



Cowley Hill School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117099
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 279985
Inspection dates 25 April 2006 to 26 April 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Paul Cosway LI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Winstre Road
School category	Community		WD6 5DP
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8 9532218
Number on roll	336	Fax number	020 8 2360174
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Jackie Spriggs
Date of previous inspection	18 October 1999	Headteacher	Ms. Sandy Davis

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Cowley Hill is a large primary school in Borehamwood with an attached nursery. The local population served by the school represents a wide mix of social backgrounds. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Pupils are mostly of White British heritage. A small number of pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, is above average. There are two bases for pupils with speech and language impairment, taking children from a very wide area within Hertfordshire. Attainment on entry is below average. The school is in an area where it is difficult to recruit teachers and almost a quarter of the teaching staff were temporary or unqualified at the time of the inspection. The school has been awarded Investors in People status. It had an acting headteacher for two terms before the current headteacher was appointed in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. It shows signs of rapid improvement under the leadership of the new headteacher. She is tackling the weak areas, such as the development of numeracy skills, the problems with staff recruitment and retention, and the need to track pupils' progress rigorously and to use assessment information to help pupils to improve their work. This is an inclusive school where everyone is valued. The pupils with speech and language difficulties in the two special needs bases are integrated successfully into the main school and the provision for them is good. In the Foundation Stage, satisfactory provision means that children make sound progress. Attainment on entry to Year 1 is below average. By the end of Year 2 and Year 6, they have made satisfactory progress and standards are also below average. Through 2004 2005, the school concentrated on improving literacy standards. These rose in 2005 and results in Year 6 in English were close to the national average in the national tests. Less attention was given to improving pupils' basic numeracy skills and results in mathematics dropped to well below the national average. However, standards are beginning to rise again. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but not enough of the good practice is yet shared more widely. Some teaching in Years 3 to 6 has suffered because of long-term staff illness and this has adversely affected the progress that pupils are making in some classes. Behaviour is satisfactory and pupils have positive attitudes to work and school. Attendance is below average, but the school works hard to motivate parents to send children to school regularly. Relationships between the pupils and the adults in the school are good and the pupils enjoy school, where they feel cared for and secure. They report that the small amount of bullying is dealt with well. Leadership and management from the new headteacher are satisfactory. There are already positive results from some of the changes that she has made. She is determined that the school will improve further and is fully supported by the senior team, staff and governors. Over the past year, systems for monitoring and self-evaluation have improved, so that the school's capacity to improve is now satisfactory. The issues identified in the previous inspection have been tackled successfully. Given the satisfactory progress that pupils make and the good aspects of the school's work, it gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by concentrating on improving pupils' basic numeracy skills throughout the school.
- Use the information gathered about pupils' attainment to monitor their progress and to help them understand what they need to do to improve their work further.
- Work with the local authority to improve the stability and quality of teaching so that the effectiveness of recruitment processes is improved and best practice in the school is more widely shared to develop teachers' skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Standards are below average, but not exceptionally low. Pupils start school with standards that are generally below average. Their attainment levels are still below average at the end of the Foundation Stage, and at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Standards vary between subjects. They are highest in English, where they are close to the national average. They are lowest in mathematics, where achievement was inadequate in 2005. The teaching of mathematics has improved this year in Year 6, where it is now good. However, the teaching and reinforcement of basic numeracy skills are not good enough in other parts of the school. Overall, most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language, make satisfactory progress. Some have profound needs and benefit from skilled and dedicated support. Those with less significant needs are also provided for effectively. However, some more able pupils underachieve in mathematics and English because the work they are given is not always challenging enough. Achievement in some classes from Year 3 to Year 6 has also been adversely affected by staffing difficulties and staff illness. The school failed to meet its targets for Year 6 in 2005, falling well behind its target for mathematics in particular. Improved monitoring and tracking of progress is leading to higher standards, but is still not sufficiently robust to ensure the school meets its equally challenging targets in 2006.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They have positive attitudes to school; they enjoy lessons and the range of other clubs and visits the school provides. A few parents expressed concerns about bullying, although pupils themselves felt that this was not widespread. The school acknowledges that it does take place, but it has effective strategies to deal with it. Behaviour overall is satisfactory. A minority of pupils find it difficult to maintain concentration, but most are motivated by the system of rewards the school has in place. Attendance is below the national average, although the school makes a concerted effort to promote good attendance. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. There are good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, develop skills to support their future economic well-being and play a part in the life of the school, for instance as members of the school council or as 'buddies' who help others. They contribute to the wider community by raising funds for charity and singing carols to the elderly. The school council raises funds for developments within the school. The school has good links with the local church. There are few links with other faith groups in the community, although it does celebrate a range of festivals in its assemblies. A strength is the way that the school encourages pupils to eat healthily and take part in a good range of sports.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with some good features. Teachers have good relationships with pupils, which helps to ensure that pupils enjoy their lessons and try hard. Teachers make clear what they want pupils to learn, so that they know what is expected of them and how to succeed. Numeracy is taught well to Year 6 pupils but not well enough in the rest of the school. In Year 6, teachers make numeracy lessons interesting and set challenging but achievable targets. They encourage pupils in order to build their confidence and sustain a brisk pace so that their pupils learn quickly. The school recognises that this good practice needs to be shared and reinforced throughout the school. Homework is set regularly and provides satisfactory opportunities for pupils to consolidate their learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language receive good support. The school has had problems with long term staff illness and some classes have had a string of temporary teachers as a result. Some weaknesses in teaching are slowing the progress of some pupils. For example, tasks are not always well matched to individual needs and therefore do not provide enough challenge. Consequently, more able pupils in particular do not always make as much progress as they could. Although teachers are starting to track pupils' attainment and progress in a more structured way, they do not yet make effective enough use of assessment information or marking to give pupils clear guidance about the next steps in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and provides an appropriate range of subjects, including French for pupils from the Reception classes to Year 2. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are at early stages of learning English are provided for effectively and the provision is improving as systems to monitor pupils' progress are strengthened. The curriculum for children in the Nursery and Reception classes has been reviewed this year and is giving more opportunities for children to develop good learning skills. After-school clubs are varied and well attended and there are good opportunities to take part in sports and arts activities. The provision for literacy and information and communication technology is satisfactory. The provision for numeracy does not focus sufficiently on developing and reinforcing pupils' basic numeracy skills, except in Year 6, where this is done well. The headteacher is aware that the curriculum for the mixed age classes does not always meet the needs of the wide range of abilities. The curriculum is therefore being reviewed to make it more relevant and exciting.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support, with strengths in the systems for child protection. Health and safety audits are carried out and the procedures for these are being made more thorough. Most parents are happy with the care their children receive and the school is proactively involving them in their child's education through regular meetings and brochures. The bases for pupils with speech and language difficulties are managed well. Regular meetings between parents, pupil and the class teacher effectively support the progress of pupils with statements of special educational need. Systems have recently been introduced to assess how well pupils are doing in mathematics and writing and these are being extended into how well pupils do in reading. The information is not always used effectively to match work to pupils' needs, so the systems have not had yet had an impact on the progress that pupils make.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The recently appointed headteacher has quickly developed a good knowledge and understanding of what the school does well and where it needs to improve to raise standards for all children. The changes that she has made have already had a positive effect. For example, behaviour in the school has improved as a result of the new behaviour policy. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities has been improved and systems are in place to give additional help to pupils at an early stage of learning English. The progress that these pupils are making has improved as a result. The headteacher has established a strong senior team which is monitoring the quality of teaching and learning effectively. There is a clear sense of teamwork and direction to the management of the school, with national initiatives, such as performance management, now firmly embedded. Parent questionnaires and pupil surveys form an important part of the school's self-evaluation procedures, which are satisfactory overall. The governing body is supportive of the school and has a sound understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Consequently the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for all the help you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and visiting your lessons. Thank you for sharing your work with us. You were all very polite, cheerful and helpful. These are the things we thought were good: - We think you are getting on well together and enjoy being at school. - The School Council is helping you to learn to be responsible for what happens around you. - You do some interesting work. All the teaching we saw was at least satisfactory and some was good and we were impressed with how well the Year 6 pupils were working in their numeracy lessons. - You have a good number of after-school clubs and visits to make your time at school even more interesting and enjoyable. - Your headteacher and all the staff are working to improve the school and make it an even better place for you. You are safe at school, cared for by all the staff. We have suggested a few things that will help make the school even better: - We want the school to give you more practice with number skills to help you to get better results in mathematics tests. - We have asked the school to make teaching even better and to try to have fewer changes of teachers, so that you have one teacher all the time. - We want the school to track your progress better, so that if you are not learning well, something can be done quickly to help you. All the best for the future,