

INSPECTION REPORT

CHESTNUT LANE SCHOOL

Amersham

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110294

Headteacher: Mrs B Searle

Reporting inspector: Mr J Bald
17932

Dates of inspection: 9 – 10 February 2000

Inspection number: 118642
Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant school

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 4 to 7

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: 105 Chestnut Lane
Amersham
Buckinghamshire

Postcode: HP6 6EF

Telephone number: 01494 727415

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs J Faulkner

Date of previous inspection: June 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Following re-organisation, Chestnut Lane is now an infant school, with a part-time nursery class for four-year-olds. There are 143 full-time pupils. Most have reached high standards by the time they start school. A relatively low proportion have special educational needs but in some cases these involve serious learning and behavioural difficulties. No pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school has a small number of pupils from ethnic minorities, some of whom are still in the early stages of learning English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Chestnut Lane is an effective school, which achieves high standards and makes very good provision for pupils' personal and social development. The school is very well led and managed, and there is a strong sense of teamwork among teachers, teaching assistants and volunteers. Teaching is good, with a strong element of outstanding teaching. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Seven-year-olds reach high standards in English, mathematics and science.
- The school is very well led and managed.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to school, work hard and behave very well.
- The home-school reading scheme is very effective.
- Parent and grandparent volunteers make a major contribution to teaching and learning.

What could be improved

- Some pupils make slower progress in the early stages of writing than they do in reading.
- The school makes limited use of information and communication technology.
- The movement from the curriculum for under-fives to the National Curriculum.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When the school was last inspected, in June 1996, standards were very high and the school was very well managed. The quality of education was good, although ten per cent of teaching was unsatisfactory. Since then, the school has maintained its strengths, and has improved the overall quality of education. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during this inspection, and the proportion of outstanding teaching has risen from one lesson in twenty to almost four in ten. The school has improved provision for pupils' personal and social development, and has made good progress on the points for action identified in the last inspection report. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good, and the school is well placed to develop its work further.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7 year olds based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
reading	A*	A*	A*	A
writing	A*	A*	A*	A*
mathematics	A*	A*	A*	A

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The grade A* places the school's results in the top five per cent of schools in reading, writing and mathematics over the past three years. A high proportion of pupils in all of these areas do better than expected for their age. While the trend in results over time is similar to that of most schools nationally, the school is operating consistently at a higher level of attainment even than that of most schools working in similarly favourable circumstances. The school sets itself challenging but realistic targets for further improvement and takes effective action to meet them.

The standards reached in tests and assessments are reflected in most of the work of older pupils during the inspection, and especially in that of the higher-attaining pupils, who reach very good standards in writing, number work and science. However, a small but significant minority, most of whom have special educational needs, do not yet write simple texts without support. Standards in science and physical education are very good, and standards in other subjects seen during this short inspection were in line with those expected nationally.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very good attitudes to school. They enjoy their lessons, work hard and complete homework very consistently.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent behaviour in lessons from almost all pupils. Behaviour out of classrooms is very good.
Personal development and relationships	There are good relationships throughout the school. Pupils co-operate very well together when working in groups, though some younger pupils do not always listen well in lessons involving the whole class.
Attendance	Very high, with no unauthorised absence during the past year.

The very good attitudes and values of the pupils contribute much to the happy working atmosphere within the school. Thanks to close personal support, the small number of pupils with behavioural difficulties are making good progress, and do not impede the learning of others.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching during the inspection was never less than satisfactory. It was very good or better in 37 per cent of lessons, good or better in 63 per cent. The teaching of English and mathematics, including literacy and numeracy, is good, and includes very good teaching of reading throughout the school. All lessons are planned in detail. The best use very effective learning tasks, which are taught with very good pace and a strong sense of purpose. Where the teaching is satisfactory, some learning tasks need further refinement, and the pace of work is less consistent. The teaching of pupils aged up to five years is good when children are working in groups, but less effective in whole-class sessions.

The learning of pupils aged up to five is satisfactory, and often very good in group work and in the early stages of reading. The learning of pupils aged five to seven is good, and very good in response to the school's best teaching, which allows them to develop and consolidate skills rapidly. Where the teaching is satisfactory, pupils cannot always see the links between different parts of lessons, and progress is slower. There are no significant differences in the quality of teaching and learning of different groups of pupils. Learning throughout the school is enhanced by committed and very well-informed voluntary help from parents and grandparents.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum throughout the school has good breadth and balance, and meets all statutory requirements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils who have difficulties with behaviour are effectively included in all aspects of the school's work and make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress overall, with some good progress in individual lessons.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils with English as an additional language are quickly identified and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is an important strength. Provision is carefully thought-out, very consistent, and well-matched to the broad range of personal and social needs of the pupils. The Millennium production, JC 2000, made an outstanding contribution to this work.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school tracks pupils' work and personal development very effectively, and takes timely action when needed. Arrangements for health and safety and child protection are very good.

The school uses the new national schemes of work well. The curriculum for pupils up to five includes all of the national learning goals for this age group, but planning for the transition from this curriculum to the National Curriculum needs further refinement to ensure

that the needs of all pupils are met consistently. Teachers, teaching assistants and volunteers know pupils and their families well, and provide high levels of personal support.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and senior management team generate a strong sense of teamwork. The school has a very clear sense of direction, with thoughtful aims and policies which are consistently reflected in its work.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fully share the headteacher's vision for the school and carry out all of their responsibilities, including difficult budgetary decisions, to a very good standard.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The headteacher and governors analyse information on performance critically, and set effective targets for improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Good, well-used resources for literacy and numeracy. Computing equipment is under-used.

The senior management team is well-balanced and very effective. The school evaluates its own performance well, and the outcome is reflected in development planning. It applies the principles of best value very well within the constraints of its financial position.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children like school, work hard make good progress. • Behaviour is good. • Teaching is good. • The school's values and attitudes are good. • The school works closely with parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One class has pupils from Years 1 and 2. • The quality of homework is not consistent. • Parents receive too little information. • There are too few activities outside lessons. • Information technology is under-used.

Most comments were positive, and were borne out by the inspection evidence. Most negative comments concerned the class for pupils in Years 1 and 2, in which the quality of education during the inspection was very good. Homework seen during this short inspection was limited, but there is a good home reading scheme, and some very good mathematics homework. Information on pupils' progress, including reports, is good overall. However, communication is not always clear, and some parents do not keep in touch with the school regularly. Activities outside lessons are similar to those in most infant schools. Parents' concerns about computers were borne out.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards are high in English, mathematics and science, particularly in reading and number work.

1. Since the last inspection, results in national tests for seven-year-olds have consistently placed the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally, and are very good overall in relation to those achieved by similar schools. In 1999, for example, 95 per cent of seven-year-olds reached the nationally expected standard in all national tests, and in teachers' assessments in science. Standards are at their highest in reading, where three fifths of pupils reach higher than expected standards at seven, but are also very good in mathematics and science, where over half of all pupils exceeded the nationally expected standard in 1999. The proportion of pupils exceeding the expected standard in writing is lower, at just under four tenths of pupils, but still very high in relation to the results of similar schools. The school has identified writing as an area for development and has begun to assess progress very closely as a basis for action.
2. Almost all children reach the nationally established desirable learning outcomes for this age-group by the age of five. Some higher-attaining pupils do much better than this, particularly in reading and science, where work is often very well matched to their learning needs. While the scope of observation was limited during the short inspection, the quality of learning in other areas of learning for children under five was satisfactory or good in equal measure. Most of the better learning often took place where children were working in small groups on work closely focused on their learning needs. Learning was less effective when the class was working as a single unit.
3. While most pupils start at the school with very good knowledge, skills and understanding for their age, a small but significant number do not. The differences in attainment between these and the higher attaining pupils in their classes pose considerable problems for teachers, both in planning and in teaching. The progress of lower-attaining pupils ranges from satisfactory to good, and is satisfactory overall. Progress is at its best in reading, where pupils benefit from the high level of personal support provided by the school, and there is some good progress in number work, for example when practising patterns in addition and subtraction with a volunteer. However, the learning of those with more pronounced difficulties in writing is hindered by a lack of specialist teaching skills within the school. The small number of pupils who are in the early stages of learning English are quickly identified and make good progress.
4. Standards in information and communication technology are improving through work in the new computer suite. However, the suite is a recent development, and is only fully used during the afternoons. Pupils' skills in the subject are in line, overall, with those expected nationally. Good standards were also seen during the inspection in displays of work in art and history. Standards and learning throughout the school reflect the good quality of teaching, pupils' very good attitudes to work, and the help of parents.

The school is very well led and managed.

5. The school has a very clear sense of educational direction, expressed both in a well-balanced statement of aims and values, and in its daily work. The headteacher monitors all aspects of the school's work very closely, and analyses all available

information carefully to find ways of improving standards. The school's senior management team has been carefully chosen to make best use of the range of skills and professional interests among the teachers, and its members work closely with the headteacher to develop the school's work in specific areas. This is an imaginative and flexible system which allows the school to direct resources to meet specific needs, and at the same time provides team members with good opportunities for professional development. The headteacher monitors teaching closely and constructively, and there is a strong sense of teamwork among all adults in the school.

6. The headteacher and governors have had to take difficult decisions to deal with cuts in the school's budget during re-organisation, while meeting government targets in class sizes for pupils under seven. They have managed this process effectively, and have closely and effectively monitored the effects of their decisions, including the work and personal development of pupils in one mixed-age class. They have at the same time ensured that new developments, notably the information and communication technology suite and the Millennium garden, are introduced in a way that provides very good value for money. Governors' additional voluntary support for the school makes good use of their personal and professional skills, and they carry out their duties to a very good overall standard.

Teaching is good.

7. The teaching of pupils up to five is satisfactory overall. It has very good features, notably in the early teaching of reading, which also benefits greatly from an excellent home-school record in the reception class, and in some group work, for example in science, which enables higher-attaining children to reach good standards in the early stages of the National Curriculum. In some lessons, however, there is no clear link between activities undertaken by the class as a whole and subsequent group work, and the pace of work is not sustained as well in some whole-class lessons as it is when children are working in groups. These factors limit the consistency of pupils' learning, particularly when they find it difficult to switch their attention from one activity to another. Learning is never less than satisfactory, however, and the teaching of children under five is effective in developing good relationships, and a genuine interest in learning.
8. The teaching of pupils aged five to seven ranges from satisfactory to excellent and is good overall. All lessons are carefully planned, with a good balance of learning styles, and work is consistently marked. The most successful lessons are delivered at an excellent pace, spurring pupils to concentrate hard and produce their very best work. These lessons often make very good use of resources – for example, the baby brother of one of the pupils in a science lesson on growth. They contain tasks for pupils which effectively meet the learning needs of all in the class, with scope for higher-attaining pupils to reach high standards, and effective support for those with special educational needs. Very good teaching was seen in physical education, combining effective development of pupils' understanding of dance with a pace which ensured that they were all fully exercised. Teaching in information and communication technology is very effective in ensuring progress in the National Curriculum, though there was very little use of information and communication technology to promote learning in other lessons during the inspection. Where the teaching is satisfactory, it is planned in good detail, but tasks for pupils are less well-designed – for example, involving too much copying – and the pace of work is less brisk.

9. Displays throughout the school are prepared to a very good standard and are an important part of teaching and learning. It was not possible to investigate the full range of homework during this short inspection, but the home-school reading scheme operates very consistently, and very good homework was seen in one class for mathematics.

Pupils have very good attitudes to school, work hard and behave well.

10. These were strengths of the school during the last inspection. They have been sustained and further developed through the school's consistent programme of personal and social education. Pupils throughout the school respond well to the lead given by their teachers, and concentrate well on their work. They settle in well in the part-time nursery classes, and learn to form constructive relationships with their teachers and with each other. As they move through the school, pupils develop very good co-operative skills when working in groups, take part in discussions responsibly and complete their homework conscientiously. The overall quality of behaviour is very good. Pupils are polite to adults and to each other, and share ideas well, though there are some lapses when pupils should be listening to each other during whole-class teaching in the reception class. A small number of pupils who have behavioural difficulties require constant individual attention from an adult. The school provides this through voluntary help, and the learning of other pupils was not disrupted during the inspection. There is a very effective anti-bullying policy, designed to involve each pupil personally, and supported by assemblies.

The home-school reading scheme is very effective.

11. From the time they start school, pupils take a book home each evening, and change their books very frequently. The scheme is run by parent volunteers, who check book bags each morning. While the school's spending on new books has been constrained by its financial situation, the consistency of practice and enjoyment of reading built up by this scheme contribute much to the school's outstanding long-term success in teaching reading.

Parent and grandparent volunteers make a major contribution to teaching and learning.

12. Well-informed and consistent voluntary help from parents and grandparents is extensively used throughout the school. Volunteers often work with groups of children to the standard that would be expected of a qualified teacher, and are consistently well-briefed. In one class, this briefing is of excellent quality, with word-processed sheets detailing the work of each volunteer. Volunteers use this information effectively, marking their own role with highlighter pens and ensuring that they fully understand what is required of them. This preparation made a key contribution to one very good lesson in information and communication technology, in which a parent and grandparent taught two groups of pupils using the computers while the teacher and another volunteer concentrated on work with programmable robots. The extensive opportunities for pupils to discuss their work with interested and supportive adults make an important contribution to their personal and social development as well as to learning.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Some pupils make slower progress in the early stages of writing than they do in reading.

13. While seven-year-olds reach high standards in writing in relation to similar schools, progress in the early stages of writing is slower than that in reading. Pupils are taught to form letters accurately from the reception class onwards, but some pupils of average attainment in Year 1 were still not forming letters consistently at the time of the inspection, and the handwriting of some lower-attaining pupils was poor. Progress in the early stages of punctuation is slower than would be expected for higher-attaining pupils, and some older lower-attaining pupils do not write simple sentences without adult support. While the best tasks for writing encourage pupils to compose text from an early stage, some others involve a degree of copying. Overall, pupils have fewer opportunities for practice in writing than in reading. The school has identified writing as an area to be addressed by the senior management team.

The school makes limited use of information and communication technology.

14. The school has given priority to the teaching of the National Curriculum for information and communication technology in the computer suite, but has many other serviceable computers often with good supporting software, which are scarcely used. Some individual parents had expressed concern at the limited use of information and communication technology in the school, and these concerns were borne out by the inspection evidence.

The movement from the curriculum for under-fives to the National Curriculum.

15. At its best, the school's planning ensures that pupils who have achieved the desirable learning outcomes for pupils by the time they are five make smooth progress into the Programmes of Study of the National Curriculum. This is very effective in science and in reading, but planning for the transition in other subjects is less consistently effective, particularly in the design of learning tasks. This results in less effective application of teachers' skills, and, in lessons seen during the inspection, limited pupils learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

16. The school adopts a consistently critical attitude to its work, and has identified aspects of the points for improvement in its own planning. In order to maintain the high standards achieved, the headteacher and governors should:

(1) Improve the early teaching of writing, by:

closely monitoring the progress of all pupils in the early stages of writing, including handwriting and the formation of letters;
ensuring that the design of tasks for writing contributes consistently to progress;
developing effective approaches to teaching pupils to write and punctuate sentences accurately;
developing specialised skills in teaching writing to pupils who have special educational needs. (Paragraphs 1, 3, 12, 14)

(2) Make more consistently effective use of information and communication

technology to promote learning, by:

identifying specific uses for all computers that are to be retained;
developing the skills of teaching assistants and volunteers in using computers with groups of pupils and individuals;
developing the use of computers to promote learning in subjects other than information and communication technology;
improving the level of use of the computer suite. (Paragraphs 4, 13)

- (3) Improve planning for movement from the curriculum up to age five to the National Curriculum, by:

adopting a single clear format for planning;
setting learning targets on the basis both of the National Curriculum and of under-fives provision, according to the needs of pupils;
establishing clear links between work undertaken in whole class sessions and that carried on in groups. (Paragraphs 3, 7, 14)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	19
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	12

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	38	20	37	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	12	131
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	20

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	6

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.6
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	35	43	78

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	34	34	35
	Girls	40	40	41
	Total	74	74	76
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	95 (92)	95 (92)	97 (95)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	34	34	35
	Girls	37	37	40
	Total	71	71	75
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	91 (92)	91 (92)	96 (94)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	87 (86)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	139
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y2

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.8
Average class size	20.2

Education support staff: YR – Y2

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	45

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	N/a

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	30

Number of pupils per FTE adult	12
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	344,604
Total expenditure	362,753
Expenditure per pupil	1,761
Balance brought forward from previous year	13,262
Balance carried forward to next year	- 4887

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	206
Number of questionnaires returned	69

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	65	28	6	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	39	51	4	1	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	61	3	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	16	57	20	6	1
The teaching is good.	40	46	9	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	50	21	6	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	42	41	13	4	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	43	9	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	29	54	12	4	1
The school is well led and managed.	25	54	7	4	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	36	52	9	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	17	25	29	19	10

Other issues raised by parents

A significant number of parents were concerned at the establishment of a mixed-year class comprising the youngest pupils in Year 2 and the oldest pupils in Year 1. Their concerns did not extend to the teaching of the class. A similar number of parents, who had children in this class, expressed strong support for the quality of education in it.