

Holwell Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117175
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379367
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Shelagh Jennings
Headteacher	Lyn Emerson
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2007
School address	Holwell Road Welwyn Garden City AL7 3RP
Telephone number	01707 323716
Fax number	01707 334431
Email address	admin@holwell.herts.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 16 lessons and observed 9 teachers. They spoke to parents and carers, pupils, staff, and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work, and looked at the information kept about pupils' progress, curriculum and lesson plans, safeguarding documents and school improvement plans. They analysed 162 questionnaires from parents and carers as well as 29 from staff and 113 from pupils.

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

- How good are progress and achievement throughout the school, particularly for the most-able pupils and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?
- How well do the pace and challenge in lessons meet the needs of different groups of learners?
- How effectively are middle managers' roles developing, and how is this strengthening progress and achievement within their subjects?

Information about the school

Holwell is an average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The remainder are from a wide range of different heritages. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities

In September 2011, following a change in local authority policy, the school moved to a single intake for its Reception children. The on-site breakfast club is managed by the school and was included in the inspection, but the after-school provision is managed by a private provider and was not included in this inspection. The school has Healthy Schools status and a Bronze Artsmark award, and is accredited under Hertfordshire Quality Standards for its Early Years Foundation Stage provision.

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 is improving well. The good senior leadership team has a clear vision which all staff share. They know what needs to be done to improve pupils' achievement, and staff and the governing body work well together to achieve this aim and the school's motto of 'Be the best you can, do the best you can, give the best you can.' Pupils and staff are proud to be part of the school, and it is well placed to improve further. Its self-evaluation is good and leadership has been strengthened by the middle management team taking more responsibility for checking on standards and improving teaching and learning in their subjects. New initiatives such as the whole-school approach to teaching phonics are already improving skills in reading and beginning to pay off in writing and spelling.

Pupils' outcomes, including those of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are good and improving. This is because of good and occasionally outstanding teaching and learning, and a good curriculum which really engages pupils' interest and enthusiasm. This is shown in their above average attendance and the ways in which pupils listen and try hard in their lessons. One said, 'It's always interesting and fun and it makes you want to know more.'

Children get off to a good start in the Reception class. This good progress continues throughout the school, and by the time they leave Year 6 pupils' attainment is broadly average from low levels on entry. The school has worked successfully to increase the percentage of pupils reaching the higher levels in mathematics and English.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and are real ambassadors for such lifestyles, saying for example, 'We really need to get less people smoking,' and, 'milk is much better than fizzy drinks, you get calcium from it and you don't get as fidgety'. They feel safe in school and say that if anything does happen teachers 'sort it out' quickly and are always there to listen. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and their cultural development is outstanding. They sing joyously and with pride, whether in assembly or the choir. Pupils show increased self-awareness and empathy for others. The many opportunities they have to learn about different cultures and faiths contribute to the harmonious community within the school and the pupils' excellent understanding of different backgrounds. The creative curriculum and good enrichment opportunities offer a strong context for pupils' skills to be developed and applied. Theme weeks such 'World of Work' help prepare them well for the next stage in their education and later life. Good care,

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support and guidance are underpinned by strong pastoral systems and partnerships with different agencies and families, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and whose circumstances make them most vulnerable.

The systems for checking on and developing the quality of teaching and learning are effective. However, in a few lessons the teaching does not take sufficient account of individual pupils' current levels and needs in all subjects, so they do not have enough challenge or the right pace for all the different groups. A strength in the best lessons is the quality of questioning and the way it enables pupils to solve problems and share ideas. In a few lessons, teachers do not tell pupils what they will be learning or why, focusing only on what the pupils will do. Sometimes pupils have too few opportunities to contribute, particularly in the whole-class part of lessons.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that at the beginning of each lesson, all teachers share with pupils what they will learn and why
 - improving the use of questioning so that it supports pupils' thinking and active involvement in all lessons
 - ensuring all teachers match work to what is known about pupils' current levels of attainment and the next steps for moving their learning on.
- Make even more effective use of the information recorded about pupils' attainment levels and progress by:
 - checking that teachers' planning takes account of pupils' different levels in all subjects
 - ensuring pupils' achievements are tracked using consistently applied measures in all subjects.

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

Pupils mostly join the school with low attainment, particularly in their communication, language and literacy skills, early number skills and personal development. The school's tracking and assessment data and inspectors' observations confirm that achievement overall is good, whatever pupils' starting points. Recent improvements in tracking mean that the school quickly identifies any pupils who are in danger of falling behind and makes good use of a range of well-targeted interventions to support them, including focused group support for social skills and language. There are no differences in the achievement and progress of pupils from different groups, backgrounds or who have different learning needs. Support for more-able pupils has improved across a range of subjects so that a higher percentage of pupils in Year 6, for example, are already attaining the higher levels in English and mathematics. Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding gains in their reading skills because a consistent whole-school approach is strengthening them. They make similarly good gains in their mathematics skills, a weakness at the last inspection. This is because of

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good systematic opportunities in a range of subjects as well as English and mathematics for pupils to try out these skills.

In the lessons observed, learning and progress were almost always good. Pupils are attentive and enthusiastic. In an excellent science lesson, for example, Year 3 pupils were keen to apply their measuring skills as they worked out how strong a magnet’s pull was. Their teacher’s excellent use of probing questions teased out ideas from them and helped them rephrase them using subject vocabulary such as ‘attract’ and ‘repel’ and ‘invisible force’. Year 6 pupils’ thinking and language skills were extremely well extended in an English lesson as they shared ideas about suspense stories and improved their use of vocabulary and writing styles. Pupils enjoy the different opportunities they have to contribute to the life of the school, whether through the school council or getting the hall ready for and contributing to assemblies. They have a good understanding about the world of work and develop good teamwork and other skills, including in areas such as information and communication technology.

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	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good and occasionally outstanding. This is because teachers have a good understanding of pupils’ individual needs and levels. Most teachers use this knowledge well to plan their lessons, and the organisation of some subject teaching such as reading into ‘sets’ and smaller groups supports this further. Teachers use the more creative curriculum and themes well to capture pupils’ interest and most give good verbal feedback to pupils as to how well they are doing and why an idea is

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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good. When lessons are satisfactory rather than good, they still have good features such as the quality of relationships and ways in which group work is carried out with teaching assistants. Most teachers and teaching assistants use questions well to involve pupils and to make them think. However, a few are not as skilled at this and tell pupils the answers too quickly rather than giving another clue or drawing the answer from another pupil.

The good and improving curriculum is highly motivating to pupils whilst also having an appropriate emphasis on key skills such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Some good use of ability grouping, for example for literacy in Years 1 and 2, ensures a real focus on the specific key skills pupils need next. An excellent range of visits and strong sporting and cultural links with other schools and the community enrich pupils’ experience further.

There are highly effective arrangements for induction into the school and to the next stage of pupils’ education. Families praise the ways in which the staff are approachable, and say they know their child is safe. The school works extremely well with outside agencies and organisations to protect those whose circumstances may make them most vulnerable. It draws well on outside support as well as training its own staff to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, a speech and language therapist works regularly with pupils in school. The breakfast club is highly valued by parents and pupils alike, is well managed and helps pupils to begin their day in a calm and healthy way.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers, including the governing body, share a common drive and good ambition to provide the best possible learning experiences for pupils and improve their achievement further. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored well and systems for tracking pupils’ progress are rigorous in most subjects. As a result, all groups of pupils are doing as well as each other and where there have been differences in the past these have been addressed effectively. Middle managers are now much more involved in monitoring the quality of provision and progress in their subjects, although their role is still developing. In subjects other than English and mathematics the detailed tracking of progress is still very new, and so only just beginning to inform teachers’ planning and subject development.

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The governing body discharges its responsibilities appropriately, is well informed about the school’s work and ensures that safeguarding policies and procedures meet current government requirements. Changes of personnel, however, mean that some members are still settling into their new roles.

Communication with parents and carers is good. They feel consulted and listened to, and praise the approachability of staff. The school is a cohesive community in which pupils are polite and show respect and understanding for others, with no sign of discrimination. There are very strong links with the local community and through charity and other connections internationally. Pupils learn about national institutions and about different cultures through the curriculum. The school reflects carefully on how it does this. Its contribution to community cohesion is therefore good.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3
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

Children make good, and in some cases exceptional progress in their first year at the school in all of the areas of learning. Standards are broadly average by the end of the Reception Year, although only a very few children exceed the expected goals for their learning. A particular strength of the provision is how quickly children settle into the happy, very purposeful environment. This is because of the very strong induction procedures. Good links with parents and carers, local nurseries and children’s centres support this smooth transition into school life. Good attention to children’s welfare, through strong keyworker systems, ensures that trusting relationships are quickly established between children and staff. These enable children to feel safe and secure and to develop very positive attitudes to learning. Good records are kept of children’s progress, including excellent ‘learning journeys’ which document children’s good progress and developing understanding in all areas.

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There is generally a good balance between activities directed by adults and those where children make their own choices, although occasionally in whole-group lessons opportunities are missed to encourage children to show more initiative. Children understand the need to keep themselves safe and healthy, saying ‘fruit is good for you, but you can only have a bit of chocolate’. Good use is made of the outdoor learning area to extend pupils’ physical and creative skills further. However, sometimes opportunities are lost to extend children’s language skills in this area, as staffing levels mean the focus has to be on keeping children safe with less time for extension of skills.

Leadership and management are good. The phase leader has a good understanding of what needs to be done and analyses outcomes carefully. Some targeted work such as that in early literacy is already paying off and supporting improvement further.

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

Over 80% of parents and carers returned the questionnaire. This is very high level of response compared with other primary schools nationally. The overwhelming majority of those who responded are very positive about the provision the school makes for their children and the progress they are making. They have great confidence in the leadership and the teachers, and in the ways in which the school keeps their children safe and meets their individual needs. They particularly appreciate the approachability of staff. A very small minority had concerns about pupils’ behaviour and the care and concern with which transition into and out of school is addressed. Inspectors investigated these concerns, but found behaviour to be good and transition arrangements to be highly effective.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Holwell 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 162 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 204 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	102	63	57	35	2	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	84	52	69	43	5	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	80	49	76	47	4	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	78	48	79	49	5	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	91	56	69	43	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	84	52	74	46	4	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	81	50	77	48	4	2	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)	69	43	87	54	3	2	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	82	51	74	46	2	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	70	43	70	43	7	4	6	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	59	36	88	54	5	3	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	86	53	67	41	4	2	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	99	61	60	37	2	1	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 8 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.



7 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holwell Primary School, Welwyn Garden City AL7 3RP

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school recently. Thank you to those who talked with us and showed us their work. It was good to hear how much you like your school and how you safe you feel there. We really enjoyed hearing you sing in your choir and assembly, and seeing the different things that you do. You told us how well everyone got on and how much you felt you were learning.

We think your school is a good school. These are some of the things we liked most.

- You have an excellent understanding of the things you need to do to keep yourselves healthy.
- The teaching is good and so you all make good or better progress.
- Your behaviour is good; you really enjoy your lessons and listen well in them.
- The headteacher, staff and governing body are working hard to make the school even better.

In order to achieve this we have asked your headteacher and staff to:

- make sure the teachers plan work for you in all lessons that is matched very carefully to what you need to learn next
- keep checking on how well you are doing in all the different subjects that you study
- make sure that the teachers always explain to you at the beginning of the lessons exactly what you are going to learn and why.

You can all help by continuing to attend so well. Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Susan Lewis
Lead inspector

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