

Whitehill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121790
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	359086
Inspection dates	12–13 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Anthony Byrne

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	458
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kerry Payne
Headteacher	Jane Porter
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed 16 lessons taught by 11 teachers and met with a representative group of pupils, with a small group of parents, with two governors and with staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including progress data, governors' minutes, and curriculum and lesson planning, alongside 211 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

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

- Whether attendance has improved and if this has raised the achievement of some vulnerable groups of pupils.
- Whether an improvement in teaching shown in the school's self-evaluation has led to all groups making good progress.
- Whether high ability pupils make as much progress as others.
- How well governors and middle leaders play a full part in leadership.

Information about the school

Whitehill is a larger than average primary school. Some children begin at Whitehill in the nursery. There is a higher than average proportion of pupils who do not have English as their first language and a high level of pupils beginning school at times other than at the start of the Reception class. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is higher than the average nationally. The proportion of pupils that has special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average. Whitehill has Healthy School status and has gained Quality Mark awards for both the school as a whole and for the Early Years Foundation Stage. As part of a federation arrangement with another primary school, the headteacher is the executive headteacher of both schools until September 2011. The school offers both before- and after-school clubs.

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

Whitehill offers a satisfactory quality of education. The school supports the personal development of pupils, who have very diverse backgrounds and needs, well, giving the vast majority confidence about themselves and a noticeable ability to relate well to others. Pupils live up to the school motto, 'Happy, helpful and hardworking'.

By the end of Year 6, the majority of pupils reach average levels, but pupils of higher ability do not make consistently as much progress as they should. In lessons observed they were not usually required to tackle work that was more challenging. Pupils who are recent arrivals, some speaking English as an additional language, receive good support and become competent in English and settle in well. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive support that enables them to progress at a satisfactory rate, but they lack confidence when working independently. Speaking skills are well developed. This was demonstrated in the nurture class when skilful role play by the teacher elicited vocal response from several pupils who otherwise lacked confidence. This willingness to speak was replicated in all lessons seen. Reading and numeracy are developed to average levels for the large majority but writing, as evidenced by a scrutiny of books, remains a weakness. Knowledge and skills in science in contrast have improved since the previous inspection. It is clear that pupils really do enjoy their learning at Whitehill. This is because teachers and assistants so emphatically value pupils as individuals and so they are eager to please and work hard. Achievement overall, therefore, is satisfactory.

The support for the personal development and confidence of pupils is a real strength of the school. From the very youngest age they go about their work and play with a confidence that shows they feel safe and act responsibly. Although the school's message about behaving well gets through to almost all pupils, there are occasional incidents of misbehaviour by individuals. Pupils who spoke to inspectors explained that the majority have such high expectations of themselves that they feel this lets the school down, but they were clear that they do not feel threatened, nor is their learning ever seriously disrupted.

A very small minority of pupils has poor habits of attendance and overall attendance data are well below average. The school's work with some individuals and with a particular community group is having a positive influence and a rising trend is established. The positive influence the school is having on those with attendance difficulties, pupils' good personal and social skills, and collaborative work habits and the achievement of average attainment shown by most, confirms that the school prepares its pupils satisfactorily for their future lives.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and best when pupils fully understand what they are learning, how they could try to do it better and are actively involved in the task. This was not consistently seen in lessons visited. Pupils who found the learning quite easy

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were not challenged to take it to a higher level. Others who found it difficult relied heavily on support, not developing independence. Assessment is regular but does not always give enough guidance to pupils to secure improvement.

Leadership is sound and the school's capacity to sustain improvement is satisfactory. Monitoring is systematic, self-evaluation is accurate and school leaders have given good guidance on assessment. However, the school does not sufficiently evaluate the impact of this guidance on teachers' subsequent practice or pupil outcomes in order to then challenge as necessary. Middle leaders show both the willingness and the capability to contribute to school monitoring procedures by judging accurately the quality of lessons, as was confirmed by joint observations during inspection. Monitoring records show there is an improving trend of good and outstanding lessons, but the trend has not yet fully impacted on pupils' progress and has not led sufficiently to teachers planning appropriate challenges in lessons for the more able or for independence for lower ability pupils. Governors acknowledge the need to play their part more vigorously in understanding data and challenging the school about progress and attendance. They have restructured and set themselves an action plan to ensure this happens.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Challenge pupils to make more rapid progress by:
 - planning lessons that expect higher ability pupils to work at a higher level than others
 - developing the capacity of lower ability pupils to work independently.
- Improve the progress and motivation of pupils who are habitually absent by involving them in a structured support programme outside normal lessons, and evaluate the impact of this support on individual and whole school attendance patterns.
- Develop subject leaders' capacity to evaluate the impact of the guidance they offer to teachers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment of pupils starting school in the Nursery is generally below age-related expectations. A large majority of children have some barriers to learning. This applies to many others who join the school at later times, often from countries outside the United Kingdom. The school's data show attainment is still below average by the end of Year 2 and this was confirmed in lessons observed and work scrutinised. As they get older pupils progress at varying rates, usually less well in writing, but by the end of Year 6 most have reached average levels expected for their age.

At all times, in lessons, when feeding the hens and ducks used to introduce a touch of rural life to their urban environment, or when following a maze laid out on the hall floor to encounter questions about their future, pupils are thoughtful and behave well. Assemblies, the prayers composed by each class and visits to places of worship are successfully used by the school to deepen pupils' capacity to reflect and to enhance their sense of identity

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and self-esteem. The inspection took place during Health Week, which testified to the validity of Whitehill's Healthy School award. The whole-hearted participation of pupils in activities ranging from sports day to science lessons related to human health showed how positively they contribute in school, readily take responsibility and feel well prepared for life's challenges. Older pupils, for example, express confidence about their future in secondary school and were often seen taking care of younger ones. Pupils regularly invite parents to events such as the 'Big Dance', make Christmas decorations for a hospice and make donations to the Salvation Army. The strong affection they have for Whitehill was reflected when a Year 5 pupil said the only reservation she had about going into Year 6 was that it would mean having to leave eventually.

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	4
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?

There are strengths in teaching. For example, in an outstanding 'booster' lesson on fractions for lower ability boys, learning was reinforced by physical actions and then by partners having to explain their answers to each other so that no-one could sit back. Use of paired talk was often a successful element, as was use of role play in giving pupils lots of ideas before they began to write. Support from assistants is active and, like the teachers, they build pupils' confidence by using humour and transmitting enthusiasm. A weakness in some lessons is that, whilst teachers are very concerned to help everyone reach age-appropriate levels, too often the most able pupils are also expected to work at

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that level, thus limiting their potential progress. Support for lower ability pupils sometimes encourages too much dependency on the part of the pupil. School guidance about assessment, particularly marking, is inconsistently applied and so pupils are not always clear about how well they have done, or what their next step in learning should be.

Science, religious education, physical education and 'talk for writing' are curriculum strengths. The information and communication technology (ICT) suite is used, with some success, to extend pupils' core skills and develop good work habits, but basic skills are not consistently and coherently represented enough in planning in other subjects to improve progress beyond satisfactory. The use of themes to encourage creativity or to regroup pupils into special 'booster' groups is, however, a success.

Family liaison officer and bilingual support have played a commendable part in improving attendance. Whilst some families still have difficulties in sending children to school readily, attendance figures for this year are moving closer to average. Child protection procedures and training for all staff and appropriate governors are securely in place. A special nurture group makes a very strong contribution to the personal development of some vulnerable pupils as well as improving their learning. By Year 6 these pupils are fully integrated into main school. Preparation for transition to secondary schools is well organised. The before- and after-school clubs run by the school offer an equally good level of care for pupils who use them.

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?

The headteacher's strong and confident leadership style has enabled her to entrust other senior managers and subject leaders with delegated authority and this is drawing all staff into a united team. There is strong consensus on the values of the school in caring for individuals with national quality marks that recognise this. This dedication to the pupils contributes to the school's good procedures to meet safeguarding requirements. There is understanding that aspirations of pupils need to be raised, but a less strongly shared ambition that some should go beyond what is expected for their age. There is evidence of an improving trend towards good and outstanding lessons and the management of teaching, learning and assessment is developing well. It is, however, currently satisfactory in terms of its impact on improvements in the level of challenge set for the more able and the independence expected of lower ability pupils.

Governors comply fully with statutory duties to maintain and review policies and are now taking steps to involve parents more in decision-making. Governors are clear about where the school has reached on its journey. Governors seek to ensure equal opportunities and

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know that the school tackles discrimination, but the under-achievement of a very small minority of high ability pupils means this is satisfactory. Although attendance remains low, the school is having some success in improving attendance. Challenging circumstances in school have limited more than they should the school's support for community cohesion more widely in the United Kingdom and abroad, but partnerships to support learning are a significant strength, going well beyond the strong ones relating to care. Links with the university and grammar school, for example, are raising pupils' aspirations and the school has made good use of its links with the partner school in its federation.

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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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

Entering Nursery with below or age-related skills, children make good progress in communication and personal development. At start of Reception classes about half of the children newly enter school. They almost all make good progress and by the time they leave are close to expected levels. Although some pupils, some of whom have with English as an additional language, have more limited reading and phonic skills. They enjoy their learning indoors and out, sometimes choosing to work alone or at other times in groups. Play and learning combine seamlessly, as when a group of boys enjoyed playing skittles and attempting to write their names and scores.

Assessment is thoroughly recorded in writing and photographs by staff, but has a weakness in not measuring progress from a clear starting point on entry. The environment is colourful and well resourced and all elements are used well in good teaching and questioning. A girl catching cut-up fruit 'fish' showed how used she was to dialogue with adults when she explained well why it was easier to catch them at the side of the pool because of the firmness of the edge as opposed to the softness of the water. The stage

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leader has demonstrated good ability to identify and achieve improvement, for example to outdoors learning, and makes all adults feel part of a strong team.

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

There was a high return of questionnaires. Most parents and carers express highly positive views of the school. Most believe that their child is happy at school. That certainly was the impression that pupils made on the inspection team. A large majority is satisfied that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with effectively. The inspection team agrees with that view. Although a very few parents took the trouble to write to express concern about their views being listened to, the inspection team found that governors are seeking to hear more from parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Whitehill 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 211 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 458 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	131	62	72	34	2	2	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	116	55	82	39	7	3	3	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	92	44	105	50	12	6	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	89	42	107	51	14	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	102	48	97	46	8	4	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	81	38	116	55	13	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	75	36	125	59	9	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)	65	31	122	58	15	7	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	78	37	116	55	16	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	64	30	104	49	29	14	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	66	31	123	58	13	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	78	37	107	51	19	9	4	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	91	43	105	50	13	6	1	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.



15 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitehill Primary School, Gravesend, DA12 5HN

Thanks for welcoming us with smiles and friendliness when we came to your school recently. You live up to your school motto, 'Happy, helpful and hardworking'. Your school cares for you very well so that you feel happy and safe. It was Health Week when we visited and you put the same hardworking effort into the lessons as you did into Sports Day. Whitehill gives you a satisfactory education, doing some things well and others that could be improved. Almost all of you make satisfactory progress, including those who have difficulties in learning or are recent arrivals and new to speaking English. However, in lessons, you sometimes rely too much on your caring support assistants. We also noticed that those of you who could go faster and further in lessons tend to only have to do the same work as others. But we could tell you would be willing to do more. We know that because you set yourself high standards. We were puzzled when quite a few of you said behaviour was not good, because we saw you behaving well at all times. You explained that this was because just a few individuals misbehaved occasionally, but you did not feel unsafe because adults are always there to turn to and when an individual pupil does let the school down, it does not stop you learning.

Whitehill is so enjoyable everybody should attend as often as possible. One girl in Year 5 said she would be looking forward to Year 6 except that it would mean she would eventually have to leave. She need not worry; Year 6 pupils have been given confidence about starting secondary school and look forward to it. Yet a few of you have developed bad habits and are away too often, which delays your learning. Science lessons have been made more interesting since the previous inspection, by giving you opportunities to experiment.

We have asked for some improvements to be made. We think the school should:

- expect some of you who are more confident to tackle harder work
- expect others to not rely too heavily on support so you can do well on your own
- ask those of you who are away too often to be helped to catch up work without missing lessons.
- follow up the guidance given to your teachers on planning and marking to check that everybody is doing it well.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Byrne

Lead Inspector

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