

Cowley Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117099
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379348
Inspection dates	5–6 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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	351
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Spriggs
Headteacher	Terry Willis
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2009
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Introduction

Three additional inspectors carried out this inspection. The inspectors observed 20 lessons taught by 18 teachers, including some observations with a specific focus on pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior managers, representatives of the governing body and pupils. They looked at a range of information, including data showing the progress made by pupils and a detailed scrutiny of pupils' work. Inspectors analysed questionnaires returned by 203 parents and carers, 82 pupils and 45 members of staff.

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

- What are the reasons for the significant year-on-year fluctuations in standards in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, and what is being done to ensure greater consistency?
- How effectively has the school responded to its previous inspection findings by ensuring that teaching provides consistently good levels of challenge for all pupils?
- To what extent is monitoring and evaluation embedded and how effective are leaders at all levels in driving improvement?

Information about the school

This is larger than the average sized primary school. About half of the pupils are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups, with 36 different home languages spoken by the pupils. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. Mobility is high. The number on roll has increased by 20% since the last inspection.

Incorporated within the school is specially resourced provision for special educational needs. This comprises two bases, managed by the school, for pupils with profound speech and language disorders. One base is for pupils from Reception and Key Stage 1, the other for pupils in Key Stage 2. Each base can accommodate up to ten pupils. These pupils are integrated into mainstream classes for much of the school day. At the time of the inspection, there were seven pupils in the Reception and Key Stage 1 base and nine in the Key Stage 2 base. In the mainstream classes, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. Most of these pupils have general learning difficulties.

In recent years there have been significant changes in staffing at all levels.

The school has achieved Healthy School status and has an Activemark accreditation for its promotion of physical education and sport.

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

Cowley Hill warmly welcomes and equally values all of its pupils, and provides them with a good education. Following a period of considerable change, its continued rapid improvement is strongly driven by the headteacher's ambitious vision. On entry to the Nursery, almost all children have very limited knowledge and skills in all areas of learning. By the end of Year 6, standards are broadly in line with the national averages in English and mathematics. This represents good progress. The good start provided for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in recent years is now resulting in pupils moving into Key Stage 1 with a secure platform for future learning. Standards are set to rise at the end of Year 2. Pupils in the speech and language bases make the same good progress as their mainstream classmates as a result of good leadership and provision. However, their attainment is generally well below average.

The pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe, and say that they feel safe at school because all adults take exceptionally good care of them. Their parents and carers strongly agree. Pupils' excellent understanding of the importance of pursuing a healthy lifestyle is recognised through the Healthy School award and the Activemark accreditation. Pupils' eagerness to learn and outstanding behaviour provide a secure platform for good learning to take place. The school is effective in ensuring that pupils have a secure grasp of basic skills in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. The key to this success is skilled teaching coupled with rigorous monitoring of the pupils' performance. Those identified as making less than expected progress are quickly given extra help. In lessons, the good dialogue between teachers and their pupils, based on the teachers' effective skills in questioning, has a positive impact on the quality of learning. However, the guidance provided through teachers' marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. There are many examples of useful comments made by teachers in pupils' books, but little evidence of pupils acting on the advice or completing corrections. Pupils confirm this lack of very clear direction and say that they do not always know precisely what their targets are. The teachers successfully develop pupils' personal and social skills and are particularly good at building pupils' confidence as learners. However, lessons do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to become independent learners. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers in the delivery of lessons, but they generally lack skills in evaluating pupils' learning.

The views expressed by parents and carers were overwhelmingly positive. Many noted the transformation of the school in recent years. Typical of these comments

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are: 'I am proud to send my children to Cowley Hill' and 'My children love everything about the school from head to school mates. They get all the attention they need.' Although parents and carers say that they are well informed on a day-to-day basis, some wanted to know more about their children's progress and ways of helping their children at home. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has already identified their greater involvement as a way of accelerating children's progress further.

The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is accurate because of the rigour with which managers monitor all aspects of its performance. The governing body fulfils its role well by providing good support and effective challenge. The pupils' accelerated progress in all key stages, as a result of effective developments in provision, demonstrates the school's good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on existing good practice to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better, by:
 - ensuring that teachers' marking is effective in bringing about improvements in pupils' work
 - improving pupils' focus on the targets that they have to achieve
 - providing pupils with regular opportunities to develop skills as independent learners
 - developing the skills of teaching assistants in evaluating the small steps in pupils' learning in lessons.

- Enhance the good partnership with parents and carers by enabling them to play a fuller part in supporting their children's learning.

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

The results of national tests in 2010 and 2011 showed very wide year-on-year variation in standards of English and mathematics. This was the consequence of a combination of factors, including staffing issues that have now been addressed. In 2010 there was a high proportion of pupils with identified, acute learning difficulties in English. In 2011, there was a relative lack of focus on mathematics as measures were put in place to improve standards in English. Current data show that these sharp differences no longer exist. The school is on track to reach the challenging targets set for 2012.

It was clear from the lessons observed during the inspection that all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those in the very early stages of learning English, generally learn well. Pupils supported in the speech and language bases respond well to the consistently well-pitched challenges set for them. In all instances observed, barriers to learning were successfully countered through good quality individual support. The daily teaching commitment of the headteacher enables the size of teaching groups for mathematics to be reduced

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in Year 6. As a result, a teaching group for lower attaining pupils observed comprised just 11 pupils. In this lesson, there was no hiding place from learning as the teacher, well supported by two teaching assistants, ensured that each individual was fully involved in discussions and practical activities. These successfully developed pupils’ understanding of equivalent fractions.

The school’s very strong focus on improving pupils’ attendance, together with the interesting activities on offer has significantly reduced the number of persistent absentees. Attendance rates have improved from being consistently low to levels that are now in line with the national average. A very clear moral code permeates the daily life of the school and pupils clearly know right from wrong. Pupils are invariably polite and well mannered. In lessons and when moving around the school, behaviour is never less than good and is frequently impeccable. The broadening and deepening of pupils’ understanding of what they need to do to keep fit and healthy are evident in the high take-up rates for the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities. The pupils are proud of their school and thrive on the many opportunities provided to take responsibility. Fund-raising activities, such as a recent cake sale by pupils in Year 1 to support the Help for Heroes campaign, demonstrate pupils’ developing good citizenship. Pupils show great respect for one another and for the range of cultural traditions that characterise their school.

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	1
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers display good skills in managing pupils and in providing clear explanations

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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about new concepts. Relationships between teachers and their pupils are extremely good. The result is a high quality climate for learning in which pupils rapidly develop confidence as learners because they feel secure and well looked-after. In most instances, teachers set out clearly what they expect to see in pupils’ completed work. However, on some occasions, these criteria are not clear enough and consequently the pupils do not know precisely what they have to do to demonstrate their learning.

The curriculum is well planned to meet the pupils’ different learning needs. Provision is carefully tailored to help close gaps in learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. Good quality specialist tuition in music adds an enjoyable extra dimension to pupils’ experiences. Enrichment activities, through events such as a recent Book Week, further enhance pupils’ learning. The wide range of clubs on offer to pupils, such as dance, African drumming and cooking provide many exciting learning opportunities. Pupils who speak English as an additional language also have an extra curricular club to help them improve their language skills. The individual education plans for pupils in the speech and language bases set out clear, staged development of skills and understanding. However, the way in which they are written makes them inaccessible for pupils and difficult for parents and carers to understand.

The school is an extremely caring community in which pupils’ welfare is given a high priority. The social and emotional needs of every pupil are very well understood, and are met exceptionally well. The school provided striking examples of the beneficial impact of its actions on both family life and the achievement of pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Procedures for monitoring attendance are rigorous. The good induction of children into the Nursery helps them to settle quickly, and similarly effective arrangements enable pupils to transfer confidently to the next phase of their education.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The very clear direction provided in embedding ambition and driving improvement stems from the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. The effective support provided by the acting deputy headteacher is a particularly noteworthy feature of the strong senior leadership team. The targets set by leaders for the attainment and progress of pupils are ambitious and provide clear challenges for all staff. The governing body is well organised and its effectiveness in raising standards is good.

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Its members know the school well and closely monitor its performance. They bring a useful range of skills to bear in holding the school to account for its actions.

The pupils surveyed felt that the headteacher and senior staff are doing a good job. This reflects their appreciation that this is a very inclusive school in which discrimination has no place and which gives them a sense of belonging. The pupils' safety and well-being are given a high priority and all aspects of safeguarding, including the required checks on adults who have contact with children, follow recommended good practice. The school understands the needs of its own community and demonstrates a clear commitment to celebrate the richness of pupils' cultural traditions. However, the governing body recognises that systems for monitoring the effectiveness of its provision for promoting community cohesion lack a formal framework.

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	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	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

As a result of effective leadership, the children make good progress overall, and outstanding progress in acquiring social skills. One of the many reasons for this excellent social development is the shared use of the area for outdoor learning. This means that children in the Reception classes help those in the Nursery and at the same time learn more about making relationships. The children have ready access to a wide range of exciting activities, both indoors and out. These cover all areas of learning while capturing children's imaginations and encouraging initiative. For example, role-play as elves in Santa's Workshop provided enjoyable challenges in wrapping 'presents' as children developed skills in estimation, cutting, folding and sticking. The production of Christmas lists resulted in some examples of good quality emergent writing as children effectively put into practice their learning of letter

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sounds.

There is a very clear purpose to all activities and adults clearly understand the learning needs of young children. An outstanding feature of the curriculum is the introduction of PLODs (Possible Lines of Development) in which children encounter and respond to situations set up by the teachers. For example, the discovery by children that one of the goldfish was missing captured their imaginations and prompted many thoughtful solutions to the problem of helping to get the fish back into its tank. All adults place a strong emphasis on ensuring the welfare and safety of the children and keep a careful check on children’s progress so that provision can be suitably adjusted in response to what is learned. However, the written assessments on which some of the monitoring is based are sometimes too descriptive. They lack detailed evaluation of precisely how well the children have achieved their tasks and make few suggestions about the next steps in learning for each individual. As a result of the good provision, children have been moving from Reception to Year 1 over the past few years with broadly average levels of attainment.

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 response to the inspection questionnaire was greater than is normally found. Inspection findings confirm the positive views expressed by almost all parents and carers in all areas surveyed in the questionnaire. They also confirmed the views of those parents and carers who feel that they would like to become better informed in supporting their children’s learning at home.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cowley Hill 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 203 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 351 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	165	81	38	19	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	171	84	32	16	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	149	73	52	26	1	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	142	70	58	29	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	158	78	43	21	1	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	153	75	50	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	135	67	64	32	0	0	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)	120	59	74	36	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	146	72	56	28	1	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	135	67	60	30	2	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	134	66	62	31	4	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	160	79	36	18	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	168	83	33	16	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 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.

7 December 2011

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Cowley Hill School, Borehamwood WD6 5DP

On behalf of the inspectors, I would like to thank you for being so helpful when we came to visit your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. Your parents and carers think that the school is good, and we agree.

Here are some of the things we like best.

- You learn well in lessons because you are taught well and you enjoy the interesting and exciting activities your teachers plan for you.
- We were impressed by your excellent behaviour and the way you get on well with each other.
- You showed us that you know a lot about how to stay healthy.
- Your attendance has improved a lot. Well done!
- You told us that you feel safe in school. This is because all of the adults make sure that you are well looked after.
- Your headteacher and all of the people who help run your school are doing a good job.

Every school has something that could be improved, and this is what we have asked your school to do to help you to make even better progress.

- We have asked your teachers to try to make sure that you have lots of opportunities to work by yourself and to become more independent. We also want your teachers to help you improve your work when they mark it, and to make sure that you clearly understand your targets. We would like all the adults in your classes to become a little bit more expert in judging how well you are learning and how you can improve.
- We have asked your school to help your parents and carers find out more about how they can help you with your work.

We would like you all to play your part in helping the school to become even better. The best ways for you to do this are to come to school every day and to make sure that you always do your corrections!

I wish you great success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mike Thompson
Lead inspector

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