

Sauncey Wood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117102
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312490
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2007
Reporting inspector	John Paull

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Murdoch
Headteacher	Mr John Burt
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Pickford Hill Harpenden AL5 5HL
Telephone number	01582 621514
Fax number	01582 621485

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Sauncey Wood is a smaller than average primary school. Almost all its pupils are White British, although a small but increasing number speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils who eat a free school meal is average. Attainment on entry to the school covers a very wide range although, overall, it is well below average. This is largely because the school accommodates a class for pupils with speech and communication difficulties ('the base'), all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is therefore high. The headteacher has been in post for two years, following a period of temporary arrangements.

The school received Hertfordshire's Basic Skills Quality Mark in 2004 and is seeking Healthy Schools accreditation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

A parent wrote, 'The school has had challenges in the past, but the headteacher is wonderful and I am 100% certain that he will lead the school from strength to strength'. This sums up the school's present position well and is typical of parents' views. The headteacher's leadership is good, following a time of instability in senior management, and Sauncey Wood provides a satisfactory standard of education. This reflects the school's evaluation of itself, which is being used effectively to promote much improvement.

Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. Several key coordinators are new and have only just begun monitoring their subjects and introducing improvements. However, the headteacher's leadership is inspiring everyone with a visionary commitment to achieving the best. Teaching and learning have significantly improved and the quality is good. As a result, pupils are now making good, sometimes very good, progress in all classes, including 'the base' for pupils with speech and language difficulties. However, this major improvement is too recent to have produced more than satisfactory achievement at the top of the school. The 2007 test results remain below average, and high attainers did not perform as well as they might. Weaknesses in the use of assessment to track progress and to adapt the curriculum to the needs of individuals have been a contributory factor. Gaps in learning have resulted, which have held pupils back.

Care, support and guidance are satisfactory overall. Teachers look after pupils well. However, formal systems to promote academic guidance are only just beginning to produce sufficient information for a consistent impact to occur. That said, the process is underway. For example, in 2007 the results of Year 2 national assessments have continued the rising trend of the past few years. These indicate that standards are already above average and achievement is good. Improvement is also evident in many other subjects, including information and communication technology (ICT). As a result, a good capacity to improve further is apparent.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy school, which is reflected in above average attendance in the last year. Pupils know what it means to eat healthily and they take part enthusiastically in physical education. Behaviour is good. Pupils act safely and responsibly in and around the building. Their contributions to the community are also good, although development of future economic well-being is satisfactory, rather than good, at this stage of the school's improvement. They are willing participants in fund-raising for projects. Older pupils are particularly effective in their 'buddy' roles, supporting younger ones. The curriculum is satisfactory. It includes all required subjects and has effective adaptations and interventions for less able pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties, including those in 'the base', are provided for fully. However, the curriculum does not contain sufficient richness to meet the requirements of potentially high achievers. Partnerships with local secondary schools and other agencies are good.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Pupils in the Reception class benefit from good provision. They are making good progress and, despite starting points that are frequently below those normally found, many reach expected goals by the time they begin Year 1. Current work based on 'The tiger who came to tea' and a project that took place mainly in the play area outside and entitled 'A day in space', for example,

indicate that all areas of learning are taught effectively. While space outside is rather small, it is well used, and plans to improve it are at an advanced stage. Children's personal, social and emotional development is also catered for well. Parents are pleased that their children settle quickly and enjoy learning. Arrangements to inform them about how their children are getting on are good and there is a good flow of information to help plan what is taught.

What the school should do to improve further

- For older pupils especially, focus on gaps in learning, so that standards and achievement improve by the time they leave in Year 6.
- Consolidate and build on the monitoring skills of subject coordinators, so that leadership and management are less dependent on the headteacher to ensure that the curriculum meets all pupils' needs.
- Use assessment information to adapt the curriculum and academic guidance more effectively, especially in the case of higher attainers.

A small proportion of schools whose overall performance is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

By Year 6, standards are below average in English, mathematics and science and results of Year 6 national tests fluctuate from year to year. The reasons are associated with variations in the numbers of pupils with speech and language difficulties affecting learning. These pupils, as well as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress towards their individualised targets. However, their results, understandably, are often at a lower level than those of other pupils. Furthermore, in 2007, a very high proportion of pupils entered the school less than two years before taking the tests. Standards have also suffered owing to past weaknesses, which led to gaps in learning and slowed progress. Nevertheless, owing to good teaching, rates of progress are now good. By the time pupils leave, their achievement remains satisfactory, as the impact of this strong improvement is not yet fully apparent at the top of the school. However, it has had a remarkable impact by the end of Year 2, where standards are now a little above average, and where achievement is already good. The 2007 national assessments and the work that pupils are currently doing confirm this finding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils use their good knowledge of right and wrong to behave well. They develop good relationships with each other, cooperating well during work and play. They also relate well to their teachers, whom they trust. Teachers give pupils much responsibility to look after aspects of school life for themselves, reciprocating this strong trust, which helps pupils to enjoy school and feel safe. For example, 'buddies' contribute a lot to younger pupils' well-being in the playground. A school council is providing an effective platform for pupils to make their views known and to effect change for the better. A good example is their willingness to raise funds to replace ineffective blinds in one of their classrooms. Attendance is good, which is contributing to pupils' much improved recent progress. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that adults deal with it seriously. 'They are good at sorting us out if we fall out,' as one of them put it. Pupils are tolerant and polite towards each other

and adults. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in 'the base', take part in all areas of school life, contributing fully.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their pupils well and are skilled in spotting those who are unsure in what they are learning. This informal assessment of needs is helping to counter weaknesses in the use of more formal systems and to ensure that learning and progress are now good. Well thought-out adaptations of planning are helping pupils in different years to understand what is taught in the mixed-age classes. This good teaching has begun to raise standards effectively, especially in younger age groups, where gaps in past learning are not as apparent as in the older classes. Classroom assistants are effective in their support of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in 'the base'. As a result, these pupils too are making good progress towards their individualised targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

All subjects are provided for adequately, and areas of learning for children in the Reception class are planned effectively. Strengths exist in what is provided to extend pupils' personal skills, such as popular clubs, sports and visits and a residential journey to Ross on Wye for older pupils. Planning for pupils with learning difficulties, including those with statements of special educational needs is good. Provision for ICT is good and, together with sound provision for basic skills in literacy and numeracy, contributes to satisfactory development of pupils' future economic well-being. The curriculum now serves the needs of many pupils well. While some higher attaining pupils are still not extended enough, past weaknesses that contributed to underachievement are now being addressed successfully.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

All staff look after pupils' personal well-being effectively. Provision for safeguarding and child protection meets latest requirements. Attendance is monitored effectively and pupils whose attendance is good are recognised and praised. Parents are very supportive of the school's staff. Links with outside agencies are also providing expertise on which to adapt planning to target pupils with learning difficulties, including those in 'the base'. This is also contributing to better progress across the school. For example, the on-site presence of a qualified speech therapist provides specific advice for supporting any pupils, whenever such a need arises, whether in 'the base' or not. However, while robust systems to provide pupils with academic support, including targets, are now in place, these are too recent to have raised standards amongst older pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Supported effectively by the governing body and local authority, the headteacher is moving the school forward well. Parents are very pleased with the clear improvement that is already apparent, especially in rates of progress and achievement lower down the school. Recent appointments have allowed a greater delegation of responsibilities. There is no complacency whatsoever, and new-in-post coordinators agree that more work and training are required to ensure that they reach full effectiveness in monitoring and evaluating their subjects. This is already starting to happen under the headteacher's guidance and all staff are pulling together and working as a strong team, supporting each other's expertise. The headteacher's accurate monitoring of teaching, with local authority support, has resulted in improvement in pupils' learning, despite the newness of many arrangements for academic care and tracking of progress. The main impact has been in much improved standards lower down the school, and the much improved provision to build on this achievement as pupils move on through the school. Satisfactory value for money is now being achieved.

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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?	3
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	2
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
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	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	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

3 October 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Sauncey Wood Primary School, Harpenden, AL5 5HL

Thank you for your tremendous helpfulness when I visited your school. It was great to find so many of you enjoying school and telling me how much it has improved since Mr Burt came. I agree with you. It is providing you with a satisfactory education, but it is getting better quickly. Already, the younger children are doing a lot of good work and your teachers are working hard to fill in gaps in what the older ones know.

Here are some of the things that I think your school does well

- Your teachers look after you well and teach you well, so you are making good progress.
- You behave well.
- Your attendance is good.
- The 'buddies' and school councillors do a good job, helping everything to run smoothly.
- Your headteacher has many good ideas to help improve things further.
- Your school governors support you and the school strongly.

Here are the things that I have asked your headteacher, teachers and governors to do next

- Help the older children especially to learn things that they missed out on when the school was not as settled as it is now. You can help by continuing to work hard and behaving as well as you do.
- Help teachers who are in charge of the subjects that you are taught to do an even better job.
- Improve the way your teachers use what they know about your progress, to help you learn even more.

I hope that you will always be proud of your school and I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

John W Paull Lead Inspector