

INSPECTION REPORT

CRABTREE JUNIOR SCHOOL

Harpenden, Hertfordshire

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117287

Headteacher: Mrs Marie Teresa Willis

Reporting inspector: Mrs Gillian W. Jones
9708

Dates of inspection: 14 – 15 March 2000

Inspection number: 191068

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Community
School category:	Junior
Age range of pupils:	7 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Crabtree Lane Harpenden Herts
Postcode:	AL5 5PU
Telephone number:	01582 623501
Fax number:	01582 623455
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Susan Cubbon
Date of previous inspection:	4 – 7 June 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Mrs Gillian W Jones	Registered inspector
Mrs Sylvia Daintrey	Lay inspector
Dr Alister Fraser	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Essex County Council
Learning Services
Advisory & Inspection Service
PO Box 47
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 6WN

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Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Crabtree Junior School has 249 children aged seven to eleven who attend the school full-time. There are significantly more boys than girls, particularly in Year 3 where there are more than twice as many boys as girls. The children come mainly from the local area and are predominately from affluent homes with professional parents. Their attainment on entry is normally well above the national average. In September 1999 attainment on entry was lower than usual but was still significantly above average. There are 38 children who have special educational needs. The number of children entitled to free school meals is very low and there are no children with English as an additional language. The school is over-subscribed and this has led to some large classes.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Crabtree Junior is a very good school with many strengths and no significant weaknesses. There is a strong and caring ethos where relationships are very positive, and there is mutual respect between all members of the community. Children work eagerly and industriously and achieve high standards in English, mathematics and science. Teaching is good and contributes significantly to the standards achieved. The headteacher, staff and governors provide very good quality leadership and have high expectations of all the children. The school has above average income but nonetheless provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- High quality leadership from the headteacher, teachers and governors promotes a culture of continuous improvement
- Standards are high in English, mathematics and science, largely as a result of the school's commitment to high achievement for all children
- Teaching is good and contributes significantly to the children's attitudes and behaviour as well as the high standards they achieve
- Children are eager and confident learners who are well behaved, exceptionally polite and show real care for each other
- The national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been well implemented and adapted to the needs of the school
- Children with special educational needs make maximum progress
- The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is very good and is starting to have an impact on raising standards

What could be improved

- A small amount of weak teaching in parts of the lower school
- Standards of presentation in children's work in some classes and the quality of the learning environment in some areas of the school
- Opportunities for children to raise their own questions and follow their own lines of enquiry
- Spiritual and cultural development

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in June 1996 and since then has made significant improvement. The strong leadership and clarity of purpose and direction place the school in an excellent position for continued improvement. Parents commented strongly on the improvements made since the current headteacher has been in post, particularly in standards of behaviour. Following its last inspection, the school produced a good action

plan to address the key issues and this has been well implemented in almost every area. Thorough analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses has meant that strategic planning is clearly focused on appropriate priorities. Work undertaken on raising the attainment of boys has been effective and there is now no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls by the age of eleven. The school is aware of the need to continue to pay attention to this issue, particularly with the gender imbalance in Year 3.

Good attention has been paid to improving the quality of teaching and there has been a notable improvement in the percentage of good and very good teaching. A small amount of weak teaching still persists and the school is taking measures to deal with this. Some action has been taken to improve spiritual and cultural development but there is work still to be done on strengthening the multicultural dimension of the curriculum and increasing the opportunities for children's spiritual development.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	A*	A*	A	A
Mathematics	A	A	A*	A
Science	A*	A	A*	A

Key

highest 5% nationally A*

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The information shows that in 1999 standards were well above average compared with national standards and with those of similar schools. In mathematics and science, the school's performance was in the highest 5 per cent nationally. Standards in English are well above average and children read extremely well. Standards of writing are also above average but not as good as reading. Improvement in writing is a priority in the current school development plan. The data also shows that the school has maintained consistently high standards for the period from 1997 to 1999. In addition the school has increased the number of pupils achieving higher levels, particularly in mathematics and science. The school has set challenging targets to increase the number of children gaining higher levels in the forthcoming years. In some classes the standard of presentation of children's work is not good enough.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children's attitudes to work are extremely good. They are eager to come to school, work hard and are thoughtful and confident learners.

Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Children behave exceptionally well in and out of class and their behaviour in assembly is exemplary.
Personal development and relationships	Children work well together and relationships are strong. They are articulate and take their responsibilities seriously.
Attendance	Attendance rates are consistently high and punctuality is very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	Aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	N/A	N/A	Good

Overall the quality of teaching is good and promotes good progress, good quality learning and high standards. Almost 70 per cent of the teaching is good or better and 25 per cent very good with one lesson that was excellent. Of the 28 lessons observed, one was judged to be unsatisfactory and one poor. The quality of teaching in literacy and mathematics is very good and in science it is good.

Teachers have high expectations of the children, lessons are well planned and focused and teaching skills are good. A wide range of interesting activities is planned for the children using good quality, well-prepared resources. Teachers are extremely good at questioning children to check their knowledge and understanding and to extend their learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school has a broad and balanced curriculum which is well planned to provide children with a good range of learning experiences and to achieve good progress. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been successfully implemented and there are positive developments in ICT.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school provides very well for children with special educational needs and ensures that they make maximum progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There is good provision for children's personal development. Moral and social development are very well promoted, for example, through the school council. Cultural development is good overall but the multicultural dimension of the curriculum needs to be strengthened. Spiritual development is not well promoted and many opportunities for this are missed in class and in assemblies.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a secure and caring environment where all can flourish. Staff know the children extremely well and they monitor their academic and personal progress carefully.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership with clear direction for the work of the school. She is ably supported by a number of key staff who have curriculum leadership roles and contribute well to the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The work of the governors is exceptionally good. They are very well organised and do significantly more than simply fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and play a critical role in strategic planning.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has very good systems and procedures in place for self-evaluation. A thorough analysis is undertaken of standards; both teaching and planning are regularly monitored. The strengths and weaknesses identified form the basis of planning for future improvement.
The strategic use of resources	The school's strategic use of resources is good. Careful planning ensures the most effective use of staff, accommodation and learning resources; an example of this is the new ICT suite. The principles of best value are applied informally but not yet in a planned and systematic way.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the school achieves for their children • The school's open door policy • The good teaching and management • Information provided for new parents • The school's close work with parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of the parents' role in the homework programme • Information about aspects of their child's progress and school life

The inspection team's findings support the parents' positive views. Parents are given good information about school life including homework. The school is aware that it can do more to explore ways in which the partnership with parents can be improved further, for example, by surveying parental opinion.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The leadership of the headteacher, teachers and governors

- 1 The school receives strong leadership from the headteacher, senior management team and governors and this promotes high standards and effective teaching and learning. The headteacher's high quality leadership and management skills are clearly recognised by staff and governors, and were particularly commented upon by parents. There is a clear and shared purpose and direction to the work of the school and a drive for continuous improvement.
- 2 The school has a strong and caring ethos with a clear focus on achievement for all. Team spirit is good, relationships are very positive, and there is mutual respect between all members of the community.
- 3 Subject co-ordinators understand their roles and responsibilities well and provide good leadership in their areas. This leadership has been particularly effective in improving the quality of provision in literacy and mathematics and is starting to impact on information and communication technology (ICT).
- 4 The school has very good systems and procedures for self-evaluation. A thorough analysis is undertaken of standards; both teaching and planning are regularly monitored. Strengths are recognised and areas for improvement identified. There are supportive procedures for providing feedback to staff and strategic planning is clearly based on the outcomes of evaluation. Subject co-ordinators and governors contribute effectively to monitoring and evaluation.
- 5 The school has recently been successfully re-assessed by Investors in People. Work in this area ensures good attention to professional development for all staff.
- 6 The work of the governors is exceptionally good. The governing body was regrouped in September 1999 and is already very well organised and effective. Governors are clear about their roles and they do significantly more than simply fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and play a critical role in strategic planning.
- 7 A key issue from the last inspection to improve strategic planning has been fully addressed. A good school development plan is in place that clearly links the use of strategic resources to priorities. Careful planning ensures the most effective use of staff, accommodation and learning resources. An example of this is the purchase of mathematics texts to improve teaching and learning and the development of the new ICT suite to improve standards. The use of specific grants is well-targeted to improving teaching and learning and raising standards; for example, the Additional Literacy Support (ALS) arrangements and the effective use of the School Improvement Grant to support staff development.
- 8 There is not yet a formal system for applying the principles of best value in the use of resources but these principles are clearly embedded in decision making.

Standards in English, mathematics and science

- 9 By the end of the key stage, standards in mathematics are very high compared with the national average and well above the average in similar schools. Standards of work seen throughout the school are of a similar standard. Children are confident and competent in all areas of mathematics and are able to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of situations. Some particularly impressive work was observed in Year 6 where children were working out the formula for finding the area of a triangle and then developing the proof that their method worked.
- 10 The introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy has brought about significant improvements in standards achieved in mental and oral work. Children are able to confidently explain their methods and demonstrate their working. They know that it is all right to make mistakes and that if mistakes are analysed and discussed it can lead to much clearer understanding.
- 11 By the end of the key stage, standards in English are well above both the national average and that in similar schools. Standards of reading are high and in writing, they are above average. Improvement in writing is a current school development priority and some joint work is being undertaken with the Infants school.
- 12 Speaking and listening skills are very good. Children use an interesting and mature vocabulary and are able to express themselves clearly and articulately.
- 13 By the end of the key stage, standards in science are very high compared to the national average and are well above the average in similar schools. Children are knowledgeable about science, have a good understanding of scientific concepts and processes and an appropriate range of scientific skills.
- 14 An issue from the last inspection was for the school to continue its efforts to ensure that the performance of girls and boys is equally well developed. The school has been successful in this and standards by the age of 11 are now equally high for boys and girls. They school is aware that it needs to continue to keep an eye on boys' attainment because of the gender imbalance in the school and particularly in Year 3.

The quality of teaching

- 15 Overall the quality of teaching is good and promotes good progress, good quality learning and high standards. Almost 70 per cent of the teaching is good or better, and 25 per cent very good, with one lesson that was excellent. Of the 31 lessons observed, one was judged to be unsatisfactory and one poor. The quality of teaching in literacy and mathematics is very good and in science it is good. The headteacher takes an active role in teaching, such as the work she undertakes with the most able mathematicians. She provides a good model for other staff. Amongst the staff, there is a strong team spirit, a reflective approach and a determination always to look for improvement.
- 16 An issue from the last inspection was to improve curriculum planning. All levels of planning are clearly in place and short-term planning identifies precise learning objectives. Teachers pitch planning appropriately high and plan a stimulating range of activities to engage and excite the children. Lesson objectives are shared with

children so that they are absolutely clear about what they should be learning and are able to evaluate their success. It was notable that some Year 6 children have writing partners who provide them with valuable feedback on their work.

- 17 Teachers have high expectations of children both in terms of behaviour and performance. They have good questioning skills that they use well to challenge, assess and reinforce learning. Questions are well targeted and differentiated to provide high levels of challenge for the more able and sensitive support for those who find learning more difficult. The teaching for children with learning difficulties is very good. There is focused work with groups and individuals as well as some good additional teaching, such as the ALS work, for those who need to catch up.
- 18 Teachers know children very well and there are strong and positive relationships that result in confident learners. Most teachers manage behaviour skillfully and there is a clear culture of mutual respect. Teachers are good at providing children with feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do in order to improve. Marking is full, thorough and constructive and is used as a powerful vehicle for setting individual targets for improvement. Very efficient use is made of teaching time with lessons starting promptly and proceeding at a good pace. The quality of lesson preparation is good and teachers use a wide range of resources that engage children's interests and support their learning.
- 19 The teaching of mathematics and English is given high priority, the quality is very good and this contributes significantly to the standards achieved.

Pupils' attitudes to their work

- 20 Children are very keen to come to school, are interested in and enthusiastic about their learning and take pride in their work. They respond very well to the good teaching they receive and to the high expectations of them. They are able to engage in high-level discussion, listen to others' points of view and build well on points made by others. A good example of this was during a debate about a local bypass. The children were able to construct an argument for the project and also present the opposing points of view in a mature and reflective way.
- 21 Children are exceptionally polite and behave very well in class and around the school. In assembly behaviour is exemplary. Occasionally the behaviour of some of the younger children deteriorates in lessons which do not engage their attention and when the class is not well managed.
- 22 Personal development and relationships are very good. Moral and social development are especially well promoted, for example, through the school council. The children are very clear about the difference between right and wrong and this forms a strong part of the school's ethos. They eagerly accept responsibility and they take their responsibilities very seriously. They have a mature and caring attitude to each other, particularly the older children towards the younger ones.
- 23 Attendance rates are consistently high and punctuality is very good. The school works very well with parents and outside agencies to ensure that all children come to school regularly and on time.
- 24 The school provides very well for children with special educational needs. Sensitive support is provided by teachers in the classroom and there is additional group and

individual support from specialist teachers. The quality of this work overall ensures that children with special educational needs are ensured full access to the curriculum and make very good progress.

The national strategies for literacy and numeracy

- 25 The school has introduced and implemented the National Literacy Strategy very successfully. Teachers are confident and have a clear focus on improving children's literacy skills. They are particularly good at the higher level interrogation of text. Teachers, children and parents believe that the literacy hour has been influential in raising standards and improving teaching and learning.
- 26 The school has successfully introduced and implemented the National Numeracy Strategy. This has brought about more consistent teaching across the school and has led to clear improvement in children's mental and oral skills.
- 27 The frameworks for numeracy and literacy have been used well to pitch work appropriately high in order to challenge the large number of able children in the school.
- 28 Literacy and numeracy work have been monitored by the coordinators and the literacy and numeracy governors. The outcomes of the monitoring have been carefully evaluated and the information gained has been used well to adapt the strategies to meet more closely the needs of the school.

The provision for ICT is very good and is starting to impact on raising standards

- 29 The school has made a large financial investment in ICT. There is now a networked ICT suite as well as fully networked classroom computers. This development, ably led by the coordinator, is already having an impact on raising standards.
- 30 All classrooms have networked computers and these are used well for the application of ICT across the curriculum.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

A small amount of weak teaching

- 31 An issue from the previous inspection was to continue to address shortcomings in teaching. In many ways the school has been successful in this and there is now almost 70per cent of teaching which is good or better. There is, however, a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching in parts of the lower school. The headteacher and senior management team are taking measures to rectify this.
- 32 In the two classes where there is some unsatisfactory teaching, behaviour is not well managed. When lessons are not sufficiently interesting and engaging, behaviour deteriorates and progress slows. An example of this was when children had to sit and listen to the teacher for more than half the lesson without being actively engaged; this led to restlessness and many children stopped paying attention and distracted others.

Standards of presentation

- 33 In some classes, the standard of presentation of children's work is good, with teachers providing good role models and setting clear expectations. In other classes, the presentation of work, while not of an unsatisfactory standard overall, is not as good as it should be. In some classes, many of the children's books contain work which is not regularly dated, where rulers are not used for underlining or for drawing diagrams, mathematical figures and so on, and too little attention is given to layout. Children in these classes are not sufficiently clear about the expectations for good presentation and teachers do not always set a high enough standard themselves.
- 34 Teachers pay careful attention to mounting displays of children's work. There are some high quality displays in the school such as the quilting in the foyer, work from the art clubs in the hall and many of the displays in classrooms. Some classrooms provide exciting, stimulating environments that are very well ordered. In some areas of the school, however, too little attention is given to the overall quality of presentation and to providing stimulating learning environments. There is some clutter and materials and resources are not displayed and presented in the most inviting or interesting ways.

Opportunities for children to raise their own questions and follow their own lines of enquiry

- 35 Overall the quality of teaching in the school is good and teachers prepare well-structured lessons. There is pressure on teachers to cover a large amount of subject matter and their planning and good teaching skills support them in doing this. Sometimes, in the effort to cover the ground and to proceed at a brisk pace, teachers control lessons too tightly and do not give children enough opportunity for reflection, creativity, decision making and risk-taking. An example of this was in a science lesson where the preparation was of a very high standard but the children did not have an opportunity to engage in any of the planning themselves. Another example was in a mathematics lesson where a child spotted an exception to the formula being used to calculate area but was not given the time develop this point.

Spiritual and cultural development

- 36 An issue from the last inspection was to improve pupils' spiritual and cultural development. While some work has been undertaken in this area there is more to be done. Cultural development is good overall but too little planned time is given to multicultural issues and there is little reflection, in resources and displays, of the multicultural nature of society.
- 37 Spiritual development is not strongly promoted through the curriculum, in lessons or in assemblies. Many opportunities are missed for the children to reflect upon the wonders of nature, art and literature, beliefs and on the world and their place within it.

WHAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

The school should now:

- 1 Take further measures to ensure that there is no unsatisfactory teaching, by

continuing to set clear targets for improvement and monitoring progress towards these;

2 Ensure that the standard of presentation of children's work and of classrooms is consistently high throughout the school by:

- agreeing and publishing clear standards and expectations for the presentation of children's work;
- agreeing and publishing standards for the quality of classroom organisation and presentation;

3 Increase the opportunities in lessons for children to raise their own questions and follow their own lines of enquiry

4 Strengthen spiritual and cultural development by:

- increasing the planned opportunities for children to develop an understanding of the multicultural nature of society;
- planning more opportunities in class and assemblies for children to reflect on:
the wonder of humankind;
their own and others' beliefs;
the wonders of the natural world;
the delight and wonder in art, literature and music.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	28
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	10

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	25	39	25	4	4	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	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	249
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	7
Special educational needs	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	38
English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0
Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.15
National comparative data	5.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	35	21	56

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	33	34	35
	Girls	18	18	21
	Total	51	52	56
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	91 (98)	93 (98)	100 (100)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	34	34	34
	Girls	18	18	19
	Total	52	52	53
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	93 (94)	94 (95)	95 (100)
	National	67 (65)	69 (65)	75 (71)

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	0
White	245
Any other minority ethnic group	4

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y3 – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26.2
Average class size	31

Education support staff: Y3 – Y6

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	41

FTE means full-time equivalent.

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.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
	£
Total income	406162
Total expenditure	399219
Expenditure per pupil	1677
Balance brought forward from previous year	8954
Balance carried forward to next year	15897

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	250
Number of questionnaires returned	99

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	47	7	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	49	44	5	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	48	2	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	43	21	1	0
The teaching is good.	56	38	5	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	42	43	12	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	63	29	6	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	28	4	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	49	36	11	2	1
The school is well led and managed.	56	36	4	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	42	4	2	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	36	7	0	1

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Overall, the parents were very positive about the school and its achievements for their children.