



St Albans Road Infant School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118249
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280275
Inspection dates 15 May 2006 to 16 May 2006
Reporting inspector Helen Hutchings AI

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	St Albans Road
School category	Community		Dartford
Age range of pupils	3 to 7		Kent DA1 1TE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01322 223751
Number on roll	293	Fax number	01322 290621
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Olga Garner
Date of previous inspection	11 September 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Angela Bevan

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 7	15 May 2006 - 16 May 2006	280275

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Albans Infant School is larger than most infant schools and has a small attached Nursery unit, funded by the local authority to serve a locality with higher than average levels of social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is higher than average. Most children are from White British backgrounds but other ethnic groups are represented, including those from Indian, African and Eastern European heritages. A higher than average proportion speaks English as an additional language and each year group has a few pupils at an early stage of speaking English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Albans Road Infant School is a good school providing good value for money. Pupils feel safe and secure and parents are pleased with what the school offers. As parents described it, 'St Albans is a real community school with strong support from parents' and 'the Nursery has given my child the best possible start for her future school life'. The school's good care and guidance develops confident pupils who enjoy a rich and varied curriculum.

Quality and standards in the Foundation Stage are good. The good teaching ensures that all children make good progress from their lower than average starting points and they achieve well throughout the school. This is reflected in the test results in 2005 which were broadly average. Writing is not as good as reading and mathematics but the school's focus on this area has brought about significant improvements. Teachers know pupils well and talk to them about their work but written comments on the work of older pupils do not remind them clearly enough what they need to do to improve further.

Leadership and management are good. Shortcomings identified in the last inspection have been tackled rigorously to bring about significant improvements in attainment, teaching and learning and using information and communication technology (ICT). The school's evaluation of its overall effectiveness is too modest and the inspection evidence shows the school to be better than it views itself. Its commitment to improvement and good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses means that it is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- implement the plans to provide pupils with a broader range of activities to improve pupils' extended writing further
- ensure that written comments on pupils' work in Years 1 and 2 make it clear what they have to do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well across the school because they enjoy the work given to them and have positive attitudes to learning. Children in the Nursery develop self-confidence and an enthusiasm for learning. Only about half of the children joining the Reception class have been in the Nursery, but all develop well and gain a good foundation for more formal study in Years 1 and 2. Because many have poor skills, particularly in communication, on entry to the Nursery or Reception class, overall literacy and numeracy skills remain lower than normal. As a result many pupils do not meet all the early learning goals when they join Year 1.

By the time they take the national tests in Year 2, standards are broadly average and have improved significantly since the last inspection. Pupils do not do quite as well in writing as in other aspects of literacy, but the focus on improving writing has had a

positive impact, shown in the 2005 test results which were in line with national standards. The levels reached by pupils now in Year 2 are slightly lower than those in recent years, but this still represents good progress for them because many had much lower starting points and substantially higher levels of learning difficulties.

All groups of pupils achieve well, although some pupils with complex learning difficulties make smaller gains in their learning. Those capable of higher attainment are effectively challenged and perform well; for example, results in 2005 were above those found nationally at the higher Level 3 in reading and mathematics, but not in writing. The school monitors pupils' progress closely and provides a range of support when pupils begin to fall behind, so that most achieve the challenging targets set for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. They are friendly, enjoy school and participate well in activities. Behaviour is good, and pupils respond well to the school's clear expectations and rules and relate well to others. Nevertheless, a few are sometimes a little too boisterous in the playground, temporarily disrupting the games of others. Attendance is satisfactory and effective steps have improved punctuality so that the school day starts calmly and promptly. Pupils appreciate the wonders of nature as they grow and observe plants. They have a good awareness of different cultures and faiths; for example, pupils enjoyed the visiting 'Chinese Theatre Group' which enlightened them about Chinese traditions. They make good contributions to school life and the wider community, including raising funds for local charities such as 'Harvest Goods'. Members of the school council represent fellow pupils well and the school has responded positively to their suggestions for improving outdoor play equipment. Pupils work safely and know the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They know about a good diet and engage enthusiastically in physical exercise. Basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills are developing well, as is their ability to work with others so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Good relationships create a safe climate for learning, resulting in good behaviour and positive attitudes. In the best lessons, expectations are high and pupils' interest in their learning is stimulated by tasks which get them actively involved; for example, 'feely bags' were used to get pupils to describe different shapes, and small group discussions ensure the participation of all pupils. Pupils say the teachers give them good activities to do. Pupils are keen and parents are confident that their child is making progress. Resources such as interactive whiteboards hold pupils' attention well and enliven teaching but these are not yet available in all rooms

and some staff require greater experience to make full use of them. In the Foundation Stage, adults use the outdoor area particularly well to provide children with a range of imaginative activities to keep learning fresh and interesting. Teaching assistants make an important contribution, especially for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Recent recruitment problems have resulted in temporary arrangements which have led to variability, including some teaching that is satisfactory rather than good. The school has taken effective steps to ensure that pupils are given additional support to continue to make good progress.

Teachers conscientiously track how well their pupils make progress over time. They discuss pupils' work with them and how it could be better. Day-to-day marking is regular and supportive, but too few of the written comments indicate clearly to pupils what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, providing pupils with a broad and interesting range of things to do which meet their needs well. The Foundation Stage curriculum provides children with a rich variety of activities which interest them so that they learn through first-hand experiences. Themed weeks provide valuable opportunities, offering real contexts to enhance learning. A heavy emphasis is placed on developing writing. Opportunities are taken to make links between subjects and the school is planning to increase this approach further, with the particular aim of improving writing.

Children benefit from an extensive range of visits to local places of interest and opportunities to join in community activities such as carol singing. Visitors come into school to discuss topical issues with the children and provide an exciting variety of experiences. Opportunities for class discussion are encouraged, for example in 'circle time' to help pupils to interact successfully with one another and to understand aspects about their health, staying safe and other people's feelings. Children with learning difficulties are included well in all activities. Out of school clubs and activities are successful in developing a range of interests and enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good quality care and guidance pervade the whole school and because they are valued, pupils become confident learners and relate well to one another. Pupils say that they feel safe. Children who need additional help are given good levels of focused support. A range of external agencies are involved and many parents appreciate the programmes to develop their understanding of how to help their child's learning. Child protection requirements and safety procedures are embedded in school practice. Adult guidance at playtimes makes these enjoyable and fun times for children because they participate in an exceptional range of playground activities.

Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' progress and make strenuous efforts to provide additional support if a pupil is seen to be falling behind. Opportunities for

teachers to share the moderation of pupils' work have been introduced to improve the reliability of interim assessments. Parents have regular opportunities to discuss their child's progress with teachers and say that these are 'frequent and informative'. Good links with the local junior school help pupils to feel comfortable about transferring into Year 3.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school well and works closely with other senior leaders, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of each pupil. Governors and staff share a high level of commitment to the school's vision of nurturing self-esteem and providing a vibrant environment for learning. Parents are effectively encouraged to work in partnership with the school and their views are taken into account well.

The school has recently developed a more formal monitoring programme to evaluate its performance, but has already identified successfully its strengths and those areas in which it could be better. Strategies put in place to make improvements are successful, as indicated by the steady improvement in standards, although more remains to be done. This shows good capacity to improve yet further.

Governors provide strong support. Many governors have had a close and extended connection with the school and are well informed. They visit regularly so that they have a good knowledge of the school and provide appropriate challenge and support for its work. The governing body has carried out all its statutory duties over time. Financial management is good. It ensures that sources of funding are well used and that spending promotes achievement. This is shown, for example, in the commitment to providing additional staffing to ensure that identified pupils in Year 2 receive the extra support that they need.

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?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	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?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	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

Dear Children

Thank you for looking after us so well during our visit to your school. We very much enjoyed joining you in lessons and talking to you about what you were learning. We found out a lot about the things you do in school and want to let you know what we thought about it.

There are good things happening in the school and you make good progress in your work. These are some of the good things we found:

- You were friendly to us and are polite.
- You told us that you enjoy the interesting things you do in lessons and we saw the way your teachers plan activities that help you to learn well.
- You listen well to your teachers and concentrate hard on your work.
- You are doing well in your reading and mathematics and your writing is improving.
- You are kind to each other.
- You are happy and safe in the playground and enjoy the games you play there with your friends.

We know that you are keen to make your work even better and here are some of the things which we have asked your teachers to do to help you:

- Help you to make your writing more interesting.
- Give those of you in Years 1 and 2 more written comments about how to improve so that you can think carefully about it the next time you do a similar piece of work.

Thank you again for telling us about what you enjoy in school and, although it is still a long way off, we hope you will do well when you move to the junior school.

Mrs Helen Hutchings Lead Inspector