

# Walkern Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117154
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE
<b>Inspection number</b>	290739
<b>Inspection date</b>	4 May 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Best

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	73
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Karl List
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Teresa Leavy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 March 2005
<b>School address</b>	High Street Walkern Stevenage Hertfordshire SG2 7NS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01438861285
<b>Fax number</b>	01438861222

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This village school is smaller than most primary schools. Over a third of pupils come from nearby Stevenage and about half live in the village. Some pupils transfer to middle school at the end of Year 4, with others moving to high schools at the end of Year 6. The proportion of pupils joining the school other than at the usual time, whilst broadly average overall, is concentrated in Years 3 to 6.

The majority of children are White British. A small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds and some of these are at the early stages of learning English. Around a fifth of the children have learning difficulties and disabilities. When they start in the Foundation Stage class most children have the skills and knowledge that are generally typical of their age.

## 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 and improving school. It went through an unsettled period when some pupils did not make enough progress. Prompt action in identifying the causes of this underachievement and taking effective steps to address it, have ensured that there is now good teaching and learning across the school. Lessons are interesting and pupils are well aware of what they need to do to improve their work. In its latest self-evaluation report, the school's leaders rightly identify its effectiveness as good. Standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 4 are above average, and are average by the end of Year 6. The transfer of a significant proportion of pupils to middle school at the end of Year 4 has a negative impact on overall standards but inspection evidence confirms that, from their individual starting points, most pupils achieve well during their time in the school.

This improvement is the result of good leadership and management. The headteacher's strong and effective lead in bringing about improvement is firmly based on robust systems for checking the school's performance and its progress towards its challenging targets. Teaching and non-teaching staff share the headteacher's clear vision for the school's development and work very well together. The governing body gives good support but its role in holding the school to account for its performance is still to be fully developed as there are several new governors.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy school and behave well, both in lessons and around the school. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are able to work independently when required. Their attendance is good and they demonstrate a good understanding of healthy living. The school provides pupils with a good range of activities in lessons and through lunchtime and after-school clubs to help them learn. Teachers' planning takes good account of pupils' different levels of attainment, and staff adapt work well to meet specific needs, for instance, to improve boys' writing.

Care, guidance and support are good. Teachers, teaching assistants and other staff know pupils well. As a result, pupils feel safe in school and are confident that there is an adult they can turn to if they are in difficulty. The school has put in place comprehensive systems for checking how well children are doing in English, mathematics and science. These help staff to set pupils' challenging targets that are well matched to their abilities and ages. Staff also use this information to identify where extra help is needed to ensure children do not fall behind, or to provide extra challenge for the more able. As a result, staff have rightly identified that pupils' investigative and problem-solving skills, particularly in mathematics and science, could be improved. More accurate systems for checking on the progress of children in the Foundation Stage are now in place. These are helping staff to address identified shortcomings in children's progress in the last school year. However, these systems have yet to impact fully on standards and quality of education in the Foundation Stage, which are currently satisfactory.

The school enjoys the enthusiastic support of parents, many of whom speak of the high quality care and support for their children and the improvements since the last inspection. By reversing the decline in standards and achievement at the end of Year 6, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and making significant improvements to the buildings and grounds, the school's leaders have demonstrated that it provides good value for money and has a good capacity to improve further.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' investigative and problem-solving skills in mathematics and science.
- Build on systems for checking how well children are doing so that standards and quality in the Foundation Stage improve.
- Increase governors' capacity to hold the school to account for its performance.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Last year, shortcomings in the school's systems for checking children's progress in the Foundation Stage meant that some did not reach the expected goals in their communication and mathematical skills. The school is addressing this issue, with the result that children are now making at least satisfactory progress. Most are on course to achieve, and some to exceed, the expected goals by the time they enter Year 1. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and standards at the end of Year 2 are usually above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress in Years 3 and 4 is also good, with pupils of all abilities building successfully on their earlier learning. Results at the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science were average in 2006. However, the school's tracking shows clearly that the majority of pupils who remained in the school throughout Years 5 and 6 made good progress from the end of Year 2. Pupils currently in Year 6 are likely to achieve similar results to last year in the statutory tests. They too have made good progress. Their targets are particularly challenging because a high proportion of pupils in the Year 5/6 class have learning difficulties. They are achieving well because of the success of individual support programmes in reading and writing. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys and girls or of pupils with different abilities or from different backgrounds.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are good relationships between children and adults, and pupils understand what is expected of them. Pupils are developing an understanding of the diversity in society and are very tolerant of the range of cultures within the school. The school has effective procedures to deal with the rare instances of misbehaviour. Attendance has improved as the school, supported by the education welfare officer, is taking successful action to discourage parents from taking holidays during term. Pupils have an effective voice in the school through the school council, which has helped in raising money for the provision of playground equipment. Older pupils also take responsibility, for example, by helping with lunch boxes. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They make a good contribution to the local community, for instance, through their involvement in dance displays and running stalls at the May Day Walkern Fair. Most pupils work well with each other in groups and teams, and are developing good basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills they will need in later life.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that teaching and learning are good. Throughout the school, adults and pupils work well together. There is a good 'business-like' atmosphere in lessons where pupils focus calmly on their work. Teachers plan carefully to meet the needs of the different abilities within their mixed age classes. Pupils are made well aware of what they will learn at the beginning of each lesson and confidently discuss the progress they have made in the plenary (the final part). Teachers make good use of ICT to support pupils' learning. Most lessons proceed at a good pace but, occasionally, too much time is lost when pupils move from one activity to the next. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to ensure that all pupils, particularly those who find learning hard, get the right balance of support and challenge and do well. Pupils appreciate the way in which teachers' good quality marking tells them what they need to do to improve their work.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum is planned well on a two-year cycle to take account of mixed-age classes. Teachers are beginning to make good links between different areas of the curriculum and use interactive whiteboards well to support teaching. In addition to all the National Curriculum subjects and religious education, pupils are also taught French. There is a good range of sporting and other activities, including sailing. Many of these involve pupils from every age group, often on a rota basis. Visits and visitors to the school also enrich pupils' experience, but the school recognises the need to develop further opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of diversity within society. There is a strong emphasis on pupils' personal, social and health education, which includes education about citizenship and the misuse of drugs. The school's work in developing healthy lifestyles has been recognised by a Healthy Schools award.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Pupils say they feel safe in school and are confident that any problems they have will be resolved. The few incidents that occur are documented and followed up well. The school carries out appropriate checks on all adults who work with children and makes thorough risk assessments on its activities and visits. All staff have been trained in child protection. Good support is given to pupils' with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who have behavioural problems. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds are integrated well and pupils feel that they are helped to settle quickly. Pupils receive good academic guidance and most are aware of the targets they are set for reading writing and numeracy, although this practice is not consistently in place throughout the school.

## Leadership and management

#### Grade: 2

The headteacher is successfully involving all staff in moving the school forward. There is a manageable programme in place for systematically reviewing and revising policies and

whole-school practices. Subject leaders review teachers' planning and pupils' work on a regular basis, and statutory test and assessment results are carefully analysed. All teaching staff have been trained in observing lessons. As a result, they have a good appreciation of the school's strengths and shortcomings, and what it needs to do to improve. The school improvement plan is a good working document, with priorities clearly aimed at raising standards. Day-to-day routines are well established and the school runs smoothly. Support staff are valued members of the team and make a significant contribution to pupils' welfare and progress. Resources are well used and the accommodation is maintained to a high standard. The governing body fulfils all of its statutory duties but needs to take a more active role in overseeing the school's performance.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
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	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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

8 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Walkern Primary School, Walkern, Stevenage, SG2 7NS

Thank you very much for making us welcome when we visited your school last week. We enjoyed hearing about your work in lessons and all the other things you do in school. We are pleased that you enjoy coming to school and particularly congratulate you on your improved attendance this year - well done! We are impressed by your good behaviour and how well you get on with everyone in the school. We are also pleased to hear about all you have done to earn the 'Healthy Schools' award. Thank you to the members of the school council for explaining about your fund raising events and the Maypole Dancing at Walkern Fair - we hope you all enjoyed yourselves over the weekend.

Mrs Leavy and the staff are working hard to make improvements and to help you do your best. Their lessons are interesting and you get on well with your work. The staff know you well and take good care of you. They mark your work carefully and give you clear advice as to how you can improve. We enjoyed looking at your writing in English and are impressed by the progress so many of you have made this year. Most of you know your targets for improvement. Many of the changes Mrs Leavy has made are still quite new but we can see that these are working.

There are a number of further improvements she wants to make but we are asking the staff and governors to do three things in particular. Firstly, we would like you to have more opportunities to make investigations and solve problems in mathematics and science. Secondly, we think your teachers can make even better use of the checks they make on how well you are getting on in your work. This is especially important in Class 1 (Nursery and Reception) where the systems are new. Thirdly, we are asking the governors to become more involved in seeing what you do in school for themselves. This information will help them check that the school is doing all that it can to help you.

Each one of you has an important part to play in helping the school meet these targets. Keep working hard and enjoying school.

Yours truly

Mike Best

Lead Inspector