



Westcourt Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118572
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 291174
Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006
Reporting inspector Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Silver Road
School category	Community		Gravesend
Age range of pupils	3–11		DA12 4JG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01474 566411
Number on roll (school)	177	Fax number	01474 535749
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Vacant Position
		Headteacher	Jean Everest
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	6–7 December 2006	291174

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is slightly smaller than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is very high. Many more pupils enter or leave the school after the normal time of entry than is the case in most schools. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is higher than average. About one in five pupils are from a minority ethnic background, most of whom speak English as an additional language. A few pupils are from Traveller backgrounds and an increasing number of Roma pupils do not speak English when they join the school. Attainment on entry to the Nursery and Reception classes is very low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. The school works well with parents, who are particularly appreciative of the school's considerable strengths in its good level of care, support and guidance for pupils. One parent expressed a view typical of many: 'I am very happy with Westcourt School, our children have gained so much confidence since they started school. The headteacher and all staff work very hard to provide the best for all children. They have a very good relationship with the children and do a fantastic job.' The result of this hard work is seen in pupils' good personal development and well-being. Pupils' friendly and thoughtful attitudes towards each other reflect the school's philosophy of 'sharing, caring and learning together' well. They say that bullying is rare and is taken seriously when incidents happen. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe by, for example, not talking to strangers. Pupils enjoy school and their positive attitudes are developed well from the time they start in the Nursery or Reception class. Pupils who join at a later time are linked to a buddy so that they, too, integrate quickly into the school's routines and activities. Provision in the Nursery and Reception classes is satisfactory. Although children make satisfactory progress during this time, they leave the Reception year with standards well below those normally expected for their age.

The school has had considerable difficulty in recruiting suitably experienced staff in recent years and this led to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. This situation has improved and an ongoing intensive programme of development with the local authority is having a positive impact on teaching and learning. As a result, teaching and learning are satisfactory and pupils are now achieving satisfactorily. Nevertheless, standards across Years 1 to 6 remain exceptionally low, especially in reading and writing because these skills are not reinforced enough in other subjects. The curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs of the pupils. A current priority is to make the science curriculum more practically based, but this initiative is at an early stage and has not yet had time to take effect. Different groups of pupils make broadly similar progress, but some staff members still lack sufficient expertise to deal with the learning needs of lower attaining pupils, some of those with learning difficulties and those pupils who are at an early stage of speaking English.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The governing body and staff understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well and realise that the school needs to build quickly on recent developments in order to raise standards further. They have correctly identified and taken action on those areas that will have the greatest impact on improving standards. The school has already demonstrated that when it focuses on an issue it has achieved some success. For example, attainment is monitored regularly and the information is used effectively to help pupils to understand their targets and to make alternative provision when any pupil is seen to be falling behind.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more opportunities to use and practise their reading and writing skills in other subjects in order to increase achievement and raise standards in English.

- Increase opportunities for investigative work in science.
- Increase staff expertise so that the work for lower attaining pupils, those with learning difficulties and those learning to speak English are always accurately matched to their needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make satisfactory progress from their very low starting points when they first start school. Children settle quickly and develop their social skills and attitudes well, but very few reach the outcomes expected for their age in early reading, writing and number skills.

For a number of years pupils made less progress as they moved through the rest of the school than pupils did nationally, but the rate of progress improved in 2005. In 2006, the test results at the end of Years 2 and 6 declined, but this still represented satisfactory achievement for those pupils given that their starting points were lower than for previous years. The school has been working intensively over recent years to lift achievement. It has focused particularly on improving literacy and numeracy, with some success, and is now turning its attention to science. While achievement has improved, standards still remain exceptionally low, most particularly in English, at Year 6 and Year 2.

Pupils' achievement in developing their basic skills of literacy and numeracy satisfactorily prepares them for their future education and economic well-being. Nevertheless, because improvements are still relatively recent, they have not yet had enough impact to close the gap between school and national performance levels or to help pupils to meet all the challenging targets set for their performance. Different groups of pupils make similar satisfactory rates of progress to others, although those who have been in the school longer progress faster than those whose learning has been disrupted by changing schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils are friendly and confident and say they like their school. They behave well in lessons. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and pupils particularly enjoy the social and cultural activities organised beyond the school, such as carol singing in the local shopping centre. Pupils show a strong sense of respect and care for one another and try to ensure that all are included in playground games. Pupils conscientiously carry out class and whole-school responsibilities and show much concern for others through collecting charitable donations. Pupils understand how they can live healthily, for example they know that a daily intake of vegetables helps to sustain a healthy body. They learn about democratic processes in the choice of school council members. This group helps to make decisions about the school, such as changing the snacks in the school tuck shop

to fruit to reflect the school's focus on healthy eating and in suggesting playground equipment. Attendance remains below average, but has improved considerably over the last year and to the extent that the school met its local authority target.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and many good lessons were seen during the inspection. Teachers know their pupils and their achievements well and detailed marking helps pupils to know what they have to do to improve. Teachers use a variety of strategies to make learning interesting. For example, drama is used well to provide a stimulus for learning. A particularly effective example of this approach, when a 'reporter' interviewed 'Red Riding Hood', acted as a powerful preparation for a writing task.

Work is matched well to pupils' needs and teaching assistants make a positive contribution, particularly when helping those pupils who find it difficult to settle or concentrate for a long time. Sometimes the work for a few of the lowest attaining pupils, or those who are at an early stage of speaking English, is not yet sufficiently focused on their particular needs. Sometimes, too, expectations of good handwriting, presentation of work and what pupils can achieve in the time are not high enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Improving the curriculum is a school priority. A good start has been made in linking subjects to make learning more interesting and relevant for pupils. For example, history, art and music were brought together in a topic about the Ancient Egyptians. This approach has yet to be taken further so that it provides enough real contexts for pupils to develop their writing and reading skills in other subjects. The science curriculum does not yet provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to predict and record the findings of their observations.

French is a useful addition to the basic curriculum for older pupils. Visits to local places of interest and talks from visitors, including members of the Traveller community, add relevance to many topics and broaden pupils' horizons. Pupils engage enthusiastically in many extra-curricular clubs, which cover a wide range of interests, including specialist sports coaching. These make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for. Staff know pupils very well and take a personal interest in each individual child. The relationships between pupils and staff are outstanding and substantially aid learning and emotional development. The school has a good range of internal welfare support. This support is backed up by external professional support

and is used well to manage pupils' personal difficulties. For example, it helps to enhance pupils' self-esteem and helps them to feel more confident about themselves and their work. Good links with families help pupils and their parents to cope with issues beyond the school that might be affecting pupils' general happiness. The school's 'nurture group' successfully helps needy pupils overcome social and emotional difficulties.

The tracking of pupils' progress is good and these systems help staff to intervene when pupils are not making enough progress. Some of the work planned for lower attaining pupils does not match their particular needs closely enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides a good role model and sets a positive working atmosphere where individuals are valued and this helps to achieve harmony and effective teamwork. She has taken many of the steps necessary to improve pupils' achievement and has re-established the confidence of parents in the school following a period of difficulty. Initiatives such as the breakfast club, where parents can take breakfast with their children, give parents good opportunities to talk with school staff. The governing body is satisfactory and well organised, and is well led by its key members. Governors know about the school's strengths and weaknesses, but are not yet sufficiently involved in contributing ideas to the school's development plan.

Arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning are good. These activities are playing a major role in improving the quality of teaching. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school generally has the right priorities for development. The school has made satisfactory, albeit uneven, progress since the last inspection and demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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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	4
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	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	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?	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?	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

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school. A particular thanks to all of you who looked after us when we had lunch and to the groups who came to talk to us. Your contributions helped us to understand a lot about the school and we want to let you know what we found out about it. We are pleased that your school does a satisfactory job, with some things that are good.

- We were pleased when you told us that one of the best things about the school is 'learning' because your teachers give you interesting things to do.
- You behave well and this helps you to concentrate and work hard in lessons.
- Your teachers mark your work carefully so that you know how to make your work better.
- You all get on well together and have fun in the playground.
- Adults look after you well and you feel safe in school.
- You have a good range of after school clubs and these help you to keep fit and healthy as well as doing other interesting things, like chess or in 'Cheeky Chimps'.
- The staff are doing lots of things to help you to make your work better.

We have asked the school to make some improvements and we hope that you will also concentrate on these points as well.

- Give you more opportunities to practise your reading and writing skills in other subjects, such as when you are studying topics.
- Give you more practical work to do in science and the chance to record your findings and conclusions.
- Make sure that those of you who find some of the learning very difficult or who are only beginning to learn to speak English always have work that exactly matches what you need to do to learn faster.