

The Russell School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117098
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312489
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2007
Reporting inspector	George Wallace

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pat Cunnings
Headteacher	Mr David Peel
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2003
School address	Brushwood Drive Chorleywood Rickmansworth Hertfordshire WD3 5RR
Telephone number	01923 284272
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This popular and oversubscribed school is of average size. It mainly serves the families of the local affluent area of Chorleywood. Attainment on entry to the nursery is high. The proportion of pupils with special educational need is lower than national figures. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is also low compared to the national average. Attendance is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Russell School is a good school providing good value for money. It shows strong performance across all aspects of its work and some aspects of the school are outstanding. The school has made great strides in improving the use of information and communication technology (ICT) since it was identified as the only area for improvement from the last inspection. This includes equipping classrooms with interactive whiteboards and installing a new computer suite. The school serves its community extremely well. It has many links with outside organisations which help to broaden the curriculum, improve teaching and above all, support pupils' learning.

Staff work as an effective team. Together with governors, parents and the pupils, they know their school well. This is because everyone is involved fully and strongly committed in the quest for improvement. The senior leadership team, staff and governors show that they have the motivation and capacity to ensure that the school improves further.

Parents are highly supportive of the school. The pupils indicate that it is a good place to be by working hard and involving themselves in the many varied, good quality opportunities provided. Pupils love the facilities they have in school and in the grounds. The school is inclusive; as such, all pupils are catered for well according to their needs. Support for the gifted and talented pupils is good and improving, as is that for all other pupils including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Children receive a very positive start to their education as a consequence of a good and effective Foundation Stage experience. Standards reached by pupils throughout the main school, at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, are well above those expected for their age. Although pupils enter school with above average standards, they make good progress and outcomes by the time they leave school are mainly outstanding. The exception is in writing. Whilst almost year on year, all pupils reach the expected standards, few have excelled beyond this. The overall trend in standards is stable showing a gradual improvement over recent years. The school has three points in the year when pupils' attainment and achievements are assessed in detail. This provides invaluable data about standards which teachers then use to set specific targets for all pupils. Too often, the senior leadership team does not utilize this information with individual teachers sufficiently rigorously to drive up standards and achievement further.

Pupils feel they are well-informed about how they are doing. They receive information directly from teachers through individual discussions, but marking of their work, although satisfactory, varies in quality with some systems being outstanding. There is a strong thrust to ensure that pupils' experiences are broad and that the work they do is challenging. The school is also becoming stronger in ensuring that pupils develop their confidence and recognise the importance of drafting and evaluating their own and others' work. Teaching is consistently good, with some that is outstanding. The school is rightly aiming to meet the needs of its most able pupils. It is continuing to promote higher order thinking skills, independent learning skills and building an assertive approach to learning.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding in most areas. They enjoy school and behave very well. They have an extremely good understanding of the importance of safe and healthy lifestyles, and know about the need to take regular exercise. Pupils are highly responsive to charitable events in and beyond their local community and frequently raise large amounts of money. Pupils also reach standards that are preparing them extremely well for their future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Russell School has a good and effective Foundation Stage. Standards are high by the time children reach the end of their Reception year. Teaching and learning are good in Nursery and Reception. The youngest pupils, who have been in school just a few days, quickly settle as a result of close staff teamwork and careful guidance on school routines. The curriculum is planned securely for all areas of learning, with good links between indoor and outdoor activities. Teachers are making increased use of assessment information about individual children to help plan appropriate activities and guide their progress. The facilities are of a good quality and there is plenty of indoor and outdoor space, especially in the Reception area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Analyse why the more capable pupils do not make as much progress in writing as they do in reading and take action to remedy this.
- Improve the consistency with which teachers provide feedback on pupils' work so that it is used, together with other assessment data, to determine whether all pupils are reaching sufficiently high standards.
- Improve the rigour in the way that target setting is used, so that pupils know what to do next and senior leaders can question and challenge the probable performance outcomes of each class.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are largely very high and as such are well above average. Pupils from all backgrounds achieve well. The school increasingly provides very well for pupils who require additional support. They are beginning to recognise, using the outcomes of their assessment weeks each term, whether each pupil's achievement is actually high enough, bearing in mind their individual performance and capability. Progress is good and therefore achievement, in all areas with the exception of writing, is high throughout the school. In writing, although pupils reach the expected standards for their age, fewer are being extended to the higher levels they achieve in reading and in other subjects.

Girls for the most part out-perform boys in Key Stage 1, but by the end of Key Stage 2, standards reached by boys and girls are similar. Since 2004 the overall trend in attainment shows very gradual improvement in reading, mathematics and science. There is a drop in standards in writing, especially the numbers of pupils gaining the higher Level 3 by the end of Key Stage 1 and Level 5 by the end of Key Stage 2. The school is aware of this situation and has started to implement strategies to reverse the current position. This includes improving writing across the curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy their school and have very good attitudes to learning. They also recognise that the school provides a very wide range of experiences in which they participate eagerly. These include a wide variety of sports, music and drama activities as well as receiving many visitors and making frequent day and residential trips in England and beyond.

Throughout the school there is a highly positive atmosphere. Behaviour is very good and pupils are friendly, helpful, courteous and interested in what they do. They are keen to learn and be involved in their learning. Pupils are enormously responsive to high quality teaching. The routines used by teachers are known by pupils and are a product of the school listening to the concerns, ideas and aspirations of pupils, governors and parents. As such, pupils recognise that changes in school are often a result of the discussions they have with staff either through their school council, questionnaires or in class discussions. They recognise the importance of fairness, participation and the notion of democracy. Pupils feel safe and have adults they trust and would turn to if they wanted to discuss a personal issue. Their cultural development is very good as a consequence of the many activities in which they are involved.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Effective teaching and learning promote pupils' good achievement. Both the school's lesson monitoring and observations during the inspection show that teaching is typically good. Teachers generally plan well for the range of attainment in each class and communicate the main objectives of the lessons to pupils. Teachers have high expectations of work and behaviour and establish a pleasant, purposeful atmosphere for learning. Pupils respond well to this and often show independence and initiative in their learning. There is a good focus on developing pupils' basic skills. Teachers use ICT well to support pupils' learning. Teachers mostly use regular assessment of pupils' National Curriculum levels well to track individual achievements and to plan lessons. They make regular checks, for example, at the end of units of work, to establish how well pupils are doing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

There is a good range of writing activities because the school is appropriately focussed on raising standards in this area. There is also an appropriate and stimulating focus on basic skills. The wider curriculum is strong and allows pupils to successfully engage in a wide range of interesting and challenging activities. The school's curriculum is being enhanced through its work in a local Primary Learning Network. A recent initiative has boosted the quality of work and experiences in mathematics for gifted and talented pupils. The curriculum is enriched by high quality additional activities that contribute to pupils' excellent personal development as well as their academic standards. Links are made increasingly between subjects to make learning relevant. There are significant strengths in physical education, especially sport, and in music. There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with particular skills and talents. A considerable number of visits, visitors and other activities, such as a creative arts week and regular drama and music performances, capture pupils' interest and add considerably to the richness of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is good and links with pupils' families are strong. The school ensures that procedures to safeguard pupils and promote their health and safety are in place. There are effective arrangements to support pupils with particular medical or learning needs, such as

links with health services and secondary schools. Academic guidance and support is comprehensive and ensures that pupils are clear about their individual targets. However, there are inconsistencies in the ways teachers tell pupils how well they are doing in relation to these targets, for example through marking. While there are examples of very good practice in this area, this is not always the case. As a result, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to think about their learning or to determine what they should do next to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is experienced and well respected and has maintained the school's reputation and standards since the last inspection. Governors are committed and capable and work actively in the interests of the school. Parents and pupils' views of the school are mostly very positive and they are consulted well on its continuing development. Senior staff monitor the quality of teaching and the curriculum regularly and give useful feedback to colleagues. Subject leaders are increasingly involved in checking how well pupils are responding to those subjects for which they have responsibility. These leaders also ensure that they know the development needs of individual staff, so that improvements in teaching and the curriculum continue. The school is accurate in most aspects of its self-evaluation. There is a useful system for senior leaders to gain detailed information about standards and progress through the termly 'assessment weeks' linked to the pupil tracking systems. This is valuable, but there is not enough subsequent dialogue with teachers to monitor how well pupils are progressing towards the performance targets that are set for them and the school as a whole.

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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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 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	2
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	1

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?	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

19 September 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of The Russell School, Chorleywood, Hertfordshire, WD3 5RR

As you know, all parts of your primary school from the nursery through to Year 6 were recently inspected. This letter is to tell you what we found out. Firstly, it was lovely to meet you all and thank you for making us so welcome. We saw you in assembly, where it is clear that you enjoy singing, and in your classes, at lunch and in the playground. We enjoyed talking with you and finding out about the work you do and the activities you are involved in. We believe that you love and enjoy your school. Your parents also think that this is a good school and we agree.

It is clear that standards are high in your school and that each year you are introduced to a wide range of exciting things to do. Although the quality of your writing of stories, reports, information leaflets, letters and poems is good, there is room for improvement, bearing in mind how good you are at reading, mathematics and science. We note that sport and music are also very strong. You are made to think and given the right challenges in your school work.

All of your teachers are good at keeping you informed as to how well you are doing and some do this in an outstanding way. We therefore feel that you will all benefit from the increased focus your teachers will give to providing you with higher quality feedback and information about the standard of your work. It is good that you with your teachers set yourself targets on ways to improve your work. Mr Peel and the teachers will be working hard to ensure that you know how successful you have been in reaching your targets.

We are very impressed with your behaviour. In lessons you are all very keen to learn, and therefore when you are asked to listen, you do, and when asked to talk aloud with those next to you, this is also done extremely well. Your eagerness to learn and take part in lessons and other activities is impressive. It is pleasing that your points of view are listened to by the teachers and some of your ideas lead to improvements in the school.

We and all the adults who work in your school feel very strongly that your good school could become even better. As a result of what we have seen we feel confident that the school will continue to improve. We hope you continue to enjoy your days at school, and wish you all very well for the future. Good luck.

George Wallace,

Lead inspector