



Inspection report

Walkern Primary School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 117154
LEA Hertfordshire

Inspection number 274546
Inspection dates 15 and 16 March 2005
Reporting inspector Mr K Gilbert, Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Primary	School address	High Street
School category	Community		Walkern
Age range of pupils	4 to 11 years		Stevenage
			Hertfordshire
			SG2 7NS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438 861285
Number on roll	68	Fax number	01438 861222
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr K List
Date of previous inspection	March 2003	Headteacher	Mrs T Leavy

Age group

Published

Reference no.

Introduction

When Walkern Primary School was inspected in March 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on four occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in March 2005.

Description of the school

Walkern Primary School is situated in the village of Walkern, east of Stevenage in Hertfordshire. It is a small school with 68 pupils on roll. The school roll has fallen steadily over the last two years; at the time of the last inspection there were 88 pupils in the school. Some pupils each year transfer to a middle school at the end of Year 4; the school's data suggests that a large proportion of these are higher attainers. Almost all of the pupils are of white British heritage. There is a mixture in the area of local authority housing as well as that which is privately owned. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, at 13 per cent, is broadly average. Twenty one per cent of the pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs, which is just above average; two pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

Walkern Primary School has improved significantly over the past two years. Although there have been five headteachers, both substantive and acting, during that period of time, three of the four teachers have remained at the school and have provided stability. The school now offers a satisfactory quality of education. The teaching has improved significantly with all of it being at least satisfactory; three quarters of the teaching is good, very good or excellent. Standards are close to or above national averages. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good and they are keen to succeed. The curriculum is broad and adequately balanced, and there is a wide range of extra activities which are well attended.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of March 2003 required the school to address the key issues concerned with standards, curriculum, assessment, the quality of teaching, leadership and management and resourcing. There has been good progress on each of the key issues.

Capacity to improve

The school is well placed to continue the improvement. The recently appointed headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school and, with the assistance of the teachers and the support staff, issues for improvement have been identified. Morale is good and all staff work effectively as a team. There are systematic arrangements for the analysis of data about the school's performance, and a framework for monitoring is in place. The governors contribute much to ensuring the school provides a focus for several aspects of village life. The building extension and the refurbishment of two rooms to form a computer suite and a library result in the school providing an attractive and effective learning environment. There is capacity for a growth in the number of pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- continue to raise standards across the curriculum;
- continue to improve the quality of teaching.

Achievement and standards

The pupils' progress since March 2003 has improved noticeably. On entry to the Foundation Stage, levels of attainment are generally in line with those typical of the pupils' age. Many of the pupils are confident speakers and some come with the ability to write their names and read short simple sentences. The pupils engage readily in class discussions and participate sensibly in everyday routines. They are making secure progress in using everyday measurement such as telling the time on a clock face. The pupils have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the world. They discuss ideas, predict what might happen, conduct simple tests and notice the outcomes. They have a sense of rhythm and join in well with familiar singing rhymes. They make sound progress and most reach the standards of literacy and numeracy that are usual for their age.

Results in the 2004 national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 were good. All pupils achieved at least the expected Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, with 55 per cent, 36 per cent and 55 per cent respectively achieving the above average Level 3. With only four pupils in Year 6 during the last academic year, comparisons with past, local and national statistics are difficult. Three of the four pupils obtained the expected Level 4 in English, mathematics and science, two of whom obtained a Level 5 in science. The Year 6 pupils had several teachers during their last two years in the school.

Standards in reading are good in Key Stage 1. The pupils can predict missing words from a text by using their knowledge of stories and their grasp of grammar, as well as picking up specific cues from illustrations and from the plot of the text. They apply spelling rules reliably, when these are the focus for the lesson, and use these when reading unfamiliar words. In Key Stage 2, the pupils read aloud with fluency and listen intently. They participate in class discussions and some express their ideas clearly using language appropriately to emphasise their message. Standards in writing are in line with national expectations. A range of writing for different purposes and audiences is evident, much of which is spelt correctly with appropriate punctuation. Errors are highlighted by the teachers and drafted work is corrected appropriately by the pupils.

Standards in mathematics are broadly in line with national expectations and progress is secure. The pupils use methods recommended in the National Numeracy Strategy, such as partitioning to add and subtract two digit numbers accurately. There is good attention to solving word problems with pupils recognising which operation provides the right solution. The older pupils calculate accurately, have a quick recall of basic number facts, a good understanding of measures, shape and space, and they handle data effectively.

Personal development

In all of the lessons the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory, and in five of the eight they were good or very good. In the great majority of cases, the pupils were attentive, courteous, keen to learn and eager to take an active part in discussions and practical work. There are a small number of pupils who find it difficult to follow instructions,

but these occasions are dealt with well by the teachers and support assistants. The behaviour of the pupils around the school, on the playground and in social areas is good. Pupils of all ages mix well, share equipment and are willing to take responsibility when asked.

The attendance of the pupils, at just under 96 per cent, is good and above the national average for primary schools. Even so, this figure is depressed by a very small number of pupils whose attendance is being monitored by the educational welfare service. Punctuality at the start of the day has improved, and the headteacher appropriately challenges those parents who bring their children after classes have been taken from the playground for the start of the day.

Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. The teachers provide regular opportunities for the pupils to work collaboratively in lessons. They provide the pupils with good role models of effective teamwork. The school fosters positive relationships at all levels and the adults working in school are consistent in their dealings with the pupils. The pupils know what is expected of them and understand right and wrong. Older pupils take responsibility for play activities during breaks and lunchtimes. The school provides sporting and cultural activities during and outside of the school day, which cater for a wide range of interests. The staff are developing links with other small local schools to enable them to broaden further the extracurricular opportunities.

There is a daily assembly that provides an appropriate act of worship and makes a good contribution to the communal life of the school. There are firm links with the local church and the minister visits regularly to lead the assembly. The school enters fully into the life of the local community and arranges appropriate visits and visitors, all of which contribute to the progress and standards achieved by the pupils. Artistic awareness is well developed through the curriculum by means of good quality observational drawings and imitations of artists' work. Music and singing are not neglected. The pupils' studies of world faiths are enhanced by interesting displays of artefacts. A link has been made with a school in Luton with pupils whose families in the main have come from the Asian sub-continent. This relationship has enabled pupils from both schools to experience social and cultural differences at first hand.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved significantly since March 2003. At that time, one in five of the lessons were unsatisfactory and only a third was good. Now the teaching is satisfactory or better in all of the lessons, with three quarters being good, very good or excellent. The staff have worked hard to improve the quality of the lesson planning and most is now of high quality, establishing clear objectives for learning and providing challenging and stimulating work for the pupils. Where teaching was at its very best, the teachers worked hard to motivate and involve the pupils, and also to encourage the sharing of ideas and, on occasions, the pupils' evaluations. Short sessions, occasionally of only five minutes, were used effectively to emphasise a point or to build up anticipation. Some teachers gave opportunities for the pupils to prepare their answers by ensuring there was

sufficient thinking time. They then encouraged pupils to answer at length and in full sentences, building upon original contributions. This is improving speaking and listening, but there is still some way to go with the more reluctant contributors. The teachers built soundly on the pupils' suggestions and they seized opportunities to reinforce previous learning. Humour was often injected to emphasise messages. The teaching assistants and the nursery nurse contributed much to the learning and well-being of the pupils. Whether working with individuals, small groups or on occasions the whole class, they effectively supported the teacher and ensured that the pupils were making progress.

The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and satisfies national requirements. The monitoring by the headteacher, and previously the acting headteacher, of the relationship between short-term planning and the school's curriculum map provides assurance that all elements are being delivered. Curriculum policies are in place with review dates for updating and modification. With the extensions to the buildings providing three large classrooms and a group room, the school offers a valuable learning environment. Set in extensive grounds and hard-play areas, there are opportunities for ball games and social gatherings, often involving parents and younger siblings. Refurbishment to other areas has provided a computer suite, which is well-used during the day and at lunchtimes, a library and a music room. There is capacity for growth in the school, and a programme of active recruitment is being considered by the headteacher and governors.

Due regard is paid to the pupils' safety, health and well-being. Relationships between adults and pupils are good so that the pupils feel confident in seeking adult help when they need it for academic, medical or emotional reasons. At break times, there is a suitable range of equipment and benching to help the pupils socialise. Appropriate risk assessments are made before visits or journeys are made out of school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has only been in post since January but she has already developed a strong team spirit and morale amongst all staff is good. Following the resignation of the former headteacher just before the section 10 inspection of March 2003, there have been four acting or substantive headteachers. This has inevitably been a difficult time for the staff, but throughout they have maintained continuity and stability, while at the same time making many improvements within their classrooms and to their own professional expertise. The attached adviser from the local education authority (LEA) has also contributed much to ensuring that progress was being maintained. With the acting headteacher in the summer and autumn terms of 2004, the staff began to identify areas for improvement over and above those in the action plan.

The acting headteacher and the governors have produced a monitoring framework with dates by which activities should be included. Lesson observations, the monitoring of short and medium-term plans, and the scrutiny of work have provided evidence of the progress being made. Subject co-ordinators have been given time to undertake their responsibilities, but this is at an early stage of development.

The governors have increased their involvement in monitoring the work of the school and in holding it to account for its performance. The chair of governors is well informed about the school's progress and the governing body includes members with helpful and relevant expertise. Individual governors make visits to the school and report back on their observations. The governors see the school as an essential component of village life and are keen to see other organisations use the school hall for social and club events.

The school has valued the work of the LEA, especially the attached adviser, who has sought the assistance of consultants and advisers as necessary. The teachers speak highly of the professional development they have received. Having balanced the budget, using some contingency reserves, the managers are well aware of the difficulties the school will face if numbers on roll do not rise.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Walkern Primary School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in March 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in September 2003 and in March, June and October 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of March 2003.

In March 2005, one Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Eight lessons, three registrations and two assemblies were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, all of the teachers, the chair of governors and a representative from the LEA. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of March 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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