

Ashwell Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117084
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358077
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Terry Elston

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	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Chapman
Headteacher	Kate Oxley
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2007
School address	Silver Street Ashwell SG7 5QL
Telephone number	01462 742297
Fax number	01462 743274
Email address	admin@ashwell.herts.sch.uk

Registered childcare provision	Head and Tails Breakfast and After School Club
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	25
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	N/A

Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	15–16 September 2011
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by 11 of the 15 teachers. They held meetings with the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at the tracking of pupils' progress, curricular planning documents, examples of the ways the school promotes community cohesion, evidence of lesson observations and information from questionnaires completed by pupils, staff and 129 parents and carers.

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

- How effectively does the school use assessment to identify groups of pupils who are underachieving?
- How well do leaders at all levels evaluate the quality of teaching and learning to ensure pupils make equally good progress throughout the school?
- What evidence is there that pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve?
- To what extent do the curriculum and teaching-support motivate all groups of pupils in their writing?

Information about the school

This is a primary school of average size where the vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is lower than most schools. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has recently gained the Activemark Award and achieved Healthy Schools status. The governing body manages care facilities for children before and after school.

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 that fully justifies its high reputation in the local community. Parents and carers feel strongly that this is a school where their children feel exceptionally safe and prepared for the future. One parent, typical of many, commented, 'Ashwell is a very happy school where children do well in all aspects of their development and leave as extremely confident, well-rounded individuals.'

Pupils enjoy school and attendance rates are high. They make good progress so that by the end of both key stages their overall attainment in English and mathematics is well above average. Reading is a particular strength because teachers are very good at teaching word-building skills and encouraging pupils to read at every opportunity. The quality of pupils' writing is improving but attainment, particularly by boys, is not as high as in other subjects. This is often the result of teachers spending too long talking about writing tasks and leaving insufficient time for them to put pen to paper. Writing tasks are usually challenging, but often stimulate girls more than boys. As one boy commented, 'Sometimes the writing topics are a bit girly.' While there are plenty of opportunities for writing across the curriculum, teachers do not always have the same high expectations of written work in other subjects as they do in English lessons. Teachers are very good at developing number skills so that pupils enjoy tackling complex mathematical problems from an early age.

The school is developing useful new ways of checking on pupils' progress. These are, however, not fully in place yet and gaps in pupils' knowledge, including those coming to the school part way through the year, are not always identified well enough to ensure they make the best possible progress. Overall, pupils have a reasonable understanding of what they need to do to improve but their knowledge of their personal targets is better in some classes than others.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They think deeply about people in the world suffering hardship and reflect on important issues with great maturity. For example, when asked to consider what she had gained from being at this school one pupil wrote, 'Friends are not just to play with but also to remember and treasure for the rest of your life'. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and behaviour is consistently good. They develop their social skills particularly well and play an outstanding role in helping others in school and the local community.

The teachers have developed an interesting curriculum with a good balance of

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academic and creative activities. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of visits and visitors that make topics such as 'The Time Machine' come to life. The many extra-curricular clubs to extend pupils' learning are popular and pupils say how much they enjoy them. They embrace the many opportunities to learn about healthy living with great relish. They speak with authority on the value of exercise and eating nutritious food and a high proportion enjoy the healthy school lunches.

The headteacher leads well with high expectations of all members of the school community. Her commitment to developing pupils' personal as well as their academic skills is a key reason for the school's popularity with parents and carers. The headteacher evaluates the quality of teaching and learning regularly and teachers find this helpful. However, subject leaders play too little part in this process to ensure consistency in, for example, teachers' use of assessment. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and attainment is higher. The leaders evaluate the school's performance well and avoid complacency by comparing its test results with similar schools locally and nationally. Staff work well as a team and embrace new initiatives with enthusiasm. The school has a good capacity to sustain its improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing to the levels reached in reading and mathematics by:
 - giving pupils more time to write in lessons
 - having higher expectations of their writing in all subjects
 - ensuring that writing topics stimulate boys as well as girls.
- Fully develop the new assessment systems by:
 - checking more rigorously on pupils' progress throughout the year and using this information to support those falling behind
 - ensuring pupils have a clear understanding of the next steps in their learning
 - making more detailed analyses of the skills of pupils entering the school during the year
 - subject leaders playing a more active role in ensuring consistency of assessment across the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Data from national test results and the evidence of pupils' learning in lessons show that they make good progress. In Key Stage 1, while standards are well above average, those in writing are a little below those in reading and mathematics. Pupils thoroughly enjoy reading and many read for pleasure at home and school. They do so well in mathematics because teachers focus on teaching basic number skills and then provide many opportunities to use them to solve problems. They use exciting

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words to make stories interesting for the reader but occasionally their spelling and punctuation affects the quality of their work. In Key Stage 2, pupils make good progress in reading and scan information on computers quickly to gain information. Their mathematical skills develop well and the vast majority are confident calculating quickly and finding the best way to solve problems. For example, one very successful lesson saw pupils doubling numbers in their head and then devising the quickest way to multiply larger numbers. This challenged all groups of pupils and all made rapid progress. Again, writing is the weaker subject. While pupils have some good ideas for their writing boys in particular write too little in a lesson because they are given too little time. Pupils’ work is sometimes careless when writing in subjects other than English leading to errors in spelling and punctuation.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. They are supported well in class while enjoying good opportunities to work independently. Their reading skills improve particularly well because teachers are very good at helping them build sounds into words. The most able pupils do well and some attain very high standards in both English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Pupils’ outstanding personal development makes an important contribution to their academic progress. They show an excellent awareness of the potential hazards of fire, busy roads and unsupervised use of the internet. Pupils of all ages enjoy taking responsibility and do it extremely well as play leaders, ‘buddies’, lunch servers and librarians. Members of the eco-committee show great maturity as they help others understand the need to take care of the environment. For example, they monitor energy levels, make compost and grow vegetables in the school garden. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the future by their very good literacy and numeracy skills, high aspirations for themselves and enthusiastic involvement in projects teaching them about sustainable resources. They are proud of their local community and are often praised for their enthusiastic involvement in village events that raise money for charities.

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	1
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

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

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

In the large majority of lessons, teachers make learning enjoyable by giving pupils many practical activities and opportunities to discuss their work with their 'talking partner'. Teachers show a very good knowledge of subjects and explain new work clearly. They make it clear what learning is expected by the end and revisit these goals throughout the lesson to ensure pupils keep on track. In the few lessons where progress is satisfactory rather than good, teachers talk for too long and give pupils too little time to work independently at their own pace. This is particularly the case in writing. Teaching assistants make an important contribution to lessons, particularly by supporting lower-attaining pupils and giving them confidence to answer questions.

Teachers mark pupils' books diligently and provide helpful comments to help them improve. They are embracing new assessment systems well, but some are better than others at using this information to identify individual pupils' weaknesses and planning tasks to rectify them.

The school has recently developed a curriculum that links subjects together and uses pupils' views to decide how each topic will develop. These themes provide good opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills. However, expectations of their written work are not always high enough and they make careless spelling and punctuation errors when writing outside English lessons. The excellent personal, social and health education provision ensures that pupils gain a deep awareness of health and safety issues and learn the importance of understanding other's feelings. The curriculum is enriched by activities such as visits to historical sites, science weeks and residential visits.

Parents and carers are right to feel the school provides good care and support for their children. They appreciate the way staff know their children so well and are always there if any individual needs support. Care provision before and after school is managed well and provides a good range of safe and stimulating activities. Pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable benefit from sensitive support both from the school and from outside professionals. The school has extensive systems to help new pupils from other schools settle in but the assessment of the gaps in their knowledge sometimes lacks the rigour to ensure that they make the best possible progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher sets high standards and is highly respected by pupils and staff. She has helped create a school where pupils feel valued and free from harassment. The headteacher manages change at a sensible pace and her priorities to improve the school are ambitious and clear. The good focus on providing equal opportunities for all pupils ensures that the leaders have a secure awareness of progress made by different groups of pupils and put in place strategies to support those falling behind. While these systems have only recently been put in place they are beginning to have an impact. For example, pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics are improving as teachers provide more opportunities for them to use their number skills in investigations.

The systems to evaluate teaching and learning are valued by teachers and give a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses. However, not all middle managers are sufficiently involved in this process, which helps to explain some variations in the quality of assessment.

Good partnerships with parents and carers provide them with valuable information about the curriculum and their children's progress. They feel welcome in school and most believe their concerns are taken seriously. Links with other schools in the area provide cost effective training and give staff some good opportunities to, for example, make best use of the abilities of gifted pupils.

The school enhances community cohesion by creating valuable links with contrasting schools in the United Kingdom and overseas. These involve visits and written communication that provide pupils with a good first-hand knowledge of different faiths, cultures and social backgrounds.

The governing body provides good support and challenge to the school. Its members have a clear awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and, with strong leadership, are not afraid to hold the leaders to account. The governing body has a good involvement in establishing rigorous safeguarding systems and updating policies. Regular training ensures that the staff keep up to date with new requirements and the school maintains meticulous records of any incidents involving the safety of pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	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 attainment of children on entry to the school is generally higher than the level expected nationally for their age and they make good progress in all areas of their development. Their reading, number and language skills are particularly well developed, but the writing tasks for boys do not always capture their imagination and their written work is not as good as that of girls. Good induction procedures, very strong partnerships with parents and carers and thorough attention to children's welfare mean that children settle quickly into school routines and enjoy learning as much as play. Consistently good teaching that makes learning fun ensures that children achieve well. For example, they thoroughly enjoyed a lesson when using giant dice to practise adding numbers together.

The planning of the wide range of tasks is detailed and challenging for all groups of children. The classrooms' resources are organised well to support different areas of learning. Children choose happily from the range of activities on offer and enjoy learning about the world by tasks such as acting as travel agents planning holidays. The outdoor area is used well and provides some good opportunities for pupils to play as well as hone their reading, writing and number skills. Staff observe children's learning and development carefully and the 'learning journeys' provide a very comprehensive record of their work.

Children's personal, social and emotional development is exceptional. They behave extremely well, learn to play with and help each other, and take responsibility readily. The provision is led and managed well. The leaders give staff a clear understanding of how well the provision meets children's needs and what needs to be improved. For example, shortcomings in systems for assessment were identified recently and have quickly been corrected.

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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

The number of parents and carers who completed the questionnaire was higher than is usual for a primary school this size. Their views are very positive. The vast majority appreciate the way their children enjoy school, feel safe and learn how to live healthy lives. They believe the school is well led and that their children are making good progress. All of those who responded say that the teaching and learning are good. Inspection findings support their views on these issues. A few express concerns about how well the school communicates with them, but inspectors found that the school keeps them well informed about their children’s progress and school events.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashwell 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 129 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 244 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	92	71	36	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	70	54	57	44	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	36	28	80	62	11	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	40	64	50	12	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	71	55	56	43	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	38	29	77	60	12	9	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	26	82	64	9	7	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)	66	51	51	40	5	4	1	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	47	36	72	56	5	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	33	64	50	7	5	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	23	77	60	11	9	5	4
The school is led and managed effectively	60	47	65	50	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	71	55	53	41	2	2	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



19 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashwell Primary School, Baldock, SG7 5QL

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed seeing you work hard in lessons and play so happily outside. Those who were kind enough to speak with us showed how much you like school. You say yours is a good school and we agree.

You behave well and listen carefully to your teachers. You make good progress and are exceptionally well prepared for the future. You have an outstanding understanding of how to live a healthy life and stay safe. We were impressed with the way you take responsibility so well and help those who are lonely or sad. The school provides an interesting range of activities for you and you enjoy the many clubs at lunchtime and after school. Your teachers make learning fun and are good at helping you when you find things difficult. All staff at the school take good care of you. Those in charge of your school do a good job and work closely with your parents and carers to help you get the best out of your time here.

Your leaders are always looking for ways to improve the school. These are the improvements we want them to make.

- We have asked your teachers to improve your writing and make sure you write as well in all subjects as you do in English lessons. You can do your part by getting down to work quickly and doing your very best writing in all subjects.
- We have also asked them to check more carefully on your progress and make sure you know how to improve your work.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Terry Elston
Lead inspector

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