

The Russell School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117098
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379347
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2012
Lead inspector	Mary Summers

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	269
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Cunnings
Headteacher	David Peel
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2007
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Mary Summers

Additional Inspector

Lindsay Hall

Additional Inspector

Ken Parry

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 15 lessons taught by 11 teachers and talked with groups of pupils, three members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents associated with safeguarding procedures and self-evaluation. They examined data and other information about pupils' progress, listened to pupils read and looked at samples of their work. The inspectors scrutinised the school's improvement plans as well as the curriculum and teachers' planning for lessons. The responses to the 126 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, together with those submitted by staff and pupils, were taken into account.

Information about the school

Most of the pupils who attend this average-sized primary school come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs is also low. The school meets the current government floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for progress and attainment. The school has gained the Eco-Schools Silver and Sportsmark awards in recent years.

The Year 4 class was on a residential visit during the inspection.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Provision is good and the school is led and managed well. It is not outstanding because there is not enough outstanding teaching and pupils' spelling is not always secure in Key Stage 2.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. They receive an excellent start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. By Year 6, their attainment is well above average. A new strategy for improving writing has had a positive impact on pupils' achievement in English throughout the school. Spelling in Key Stage 2 is not always as accurate as it might be because some pupils do not have a secure understanding of letter and sound patterns.
- Teaching is good. Lessons build well on pupils' previous knowledge and skills. Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and behaviour is managed effectively. In the few satisfactory lessons seen, the more-able pupils found the work too easy and the slow pace of teaching did not engage pupils' interest effectively.
- Behaviour, safety and pupils' personal development are good. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and attendance is above average. Pupils are extremely polite and respectful of one another's views and ideas. They eagerly accept responsibility and show high levels of confidence and maturity in their dealings with one another. The vast majority are well motivated and approach their learning seriously, understanding the need to gain a good education.
- School leaders work well together and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The monitoring of teaching is good with clear systems in place to evaluate teachers' performance and provide appropriate advice and support. The curriculum is well-organised and monitored carefully to ensure that pupils receive a well-balanced experience in all subjects as they move through the school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By January 2013, improve the standard of spelling in Key Stage 2 by ensuring that all pupils have a secure understanding of letter and sound patterns.
- By January 2013, improve teaching so more of it is outstanding by:
 - making sure all that lessons provide high levels of challenge for more-able pupils
 - ensuring that all lessons move at a good pace and engage pupils' interest effectively.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is good. The school's own assessment information shows that pupils make good progress over time in reading, writing and mathematics. Typically, standards are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. English standards dipped in 2011 but current Year 6 pupils are on course to attain levels that are significantly higher than those found nationally. Assessment information is used well by teachers to ensure that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive the right support to enable them to make good progress.

Children's attainment on entry varies considerably but is usually above expected levels in personal and social development and in their communication. They make excellent progress through Nursery and Reception, reaching above average levels of attainment by the time they transfer to Year 1. They continue to progress well during Key Stage 1. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 have a good knowledge of letters and sounds. Even those that do not read quite as fluently, employ well-embedded strategies to build words. By the end of Years 2 and 6, attainment in reading is well above average. Most pupils in Year 6 are reading long novels and talk confidently about the reasons why they enjoy certain types of books and why they prefer certain authors to others.

The school's successful focus on writing over the last few years has had a positive impact. Pupils use an impressive range of vocabulary very effectively in their work. They write with good attention to punctuation, grammar and structure. However, pupils in Key Stage 2 did not have the benefit of recent initiatives to ensure they have a secure understanding of letters and sounds when they were younger, and this affects the accuracy of their spelling.

Pupils say they enjoy learning because teachers provide activities that are 'never boring' and help them to 'learn loads'. In a very successful Year 6 English lesson on the use of expressive language, pupils worked enthusiastically together to compile

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lists of appropriate vocabulary for them to use in their descriptions of walking through a jungle. They made excellent progress which resulted in high level work from virtually every pupil. Similarly in Year 2, pupils made excellent progress in writing clear beginnings, middles and endings for their stories because they were so well prepared for and enthusiastic about the task.

Quality of teaching

Staff have developed good relationships with parents and carers, almost all of whom said that the teaching was good. Teachers have positive relationships with pupils which underpin good behaviour management. Teachers ensure that work is planned well to meet the needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Their needs are supported by the careful deployment of teaching assistants who make a considerable impact on these pupils' progress. More-able pupils sometimes find the work too easy; they are not always challenged to work at higher levels. Teachers' questioning is good and probes pupils' understanding well. However, occasionally teachers take too long to introduce activities and this leads to a drop in the pace of learning. Teachers mark pupils' books regularly and provide very useful pointers about how they can improve their work. These often refer to pupils' individual targets, which are clear and measured against National Curriculum levels. Reading and writing skills are taught effectively and there are many opportunities for pupils to practise and refine these skills in different subjects. In Year 3, for example, pupils researched different aspects of Ancient Greek culture, and wrote brief reports of their findings. Science lessons always include opportunities for pupils to record their hypotheses, their investigation methods and the conclusions they reached.

The staff are very successful in supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In virtually all lessons, pupils benefit from many opportunities to work in pairs and small groups. This was evident in a lesson in one of the Reception classes, where pupils helped each other to plant sunflower seeds. They listened to one another's ideas politely before taking turns to carry out the task. A school-wide focus on helping athletes from Kiribati in the South Pacific to attend the Olympics 2012, has extended pupils' cultural and geographical knowledge as well as help them learn the importance of supporting those less privileged than themselves.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The positive climate for learning and clear code of behaviour mean that behaviour is typically good in lessons and around the school. A small minority of parents and carers expressed concern about the standard of behaviour but school records show that behaviour is managed well and the few incidents of unacceptable behaviour are quickly addressed. Pupils are proud of undertaking responsibilities such as helping to set up the outdoor area in the Nursery. The school council plays an extremely active role in school improvement. In an assembly seen during the inspection, they reported clearly, using a well-organised interactive presentation, on the impact of their work in improving lunchtime organisation.

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Pupils say they feel safe in school and virtually all parents agree. Pupils say they feel confident to share any concerns they might have with adults. They are aware of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying and know how to deal with them. Nonetheless, they say that bullying is extremely rare. 'If a bully came to our school everyone would work together to sort it out – but not in a nasty way,' noted one pupil.

Pupils' mature attitudes to learning and hardworking approach are key elements in their enjoyment of school and their good achievement. Attendance is good. Pupils arrive punctually each morning and quickly settle down for the day's work. They show care and concern for each other and are always ready to help out if anyone has a problem. Many parents wrote appreciative comments about how well the staff have helped their children to become confident and secure learners who value one another. One, echoing the views of many, wrote, 'The school teaches the children about a sense of community. My children feel that they "belong" and are very proud of their school.'

Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead the school with passion and care. The governing body and staff share the same high ambitions for the school. School leaders have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and there is a good focus on continued improvement. Since the last inspection, standards in writing have risen because of the implementation of new literacy programmes, and pupils now receive better guidance on how to improve their work through effective marking and target-setting procedures. Teachers' performance is well-managed and professional development opportunities focus effectively on improving teaching. The governing body has effective monitoring systems in place to ensure it gains an accurate view of the school's performance. Governors provide good levels of support and challenge. In addition, they ensure that statutory requirements for safeguarding children are met so that pupils are safe.

The school takes good account of parents' and carers' views. Recent improvements to the regularity and quality of home-school communication mean that parents and carers receive clear information about school events and their children's progress. The whole school team, with strong support from parents and carers, ensures that the school is well placed to go on improving.

The curriculum is well-balanced and continues to develop because of effective monitoring and review systems, led by the deputy headteacher. A continuous focus on personal, social and health education contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Music continues to be a strength of the school, with a wide range of instrumental tuition offered and opportunities for pupils to participate in class music-making, choir, orchestra, festivals and school concerts. Sport also continues to thrive, with pupils enjoying the many opportunities to engage in games activities within school and beyond. The curriculum for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is good and continues to improve because of a careful

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focus on monitoring their provision and progress. Throughout the school, each pupils' progress is analysed regularly and carefully so that underachievement is quickly identified and addressed.

Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated and the school is clearly committed towards ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. They all receive the support they need to make good progress.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



28 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Russell School, Rickmansworth, WD3 5RR

Thank you for giving us your views about the school when we came to visit you recently. We enjoyed looking in your books, reading your questionnaires and watching you in your lessons. This helped us to get to know your school. It provides you with a good education and these are some of the things we liked best.

- You enjoy coming to school and your attendance is good.
- You make good progress because you work hard and the teaching is good.
- You enjoy all the different activities that adults organise for you to make learning interesting and fun.
- Your behaviour is good and you are always ready to help out if someone has a problem.
- The school council works hard to help your school improve. (I especially enjoyed seeing the interactive presentation during assembly showing how the school council had improved lunchtime organisation.)
- Your headteacher and deputy headteacher lead the school well and they are greatly helped by all the staff.

Even in a good school like yours, there are things to improve. We have asked the teachers to:

- help the pupils in Key Stage 2 improve their spelling
- make sure that lessons are set at just the right level, not too easy and not too hard, so that you all make as much progress as you can.

You can all play your part in helping the school to improve by continuing to work hard and behave well. I hope you continue to enjoy your education.

Yours sincerely

Mary Summers
Lead Inspector

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