



Purwell Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117224
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290761
Inspection dates 22–23 November 2006
Reporting inspector Geof Timms

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Fairfield Way
School category	Community		Hitchin
Age range of pupils	3–11		Hertfordshire SG4 0PU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462 432950
Number on roll (school)	153	Fax number	01462 437950
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs T Hawkins
		Headteacher	Mr R Cano
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	22–23 November 2006	290761

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average. Most pupils are from a White British background but there are a small number from a wide range of different minority ethnic backgrounds. Few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. There is a range of attainment on entry to the school, but overall it is below that typically found elsewhere. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had been in post for three weeks.

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 which is providing an effective education. It is going through a period of significant change due to falling rolls and a change of headteacher and senior leadership. Pupils make good progress throughout the school and reach above average standards by the time they leave. The school provides good value for money. The quality of the provision and children's achievement in the Nursery and Reception classes are outstanding. Parents and pupils are positive about the school. One parent said, 'My two children have both had very happy times at Purwell and have both been very well educated.'

Standards are above average and achievement is good. This is evident in the latest test results for the Year 6 pupils and also in the work of the current Year 6, particularly in mathematics. Recent improvements in teaching designed to raise the number of pupils reaching the higher levels in mathematics have been successful and have resulted in exceptional standards. Standards are less good in English, mainly due to weaknesses in pupils' writing, and the school has recognised this as an area needing improvement. Standards are also above average in science and in art and design, where the use of a specialist teacher has resulted in some exceptionally high quality work. Standards in information and communication technology have improved since the last inspection, and are now in line with those expected.

Pupils' good progress is due to good quality teaching and learning. Teachers have very good relationships with their classes and encourage full participation in lessons. Pupils consequently have very positive attitudes towards school and are very enthusiastic in most lessons. They are very happy to share their work and clearly have pride in their achievements. They enjoy taking on responsibility and older pupils love looking after younger ones at lunchtime. They make the most of opportunities to collaborate on tasks. They enjoy assessing their own learning although there are insufficient opportunities for them to do this. Teachers do not always provide enough information for pupils to understand exactly what they are expected to learn in lessons and how they can be successful.

Falling rolls have necessitated mixed age classes, and teachers have needed to restructure the curriculum to take account of this. The curriculum is currently satisfactory as this work is still at an early stage and further development is needed. There are too few opportunities for pupils to make links between subjects and to use their writing skills other than in English. There are, however, a growing range of opportunities for pupils to work in and with the local community.

Leadership and management are good. This is clear from the good quality of the provision and the good standards achieved. The improvements already made to standards in mathematics show that the school is able to improve further. The new headteacher has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has created a climate where the staff are taking on more leadership responsibilities. This has resulted in changes to subject responsibilities which have yet to be fully

embedded, although staff are beginning to take more responsibility for monitoring the work in their areas.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by providing sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop writing skills in other subjects.
- Improve the impact of subject leadership by helping coordinators to improve their evaluation of teaching and learning, and to spread good practice.
- Improve teaching by ensuring that pupils know exactly what is expected of them in lessons and how they can assess their own progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards achieved in the latest national tests at the end of Year 6 were above average. Results in mathematics and science were well above average and a high proportion of pupils reached the higher levels. In English, results were closer to the national average due to the pupils' weaker standards in writing. This weakness is evident throughout the school and is a priority for improvement. Children starting school are particularly weak in speaking and listening and their knowledge of the world. By the end of the Reception year, children have made excellent progress and achieved standards in line with and sometimes exceeding those expected. Progress is good throughout the rest of the school. Standards at the end of Year 2 dipped in 2006, although pupils made good progress in relation to their individual starting points. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those at an early stage of learning English, make good progress, especially where they receive extra support. High attainers make good progress when they receive extra support, such as the more able mathematicians in Year 6, but this is not always evident in day-to-day class work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and has improved since the last inspection. There is now a range of very effective cultural activities and opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures and faiths. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They explain that bullying is rare but well dealt with by staff if it occurs. The school offers older pupils a good range of opportunities for showing responsibility. However, the school council is not being used effectively to listen and respond to pupils' views and ideas. Pupils' attendance is broadly average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good because pupils' progress is carefully assessed and intervention programmes are used well to address any weaknesses. In the Foundation Stage, teaching is outstanding in meeting the needs of the youngest children, enabling them to make excellent progress. Where teaching is good or better, teachers' good subject knowledge, careful planning of engaging activities and high levels of questioning encourage higher thinking skills. These lessons have good pace and include activities that are closely related to the learning objective and match pupils' needs. Teaching assistants give teachers good support, especially for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Where teaching is less successful, teachers do not always make it sufficiently clear to pupils what they need to do to improve. There is very effective use of external teachers with specific expertise, especially in art and mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has worked hard to plan a curriculum which ensures continuity across the mixed age classes. This work is still at an early stage and the school acknowledges that it must improve the effectiveness of its curriculum. Not all subjects are given sufficient time and there are too few opportunities for pupils to make links between subjects or to use skills, especially in writing or in using computers, in other subjects. There are, however, good visits to local places of interest and visitors are brought in to enrich the curriculum. The exemplary art work reflects the wide range of extra-curricular activities which help pupils to develop wider skills and interests. The school organises events to address specific issues, such as the recent 'Black History' week, and these are effective in enabling pupils to extend their knowledge.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care for pupils and this is recognised by the majority of parents. One said, 'There is a genuine feeling of care and concern for pupils and their families.' The school has a supportive ethos and pupils learn to cooperate and support each other well. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 spontaneously applauded one of their classmates when he reached the top of the reward chart. First aid arrangements are secure, although training for staff needs updating. Child protection arrangements are very good and the school meets the requirements for ensuring adults are checked appropriately before working with children. Pupils' academic and personal progress is tracked effectively and the information used to provide appropriate intervention for those needing extra support as well as for those who require more challenge.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership is good. The very recently appointed headteacher has made a good start since his appointment and has begun introducing important improvements by listening to the staff team and ensuring all staff are fully involved in decision making. He has a clear vision of how the school will become a major contributor to the community and strong links with local secondary schools and other groups have been formed. The monitoring of teaching and learning has until recently been underdeveloped, but good arrangements have now been put into place. Subject leaders have begun to take more responsibility and are aware of the need to sharpen their contribution to the school's drive for improvement. The school has made good use of local authority support and recent improvements are already having an impact on standards, especially in mathematics. The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through their involvement in the life of the school.

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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?	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	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?	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?	2
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?	2
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	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

24 November 2006

Dear Children

Purwell Primary School, Fairfield Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 0PU

Many thanks for the way you welcomed us to your school and for the help you gave us in finding out what the school does well and what you would like to see changed. We particularly enjoyed meeting the school council and we think you need to meet more regularly and be able to have a bigger part in helping the school improve. You told us how much you enjoyed school. Your parents are mostly very happy with your progress and what the school does as well.

We found that Purwell is a good school. You help the teachers by behaving well and you are very keen to learn new things. You have an excellent start to school in the Acorns class and you are very lucky to have so many interesting things to do. Because you learn so much you are good at reading, mathematics and science. You are also very good at art, and have done some exceptionally good work. We liked the way the older children helped younger ones at lunchtimes and helped teachers by doing lots of other useful jobs around the school.

To help the school become even better we think that these things should happen:

- Teachers should help you become better at writing.
- Teachers who are responsible for particular subjects should spend more time finding out how well they are taught and how good ideas can be spread.
- Teachers should make sure you understand exactly what is expected of you in lessons and help you to assess your own progress.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection. Enjoy your time at Purwell and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms

Lead Inspector