



Featherstone Wood Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131505
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 293770
Inspection dates 21–22 September 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Michael Best

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Featherston Road
School category	Community		Stevenage
Age range of pupils	4–11		Hertfordshire SG2 9PP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438 235 550
Number on roll (school)	155	Fax number	01438 235 559
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr. John Hayes
		Headteacher	Mrs. Sue Mitchell
Date of previous school inspection	29 January 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than many other primary schools and numbers are declining. Most pupils come from the local area. The prosperity of the area is average. The attainment of children entering the Foundation Stage is below average. Pupil mobility is average. The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is above average and has increased three-fold in the last two years. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, and of those with statements of special educational needs, is average. At the time of the inspection, an acting headteacher (on secondment from a nearby school) and an acting deputy headteacher were leading the school pending the appointment of permanent post holders.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's view that its effectiveness is satisfactory and judge that it has the necessary capacity for further improvement. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Parents express their confidence in the school. They find staff approachable and are pleased that their children enjoy school. Pupils get on well with each other and their behaviour is good. Pupils are keen to learn, and say they feel safe and secure in school. The school's promotion of healthy lifestyles, pupils' key skills and the preparation for the next stage of their education and the world of work, are satisfactory. Achievement is satisfactory. Children make satisfactory progress from a below average starting point in the nursery and reception classes (the Foundation Stage). Many are still working towards the early learning goals expected for children of this age when they move to Year 1, particularly in their language and literacy skills. Standards at the end of Year 2 are below average and have declined since 2002. Girls make better progress than boys and more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Overall standards at the end of Year 6 are average and have improved in each of the last four years, with pupils doing better in English and mathematics than in science in the 2006 tests. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 2 but this is not consistent between year groups. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is some good and outstanding teaching in the school that enables pupils to achieve their best. Other lessons lack pace and work is not challenging enough for pupils, particularly the more able. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language receive satisfactory support. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for pupils, with particularly good provision for art. The support, care and welfare of pupils are satisfactory. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work, and their use of this information to plan the next steps in learning, are inconsistent. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher are working well with the staff to ensure a smooth transition to the new leadership team. Their interim school development plans are manageable and address the school's most pressing needs. The school's arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its work, while adequate overall, are complex and do not sufficiently inform its future plans. The chair of governors has an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses but, with many recently appointed members, the governing body is not yet fulfilling its role as the school's 'critical friend'.

What the school should do to improve further

- raise standards, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and in science by the end of Year 6; - improve the quality of pupils' learning by making better use of assessment information in planning and teaching lessons; - put in place manageable procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and standards which rigorously inform school improvement plans; - work with governors to develop their role in holding the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress in their personal and social education and satisfactory progress in the other areas of learning. When they move to Year 1, many have weak language and literacy skills. Results in the Key Stage 1 national tests in 2006 were broadly average in reading but exceptionally low in writing and mathematics. Boys did not perform as well as girls in reading, writing and mathematics, and in mathematics no pupil reached the higher levels. At Key Stage 2, the 2006 results were above average in English and mathematics and the proportions of pupils reaching the higher levels exceeded the national average. In science, however, results were below average because a lower than average proportion of pupils gained the higher levels. Consequently, standards overall are broadly average. Teachers' use of sharply-focused targets to guide Year 6 pupils' efforts helped to successfully address the underachievement of boys identified in the previous year's test results. Pupils make satisfactory progress within the key stage but inspection evidence confirms inconsistent achievement from year to year. In art, pupils at both key stages achieve well. Pupils learning English as an additional language make similar progress to other pupils. Those with learning difficulties make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans and satisfactory progress overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Foundation Stage children quickly settle into the school routines and become happy and keen learners. Pupils show that they can make informed choices and decisions about their work but teachers do not consistently provide them with opportunities to take initiative and work independently. Attendance is broadly average. The school's arrangements for ensuring good attendance and punctuality are effective. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They show good respect for different points of view and celebrate each other's achievements. They are keen to help and responsible. Pupils take on duties, such as school councillors, that involve them in the life of the school. Pupils behave well, feel secure and free from discrimination. They have a satisfactory understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. For example, when asked if chocolate is a healthy option, one child replied, 'No, but it is a treat'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The most effective lessons build well on pupils' previous learning. They proceed at a brisk pace and actively involve pupils in thinking and working through questions and problems. In these lessons, well-focused learning intentions help pupils be clear about

what they are learning. Teachers' good questioning encourages learners to contribute their ideas and apply their skills and knowledge. There is a buzz of excitement as pupils help each other solve problems. In other lessons, the pace is not fast enough and pupils' concentration falters because the work is not challenging enough for them. Teachers' plans give insufficient indication of how staff will meet the differing needs of learners and promote independence. The learning intentions shared with pupils sometimes focus on the content of the lesson rather than what learning they will achieve. Teachers do not always make best use of capable support staff during lesson introductions. Teachers' recording of what pupils learn is inconsistent. As result, their expectations are not always high enough, and they do not clearly identify the next steps in learning for individuals or groups. Where marking is good, pupils say they have a clear understanding of how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Planning follows national guidelines and includes a suitable programme for pupils' personal, social and health education. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good but it is inconsistent for those capable of higher achievement. Most lessons satisfactorily promote the application of skills learnt in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), and there are satisfactory links with partner schools. Staff are successfully building links between subjects, for example by promoting healthy living through science and physical education, but pupils do not sufficiently develop their writing skills through other subjects. There is satisfactory provision for visits to places of interest and other activities to enhance pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff give good attention to children's welfare. Child protection procedures are in place and risk assessments are effective. The school has established systems for monitoring pupils' progress but not all staff make the best use of this information to drive up standards. Target setting is inconsistent and pupils do not always know what they need to learn. Pupils with learning difficulties and those at the early stages of learning English are well supported. The school has good links with outside agencies and there are satisfactory transition arrangements with local secondary schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Staff and governors are working hard to resolve the challenges of falling rolls and changes in the school's leadership and management. The acting headteacher is leading the school well during a period of transition. The school is a calm and orderly community. Day-to-day routines are well established and managed. In recent years, the school has put in place a large number of policies but there has been too little

emphasis on monitoring and evaluating how these have helped to raise standards and improve teaching and learning. As a result, school development plans have lacked clear priorities and the school's self-evaluation report is descriptive rather than analytical. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have quickly identified what the school needs to do to raise standards. They have correctly recognised that teachers are not always making the best use of assessment information to plan lessons that enable all pupils to achieve their best. In consultation with the staff and governors, they have drawn up an interim development plan which is both realistic and manageable. The governing body benefits from the expertise and experience of its new members. Governors are currently undertaking a comprehensive programme of training to prepare them to effectively monitor and evaluate the school's work.

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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?	3
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	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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.

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

26 September 2006 Dear Pupils Featherstone Wood Primary School, Featherston Road, Stevenage
Thank you very much for making us welcome when we visited your school last week. We are impressed by your good behaviour and how much you enjoy school. We congratulate you on improving your attendance. The staff take good care of you. They are working hard to help you grow up into interesting and responsible adults who enjoy life and can work and play well with others. In the best lessons, your teachers tell you what you are going to learn by the end of the lesson. They give you interesting work that makes you think about what you are doing. In these lessons, you work well with each other and on your own. In other lessons, the work your teachers give you is sometimes too easy. They are not always sure how much you already know and how much more you can learn. As a result, some of you are not doing as well as you should, and you have to catch up when you move to the next class. To help you all do as well as you can in the future, we are asking your teachers keep a check on how well they are teaching and you are learning, and to use this information to help them make plans for improvement. Many of the governors have recently become involved in the school and we want them make the right decisions when they have their meetings. We very much hope that you will help them, and your new headteacher, get to know your school better. Keep working hard and enjoying yourselves at school. Yours truly, Mike Best Lead Inspector