

# Almond Hill Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117221
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	312535
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Martyn Groucutt

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	237
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs N Clarke
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs J Lovelock
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 November 2002
<b>School address</b>	Almonds Lane Stevenage Hertfordshire SG1 3RP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01438 233660
<b>Fax number</b>	01438 235400

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Almond Hill Junior School is of average size. It takes its pupils mostly from its surrounding area, which is mixed, but comprised mainly of privately owned housing. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, or who speak English as an additional language, is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities is below the national average and none are currently in receipt of a statement of special educational need. The percentage eligible for free school meals is below the national average. When pupils start in Year 3, their attainment 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

Almond Hill Junior School is achieving standards above the national average. It is able to evaluate its own effectiveness well and correctly judges itself to be a good school. It has many strengths, not least the extremely positive support it receives from its pupils and their parents. Partnerships with other bodies, such as nearby schools, are outstanding, supporting rising standards. The school rightly identifies that its track record shows that it has a good capacity to bring about further improvement. It seeks at all times to live up to its motto - 'Aim High'. The school offers good value for money.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is very effective and well supported by the deputy headteacher. Together they have a clear vision for the school and its continued development. The work of the governing body is outstanding; they know and support the school very effectively. Subject leaders have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and show enthusiasm for developing their individual areas of expertise. There are positive relationships throughout the school, at every level.

The school enables pupils to achieve well. Teaching and learning are good and teachers challenge pupils through clear individual goals and high expectations. The special needs coordinator supports teachers and teaching assistants in providing effective education for pupils with learning difficulties, so they make good progress. At the same time, pupils capable of achieving high academic standards are challenged to reach levels more commonly associated with a secondary school. Marking of work is often very good, so pupils know how well they have done, but also how it could be better. However, in a few instances the marking policy is not implemented as effectively.

While attainment exceeds the national average, it is currently higher in English and science than in mathematics. Even though achievement in mathematics is not as high, progress and standards are nevertheless good. Over recent years, the school has focused particularly on raising standards in English and the success of its strategy is now clear. In science, effective teaching is reinforced by the very good link with the neighbouring specialist science college. The focus has now turned to raising achievement in mathematics further, with a particular focus on the performance of girls. Pupils say that they are already seeing the positive impact of this, and the school is monitoring its initiatives closely although it is still early days. The curriculum is good and meets the needs of all pupils. It addresses the academic and social aspects of learning, and is very well supported through external partnerships. Care, guidance and support are outstanding so that pupils get a real enjoyment from learning and from participating in the many activities available.

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Their behaviour is exemplary. It is a strength of the school that it places an emphasis on the need to educate the 'whole person'. In a community where there is not a great diversity, the school seeks to ensure its pupils understand some of the complexity of contemporary society. Attendance is above the national average and punctuality is good. The wide-ranging opportunities to participate in sport and an understanding of healthy lifestyles are reflected in pupils' progress in these respects and in achieving the Healthy School Award.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of pupils in mathematics further and continue to monitor the performance of girls in the subject.
- Ensure that all teachers implement the school's marking policy fully.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

The standards reached by Year 6 have risen faster than the national average since the last inspection. A high proportion of pupils reach Level 4 at the end of Year 6, with many more than the national average reaching Level 5. Teachers' assessments show that current pupils continue to make good progress and that a few pupils in this year's Year 6 are on track to even reach a very high level in mathematics, more usually seen by pupils in Year 7 or 8 in secondary school.

The performance of pupils in Year 6 in the 2007 national tests was the highest for five years. Across all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, pupils exceeded the national average. English and science results were considerably above the average achieved both nationally and within the local authority, and English performance was exceptionally high. The results in mathematics achieved by boys were above the national expectation, but girls did not do as well. Girls' performance in mathematics has been identified by this and other local schools as an area for improvement, and a strategy to address this area is being implemented. The school is currently monitoring the effectiveness of this strategy.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and can be seen in rich displays of their work throughout the school. Older pupils help newly arrived pupils, for example, through the Young Leaders scheme. All pupils feel very safe in school, saying bullying and racism are rare. The pupils are active in promoting safety, such as when they sold parents 'We Say Park Safely' stickers for their cars.

Pupils know that their views are sought and valued by the staff and the wider community. The school council is instrumental in making changes such as improvements to playtime activities. The council encourages recycling and held an 'Eco-fashion show' of clothes made from items that are normally thrown away. Pupils recently met the town's mayor and helped with a litter sweep locally. They are enterprising and recall a memorable week when they ran their own small businesses. Although pupils' mathematics standards are not quite as high as their other key academic skills, they are well prepared for the next stage of education and for their future lives in the world of work.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching is effective because teachers plan their lessons with great care and make sure that the needs of every pupil are taken into account. This is possible because pupils' progress is monitored throughout the year, giving teachers an understanding of individual needs and achievement. Pupils' work is planned to be appropriately challenging and the quality of learning is good as a result. There is an agreed marking policy in place so that pupils know how good

their work is and how it can be made better. However, marking is not always followed up to full effect. For example, when an area for improvement is noted, there is not always time given for the pupil to address it.

Relationships in lessons are outstanding, so pupils are motivated to work hard and achieve. They are enthusiastic learners and behaviour is generally excellent. The work that pupils produce in their books reflects above average standards and good progress. A variety of styles of teaching and activities are used within lessons and this, combined with good levels of pace and challenge, maintains pupils' involvement in learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

A broad range of work and activities is provided. In addition to all the required subjects, the school offers lessons in French and a wide range of visits, visitors and clubs. There have been good improvements in the provision for information and communication technology, which was a weakness at the time of the last inspection. Valuable science and sports partnerships have been established locally and secondary school staff help the school to cater for the needs of pupils with particular gifts or talents. There is good planning for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities that is shared productively with pupils, parents, teachers and teaching assistants. The small number of pupils who have English as an additional language are catered for and monitored well. The programmes of education for health, social skills and citizenship are very effective in promoting the high standards in pupils' personal development.

Well planned initiatives to improve provision in mathematics are in place, about which pupils are very positive. It is, as yet, too early to assess their overall impact on standards.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

These aspects are outstanding and highly valued by pupils and their families. The day-to-day care of pupils is extremely good. The school ensures that procedures to safeguard pupils and promote their health and safety are securely in place and checked regularly. The arrangements for pupils who are vulnerable in any way are managed exceptionally well, under the excellent leadership of the special educational needs coordinator. The parent of a child receiving extra support summed up the view of many when she wrote, 'My son's confidence has grown so much. He likes to be involved in everything at school'. There are effective links with external agencies, such as health and social services.

Although marking occasionally lacks a sharp focus, academic support and guidance are generally of high quality. Pupils are clear about their individual or group targets and receive good quality feedback on their work. There are excellent systems for ensuring that pupils move smoothly from the infant school and transfer equally well to their secondary schools.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher is an experienced practitioner with high expectations who brings out the best in her staff. The deputy headteacher provides very good support and is currently taking the lead in implementing the strategies for

raising standards in mathematics. A recent period of staffing instability has been dealt with effectively and steps taken to ensure that the long-term progress of pupils was not hindered by changes in personnel during the year.

Subject leaders and the teams in charge of upper and lower school have clear areas of responsibility to which they respond positively, for example, in developing the curriculum, or leading in-service training. Those with responsibilities develop and implement their roles effectively. Teachers' performance management objectives are set in the light of the priorities in the school improvement plan as well as their individual professional development needs. Senior leaders know the school well and are able to implement self-evaluation procedures effectively.

The governing body is outstanding, giving a positive stimulus to achieving higher standards. Governors are active and hold the school to account extremely well. They are given very effective help, in terms of training, support and the quality of the information that they are given, by the senior leadership team.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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

30 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Almond Hill Junior School, Stevenage, SG1 3RP

I am writing to thank you all for the help you gave when Mrs Ranger and I visited your school recently. We really enjoyed our time with you and we were made to feel very welcome. We were really impressed by your extremely good behaviour and politeness. You obviously enjoy school a great deal and like your teachers. It was really nice to be in the company of people who get on so well together.

We think that you go to a good school that is getting even better. You will be pleased to know that the standard of your work is better than we would normally expect to see when we visit schools for pupils of your age. Your standards in English and science are particularly strong, but what you achieve in mathematics is not as good. We are pleased the school is taking steps to improve results in mathematics and we have asked Mrs Lovelock to persevere with this and make sure girls get at least as good results as boys do. We have also asked that teachers look at the way in which they mark your work. Mostly they give you good ideas on how to make your work even better, but not always. We would like your teachers to make sure that, when you need to go over some work again, you are given the time to do so.

We think that you are very fortunate in having so many clubs to join and there are lots of opportunities for taking part in sports. It is also good that the school provides you with an education that prepares you well to go on to secondary school, and for later in your life.

You have a good headteacher who has a very clear view of what she wants the school to be like. Your teachers and the governors work well with her and have a very good idea of what you can each achieve in your learning. This means that they can give you lots of help in order that you can do your very best. In return, most of you do work very hard and do your best in class. Well done!

Best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Groucutt

Lead inspector