

Giles Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117306
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379391
Inspection dates	27–28 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Bland
Headteacher	Heather Davies
Date of previous school inspection	16 September 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 18 lessons, observing eight teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and members of the governing body. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and school improvement plans. Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires from 68 parents and carers, 205 pupils and 23 staff.

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

- How effectively does target-setting and marking help pupils to improve their work and meet their long-term goals?
- How sharply do teachers use learning aims, success criteria and assessment to promote more effective learning for all pupils?
- To what extent do pupils use and develop their information and communication technology skills to support their learning across subjects?
- How well are guided reading sessions and the modelling of writing improving the pupils' achievement in English?

Information about the school

The school is average in size. A fifth of the pupils are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds but very few are at an early stage of speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average and rising. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities has also risen to the national average. Their needs are mostly associated with learning difficulties related to literacy. The new headteacher took up the post in September 2010. The school has recently received the Extended Schools award.

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

2

Main findings

Giles Junior School is providing a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. It has some good features and is improving under the skilled leadership of the headteacher. She has high ambitions for the school and a determination for these to be achieved. She is ably supported in driving improvement forward by an effective team of senior leaders and a supportive governing body. Some improvements are underway while others need time to become embedded in school practice. Parents and carers are very pleased with the school, particularly valuing the way their children are cared for and supported.

Pupils make satisfactory but uneven progress across the school because teaching does not consistently move learning forward rapidly for all pupils. The most effective teaching seen was lively, involved clear explanations and grabbed the pupils' interest by engaging all groups in a wide range of well-chosen activities. However, this is not a consistent picture across the school, as not all teaching engages and challenges the pupils. At times they spend too long listening to explanations of concepts they have already mastered. Through their improved marking, teachers indicate what pupils have done well and how to do better. However, they do not always give them time to respond to their comments and so improve their work to meet their targets.

The attainment of boys in English is lower than that of girls. Action to tackle this and raise attainment in English in general, through more effective guided reading sessions and teachers providing models of high quality writing, is not fully embedded in all classrooms. The headteacher and senior leaders have rightly recognised the scope to make the curriculum more interesting, particularly as writing and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are not sufficiently developed across subjects.

The pupils say that they feel safe in school, which is a view supported by their parents and carers. They have confidence that any matters they bring to the attention of adults will be dealt with constructively. The pupils' considerate behaviour in lessons and at other times helps to make the school a harmonious environment in which to learn and develop. Pupils are known as individuals, which enables the school to tailor its support sharply to meet their needs. Careful attention is paid to safeguarding the pupils, helping them to cope with risks they might face and to care for the safety of others. Pupils make a valued contribution to school life, such as being trained as 'Young Leaders' to organise games for others at lunchtime, or as 'Eco-Warriors' in promoting recycling.

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Since her appointment the headteacher has identified the action needed to improve aspects of teaching and the curriculum and so raise the pupils' achievement and enjoyment of school. The focus last year on mathematics is already leading to tangible improvements in attainment. Accurate self-evaluation, based on rigorous systems to check the performance of staff and pupils, gives a clear picture of the school's qualities from which leaders and governors plan both strategically and in the short-term. Given this and the progress it has made over the last year, the school has good capacity for further improvement.

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?

- Raise attainment in writing particularly for boys by:
 - providing more interesting and engaging contexts to stimulate writing
 - providing more consistent opportunities across the school for pupils to develop extended pieces of writing.

- Accelerate learning and bring the quality of teaching more consistently up to that of the best by:
 - using assessment information more effectively to plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils, particularly ensuring that the more able pupils are consistently challenged
 - planning opportunities for pupils to reflect on and respond to their teachers' marking and other feedback.

- Provide a curriculum that generates greater interest by developing a coherent plan for linking learning between subjects more closely and:
 - planning structured opportunities for pupils to apply new and emerging technologies to support their learning
 - making more effective use of reading sessions to embed skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When learning is most effective, pupils are attentive and show interest in what they are doing. Year 6 pupils were very keen to answer questions posed by their teacher as they contemplated how to create an atmosphere in their story setting. They were engaged and interested by what they were doing. Most pupils work hard in a range of situations. They show interest and enthusiasm when lessons are stimulating, although they can lose concentration when the work is not engaging, when they spend too long on the carpet or when teaching is not closely matched to the next steps in their learning. They collaborate very effectively when working in groups or discussing their ideas with each other. They greatly enjoy practical work and

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investigating problems, but do not use and develop their writing or ICT skills sufficiently across subjects.

Attainment, as shown by recent Year 6 test results is broadly average. The proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics has risen since the last inspection. Assessment data and observations in lessons show that the pupils' progress is improving from their broadly average attainment on entry to Year 3. There are no significant variations in the progress of pupils from different ethnic groups. Pupils who have problems developing their literacy skills are supported appropriately through activities in lessons and specific withdrawal sessions and make similar progress as others. Skilled and focused support for pupils with a statement of special educational needs enables them to participate fully in lessons and make sound progress towards their individual targets.

Pupils of all backgrounds work and play happily together and support each other. They understand the consequences of their actions and are sensitive to the needs and interests of others. 'School ensures you have fun' and 'teachers help you to settle in' are the views of two pupils, which reflect the enjoyment and confidence of many. Through assemblies on e-safety and visits to 'Crucial Crew', they have a very good understanding about how to keep themselves safe. Peer mediation and 'protective behaviour' training show pupils how to influence the safety of others. Pupils are keen to stay fit and healthy. They understand what it will take them to adopt a healthy lifestyle and greatly enjoy the sports activities provided. Pupils are proud of their roles in school and take part in charity fundraising to help those who are less fortunate than themselves.

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	3

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 of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory overall, although some good and outstanding lessons were seen. The most effective lessons engage pupils through expert questioning, which helps to draw out their ideas and check their understanding. However, not all teachers have perfected this skill. Teachers develop confidence in the pupils by showing how much their contributions to lessons are valued, which also helps to promote calm and purposeful classrooms. By having a sharper picture of what pupils can already do, teachers plan activities pitched more closely at their specific needs. However, at times the learning of the more able is held back because they spend too long listening to explanations rather than getting on with more challenging activities.

Teachers focus on developing basic skills, but the contexts for pupils’ writing do not always grasp the boys’ imaginations. The arrangements for weekly planning in the pairs of classes in each year group for English and mathematics are ineffective. Teachers lack ownership of the other’s plans and do not adapt them sufficiently to meet the needs of their own class. Carefully planned additional programmes are provided to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities but the school is less systematic in extending those with particular talents. Nevertheless, talents are recognised through awards for ‘writer and mathematician of the week’. Experiences are enriched in a wide variety of ways and pupils benefit considerably from the expertise of outside providers and activities in partnership with local secondary schools. The expertise of staff from local secondary schools greatly enhances the pupils’ experiences in areas such as science and sport.

The early identification of any pupils falling behind their targets and the effective action taken, help them catch up rapidly. The school has established strong links with key agencies in order to seek advice, access support and build collaborative relationships to support particularly those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. The well-run before-school club is greatly appreciated by the families accessing its service. The developing partnership with the feeder infant school helps pupils to settle in happily to Year 3, but has not extended to close curriculum links to provide continuity to their learning.

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and school community have worked together to develop a shared vision. The wide variety of strategies to monitor performance gives senior leaders a clear picture of each teacher’s qualities. Teachers are being successfully supported in developing their skills by working together to improve areas of their practice, or by having opportunities to observe and work alongside experts. The school’s cohesiveness is an indication of its success in tackling any forms of discrimination. The strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity is enshrined in the school’s values and central to its work. Targets for pupils have become more challenging and assessment data frequently checked so that action can be taken to tackle any potential underachievement. However, more limited attention has been paid to evaluating the performance of different ethnic groups to identify if any gaps are emerging. Furthermore, action to close the gap in attainment between girls and boys in English has yet to show lasting success.

The well-led governing body has a good oversight of the school and is closely involved in forward planning. Although it questions the school over its performance, it recognises it does not always have first-hand evidence from which to challenge leaders sufficiently. Governors, in conjunction with the school’s leadership, make sure that safeguarding arrangements are rigorously applied. Recommended good practice is adopted and over the last year the impact of well-established procedures has been evaluated and practice improved.

The school’s leadership is strongly committed to partnership working by bringing in expertise not otherwise available to extend the opportunities provided for the pupils and to support their welfare. Senior leaders and governors have planned a wide range of activities to secure greater community cohesion within and beyond the school based on a clear understanding of its context. Their impact locally has been recognised by the Extended Schools award, but the school has less impact nationally and overseas. To tackle this, the headteacher has developed links with a school in Bradford and schools abroad through the ‘Leader in me’ programme. The partnership with home is positive and much valued by parents and carers. They are kept well informed about activities and their children’s development. Workshops such as for mathematics enable them to support their children more effectively at home. Their participation in reviewing its aims has proved valuable in helping to shape the school’s direction over the next few years.

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	2

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school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	
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	3
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	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire is in line with the average for primary schools. The level of satisfaction is above average in response to all of the questions. Inspection evidence endorses the very positive views of parents and carers about the school, particularly that leadership is effective and their children are helped to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle. Inspectors investigated through observations and discussions with pupils the concerns of a small number of parents and carers about whether unacceptable behaviour is handled well. Inspectors found that behaviour is good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Giles 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 68 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 231 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	60	26	38	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	59	26	38	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	37	54	28	41	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	49	31	46	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	33	49	33	49	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	34	50	29	43	4	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	49	32	47	2	3	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)	27	40	35	51	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	30	44	36	53	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	34	38	56	5	7	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	38	36	53	4	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	33	49	31	46	3	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	41	60	24	35	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	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.



29 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Giles Junior School, Stevenage, SG1 4JQ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently, and for telling us your views. We know that you enjoy attending school and saw that you work hard. Inspectors were particularly impressed by your confident answers to their questions. These are the things we liked best.

- Giles Junior School is satisfactory and improving because the headteacher, staff and governing body are fully focused on how to help you to be more successful.
- The school takes good care of you and everyone is doing their utmost to keep you safe.
- The school works well in partnership with others to support your learning and has formed strong links with your parents and carers.
- Teaching is satisfactory and improving, although marking is not yet used consistently to help you to understand what you need to do to improve.
- You develop a good understanding of how to keep yourselves safe and healthy.

Everyone is trying hard to make the school even better. There are three things in particular we have asked the teachers and other adults to do.

- Improve your writing, particularly the boys.
- Help you to learn better by improving teaching.
- Provide you with more interesting opportunities for learning, for example by using computers more across all subjects.

You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to work hard. Well done for showing pride in your school.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale
Lead inspector

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