

Fairlands Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 117152 |
| Local Authority | HERTFORDSHIRE LA |
| Inspection number | 312518 |
| Inspection dates | 27–28 February 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Marianne Harris |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 310 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Michael Downing |
| Headteacher | Mr Robert Staples |
| Date of previous school inspection | 2 June 2003 |
| School address | Pound Avenue Stevenage Hertfordshire SG1 3JA |
| Telephone number | 01438351053 |
| Fax number | 01438750116 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a school in a socially mixed area that has faced challenging staffing issues since the last inspection. There have been many changes in both senior leaders and teachers over the last four years, with six headteachers in that time. The current headteacher started a little over a year ago. Approximately three quarters of the pupils are White British. The remaining pupils are mainly from an Asian background or from the Travelling community. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is average. In 2006 the school gained 'Investors in People' status and 'Active Mark' for sporting opportunities. When they join the school children's abilities are generally below those usually expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Fairlands Primary School and Nursery provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. It has some good features and is rapidly getting better. The new leadership team has been most successful in improving behaviour and pupils' attitudes to school so that they are ready to learn. Many parents are impressed with the recent improvements to the school and say how approachable the headteacher and staff are. They comment on how well their children are progressing and are happy with the provision for pupils with particular learning needs, especially those with emotional difficulties. Most say that their children enjoy school and pupils generally agree with this. Pupils are making better progress than previously seen and there is good capacity to improve further.

Standards in both key stages are below average, but this represents satisfactory achievement and progress from a low starting point. The school's very good tracking systems and the strategies that have been used to raise standards are beginning to have an effect and it is expected that, this year, there will be more pupils who reach the higher levels in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6 than previously. However, standards in reading by the end of Year 2 are well below average because there is little dedicated time spent teaching the basic skills that pupils need to become confident readers.

Pupils' personal development is good because of the drive to ensure that all are included in the life of the school and that the atmosphere is warm and welcoming. Staff take good care of all pupils and give good guidance in the form of targets so that pupils know how to improve their work. Good support is given to pupils with particular needs and parents from Traveller communities comment on how well the school supports their way of life.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, although it is much stronger in Years 5 and 6 than it is further down the school. The leadership team has been successful in ensuring that some lessons move at a brisk pace with plenty of interesting and exciting activities so that pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress. However, there is an insufficient number of qualified teachers in the Foundation Stage and, in some classes in Key Stage 1, there is a heavy reliance on printed worksheets and lessons drift away because there is no sense of urgency. Consequently, pupils do not achieve as much as they could.

Leadership and management are satisfactory, although this is a changing picture as the recent improvements begin to have a positive impact on the life of the school. Pupils are already commenting on improved behaviour and how much more they enjoy lessons.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. There has been a legacy of staffing issues in this part of the school and there is currently only one qualified teacher who works in the Foundation Stage, despite the fact that there are three classes. Although all staff have relevant experience and are working well together, there are sometimes inconsistencies in encouraging children to become independent. Children make satisfactory progress, particularly in their personal and social development. They quickly settle into school routines and make friends easily. They learn to work together and explore a wide range of activities and tasks that cover all areas of learning. However, there are fewer opportunities in one class for children to

explore activities by themselves and many tasks are too adult directed, with insufficient opportunities for children to try things for themselves.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' early reading skills to help raise standards at Key Stage 1.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good in all classes, in order to ensure that all pupils make good progress in lessons.
- Ensure that there is a sufficient number of qualified teachers in the Foundation Stage.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness 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

From low starting points, pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning and achieve satisfactorily. 'Results in national tests for pupils at the end of Year 2 are below average overall, although they are well below average in reading. Current standards reflect this, although pupils are now making better progress in writing and mathematics. Standards in reading still remain too low and parents comment on this. Results in national tests for pupils at the end of Year 6 are below average and have fluctuated over the last few years. This fluctuation has reflected the turbulence in leadership and is now being tackled effectively. Very good tracking systems, precise targets and improved teaching are leading to higher standards. The national programme to help pupils who are falling behind in mathematics, for example, has been particularly successful. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or the Traveller community make satisfactory progress, as do pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy their lessons and have excellent relationships with adults and other pupils. Inspectors agree with parents and pupils that recent initiatives to improve behaviour are beginning to show results. Behaviour is now good, both in lessons and around the school, giving rise to a calm and relaxed learning environment. Pupils feel safe because they know they can easily approach an adult and they are confident that their concerns will be dealt with swiftly. Attendance during the last academic year was a little below average but punctuality has improved significantly. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community. The school council has recently been active in organising a charity event and improving the range of playground equipment. Pupils are aware of the need for a healthy diet and the importance of exercise and safe play. They show this through their enthusiasm for school sporting activities and by bringing only fruit and vegetable snacks for their morning break. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for the next stage of their education and, apart from reading, basic skills are suitably developed to contribute to their future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, although it varies across the school. Teaching in Years 5 and 6 is much stronger than in Key Stage 1 because lessons are much brisker and pupils make good progress. Teaching in Years 3 and 4 is improving. Work is well planned to meet the needs of all pupils in the class and every opportunity is taken to make learning interesting. Teachers mark work well with encouraging comments and useful points to help pupils improve further. In Years 1 and 2 teaching is satisfactory overall but activities are not always interesting and the reliance on printed worksheets reduces the opportunities pupils have to read and write for themselves. Further up the school, good use is made of 'Talk Partners', where pupils discuss their ideas before they share their thoughts with the class, and time is well used so that there is a sense of 'getting the job done'. However, lower down the school this is not the case. Learning slows when teachers do not give pupils a set time to complete their tasks and some of the lessons drift, with some work left unfinished.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum that meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. There is good emphasis on encouraging pupils' personal development so that they understand about the rights and responsibilities of living in a community and how to express their feelings and worries. A satisfactory range of visits out of, and visitors into, school enrich learning: pupils in Years 1 and 2 were very enthusiastic about their visit to the local church. The range of out of school clubs is more limited than usual. They mainly provide sporting activities, with little music or art. The school has themed days and weeks that extend the curriculum, and pupils appreciate the opportunities they have to learn in Science Week and World Book Day, for example. However, there is little designated time allocated to teaching basic reading skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils receive good care, guidance and support. There are robust procedures for safeguarding pupils, child protection and to ensure that health and safety are carefully monitored. The school's behaviour policy has been very successful and is clearly understood by pupils and adults. The school makes effective use of outside agencies and visitors to further pupils' personal development and particularly, to improve their confidence and self-esteem. Procedures for tracking progress are very effective and pupils are set challenging targets. They are now given good guidance on how to develop their work and this is already beginning to have an impact on standards. Pupils with particular needs or learning difficulties receive good support. All of this is new in the school and the full impact of these systems is yet to be felt.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has satisfactory leadership and management. After a long period of instability the new headteacher has quickly established clear direction for the school. He is well supported by the assistant headteachers, and subject leaders are making an increasingly significant contribution. Many are new in post and there has not been enough time for their work to fully impact on the standards reached by pupils. Teaching and learning are regularly monitored and the evaluation is used to plan professional development. This makes a significant contribution to the good school self-evaluation. There is strong commitment to the inclusion of all pupils in the school's activities and pupils are now set challenging targets so that they can reach higher standards. The governing body provides appropriate challenge to managers, and members are becoming increasingly involved in developing and improving the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| 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 | 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 | 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

29 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairlands Primary School and Nursery, Stevenage, SG1 3JA

I am writing to let you know how much we enjoyed visiting your school recently. We talked to many of you and loved hearing about your work.

We think that your school is satisfactory, but there are some good things about it. The most important thing we have to say is how well you behaved. You were so mature about the recent fire and got on with learning without making a fuss. We understand how upset you must be and we hope that your lovely building is back to normal soon.

Your parents told us many things about your school. They are pleased with the recent improvements and said that they thought you made satisfactory progress. We agree with them. Your teachers work hard and help you as much as they can. We have asked some of them to use fewer printed worksheets so that pupils in Years 1 and 2 can write for themselves. We have also asked them to give more time to reading so that you can make better progress.

Your headteacher has worked very hard since he came to the school and has made such a difference. We know that there have been many teachers come into and leave the school recently, and we also know that children in the Foundation Stage have had many different teachers. We know that the staff there are doing as well as they can, but we have asked the headteacher and governors to make sure that there are enough teachers to help you learn and make good progress.

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited and we wish you all good luck in the future.

Marianne Harris

Lead inspector