



William Harding Combined School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110358
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288645
Inspection dates 22–23 November 2006
Reporting inspector Sean O'Toole

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Hazlehurst Drive
School category	Community		Aylesbury
Age range of pupils	4–11		HP21 9TJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01296 421733
Number on roll (school)	667	Fax number	01296 436605
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr A Rogers
		Headteacher	Mr G Osman
Date of previous school inspection	24 June 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This very large primary school admits pupils from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is average. In addition, there are 30 pupils with physical disabilities and and/or language needs; a high proportion. These pupils with statements of special educational needs are fully integrated into mainstream classes. The vast majority of pupils have White British backgrounds but about 10% are from different minority ethnic backgrounds. Few of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Pupils start school with a wide range of abilities; their overall attainment on admission is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education and has several good features. Following a period of declining standards, the school has turned the corner and achievement is now satisfactory. Standards throughout the school are average. Staff successfully focus on providing high quality care, and the leadership of the headteacher in this aspect is exemplary. One of the strengths of the school is the outstanding provision for pupils with physical disabilities. As one parent wrote, 'The teachers have changed my child's life from one who could not speak to a child who can talk and listen'.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They clearly enjoy school and this is reflected in their positive attitudes in lessons and the care they show for each other. The school's inclusive approach is illustrated by the ways in which those with learning difficulties and disabilities establish firm friendships and feel valued. Several pupils said, 'This is a very friendly school, and we all get on well together'. This comment is borne out by the good standards of behaviour.

Children make a satisfactory start in the Foundation Stage and progress well in their physical, creative, personal, social and emotional development. Standards in reading and mathematics throughout the school are average but there are weaknesses in writing. Pupils struggle to apply writing skills throughout the curriculum, and their basic skills in handwriting and spelling are weak. Although there are strengths in teaching, including relationships and thorough planning, some lessons are not challenging enough especially for the more able. In some English lessons there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to discuss and express their ideas. Pupils are not always clear about how to improve, as targets are not sharply defined.

The staff, supported by the governors, are keen to see the pupils succeed. Teaching is observed regularly but there is not enough emphasis on checking how well pupils are learning. More remains to be done by middle managers to develop links between subjects to improve pupils' writing. By correctly assessing the school's position and tackling issues, the headteacher and deputies have secured some improvements in teaching and achievement, and standards have risen. There is good capacity to build on these recent successes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by providing better opportunities for pupils to use their skills across the curriculum.
- Ensure greater consistency in teaching so that pupils are clear about how they might improve, are given more challenging work and improve their handwriting and spelling.
- Sharpen up the skills of senior and middle managers in evaluating how well the different groups of pupils learn.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Throughout the school, achievement is satisfactory. Children enjoy the Foundation Stage because of the opportunities to explore and investigate as well as to learn in groups. By the time they start in Year 1, their skills in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development are still slightly below those expected for their age.

Between 2003 and 2005, standards at the end of Year 6 fell and were not high enough. By focusing on setting realistic targets in national tests, and tracking the progress of the pupils, the school has reversed this trend. Standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 are now average. Nevertheless, pupils' writing is below average and this hampers their success in subjects such as history, geography and religious education.

Pupils have a very wide range of abilities. Those with physical disabilities are very successful because they receive intensive and highly skilled support. Other pupils with learning difficulties, especially those with language needs, make satisfactory progress. Although there has been a steady increase in the percentage of pupils attaining above average levels in mathematics and science, this has not happened in English. In general, more able pupils should do better. Pupils who are learning English as an additional language are working at similar levels to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

'The teachers think about what is best for us and help us to do our best', said one Year 6 girl. Comments like these show how much the pupils value the school. Pupils take responsibility seriously and are always keen to help others. They are involved in fund raising and enjoy visits and special events. The proceeds from cake stalls, organised by the pupils, help to keep the cost of visits down so that all are able to enjoy them.

Pupils are happy and feel safe. Their behaviour is good. They say that bullying is rare and have every confidence that adults listen to and respond to their worries. One child with learning difficulties said, 'I like it here, no-one laughs at me and I've got lots of friends'. Pupils know how to look after themselves and understand how to lead healthy lives. They enjoy the good range of extra curricular activities, especially in sport. Through their time at the school, pupils grow in confidence and personal skills. Pupils have good spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities. Their competence in English and mathematics linked to their enthusiasm for work and enjoyment of being part of a team prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are some good features which include well planned lessons. In some classes, the use of visual aids contributes effectively to learning. Support staff work well alongside pupils with physical disabilities so they make good progress. However, when supporting some pupils with weak language skills, adults do not give them sufficient opportunities to answer in sentences using their own words. Boys and girls appreciate the time teachers spend in explaining the tasks and also enjoy learning by taking part in practical activities.

Introductions to lessons are clear and tasks are explained thoroughly. Sometimes the pace of lessons is too slow because teachers talk for too long, which limits the time available for pupils to work. The more able pupils are not always given sufficiently challenging tasks. Most teachers assess and mark pupils' work conscientiously and there are good examples of helpful suggestions for improvement. However, targets are not clear enough and pupils are unsure why they have them. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour although there is a lack of insistence on well presented work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum provides pupils with sound opportunities to improve their basic skills. It is enriched through good opportunities for sport and music which enhance their social and personal skills. Pupils get excited about practical work such as design and technology. Several agreed that, 'We love making moving toys and finding out how things work'. Although teachers are developing links between subjects not enough is done to extend opportunities for writing in history and geography. Pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved since the previous inspection and are satisfactory. Pupils enjoy using the internet for research. The good provision for personal and social education includes opportunities for pupils to discuss sensitive issues such as relationships and the potentially damaging effects of drugs. Children in the Foundation Stage benefit from a balanced curriculum which provides them with opportunities to work on their own or with others.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Parents enthuse about this friendly and happy school. One said, 'My son has changed from a shy boy to one who is outgoing'. There is strong commitment to pupils' welfare and staff are briefed well on child protection. The high quality care shown for those with physical disabilities ensures that they join in all aspects of school life. Those at an early stage of learning English are supported satisfactorily. Staff work effectively as a team. One parent commented, 'I have a lot

of contact with the teaching assistants who are approachable and supportive and keep open the lines of communication'.

The staff support their pupils' personal needs well. Monitoring of academic progress is satisfactory. There are satisfactory systems to track the progress of individuals, but inconsistencies in marking and target setting mean that pupils are not always clear about what to do to improve. Parents commented that their children are prepared well for the next stage of their education. One pupil said, 'I feel ready to go to my next school but will miss being here'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Pastoral leadership is especially strong. Parents speak glowingly of the ways in which the staff provide support and guidance for their children. The headteacher and deputies work together well and have produced a development plan which correctly identifies the strengths and weaknesses in the school. Their assessments and support for staff have led to improvements in standards in reading and mathematics. The support for those new to teaching is good. Middle managers play their part in supporting the school's aims. Their role in building links between subjects and improving standards in writing is underdeveloped. Monitoring of teaching is not incisive enough. The focus has been on looking at the different approaches to teaching rather than a critical evaluation of how successfully different groups of pupils learn.

Governors meet regularly and are proud of the school's success in promoting positive values. They are involved in regular visits and fully back the leadership in decision making. Although they are aware of the shortcomings in pupils' writing there are few mechanisms to keep a check on the school's success in meeting its targets.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your thoughtfulness in making us welcome when we came to visit your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and listening to your views. You like coming to school and many of you said how much you enjoyed sport and practical work. We were very pleased to see that you work hard and behave well in lessons and in the playground. We were impressed with your enthusiasm during the cake sale and certainly enjoyed our purchases. You contribute much to making the school a happy place.

We have judged that your school provides a satisfactory quality of education and that some parts of its work are good. The lessons we saw were all at least satisfactory and there were some good features. In some lessons the teachers made good use of projectors and resources to help you to understand. Sometimes we thought that the teachers talked for too long and this meant that you did not have enough time to finish your work. You have started to improve your test results which were much better in 2006. There is still more to be done to improve writing. You can help by making sure your handwriting is neat and that your work is well presented. We have asked your teachers to find ways of giving you clearer advice and targets to help you to improve. We have also asked the school to increase the opportunities for you to use your English skills in other subjects.

Your headteacher and the other staff care much about you and want you to succeed. You show much care and consideration for each other and make sure that everyone is included.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours truly,

Sean O'Toole

Lead Inspector