

Warden Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115740
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312048
Inspection date	21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Mary Harlow HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	380
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Fay
Headteacher	Jim Jones
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2004
School address	Durham Close Warden Hill Cheltenham GL51 3DF
Telephone number	01242 523827
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated in detail the following issues: the decline in standards and achievement in mathematics and science at KS2 in 2007, the rigor of academic monitoring procedures, and the way that the school checks its own performance. Evidence was gathered through classroom observations, work sampling, observation of an assembly, play and lunch times, and discussions with pupils, staff and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, although a little modest, were not justified, and these have been slightly amended and included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Warden Hill Primary School is significantly larger than the average primary school. It is situated close to the centre of Cheltenham and the majority of pupils come from the local community. Most pupils are of White British heritage and very few are learning English as an additional language. Attainment on entry to the Reception Year is broadly average, although a minority of children start school with language and communication difficulties and underdeveloped mathematical skills. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is below the national average and the majority of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties or behaviour problems.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'Warden Hill provides a very high quality education.' 'Our children love coming to school and love learning.' 'It is a nurturing community full of happy children.' 'The work ethos is excellent and it is seen as cool to do well and achieve.' 'What more from a school would you want?'

These are the views of the parents and they are right! Warden Hill is an outstanding school where pupils flourish in an oasis of educational excellence where nothing but the best will do. Every child really matters at Warden Hill and all the adults at the school strive relentlessly to achieve its laudable vision, 'to help the children realise their uniqueness and immense worth' in order for them to make a difference for the better to society. Because of the school's exceptional commitment to the pupils, coupled with good and often excellent provision, their personal development and care are outstanding.

Achievement across the school is at least good. The children get off to a flying start in Reception, where all make good progress due to high quality teaching and care. This good progress continues across Key Stages 1 and 2 and, in recent years, standards were exceptionally high by the time the pupils left school. However, in 2007, these high standards dropped to be well above average; there was a noticeable decline in mathematics and science, although standards in English remained exceptionally high. The school has taken sensible action to reverse the dip in standards in mathematics and science by increasing the opportunities for problem solving and investigation activities, and ensuring the more able pupils are challenged sufficiently. Current assessment of the pupils' progress indicates that standards in both subjects are improving, particularly for the more able, and pupils are on track to achieve their predicted, sensible targets for this year. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are highly developed at every stage because the school provides a wealth of opportunities for them to express their ideas.

When visiting each classroom, it was evident from the exemplary behaviour and the infectious buzz of enthusiasm that pupils greatly enjoy their learning. This is due to exciting and interesting teaching, which is consistently good and often outstanding. Without exception, relationships are excellent, planning is thorough and classroom management and organisation are excellent. Drama and role-play activities are used skilfully in the teaching of English to capture the pupils' imagination and their appreciation of text and challenging questions underpins investigative work in mathematics and science. Notable examples observed were the use of sorting and sifting information techniques to solve tricky calculations relating to volume and practical research into the permeability of different soils, a topic that was brought alive by reference to the recent local floods. Such imaginative teaching whets the pupils' appetite for learning. As a result, their ability to work independently and collaboratively is impressive. Careful planning, coupled with rigorous assessment systems, enables pupils with moderate learning difficulties or behavioural problems and those who are more able to achieve well. All benefit from the skilled support staff and thoughtful intervention programmes.

The curriculum promotes pupils' personal development and well-being extremely well, as exemplified by the vibrant range of high quality displays in classrooms and the strong commitment the school places upon the importance of the arts and sports. Pupils know how to keep healthy and appreciate the school's commendable approach to snacks and lunches. When asked about healthy food, a younger pupil reported, 'At break time we are not allowed crisps or chocolate and we must have salad, protein and fruit in our lunch box.' Regular physical education lessons, high quality after-school sporting events and the daily 'wake and shake'

session, which was a joy to observe, ensure that pupils understand the importance of keeping fit. The older pupils gave eloquent explanations about the effect of exercise on the body, demonstrating good scientific understanding. The effective teaching of key skills, which are developed through interesting topics and themed days in the arts, science and humanities, prepares pupils extremely well for their next school and for living in the modern world. The regular use of professional artists, residencies and sports specialists provides excellent enrichment to the curriculum, which pupils and their parents value immensely. The artwork produced by Year 2 children, who were working with an artist, is of a very high standard, as are the art displays around the school. Excellent use is made of the attractive outdoor environment to enrich creative approaches to learning and this is maintained to a very high standard. The impressive range of clubs and visits contributes greatly to the pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

The adults at Warden Hill always go the extra mile to ensure their pupils' needs are met and their families kept informed. 'We have always been very impressed by the school's personal approach; our child's well-being is at the forefront and all the teachers have fostered close links with ourselves,' wrote a parent. Many commented that the school acts swiftly if problems arise and the pupils strongly endorsed this widely held view. 'Bullying is sorted out straight away and you can go to the captains, teachers, dinner ladies, the "sunshine people" and the school council if you feel unhappy.' Pupils' academic progress is checked rigorously and marking is diligent. Without exception, pupils spoken to knew their targets for improvement, 'I have to use clauses in my writing'; 'mine is to use the right mathematical symbols'; 'we must know our 3, 4, 5 and 10 times tables', several said with bubbling enthusiasm. The school is developing good tracking systems to record the pupils' progress. That said, the presentation of this assessment data requires some improvement to ensure quick accessibility to make monitoring the progress of individuals and specific groups simpler to understand so that teachers can ensure that all pupils, and especially the more able, achieve their full potential. Every care is taken to ensure the safety of the pupils, particularly at the start and end of the day; a thoughtful travel plan is in place to ease congestion during these times.

The headteacher and the senior team provide strong, supportive leadership. They have a clear vision for the direction of the school and this is shared by staff and governors alike. The school knows itself very well and pupils' needs are at the heart of decision making. All members of the school community are valued equally and feel they have a voice. As a result, there is an impressive team spirit and an infectious enthusiasm permeating the school. Those teachers with responsibilities for subjects or aspects of the school's work carry them out diligently by gathering evidence on what works well and what needs to be improved. This contributes well to the improvement of pupils' achievement. Exceptionally good use is made of governors' professional knowledge and expertise to evaluate the work of the school and secure ongoing improvements. The school has made a good improvement since the last inspection. It provides excellent value for money and has excellent capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Very good planning and teaching mean that children in the Reception class achieve well. Most reach, and some exceed, the goals expected of them by the end of the year. An excellent choice of suitable themes for learning ensures that the children are engaged and motivated in their learning. This was typified by the work observed on mini-beasts, where the children produced some impressive salt dough models of caterpillars and exhibited commendable levels of concentration as they explored plastic models of mini-beasts in a trough of bark chippings.

Several could use rich vocabulary, including words such as 'chrysalis' and 'cocoon', to explain the life cycle of the caterpillar, and they confidently used language like 'biggest', 'smallest' when placing bricks. Support staff and other adults who volunteer their time contribute well to children's development. The attractive outdoor area is very well resourced and is used extremely effectively to promote children's confidence, independence and physical development.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Improve the presentation of assessment data to ensure quick accessibility to make monitoring of individual pupils' progress and specific groups simpler to understand so that all pupils are helped to achieve as well as they possibly can.

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Annex A

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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

22 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Warden Hill Primary School, Cheltenham, GL51 3DF

I am writing to say thank you very much for giving me such a warm welcome during my recent visit to Warden Hill Primary School. I was impressed with the way you greeted me so courteously with friendly smiles. I enjoyed talking with you about your work, seeing your wonderful den and nature reserve, and watching you walk up so confidently to receive your merit awards in assembly. What delightful children you are!

Your school is outstanding in many ways. Here are some of the special things that it does very well indeed:

- ?
- Your school looks after you very well and the adults want to do their best for you. ?
- Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. Everyone in the school cares for each other exceptionally well. ?
- In Reception, you get off to a good start in all aspects of your learning; you make at least good progress in all other year groups and achieve good standards by the time you leave Year 6. ?
- Your teachers plan exciting activities for you, which help you to enjoy school. ?
- The school council takes its responsibilities seriously and it has made a significant contribution to the development of your attractive school grounds. ?
- There are lots of clubs and visits, which you participate in enthusiastically. You contribute well to the local community, particularly performing to the senior citizens. ?
- Your headteacher and other adults are always looking for ways to make your school an even better place to be! They listen to your views and those of your parents and carers in helping them to do this.

You are lucky to have such a caring headteacher, fantastic adults and committed governors at the school. I have asked them to improve the presentation of records of your progress so that staff can help you even more.

It was a real privilege to visit Warden Hill Primary School. Keep up the excellent work and, most importantly, continue to enjoy your learning.

Best wishes for the future; I hope that you achieve great things!

Mrs Harlow HMI Lead inspector