

# Ashtree Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117352
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE
<b>Inspection number</b>	290807
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mary Summers

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>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	435
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs J Hollywell (Acting)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms E Kirwan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 October 2001
<b>School address</b>	Chertsey Rise Stevenage Hertfordshire SG2 9JQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01438 351090
<b>Fax number</b>	01438 353464

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This large school serves pupils from a wide catchment area. Most are from White British families; the remainder represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. There are very few who speak English as an additional language and the proportion identified with learning difficulties and disabilities is lower than in most schools.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This school provides a good and effective education for its pupils. Pupils make good progress, achieve well and leave the school at the end of Year 6 with standards that are above average, especially in science and mathematics. Raising standards in writing has been a priority over the past year and, while there has been little impact on results in national tests so far, there are signs that strategies introduced are beginning to have an impact in younger classes. There are still too few pupils however, gaining the higher levels in writing in the national tests and assessments in Years 2 and 6. The school identified last year that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities were underachieving. New intervention programmes have made a real impact on these pupils who are now making much better progress, especially in Years 5 and 6.

Provision in Nursery and Reception is good because children quickly settle into the warm and welcoming atmosphere and enjoy a good range of stimulating activities which get them off to a positive start in their formal education. However, most are still below levels expected nationally in many areas of their learning before they transfer to Year 1.

Teaching is good. Lessons are planned and structured well; this ensures that learning proceeds at a good pace. Pupils concentrate well because teachers usually present lessons in interesting ways, often using computer technology to help them. They are clear about what they are expected to learn and how they can improve their work. The good curriculum is well organised and provides a variety of interesting experiences. Pupils enjoy their education, particularly topic work in history and geography and workshops in science and music. There are not enough opportunities, however, for pupils to practise and refine their literacy skills in different subjects. Pupils cooperate well in class, working in pairs for example, to assess each other's work. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They reach good levels in their personal development, showing responsible attitudes and good behaviour. Along with their good contribution to the school and wider community, these skills prepare them well for their future education and economic well being. Care, guidance and support are good. The school looks after pupils very carefully, helping those with medical and emotional problems as well as those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully and clear targets set for improvement.

The school is led and managed well by an enthusiastic and hardworking senior leadership team ably supported by governors. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and there is a clear commitment to raise standards further.

However, links between school self-evaluation procedures and improvement planning are not well established and there are no clear indicators by which the success of the plans can be judged. Nonetheless, the school continues to improve and parents are very happy with the provision it offers their children. As one parent said on a questionnaire, 'I have been very happy with the quality of the teaching and the care given to my children. I would not hesitate to recommend Ashtree as an excellent, well run and friendly school'. The school provides good value for money and shows a good capacity to improve.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the proportion of pupils gaining higher levels in the national tests and assessments in writing.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills in other subjects.

- Strengthen the links between self-evaluation and school improvement planning, ensuring that there are clear indicators by which success can be measured.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Many children begin in the Nursery at levels which are below those expected for their age. Although they make good progress and achieve well, when they transfer to Year 1 most are still below national expectations in many areas of learning, especially in their communication, language and literacy skills and in mathematical development. Their personal, social and emotional development is especially good, with most children reaching appropriate points for their age by the end of Reception. They continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2, achieving standards at the end of Year 2 that are in line with the national average in mathematics. Standards in reading and writing are not quite so high.

Achievement is good overall and pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6 with standards that are generally above average. Standards in English are not as high as in mathematics and science because not enough pupils reach the higher levels in the national tests especially in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well because of the extra support provided by teaching assistants. However, the most able pupils do not achieve well enough in writing because of the lack of opportunities provided for them to develop their skills in more extended pieces of work.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Cultural development, while satisfactory, is not as strong as other aspects. Pupils leave Ashtree as sensible, sociable and well adjusted young people, equipped with the skills that make them ready for the next phase in their education. They know why it is important to keep fit and healthy. Behaviour is good. Pupils know how to keep safe and are confident that there is always an adult to turn to if they have any problems. Attendance is above average. Pupils are eager to learn and attend school regularly. They enjoy lessons and the vast majority work hard. A small number of pupils, mainly boys, on occasions when lessons fail to grasp their interest, find it difficult to maintain concentration and this hinders their learning. Pupils are keen to take responsibility. They appreciate how their views are considered through the school council. They contribute well to the wider community through numerous charitable works and by performing concerts for family and friends.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching is good. The great majority of pupils learn well because most teachers plan lessons carefully and keep them actively engaged through a variety of stimulating activities. Drama work in Year 2, for example, involved pupils rehearsing what characters in their story were going to say, before they began the writing process. Occasionally, teaching strategies are too narrow and do not match the learning styles of boys, who then lose concentration. This adversely affects their behaviour and their learning. Teachers plan activities at different levels and this ensures that the more able pupils are challenged and that those who learn at a slower rate are

supported to take the next steps in their learning. Computer technology is used well to make lessons interesting and visually stimulating for pupils. Teachers always share the learning intentions of the lesson with pupils at the start; this means that pupils are clear about what is expected and take a more active role in the learning process. Their work is marked carefully and teachers often provide helpful comments about how it can be improved.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good because it meets the needs of pupils and is enriched by a wide range of visits, visitors, and extra-curricular activities. Sport has a high priority and pupils engage enthusiastically in physical education lessons as well as the clubs on offer outside the school day. Specialist teachers in, for example, Spanish and instrumental music, enable pupils to develop particular skills and interests. Pupils' creative talents and imagination are fostered well through the use of art and drama. Visits by authors, musicians and artists add excitement and interest to pupils' learning. Literacy skills are well taught in English lessons but there are not enough occasions when pupils can practise these within other subjects. This restricts their progress particularly that of the more able pupils, who do not have sufficient opportunities to write extended pieces of work.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. All the procedures to ensure pupils' health, safety and welfare are in place. Teachers know pupils well and offer them good pastoral support and academic guidance. This is reflected within a comment from a parent who stated, 'My daughter has always been encouraged and nurtured in all areas of learning'. Pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants in lessons and in small groups outside class where they get a chance to catch up on gaps in their learning. This is making a real difference to their achievement. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully in English and mathematics, and effective guidance is given about how pupils can improve. Procedures for checking their progress in other subjects are not as thorough.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The school runs smoothly and there is a clear focus on improving pupils' achievement. The headteacher, very ably supported by the deputy, provides a good drive to the school's work. Pupils' performance in national tests is analysed carefully and steps are taken to address areas of weakness. Last year, for example, assessment information showed that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities were underachieving, and strategies introduced this year have improved their performance considerably. Systems to evaluate other aspects of school provision are too informal and do not link well enough to the school improvement plan. There are no clear indicators to enable the success of the plan to be measured.

Coordinators show great enthusiasm for their roles and are tackling the areas they have identified for improvement well. Governance is good because governors perform an effective role, gaining good levels of information which enable them to monitor the school's work effectively. Individual

governors bring a wide range of expertise to support the school in, for example, finance and health and safety.

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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	2
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	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

<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	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 June 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Ashtree Primary School and Nursery, Stevenage, Hertfordshire. SG2 9JQ

Thank you all so much for your warm welcome during our recent visit. We enjoyed spending time in your school, watching some of you working in lessons and chatting with you in the playground and the dining hall. Everything we saw and heard convinced us that you go to a good school.

These are some of the things we think are good about your school.

- You all work hard and achieve well - the standards you gain in the Year 6 national tests are higher than in most schools in mathematics and science.
- The teaching is good and you learn lots of new skills.
- You are growing up as confident, polite young people who enjoy learning and know how to keep safe and healthy.
- Teachers and other adults take good care of you and give you help if you need it.
- The people in charge do a good job in running the school.

There are three things we think could be even better.

- More of you should be reaching higher standards in writing in Year 2 and Year 6.
- You need more opportunities to use your reading and writing skills in other subjects.
- The adults in charge need to plan more carefully for the future to make sure they have identified all the things that need improvement so that you can do even better at school.

I know you will continue to work hard and support your teachers and other adults. I would like to extend my very best wishes to you all for your future education.

Yours sincerely

Mary Summers

Lead Inspector