

Bernards Heath Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117143
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290737
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Colin Henderson

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	193
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Sian Kilpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001
School address	Watson Avenue St. Albans Hertfordshire AL3 5HP
Telephone number	01727 856262
Fax number	01727 856355

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils transfer from the nearby infant school with broadly average attainment. They come from a broad range of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. There are an average number of pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is average. The school now has a stable staff after a high level of change since the last inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It is valued highly by pupils and their parents, as reflected in many positive comments such as 'a warm and caring school in which every child is encouraged to achieve their potential'. After an unsettled period, the school now benefits from the outstanding leadership of the headteacher that is focused strongly on improvement. She has established an effective partnership with her deputy and a strong sense of teamwork and community throughout the school. This unity of purpose is improving rapidly the quality of education provided. The effective leadership has established good procedures to check on how well the school is doing. These are used well to target further development. As a result, standards are rising.

Pupils achieve well throughout the school because of consistently good and with elements of outstanding teaching. Pupils clearly enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance and enthusiastic attitudes in lessons. They work hard to succeed. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average overall. They are consistently above average in science, with a high proportion of more-able pupils attaining above-average levels. Standards in reading are above average, particularly for girls, although writing standards are limited by weaknesses in boys' descriptive and imaginative writing. Standards in mathematics are average. The proportion of pupils attaining above expected levels is above average but weaknesses in number skills and knowledge limit the attainment of average ability pupils. The leadership is aware of these weaknesses and is taking effective action to improve them.

The outstanding, caring and supportive ethos of the school promotes pupils' personal development very successfully. This ensures that all children are valued and respected, for example, the traditions and beliefs of different ethnic minority groups. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They talk enthusiastically about the excellent range of learning activities including the large number of extra-curricular activities. Pupils have a detailed understanding of healthy and safe lifestyles. Older pupils enjoy taking responsibility and the school council is developing pupils' awareness of the contribution they can make within the school and beyond.

Teachers know their pupils very well. They check regularly on how well each pupil is doing and use this information to guide their teaching and provide further support where needed. The senior leadership team closely evaluates teaching and how it supports pupils' learning. This has resulted in teaching being good throughout the school. Teachers use improvement targets for pupils successfully to guide them to improve their work. The increasingly effective involvement of pupils in assessing their own work and that of other pupils is helping them to gain a secure understanding of the different levels of work. It helps them to know their own attainment level and what they need to do to make the next level. This is helping to raise standards.

The good leadership and management of the school benefit from a supportive and influential governing body and enable the school to give good value for money. Given the outstanding influence of the headteacher, the strong staff team, excellent parental support and the good improvement since the last inspection, the school is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the number skills and knowledge of average-ability pupils.
- Improve boys' skills in imaginative and descriptive writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well. They make good progress throughout the school and attain standards at the end of Year 6 that are above average overall. They are above average in science and in English, especially in reading. Girls achieve better than boys, particularly in writing, and the school has recently introduced new resources to improve boys' attainment in English. Attainment in mathematics is broadly average, although it is improving as result of effective support. More able pupils achieve well, although the achievement of many pupils of average ability in mathematics is restricted by their weak number skills and knowledge. The school makes good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and they achieve well as a result. Pupils for whom English is an additional language and ethnic minority pupils, for example those from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds, achieve well when compared with similar schools as staff provide effective individual support to meet their specific learning and language needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding enjoyment of school is evident in their very positive attitudes to learning, good attendance and regular participation in clubs and school outings. Pupils trust staff and are confident to share any concerns they may have. They are proud of their school, enjoy accepting responsibility and helping others. For example, Year 5 pupils visit the local infant school and form friendships with Year 2 pupils. This helps new pupils to settle quickly when they join the school. Fundraising events are organised by pupils and they are encouraged to develop their entrepreneurial skills. These events provide pupils with the opportunity to use and develop further their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

Pupils exercise regularly and enjoy the healthy range of food cooked by the school kitchen. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There are many opportunities for reflection to help foster pupils' spiritual awareness and self-esteem. They learn about many different cultures in lessons and through events such as 'Arts Week'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good and occasionally outstanding. Teachers use a good range of teaching approaches to capture pupils' attention and stimulate a desire to learn. They have excellent relationships with their pupils and high expectations of their response. As a result, lessons are calm and purposeful. Teachers use their good subject knowledge and assessment data to match activities to learning needs, for example, for pupils with English as a second language. Most lessons have a brisk pace, although teachers do not always remind pupils what they should have achieved within the time to ensure that they always achieve as well as they could. Teachers' partnership with their teaching assistants promotes good learning by providing quick and effective support or an extra challenge to pupils who need it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The range of learning activities for pupils is outstanding. Teachers know their pupils very well and plan carefully to match activities to the different learning needs. For example, extra classes held during the Easter holidays improved pupils' mathematical knowledge and understanding. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to participate in music and sports, as well as French lessons. 'Master Classes' held at the local secondary schools challenge pupils to learn new skills. There is an impressive range of after-school clubs, adding greatly to pupils' learning and enjoyment of school. The focus on personal, social, health and citizenship lessons promotes pupils' emotional well-being and has helped to develop the school's very positive learning environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Teachers and support staff know pupils very well and work hard to provide an outstanding level of care and support. Excellent liaison between school staff and outside agencies means that pupils with different needs get the support that they need. Pupils' personal development is carefully supported and monitored and this makes pupils feel valued. All legal requirements for safeguarding pupils' welfare are met.

Pupils' academic progress is regularly and accurately assessed. This information is shared with the pupils and they are encouraged to improve their own understanding of different levels of work. As a result, pupils understand how well they are getting on and how they can improve. Any problems are picked up quickly and this helps pupils to do as well as they can.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and a strong sense of purpose to improve the work of the school. She works in a very influential partnership with her deputy to manage the school successfully. They are supported increasingly effectively by a new senior leadership team that includes key subject leaders. They have developed a very effective system to check the progress of each pupil and to set challenging improvement targets. This is raising standards. In a short time, the headteacher has established a strong team approach in which staff, governors, pupils and their parents work well together. Governors provide good support to the school and exercise effective oversight. The leadership knows the school well and is establishing a continuing, rigorous cycle of self-evaluation and planning for improvement. The strong influence of senior staff is reflected clearly in the way they evaluate teaching and learning effectively. As a result, it is now consistently good.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

27 April 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of Bernards Heath Junior School, Watson Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL3 5HP

Thank you for being so friendly and making us feel welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. You and your parents think that it is a good school and we agree. The things we liked most about your school were:

- your teachers and other adults care about you as individuals, make sure that you are safe and listen to your opinions about school
- the good work of your school council
- you get on very well together and are kind to each other; we particularly like the way that older pupils look after the younger ones
- you behave exceptionally well and clearly enjoy school; this means that teachers can get on with the job of helping you learn
- teachers make your lessons interesting and all the adults put a lot of effort into helping you do well; you enjoy your work and try hard to do what your teachers ask
- the school puts on many activities, clubs and trips; we know you enjoy these very much
- all the staff and governors are working hard to make your school even better.

We agree with Mrs. Kilpatrick and her staff that you could do even better in mathematics by working hard to improve your number skills and knowledge and that the boys could improve their writing by including more exciting and interesting words and phrases.

We hope that you continue to be happy at school and carry on working hard.

Colin Henderson Lead inspector