

The Lea Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117327
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290798
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Nichola Perry

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	146
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Debi Lee
Headteacher	Mrs Sharon Swinson
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002
School address	Moorland Road Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 4LE
Telephone number	01582767939
Fax number	01582462945

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school. Most pupils are White British, although the proportion coming from minority ethnic groups is above average. Seven of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is slightly below average, although a higher than average proportion of these pupils have statements. Attainment on entry to the nursery is broadly in line with expected levels but changes significantly due to pupil mobility. This affects the make-up of some year groups so that sometimes overall attainment decreases to below expected levels, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. It provides satisfactory value for money. The headteacher has made good use of external expertise to support her drive for improvement. Strategies for improvement, introduced since her appointment, are proving to be effective. They are beginning to close the gap between the school's performance and the national average, and are improving pupils' progress. From September 2007 the school will have a stable staff, including a new deputy headteacher.

Standards are broadly average. Pupils make steady progress and achieve satisfactorily. However, this is not yet consistent and some more able pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Some historical underachievement in writing, and in mathematics in Years 1 and 2, is being tackled successfully. Standards in the Nursery and Reception classes are average and the provision satisfactory. Pupils say they feel safe and enjoy school. Most demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and attendance is satisfactory. Behaviour is satisfactory, although some parents expressed concerns about inconsistent behaviour. Pupils understand how to keep safe and healthy. This, and their social awareness, together with sound progress in their literacy and numeracy skills, prepares them satisfactorily for the future.

Teaching and learning are sound and are underpinned by good relationships. Whilst some good teaching was seen during the inspection, this is not yet consistent. Classrooms are stimulating and displays around the school are good. Pupils are clear about what they are going to learn and how well they are doing. However, marking is not consistent and does not yet fully explain how they can improve, target gaps in learning or avoid repeated errors. The curriculum is satisfactory and provides a range of learning opportunities, well supported by additional features and after school activities. Pupils are well cared for with appropriate links to a range of external professionals. Links with parents are good and many have good things to say about the school.

Leadership and management, including governance, are satisfactory. The good leadership of the headteacher, supported by satisfactory management at all other levels, provides a secure overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge is incorporated into well focused plans for raising achievement. Systems for assessing and tracking pupils progress are sound, but are not always applied rigorously or regularly enough to bring about faster improvement. Self-evaluation is secure and the school views itself as satisfactory. The school has a satisfactory capacity for continuing improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils do as well as they can by making better use of tracking to check pupils' progress more frequently and by ensuring that all staff, particularly middle managers, are aware of performance against national standards.
- Ensure more rapid improvement in teaching to the level of the best so that learning and behaviour becomes consistently good.
- Raise the profile of basic skills, particularly writing, across all subjects so that pupils have increased opportunities to practise these skills.
- Use marking more effectively to help pupils know how they can improve their work.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils, including those in the Nursery and Reception, make steady progress and achieve satisfactorily. Standards at the end of Year 2 are broadly average. Although standards in 2006 were above average overall, writing and mathematics were average. Nevertheless, results were in line with the school's predictions, with a higher than average proportion of pupils attaining higher levels in all subjects, a significant improvement on previous years. Pupils' current achievements do not maintain the improving trend, particularly in writing, but reflect the make-up of the group. Standards in the current Year 1 show a return to the improving trend, although writing remains a weaker skill.

Standards at the end of Year 6 have been more variable, reflecting the make-up of year groups, high pupil mobility and some inadequate teaching in the past. In 2006 standards were average, a significant improvement on the previous year. Standards in the current Year 6 are below average. Past issues with teaching and behaviour have had a negative impact on this year group. Whilst good teaching during Year 6 has brought improvements it has not been sufficient to close the gap in standards. Consistently good teaching in Year 5, with pupils already working at higher levels, indicate that standards are likely rise significantly in 2008. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress because of the well targeted provision and support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Good relationships contribute well to pupils' personal development. Pupils are sensitive and tolerant. The older ones enjoy taking greater responsibility and are happy to help younger pupils. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils celebrate a range of faiths and customs and support various charities. Attendance is satisfactory and the school is taking steps to improve this. Attitudes to work are satisfactory and pupils enjoy school. Behaviour is satisfactory, but some pupils are inattentive and do not yet take full responsibility for their own actions. Pupils are acquiring skills which will be useful to them in later life. They are involved with the community through the church and links with other schools. The school council gives pupils a voice in the running of the school. Pupils are provided with well balanced meals and healthy snacks and there is good emphasis on physical exercise and sporting activities. This helps pupils understand the importance of exercise and healthy eating.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Some good teaching is evident in Years 3 and 5. Improved teaching has led to the better management of pupils and increased progress. This improvement has been achieved by rigorous monitoring of teaching by the headteacher and external consultants, a better match of activities to pupils' needs and higher expectations of what pupils can do. Teaching assistants play an important role in pupils' learning. Good relationships, greater clarity about what is to be learnt, stimulating classrooms and better use of resources are all helping staff to motivate pupils to learn. Assessment is satisfactory and is accurate in identifying the needs of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English and who have learning

difficulties or disabilities. Some good examples of helpful marking are evident, but this is not consistent. Some teachers do not demand high enough standards of handwriting and presentation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The headteacher has worked hard with staff so that the curriculum is now satisfactory in meets pupils' varying needs. She is continuing to explore ways of linking subjects together to make learning even more stimulating. There is a good focus on speaking, listening and communication skills to help pupils make better progress in these areas, often from low starting points. Satisfactory emphasis is placed on the development of literacy and numeracy, although there are too few opportunities for pupils to practise their writing across all subjects. The curriculum is enriched by a range of visits and visitors, including a residential trip for pupils in Year 6. Visits from religious leaders and to various places of worship, access to personal, social and health education and involvement in the Young Enterprise initiative have a positive impact on pupils' understanding of their roles and responsibilities within a diverse community. Many pupils enjoy attending a good range of out of school activities to extend their sporting, artistic and other interests.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Sound emphasis is placed on developing pupils' self-esteem and independence, such as self-registering in the Nursery class and older pupils running stalls at school events. Adults know pupils well and are sensitive to their needs. Links with other schools and outside agencies are beneficial. For example, gifted pupils have opportunities to extend their knowledge by having lessons from visiting secondary teachers. Specific needs are identified quickly and a range of support helps lower attaining pupils to achieve satisfactorily. Pupils say that they like their teachers and know they can turn to anyone if they have a problem. Pupils feel safe and well cared for and know that any bullying or bad behaviour is dealt with. Arrangements for safeguarding comply with government requirements. Child protection and other health and safety procedures are all in place, as demonstrated during the inspection when a swarm of bees threatened an unwelcome visit. Academic guidance is satisfactory, but the system for tracking pupils' progress is not yet used well enough to promote faster learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides good leadership. She has a clear vision for improving the school, which is motivating staff to join her on her mission. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The headteacher has undertaken a full evaluation of the school, bringing about necessary and rapid improvement. Better teaching, through regular monitoring, has resulted in improved learning and behaviour. Regular monitoring and evaluation provide a more accurate picture of what still needs to be improved. Parents and pupils recognise and value the improvements. Subject leaders provide satisfactory management. However, they lack a precise understanding of standards and pupils' progress because they do not analyse data regularly or with sufficient rigour. Governors are supportive and are led well by a knowledgeable chair.

However, they are not all involved fully in analysing and challenging the school's performance. Parents are positive about the school and the level of care provided for their children.

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

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.

Annex A

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 May 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of The Lea Primary School, Harpenden, AL5 4LE

Thank you for being so helpful and kind when I visited your school recently. This letter is to let you know what I think of your school and how it can be even better.

I enjoyed meeting you and talking to you about your work and it was especially nice that you wanted to share your views about school with me. I was also pleased to hear that you like your teachers, think your school has got better and that you like coming to school so much. I agree with you that it is a happy place and that it has got better.

I think that everyone looks after you which is why you feel safe and know that someone will always help you if you are worried. I think your classrooms look very bright and the displays look lovely. Your teachers and classroom assistants work hard to make your learning interesting and Mrs Swinson does a good job in leading the school. I think that the teaching is satisfactory and that most of you behave well in lessons and in the playground. Most of you make satisfactory progress in your learning but I think some of you could do even better, especially in writing. Many of you know about your targets and how well you are doing in your work but not all of you are really clear about what you need to do to get better.

There are a few things that would make your school even better.

- To keep checking the teaching so that teachers are doing their very best to help you to make good progress and behave really well.
- To make sure that the school's leaders check more carefully on the progress you are making, including in the Nursery and Reception classes, so that you all do as well as you can.
- To make sure that you get lots of practice in your writing in all the subjects, not just in literacy, so that you can write really well.
- To make sure that when they mark your work, teachers tell you how can improve and help you correct some of the mistakes you make.

I hope you continue to enjoy your school and wish you all luck in the future.

Nichola Perry

Lead Inspector