
 - sharply focusing on pupils' differing learning needs at all stages of each lesson to give pupils the right amount of challenge and support
 - allocating time correctly to activities and whole-class sessions in order to increase the pace of learning in lessons
 - providing all pupils with clear information on what they are doing well and what they need to do next to improve their performance.
- Provide pupils with more good quality opportunities for sustained writing within English and other subjects and to use and develop mathematical and ICT skills across the curriculum.
- Speed up the pace of improvement by:
 - increasing the frequency and rigour with which the contribution of teaching to learning is monitored and evaluated, taking swift action for improvement
 - developing the contribution of staff with responsibilities, such as subject leaders, to ensuring that provision in their areas is developed effectively and increases pupils' rate of progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When given real challenge, pupils rise to it with enthusiasm. In the upper-ability class in Years 5 and 6, for example, pupils worked with good concentration and were able to articulate their learning confidently as they analysed part of a novel. They showed good understanding in differentiating between facts and what they could deduce from 'reading between the lines'.

In lessons where learning is satisfactory, pupils follow instructions sensibly and do the activities which are asked of them. They share ideas when asked to do so and can work in pairs or small groups. This was seen when pupils identified various types of angles around their classroom during a mathematics lesson in Years 3 and 4. However, pupils do not enjoy long whole-class sessions which do not support their learning well and that involve a lot of listening and little active involvement. At such times, and when too long is allowed for an activity, pupils become restless and lose enthusiasm. This is a major factor preventing learning from being better than satisfactory. Pupils behave well around the school and when at play but attitudes and behaviour in lessons are satisfactory.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond well when taught in small groups. Like other pupils, their learning proceeds best when activities are well paced and they have opportunities to use their own ideas and to show initiative

Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Those who eat the school's healthy lunches enjoy them a good deal. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities to keep fit through extra-curricular sporting activities. They know a good

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deal about how to stay safe outside of school, for instance, through participation in training for safe cycling.

Pupils contribute positively to the community by raising funds for charities, entertaining older people and taking part in local events. Older pupils who undertake responsibility as play leaders help to ensure that break and lunchtimes run smoothly. School council members report sensibly to their classes. However, pupils across the school have too few opportunities to discuss what features of the school's provision help or hinder learning or to influence the curriculum. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 have little opportunity to undertake responsibility.

Pupils gain a basic, but adequate, awareness of different cultural traditions and faiths and the school is racially harmonious. Discussion with pupils reveals that they would like to know more about the rich diversity of modern society.

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	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
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	3

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?

Instances of good teaching, particularly for the more able pupils in Years 5 and 6, develop independence and initiative as well as support good progress. In almost all lessons, teachers promote learning satisfactorily through sharing the learning objective with pupils and providing activities that support them in achieving it. Often activities are varied for different ability groups, but not well enough to ensure that all pupils are given exactly the

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right challenge and support to increase the progress they make. This lack of sharp attention to different learning needs, and a slow pace in some lessons, restricts learning and prevents it from being good. Feedback to pupils on their learning is not good enough to ensure that pupils are securely focused on the personal goals that they should strive to achieve, for example, in improving their writing.

There is good provision for pupils to learn to play a musical instrument and to participate in the choir and orchestra. The recent successful development of French is recognised in the achievement of the Oxfordshire award. A residential visit, events such as sports day and opportunities provided in the gardening club build pupils' skills in teamwork. While pupils write for a variety of purposes, the extent to which they develop and communicate ideas through longer pieces of writing requires improvement. Insufficient attention in the curriculum is given to pupils using mathematical and ICT skills in subjects such as science, resulting in missed opportunities to promote a good rate of learning.

Pastoral care is effective, resulting in pupils being sure that adults in school care about them. The breakfast club provides a pleasant and healthy start to the day for those who attend it. The school is able to point to good examples of success in supporting its most vulnerable pupils. Effective action has been taken to restore the attendance rate to above average, following a dip last year. Satisfactory and improving arrangements support the transition of pupils from the infant school into Year 3 and prepare pupils to move to Year 7 at secondary school. Guidance to support pupils in becoming independent learners is not sufficiently developed.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has ensured that established strengths of the school, such as pastoral care and the arrangements for safeguarding pupils, have been maintained and built on. As a result, current government requirements for safeguarding pupils are met well.

A secure understanding has been established among staff this year that the core business of the school is the promotion of effective learning. All teachers now recognise that they have a crucial contribution to make to the improvement of the school. The roles of staff with leadership responsibilities, such as subject leaders, are developing satisfactorily from a low base. This is starting to contribute to teachers' increasing the awareness of how well teaching supports learning, for example, through teachers jointly reviewing progress in pupils' books.

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Key governors recognise that, in the years since the last inspection, the governing body has not been sufficiently questioning of the school's effectiveness. They welcome the improved information they are given by the headteacher and they are now asking helpful but challenging questions to help move the school forward. A team approach to realising an ambitious vision for the school is developing steadily.

Action taken this year to improve teaching and learning has resulted in satisfactory promotion of equality of opportunity. The school has reviewed its arrangement for placing pupils in classes in order to raise its expectations of all pupils and better meet their learning and social needs. The headteacher recognises that changes such as these will require close monitoring as part of a more intensive focus on evaluating how effectively learning is promoted.

Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily. The school is involved well in the local community and has links with a school in Kenya. Links are currently being established with a city school with a culturally diverse intake of pupils.

The partnership with parents and carers is strong. Parents and carers have been kept well informed of changes taking place, including the reorganisation of classes. As a result, the headteacher has won the confidence of parents and carers as well as that of staff and governors. Links with other schools satisfactorily support pupils' learning and well-being. The link with the infant school has been strengthened this year to improve the effectiveness with which pupils' needs are met on entry to Year 3.

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

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers are pleased with the school. A small number expressed concern about a lack of homework and information on their children's progress. The school has

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taken appropriate action. There are now examples of good homework activities in Years 5 and 6, although the headteacher agrees that homework is used more effectively in some classes than in others. Action is being taken to establish homework in Years 3 and 4. The information provided for parents and carers on their children's progress reports has been improved and is satisfactory. The headteacher agrees that there is scope to give even better information.

A small number of parents and carers expressed concern about the school's handling of unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors found that the rare incidents of poor behaviour are handled appropriately.

Inspection evidence supports parents' and carers' positive views regarding their children's safety and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. It shows that, although many parents and carers consider that the school is good, it is currently satisfactory in its promotion of pupils' learning and progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Fir Tree Junior 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 85 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 176 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	46	45	53	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	49	58	35	41	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	24	28	52	61	7	8	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	34	47	55	5	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	42	49	41	48	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	29	51	60	5	6	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	40	48	56	3	4	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)	31	36	47	55	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	36	48	56	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	31	46	54	9	11	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	26	53	62	3	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	39	46	39	46	0	0	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	44	52	41	48	0	0	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



23 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fir Tree Junior School, Wallingford OX10 0NY

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you, watching your lessons and looking at your work. You are pleasant and friendly young people who are keen to do well and your attendance is good. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education.

The adults in your school look after you well and keep you safe. They do much to help you to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The photographs of your visit to Wales and other events, such as your celebration of the Royal Wedding, show that there are times when you have a lot of fun. We know that you and your parents and carers value the activities provided in addition to your daily lessons, such as clubs. You also told us that you do some exciting things in lessons, such as your project work and performing your own version of scenes from *The Tempest* in Years 3 and 4.

Teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory which, in turn, results in you making satisfactory progress. Your new headteacher, with the support of the staff and governors, is keen to make sure that you do as well as you can and that the school keeps improving. To help the adults achieve this, we have asked them to work on these three things in particular:

- improving the teaching so that there are more good lessons. Part of this will involve giving you more information on what you are doing well and what you need to do to improve your work. Some of you have said this information will help you
- providing you with more opportunities to develop your skills in writing at length and to use and develop mathematics and ICT skills in different subject.
- keep checking on how well teaching is supporting your learning so that improvements can be made more effectively and quickly.

You can help by always doing your best and talking with your teachers about how well you are learning.

Yours sincerely

Alison Grainger

Lead inspector

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