

The Leys Primary and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117364
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379402
Inspection dates	29–30 May 2012
Lead inspector	Ronald Cohen

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	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joy Jackson
Headteacher	Leigh Humphries
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2009
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Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	29–30 May 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Ronald Cohen Additional Inspector

Hilary Green Additional Inspector

Gillian Walley Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 23 part lessons taught by 18 class teachers. They also observed intervention activities, including those which took place in the Primary Support base. They talked to different groups of pupils about their learning and scrutinised in detail the work in pupils' books. Inspectors checked pupils' reading across the age range. In addition, inspectors held discussions with pupils, members of the governing body, staff and the designated school improvement adviser. Inspectors examined a range of documentation including the school's records relating to pupils' progress and attainment, monitoring and evaluation, behavioural records and safeguarding. They also took into account the questionnaires returned by 106 parents and carers, 93 pupils and 48 staff.

Information about the school

The Leys is a larger than average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is average. The proportion at the early stages of learning English is below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is well above average, as is the proportion of those pupils with a statement of special educational needs or at school action plus. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The school meets the government's current floor standards which set out the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school has Activemark, Investors in People, and the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark. The headteacher took up post in January 2012.

The school hosts two bases that are run by the local education authority, one of which is a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs. This base supports seven pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and provides outreach provision for other schools. The other base does outreach work across the authority for pupils with specific learning difficulties. It is subject to a separate Ofsted inspection and report, as is the on-site pre-school 'Pilgrim's Way' playgroup.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- The Leys is a satisfactory school. It is improving rapidly because the headteacher has quickly established a strong focus on learning and high expectations. The school is not good because it has yet to achieve a sustained and consistent pattern of good achievement and average attainment at the end of Year 6. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress over their time in school. However, progress is improving quickly and appreciably. This is particularly true for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, in the unit and in the main school, and for pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Nevertheless, more-able pupils are not always fully stretched.
- The majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good. However, over time, teaching's impact on pupils' achievement is satisfactory, because aspects of practice are inconsistent. Sometimes, work set is not sufficiently challenging for more-able pupils. In pupils' notebooks, marking is not always done quickly for pupils to improve their performance in their next assignment. In some lessons, pupils were not given opportunities to use their skills in writing or in problem-solving.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and sometimes exemplary. Pupils are considerate. Bullying is rare and, when it occurs, is dealt with effectively. Most parents, carers and pupils agree that pupils are safe in school. Attendance is above average.
- The headteacher's evaluation of the school's recent performance and her drive to improve it, have markedly affected all aspects of the school's work, especially standards and progress. Development plans identify the correct key priorities and the positive impact of action is evident. Senior leaders review teaching and

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pupils' performance appropriately. Subject leaders, however, do not monitor and evaluate pupils' progress sufficiently well in their areas of responsibility.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress and raise attainment for all pupils in writing and in mathematics by:
 - providing opportunities for pupils to apply their developing writing skills in a wider range of contexts across the curriculum
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to use their problem-solving skills in a broader range of mathematical tasks.

- Ensure the consistency of good and better teaching by:
 - matching work to pupils' different capabilities to ensure sufficient challenge, especially for the more-able
 - ensuring that marking clearly shows pupils how to improve their work, and teachers give pupils opportunities to utilise these comments in order to improve subsequent work.

- Ensure leaders and managers in all phases and subject areas have greater impact on accelerating progress by:
 - being more acutely aware of the criteria which define good and outstanding teaching and learning
 - focusing more sharply on evaluating pupils' learning across all curriculum areas and key stages through lesson observations and the analysis of work in pupils' books.

Main report**Achievement of pupils**

Pupils' achievement over time is satisfactory. It is strongly accelerating as improvements in the quality of learning are systematically embedding in all phases in the school. On entry to the Nursery, children's speech and language skills are often underdeveloped and some children find the rigour of classroom routines difficult. Most settle quickly and happily and enjoy the mixture of teacher-led activities, and those which they choose for themselves. Staff's high expectations for routine working in both the Nursery and the Reception classes promote children's positive attitudes and good self-control. Children make good progress and enter Year 1 with skills and knowledge close to those typical for their age. The school works well with parents and carers and encourages their involvement in their children's learning. The curriculum is appropriate and meets the needs of the children well. Rigorous tracking of progress ensures appropriate intervention, and children are well prepared overall for the next phase of their learning.

In national tests in 2011, at the end of Year 6, attainment was significantly below the national average in all subjects. All groups of pupils did less well than their national

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counterparts. The school's current data concerning pupils' progress, confirmed by inspection evidence both in lessons and in pupils' work, reveal that there has been strong, accelerated progress in Year 6, replicated in Year 5 and further down the school, thus assuring the sustainability of pupils' progress across time. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make at least satisfactory progress, and many make good progress. Their rate of progress is accelerating consistently as the various intervention strategies and other support programmes are increasingly effective. The progress of pupils in the support unit is good, because of the good delivery by staff of pupils' individual and specific learning programmes. Parents and carers mostly believe that their children are making good progress. Inspectors judge that progress, while accelerating markedly, is satisfactory over time, because a consistent pattern of higher achievement has yet to be sustained

Standards are closing rapidly towards national figures and gaps between groups of pupils are closing. This is particularly true for those pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. However, the most-able pupils are not always fully challenged and some have not maximised their potential. All pupils do not have enough opportunities to use problem-solving skills in a range of subjects. Attainment in reading is average overall at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.

Quality of teaching

The large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children are taught well. The majority of lessons observed by inspectors were good. However, the quality of teaching over time and its impact on achievement, over a sustained period for all groups of pupils, is satisfactory.

Where teaching is best, teachers set high expectations of behaviour and effort. In these lessons, pupils are encouraged by teachers to take risks through innovative ways and approaches to learning. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson on the art of 'recount', the pupils took on the challenge of seeking information from Olympic torch bearers, to get them to reflect and recount their emotions and feelings. Teaching such as this also develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, but this is not so strong where it has not been directly planned for. In a number of lessons, the challenges and differentiated tasks did not stretch the more-able pupils, whose progress slowed accordingly.

Reading has been identified as an area for improvement, and all classes have guided reading timeslots. Teachers follow well a reading curriculum which focuses on increasing the joy of reading as a precursor to improving reading techniques. Many pupils say they now enjoy reading, where they did not do so before. This is improving their achievement.

Teachers know each pupil well and relationships are good. Although teachers assess and track each pupil's progress, they do not always mark pupils' work to ensure that pupils are clear how to improve, and sometimes, the marked work takes too long to

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get back to pupils in time for it to have an impact on their next homework task.

Teaching assistants in classrooms and teachers and assistants in the support units provide timely and skilled interventions for pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs. This contributes very effectively to these pupils' progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children are very safe at school and that behaviour is good. A small number are concerned about bullying or that inappropriate behaviour disrupts learning. Nearly all pupils feel that behaviour is good, both in class and around the school. They know that a few children have some problems managing their own behaviour but generally believe that teachers deal well with any problems and pupils 'can always chill out in the [resource] base'. The sentiments and views of the pupils and of the majority of parents and carers are consistent with inspection findings. Pupils' behaviour is good, and sometimes exemplary, both around the school and in class, where they demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning. Inspectors noted that pupils clearly know the 'Golden Rules' about behaviour and are aware of the rewards and sanctions which pupils believe are applied fairly and justly.

Pupils have a keen sense of how to remain safe and are knowledgeably cautious about their use of the internet and mobile phones. They are aware of the different types of bullying, and, in discussions, were unanimous that, if they had concerns, they knew who to go to in school, and concerns would be dealt with effectively. Rates of attendance are above average.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, with good support from senior colleagues, has galvanised the whole school in a short space of time, and her clearly-communicated areas for improvement are being tackled effectively and at a brisk pace. Monitoring of teaching is robustly carried out by the senior leaders and linked to appropriate professional development. Members of staff feel that their contributions are valued and middle leaders are growing in confidence. They are, however, at the early stages of developing their role in monitoring the school's effectiveness in their particular subject areas, particularly in evaluating classroom teaching of their subject, and in improving teachers' marking of pupils' work. This means that there is an over reliance on senior leaders to monitor teaching and learning which limits the sharing of good practice. The school is aware of this, and has committed one of the senior leaders to oversee the development of the appropriate skills of middle leaders.

Accurate and honest self-evaluation lies at the heart of the headteacher's vision for the school's current and future success. The tracking and monitoring of individual pupils' progress, including those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, together with the tracking of all groups, is rigorous and accurate. The efficacy of the tracking system is already apparent in the general progress that has been made in

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closing the gaps between groups, in particular, the gap between boys and girls, and between those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and the other pupils in the school. More than this, it provides a reliable basis for school improvement planning. The strong reversal of the decline in attainment due to the rapid and accelerated improvement in progress and in teaching show the school's capacity to sustain improvements.

The supportive governing body provides satisfactory support by holding the school to account. Effective collaborative working with specialists such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and with the local authority and parents and carers, is adding to the impetus of improvement.

The creative curriculum meets the needs of the large majority of pupils, although, occasionally, the needs of the more-able are not always fully met. The curriculum is extending the range of interesting learning experiences, for example, the adoption of more imaginative approaches to writing. Most, but not all, lessons reflect this. There is an increasing range of cultural events which promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

Safeguarding practices and procedures are thorough and meet statutory requirements. Combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities are highly regarded as integral factors of school life, as befits a school which houses, and fully supports, units which support pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable.

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.



31 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Leys Primary and Nursery School, Stevenage, SG1 4QZ

I would like to thank all of you for being so welcoming and helpful to the inspectors when we visited your school, and for telling us your views in person or through the questionnaires some of you completed. The school gives you a satisfactory education. This means that there are a lot of things it is doing right and some things that need to be improved. I know that all the adults who help to run your school want it to be a good school. For this to happen, you need to make even better progress in your work.

These are the best things about your school. It is a happy place, and you enjoy coming to school. You told us that you feel safe in school. Your attendance is good. Well done! Teaching is improving, and an increasing proportion is good.

Your headteacher agrees that some important things need to be improved to help you make better progress. To ensure that this happens, I have asked the teachers to give you work that always makes you think hard and challenges you to do better, especially in writing and mathematics. I have asked them to make sure to give you lots of opportunities to practise your writing in all subjects, and to practise your problem-solving skills in mathematics. I have further asked teachers to make sure that when you hand in your books for marking, that they mark them quickly and get them back to you before you do your next piece of homework or marked classwork. This way, their comments will be fresh in your minds, and you will know what to do to get even better marks.

Finally, I have asked the middle leaders to look more carefully at your work and your progress so they can help you to improve.

I would like you all to play your part in helping the school to become a good school. The best way for you to do this is always to try your hardest and let your teachers know if the work they give you is too easy.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely
Ronald Cohen
Lead inspector

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