

Wheatfields Junior Mixed School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117212
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312532
Inspection date	23 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Brown

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	372
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Breen
Headteacher	Mr Lyndon Evans
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2004
School address	Downes Road St. Albans Hertfordshire AL4 9NT
Telephone number	01727 757443
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following aspects: the impact of curricular developments with particular reference to maintaining overall standards and, specifically, to improving standards in the humanities and information and communication technology; the quality and effectiveness of the care and guidance given to pupils, particularly academic guidance.

Evidence was gathered from brief lesson observations and a scrutiny of pupils' work and school documentation. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with pupils, governors and staff also contributed to the judgements. 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 form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a large school drawing pupils from the town of St Albans. Most of the pupils are of White British descent. There are small numbers of pupils from other backgrounds. A few of these do not have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the number of pupils who require extra help with their learning.

The school has Healthy Schools status, Activemark, an ECO School Silver award and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which has developed well since its last inspection. Several aspects of its work are now outstanding, including, pupils' personal development and well-being, the care and guidance they receive and the quality of the curriculum. The pupils really enjoy their time here and think it is a happy and interesting place to be. The great majority of parents appreciate the high quality of care and education provided and many noted the warm and friendly ethos that helps their children thrive. As one wrote, 'The school provides a good balance of academic activities alongside opportunities for our child to develop as a young person.'

The majority of pupils start at the school with standards that are above those expected. By the end of Year 6, pupils attain standards in English, mathematics and science that have been consistently high for a number of years. For the last two years, standards have been well above average and are particularly high in English where pupils make outstanding progress in reading. Overall, pupils make consistently good progress in all subjects, and their achievements are good. The teachers now make very good use of a system to track pupils' progress. This has enabled them to identify that while the highest performing pupils do especially well, the progress of those pupils whose attainments are slightly below national expectations is not as strong. To remedy this, staff have reorganised the mathematics groups across the school and are now employing new strategies to target the progress of these pupils. The small group of pupils who experience significant learning difficulties outperform similar pupils in other schools by a significant degree.

The aspects of the school's work which were found to be weak at the last inspection have been transformed, and are now amongst the school's strengths. The curriculum has been strengthened and improved to the point where its impact on the pupils' learning is outstanding. The rich and diverse curricular program exploits the school's resources to the full. A great library, with a full time librarian, is used particularly well. This adjoins the information and communication technology (ICT) suite, where the use of specialist instruction allows the pupils to make very successful progress in this subject. The combination of the two areas, along with the instruction and guidance the pupils receive, guides and develops their skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects very effectively. The sports hall and extensive grounds are also fully exploited; once again, specialist instruction is used to great effect. Pupils have a wealth of opportunities to try different sporting activities. Year 6 pupils were keen to point out, 'You don't have to be brilliant at something to be in a team or take part, everyone gets a chance if they want to.' They were, however, quietly very proud of the school's success in a number of inter-school competitions. The curriculum incorporates exceptional provision for music. Many extra-curricular clubs, visitors and visits, including residential visits are all built in to the planned curriculum as an integral part of the experiences that the pupils receive.

The care, guidance and support the pupils receive has been specifically strengthened and improved by a focus on improving the quality of teachers' marking. The academic guidance pupils receive is very effective; this is particularly so in English. As Year 6 pupils commented, 'Our teachers really make us think about what we are doing, they not only tell us what it is that we are doing well, but what we need to do to improve.' The personal guidance the pupils receive, and the opportunities to work together and help others, are of an equally high standard. The school campus adjoins an infant school, from which the school receives the vast majority of its intake, and also a high school, to which most pupils transfer. Staff fully exploit this situation. For instance, the school's pupils support and guide the infant children in a number of ways.

This includes reading with them on a regular basis, and helping them at play, whilst some high school students give support to some of the junior school sports activities. In addition, to the excellent level of cooperation between the schools, the pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities for developments in and around the school. The school council and the ECO council have raised issues, planned changes and introduced ideas that have been taken up to improve playtimes and the school environment.

Leadership and management were considered to be good at the last inspection. Despite significant changes they are still good. The systems and procedures that have been put in place give the leadership of the school a very clear picture of what works well, and what needs to be improved. All staff and governors are involved in evaluating the work of the school and the quality of the self-evaluation systems now used in the school are outstanding. Teaching and learning are good. High quality relationships and effective teamwork between all staff are key elements in achieving this. The school makes good use of robust systems to observe and monitor the quality of teaching. It correctly judges the majority of lessons to be good, with a growing proportion outstanding; a small number, however remain satisfactory. The leadership recognises that in order to sustain the best teaching and raise the quality of learning to a consistently high level more work is needed. Plans are being developed to implement a system of coaching so that greater recognition is given to the most effective teaching and to allow staff to share their expertise and skills more effectively.

The pupils' personal development and well-being, are outstanding. The high quality relationships between all staff and the children ensure this level of excellence. Pupils are safe and happy, as is shown by the exceptionally high level of attendance. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. They work well together and make an excellent contribution to the life of the school and its community. All are developing skills that give them an excellent preparation for their next stage of education. Given the high quality of the provision, and the drive and commitment that are apparent throughout the school, there is a good capacity for it to continue to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses more accurately so that they can both share their expertise with others and ensure more teaching is outstanding.

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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?	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 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	1

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	1
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	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?	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?	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	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	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

24 June 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Wheatfields Junior Mixed School, St Albans AL4 9NT

Thank you for being so friendly when I visited your school. I would like to share with you what I found when I spent time in your lessons and talked with you and your teachers.

I really enjoyed my time in your school. I was very impressed with how polite and thoughtful you are. I was also glad to see how well you get on together and delighted to hear how you enjoy coming to school. I think that the level of attendance you achieve is stunning. Do keep this up. It is by coming to school so regularly that you are able to achieve the high standards that I could see throughout the school.

I think you go to a good school. It is clearly working well, and some of the achievements of your teachers and staff are outstanding. Practically all of your parents agree with me about this. They had a great deal to tell me about things you do at school and the exciting opportunities you have. Among the things that impressed me was the great way your teachers encourage you to work with the infants and at the same time prepare you so well for high school. I was very envious of your library, the ICT suite and sports facilities. I could see that you get excellent help from the adults in school in using these so well. I just wish that I'd had more time to hear some of your music: the little bit I heard was very impressive.

When I watched your lessons and looked at your work, I could see that your teachers and teaching assistants work really hard to help you to learn, and they have some really great ideas to help you. However, with so many exciting things happening in your school, I have asked your teachers to work out how they can improve your learning by sharing their own skills and practices with each other. I would like them to try to bring all their teaching up to the standard of the best that you delighted in telling me about.

Thank you once again for your warm welcome.

All the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Brown

Lead inspector