



Pixies Hill Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117256
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290772
Inspection dates 22–23 November 2006
Reporting inspector Raminder Arora

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Hazeldell Road
School category	Community		Hemel Hempstead
Age range of pupils	4–11		Hertfordshire HP1 2BY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 251793
Number on roll (school)	187	Fax number	01442 251633
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Maureen Barton
		Headteacher	Mrs Terri Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2001		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 22–23 November 2006	Inspection number 290772
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average size school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Children's attainment on entry to school is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those eligible for free school meals is average. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2005. The school is currently the subject of reorganisation proposals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Pixies Hill is a satisfactory and improving school. Since her appointment, the headteacher has introduced several improvement initiatives, which are currently being established. Parents are unanimously supportive of the school. One wrote, 'A lovely school with lovely atmosphere'. This is being achieved despite the possible prospect of closure resulting from reorganisation proposals, and a background of changes in staffing and leadership. The improvements have been secured as a result of the headteacher's vision and energy. Her good leadership gives the school a clear direction, which is securely centred on raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress. She has formed a good partnership with the deputy head, and all staff with management responsibilities maintain and promote the school's ethos enthusiastically.

An important strength is the good pastoral care, which impacts positively on pupils' personal development and achievement. Pupils behave well and show good attitudes to their work. They say how much they enjoy the learning, especially in art and design technology, and in the out-of-school visits, which enliven their learning. Teaching, learning and pupils' achievement are satisfactory. Over time, teaching has not been robust enough to raise achievement of pupils, particularly in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2. The headteacher has eliminated most unsatisfactory teaching and has, rightly, identified the need for its continued improvement as her highest priority. Teaching and learning are monitored closely. Consequently, there have been significant improvements, such as the introduction of interactive whiteboard technology and more effective systems for tracking pupils' progress. These improvements are having a positive impact on pupils' learning and achievement and point to the school having satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

The school has made satisfactory progress in improving and maintaining standards since the last inspection. Children in the Foundation Stage are making good progress because their learning is interesting and relevant. Most pupils in Years 3 to 6 make the progress that they should. In Year 2, standards have been consistently above average in the recent years. In Year 6, standards are also above average. The number of pupils attaining the higher levels has improved, particularly in English because carefully targeted work to improve writing is beginning to take effect. There has, however, been a drop in the number of pupils attaining higher levels in mathematics and science, and the need to promote high expectations and increased challenge in lessons has been identified. This is partly because improved assessment procedures are not yet fully embedded. Consequently, staff do not use assessment information effectively enough in matching work to pupils' abilities or use marking to support pupils' understanding of how to improve. The targets for the current Year 6 are challenging and pupils are on track to achieve them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that all pupils, but especially the most able, are challenged sufficiently to attain high standards in all subjects.

- Strengthen the assessment arrangements and ensure that teachers use the information effectively to match work to pupils' needs.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teachers' marking so that it clearly informs pupils how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievements are satisfactory. Children enter the Reception class with above average skills in most areas and average skills in writing. The majority make at least satisfactory progress. Children's rate of progress is increasing as a result of improved provision in the Foundation Stage that makes children's learning more stimulating. On entering Year 1, most meet standards normally expected of five-year-olds in writing and exceed these in other areas of learning. Pupils make satisfactory progress and attain standards that are above average at age seven and eleven. However at age seven, standards are better in reading than in writing. At age eleven, recent results show a decline in the number of pupils attaining higher levels in mathematics and science. This is not the case in English, where pupils' progress, particularly in writing, has been good and resulted in increased numbers pupils gaining higher level test scores. This improvement is reflected in good quality writing across the curriculum. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress towards their identified targets due to carefully planned work and effective support in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, is good. Their above average attendance and close attention in lessons point to their enthusiasm for learning. Parents say how greatly their children enjoy going to school. One wrote: 'My daughter wants to be first in the queue each morning'. Pupils know how to stay healthy and appreciate the labels at lunchtimes that tell them which dishes contain protein or starch, so that they can make healthy choices. They have a good sense of responsibility and contribute to the local community by raising funds. Pupils on the school council say their role is 'to make the school a better place and more fun'. They make sensible requests, like the return of the friendship bench or that lunchtime supervisors could organise games with them. Although the school works hard to introduce the pupils to the range of cultures in British society it recognises the need to do more. Pupils' good literacy, numeracy and social skills give them a good grounding for the next stage of schooling and for adult life. Their behaviour is good and they claim there is no bullying. If they feel upset or worried, they are confident that one of the adults in school will help them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in some lessons. Teaching is good in the Foundation Stage. The teacher fosters independence in learning and builds on pupils' knowledge effectively. This approach helps children to improve their progress. In a particularly good lesson, the teacher's enthusiasm motivated pupils to devise their own mathematical problems based on the TV page of a newspaper. As a consequence they improved their understanding of the 24-hour clock and developed the ability to manage the challenging activities. Good practice of this kind is beginning to drive up the quality of teaching but is not yet consistent throughout school. In some lessons, tasks do not motivate pupils sufficiently because they are not always sufficiently challenging or matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers are beginning to assess pupils' progress, but do not always use the information to plan future work. Some of the steps taken by the headteacher to overcome these weaknesses are already proving successful. Teaching assistants support pupils with learning difficulties so that they make satisfactory progress alongside others in the class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory curriculum. There is adequate provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), and the skills learnt in these subjects are suitably used across the curriculum. Personal, social and health education is central to the ethos of the school and activities such as the 'circle time' effectively support pupils' personal development. The curriculum is enriched by visits, trips and visitors that enhance pupils' learning and support the development social skills. Pupils show particular interest in art activities and benefit from effective links with two local secondary schools with specialisms in performing arts. Pupils actively participate in the after school clubs for netball, football, choir and homework.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care guidance and support are satisfactory. The pastoral care of pupils is particularly good so that they feel comfortable and secure in school. One parent commented that 'the school offers a caring and nurturing environment'. Pupils appreciate the way staff look after them with comments like, 'our teachers are kind, a little bit funny, and they work us hard'. All the required checks and policies to ensure pupils' safety and protection are in place. The school now has satisfactory systems for checking how well pupils are doing and identifying those who are not making the progress that they should. The staff are still refining these procedures to improve the way they use the information from them to set hard enough work for all pupils. Additionally, their

marking, although encouraging and regular, does not consistently support pupils' understanding of what they need to do in order to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has quickly gained an accurate view of how well the school is doing and taken action to put in place effective measures to improve it. These have included introducing a systematic programme of activities for checking the school's performance. She has worked hard to ensure the vacancies on the governing body are filled and that new governors receive training to help them to become fully effective. These recent improvements have been driven by the headteacher. She is now effectively increasing the contribution of subject leaders and governors to the management of the school as they gain experience and confidence. The school works closely with local primary and secondary schools to share ideas and good practice. The headteacher has gained the support of parents who hold the school in high esteem. One parent commented, 'Mrs Bailey has proven herself to be very helpful and efficient'.

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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	3
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	2
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	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

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?	3

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	3
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

24 November 2006

Dear Pupils,

Pixies Hill Primary School, Hazeldell Road, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. HP1 2BY

Following our visit to inspect your school we would like to tell you that we enjoyed ourselves very much, and would like to thank you all for talking to us and sharing your work. We were there to see how well your school helps you to learn, and what we saw and heard helped us to decide that yours is a welcoming and friendly school. We were impressed by how well you all behave and how much you enjoy being there.

The things we liked best about your school are:

- You listen carefully to what your teachers have to say and you are willing to work hard in your lessons.
- You learn to work and play well together and to look after yourselves.
- Everyone at school cares for you, so that you are safe and happy, and your parents are very pleased.
- The headteacher, all the staff and the governors, know what they want the school to be like and work hard together to make it a happy place for you to learn and play.

These are the things that we think would make your school even better:

Mrs Bailey and Mrs Dickson are going to help all the staff to keep getting better and better at helping you to learn. All teachers with special jobs to do are going to check regularly that everything that helps you to learn is working well and that you all know how to improve your work. All staff are determined to ensure that you all make good progress and no one gets behind in his or her learning.

We hope that everyone at Pixies Hill can work together to do these things and that you go on enjoying all the things you do there that help you to learn and be happy.

With best wishes

Raminder Arora

Lead inspector