



Amherst School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118281
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 291074
Inspection dates 6–7 February 2007
Reporting inspector Don Mason

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Witches Lane
School category	Community		Riverhead
Age range of pupils	7–11		Sevenoaks TN13 2AX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01732 452577
Number on roll (school)	375	Fax number	01732 464007
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Irene Stone
		Headteacher	P.D. Wiltshire
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
7–11	6–7 February 2007	291074

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In this larger-than-average junior school, most pupils are from White British families. Their attainment on entry to school is well above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average.

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 with some outstanding features. Among these are the very high level of commitment of staff and the exceptionally good curriculum enrichment. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school and parents hold it in very high regard. One commented that 'it is refreshing to have a school that not only has an excellent academic ethos but is also interested in the overall development of children. There is something for everyone at Amherst.'

Pupils join the school with well-above-average standards. They make good progress and standards at the end of Year 6 are exceptionally high. The large majority of pupils achieve grammar school places. Some pupils make outstanding progress, especially in mathematics. This good overall progress is achieved through good teaching. Pupil and teacher relationships are excellent, with the result that pupils behave well and show good levels of concentration. This is particularly so when pupils take part in practical activities such as science investigations and art. However, they do not respond as well to the format of many other lessons where teachers talk to the whole class and then the pupils work on their own on their activities. Opportunities for pupils to discuss their work together and to make decisions and choices are limited. The curriculum is good overall. Curriculum enrichment is outstanding and pupils take full and enthusiastic advantage of an extraordinary number and range of clubs, visits and activities. A distinguishing feature of this school is the very high level of commitment of the staff to providing these opportunities. For example, the school retains an unusually long dinner-time to give pupils time to mix together and to take part in clubs. Parents, too, make a strong contribution to curriculum enrichment. A number of activities are provided for the most able pupils, including some specialist teaching of science and mathematics at local secondary schools. However, in class lessons, too few activities are focused on the needs of these pupils.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. By the time they reach Year 6, pupils are mature, responsible young people. Care, guidance and support are good. Academic support is good but not as strong as the pastoral side. Pupils generally know their targets and have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school, cooperating well in class and helping to organise numerous activities. For example, a small group of pupils is currently running a nature club to raise money for the school fund. In class discussions, pupils put their views forward and these are raised at school council by the class representatives.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher and senior staff work together well as a team. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and plan appropriate action to bring about improvements. However, senior staff and subject leaders have too few opportunities to check the quality and variety of teaching and learning in the school. The school has shown it can bring about improvement, for example, through the increased progress made by pupils in writing. The school's capacity for improvement is currently satisfactory. Staff accept that further improvements could be made through more rigorous feedback on the

quality of teaching and learning and through greater involvement by subject leaders in classroom observation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more variation in the way the pupils are taught and give them further opportunities to work together in all areas of the curriculum.
- Ensure that senior staff and subject leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning more rigorously so that pupils of all abilities, and particularly more-able pupils, achieve as well as they possibly can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the school with well-above-average levels of attainment. They make good progress in each year group and reach exceptionally high standards by the end of Year 6. Pupils make most progress in mathematics because the work in this subject is particularly well matched to pupils' needs. Achievement in writing has improved as a result of the work done to improve the teaching of that subject. As a result, the pupils' achievement as seen in national tests demonstrates significant improvement in the past three years. Pupils with learning needs or disabilities achieve well. More able pupils could achieve even better. Their needs are identified at an early stage. Appropriate support is planned and delivered by conscientious teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' excellent personal development is mirrored in their mature, self-confident and friendly demeanour and the very good attitudes they display towards their work. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural education is exemplary. Pupils learn about other cultures and faiths in religious education lessons and events such as the recent meal provided to celebrate Chinese New Year. Pupils are proud of their school and report that they enjoy coming to school very much. This is reflected in their good attendance and excellent behaviour. Visitors such as the community police officer and school nurse enhance the pupils' secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe and how to lead healthy lives. A popular, break-time fruit stall is run by the pupils. The pupils' good progress in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) will serve them well in the future. Pupils work together well when given the chance to do so, for example, in many of the outstanding extra-curricular activities. However, in the classroom, teaching provides too few opportunities for them to show initiative and develop strong team-working skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, ensuring that pupils of all abilities make good progress. Pupils are justifiably proud of the files in which they display their beautifully presented work. Lessons are generally well planned, with work set effectively matching the needs of pupils. However, sometimes, particularly when the same activity is set for the whole class, the more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Pupils know what they are expected to learn in each lesson and the teachers encourage them to think about their progress in relation to their targets. The pace of lessons is generally good. However, the teaching style is mainly formal. As a result, pupils have too few opportunities to develop their skills as independent learners. The teaching of writing has improved because teachers are helping their pupils to develop a better understanding of their achievements and what they have to do to improve. Teachers are making good use of new science resources and pupils enthusiastically report that they enjoy their investigative activities. Teachers' planning makes effective links between subjects and this enhances pupils' interest. Sometimes, opportunities to develop the pupils' speaking and listening skills are missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has a good impact on the progress pupils make throughout the school. There is a strong emphasis on promoting pupils' progress in reading, writing, numeracy and ICT skills. A large number of pupils play musical instruments and there are excellent opportunities to take part in musical activities. The attractive displays around the school provide evidence of the pupils' good work in art and other subjects. The school has received a number of national awards for aspects of its curriculum provision. The school's outstanding curriculum enrichment accommodates pupils who want to take part in activities just for fun or because they are striving to excel. For example, there is one choir for all and another for which pupils have to audition. The number and variety of activities is impressive. Although pupils make good progress overall, the school has not adapted its curriculum in any significant way to meet the needs of its large number of very able pupils. Learning opportunities are not maximised because of the predominantly formal teaching style. For example, pupils make good progress in developing their ICT skills with the specialist teacher but they have too few opportunities to use these skills independently in their classes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils feel happy and safe because they are well looked after by the staff. Regular praise and encouragement ensure that they develop high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. They report that the few incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with

quickly and effectively. Policies to ensure pupils' safety are securely in place. Systems to check pupils' progress are sound. Pupils know their targets in English and maths and they are encouraged to evaluate their work. Pupils with learning or other difficulties are identified early and given appropriate support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership and inspires the staff to give a high level of commitment to the school. Many parents share the view that 'the teachers are brilliant under the leadership of a wonderful headteacher.' The school is calm and orderly and the day-to-day management of the school is effective. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well and takes effective action to bring about improvements. Staff make good use of assessment information to set challenging targets and regularly check to ensure that pupils are making appropriate progress. However, the formal monitoring of teaching is not rigorous enough and teachers are not always given clear advice about how to improve their teaching, especially in relation to challenging more-able pupils. Subject leaders provide effective support for colleagues in a variety of ways but have little opportunity to monitor teaching in the subjects they are responsible for and to contribute to the school's improvement. The procedures for working with pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well managed. The school works extremely well with parents, with local schools and with other agencies to promote pupils' learning and well-being. Governors are proud of the school and provide strong support. They have established close links with subject leaders and are becoming more effective in monitoring achievement and helping the school to move forward.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	2
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	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

We really enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for being so helpful and friendly. We particularly enjoyed visiting your classrooms, seeing the work you were doing and talking to you about your school. We find that your school provides you with a good education which has some outstanding features.

What you do well

- You make good progress in your work and standards at the end of Year 6 are exceptionally high.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you work and play together very well.
- Your writing has improved because the teachers are giving you more interesting activities and helping you to understand how to make it better.
- You are rightly proud of, and enjoy enormously, the amazing number and range of activities and events which the teachers provide for you.
- The adults in school know you well and take good care of you.
- The headteacher inspires everyone in school to work really hard on your behalf.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Vary your teaching so that you have more time to work on projects together, working in teams, investigating and making choices.
- Check in more detail how you are taught and give teachers clear advice about how they can help you learn even better than you are doing at the moment, especially the most able among you.

We wish you all the best for the future.