



Whitehill Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117253
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280024
Inspection dates 28 March 2006 to 29 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Keith Sadler LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Whitehill Road
School category	Community		SG4 9HT
Age range of pupils	7 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462 621313
Number on roll	202	Fax number	01462 621311
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Paul Clark
Date of previous inspection	30 October 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Fran Bradshaw

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Whitehill is an average sized junior school on the east side of Hitchin. Although most of the children live within the immediate vicinity, a growing number are from surrounding areas. Almost all of the children transfer from a local infant school. A low number of children are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of children who need extra help with their learning is around average though increasing. Over three quarters of the children come from White British backgrounds. The school serves a mixed community of owner-occupiers and social housing. An increasing proportion of children enter the school other than at the normally expected time in the autumn term of Year 3. A significant portion of these have learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Whitehill Junior is an effective school with a number of outstanding features. These are the excellence of the curriculum, the highly effective care, guidance and support provided, the children's personal development and aspects of leadership and management. Overall, the school has an accurate view of how well it is doing and provides good value for money. The headteacher's leadership is outstanding and is pivotal to the school's success. She has created a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere that pervades the whole school. Working in close partnership with the two effective assistant headteachers, she has developed a strong sense of purpose, excellent team work and very good relationships between the staff and with the children. Parents are almost unanimously supportive of the school. One parent wrote, 'Our daughter has thrived on a happy, positive and creative environment'. Children say that they are exceptionally well cared for, feel safe and thoroughly enjoy school. This is because the quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff place a good emphasis on developing the children's speaking and listening skills and organising good quality work that is usually pitched at a challenging level. They also question the children very well. Behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school, and children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. The school's evaluation of its overall effectiveness is that it is outstanding, however, the inspection finds it to be good. Children make good progress, achieve well and are given excellent opportunities across the whole curriculum to develop a love of learning. There is a need to further develop the progress of the more able children, particularly in mathematics and there are robust plans in place to address this. Although the school had no key issues for action following the last inspection, there has been good improvement since then and there is very good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to focus on improving standards, particularly in mathematics for the more able children.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Most children enter the school in Year 3 with skills that are generally around average. Children make good progress in their learning and standards in national tests until 2004 were consistently significantly above average. However, for the past two years, they have dipped to around nationally expected levels. This is because these year groups had a higher than average proportion of children with learning difficulties and disabilities. In addition, the school accepted a number of children after the beginning of Year 3 that find learning difficult. In the 2005 tests the children's achievement was particularly good in science though it was weaker in mathematics, with a smaller than expected number of children gaining the higher level. The current Year 6 children are on course to meet the challenging targets set for them.

Achievement is good for almost all children, though the school is keenly aware that the achievement of the most able in mathematics was a relative weakness in 2004 and 2005. The school's strong emphasis on the development of skills across the curriculum has resulted in very good achievement and high standards in art and music. In addition, speaking and listening skills are very well developed because of the good opportunities provided for children to collaborate in their learning, to talk about their work and how well they have done.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The children's personal development, and their spiritual, cultural, moral and social development, is outstanding. Cultural development is particularly strong as shown by the exceptional provision for art, music, dance and drama. Children behave well and have very good attitudes towards learning which helps prepare them well for the next stage in their education. There have been no recent exclusions. Children enjoy school, and most of them work hard and show a pride in their work. They take responsibility seriously. This is shown by those in the school council and the children who act as 'guardian angels' at playtimes. Relationships among children and with adults are very strong throughout the school. Attendance is above average and punctuality is good. The school's emphasis on healthy living and the contribution made by children in the local and wider community are outstanding. Children have a good understanding of the importance of diet and have an exceptional opportunity to take part in a range of sporting activities. They raise a lot of money for local and national charities. They have a very good understanding of how to keep safe and in Year 6 learn a lot about finance through work on business plans and raising money through enterprise schemes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There are a number of significant factors that make the quality of teaching and learning good. Teachers make sure that lessons are interesting and varied, and that the work is pitched appropriately. Generally relationships are good and teachers manage behaviour well. Teachers question children well and successfully promote the correct use of subject vocabulary by insisting that children use these words in their extended answers. For example, in a good Year 4 mathematics lesson when asked to explain why one third is larger than one quarter, a child responded 'although a four is bigger than a three, one third is bigger than one quarter because the denominator says it is divided by three which makes it bigger than a denominator divided by four'. It was the good quality teaching, underpinned by the school's focus on extending speaking and listening skills, that enabled this child to learn and achieve well. In another good lesson, the teacher required the children to make extended and thoughtful answers to her questions, using the effective technique of giving them a few moments to discuss their response with a partner. Teachers note children's responses and use them well

to ensure that future work is planned in the light of the children's achievements. Children who find learning difficult are supported well by knowledgeable teaching assistants who are effective in helping them to meet their personal targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum with exceptional opportunities for enrichment. The curriculum is very broad, with many opportunities for the children to undertake practical work and to work collaboratively. An exceptionally wide range of visits and visitors enliven their experience. For example, during the inspection, Year 6 children used construction apparatus very effectively and imaginatively whilst taking part in an engineering challenge led by a local business link. There are excellent opportunities to take part in outdoor and adventurous activities, some of which are residential. A major strength is in the planning across subjects to make learning more meaningful and to enable the transfer of skills between other subjects. For example, a very effective topic on whales involved literacy and ICT skills as well as those of art, science and geography. There is a very wide range of activities outside the school day and a lot of children take the excellent opportunities to extend their skills and interests in music, sport, drama, art, French and Latin, science and engineering and computing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support. There is exceptional care for the children's health, safety and well-being. The child protection arrangements are very good and staff training is up to date. Health and safety procedures are fully in place. Children say there is little bullying and that if there are any difficulties with relationships or children not feeling well the playground guardian angels help resolve them quickly. They know how to keep themselves safe. First aid procedures and resources are very good. Children with specific learning needs are given a good level of support to help them to achieve well. All staff support the children well in their learning and children receive good guidance about how they can improve. The school is developing peer and self assessment by children which is effective in supporting their learning. For example, in one outstanding Year 6 lesson children devised their own success criteria to check how well they had achieved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership of the head teacher is outstanding and she is supported well by the effective assistant heads. The head is inspirational and has a clear vision for the school that is shared by governors, staff and parents. The integration of pupils from all backgrounds is central to this. Any barriers to learning are tackled and removed to ensure that all children are included. This helps to develop their love of learning and achievement across the curriculum. Management is excellent. The school has very

good systems for self evaluation. These ensure that it has a precise grasp of its provision and children's achievement and how to improve further. All staff are fully involved in reflecting on what is going well and what could be improved. Improvement planning is excellent and there is significant capacity for further improvement. Staff regularly seek and act upon the views of parents and their children through surveys and the school council. The school has attracted a very wide range of additional funding. This has been used very well to ensure that the school provides a high quality learning environment that is enriched by excellent celebrations of children's work. Resource levels, particularly in ICT, are exceptionally good. The school makes excellent use of specialist teachers, particularly in the arts, sport and music and all spending is carefully planned. Governance is good. The governors have a good understanding of the school's position and, due to the high quality information provided by the head teacher, they are appropriately involved in checking the school's performance and asking staff challenging questions about how well it is doing.

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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

We really enjoyed visiting you when we came to inspect your school. Thank you very much for the friendly way you welcomed us and for your help in finding out about the school. You told us that you love coming to school and that you feel safe and well cared for. We are not surprised. Whitehill is a good school and everybody who works there tries very hard to help you to do well. We agree with you that teaching is good. Your lessons are made interesting and exciting and teachers give you lots of chances to work together and to talk about your work. Mrs Bradshaw has done an excellent job in making sure that you can all work and play together in such a friendly way. She has also made sure that there are lots of opportunities for you to succeed in many areas. We were very impressed with your artwork that was displayed and your skill and enthusiasm in the concert. You work hard in lessons so that you learn lots of new things. Your teachers know that they can help you to do better in mathematics - particularly for those of you who find learning easy. You're really lucky to go to Whitehill Juniors. It is a friendly place where everybody wants the best for you. Thank you once again for being so helpful to us. With very best wishes for your future.