

How Wood Primary and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117235
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	312541
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Ian Getley
Headteacher	Mrs Meg MacPherson
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2003
School address	Spooners Drive Park Street St Albans Hertfordshire AL2 2HU
Telephone number	01727768885
Fax number	01727768884

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is similar in size to most other primary schools. Attainment on admission is in line with national expectations for pupils of that age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is below average. Almost all pupils have White British heritage and a very small number are at an early stage of learning English. A below average proportion is eligible for free school meals.

The school has achieved a Healthy Schools award and the Hertfordshire Quality Standard for the Foundation Stage.

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 with some outstanding features. It provides good value for money and is well placed to improve. The main reason for the school's success is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. She is charismatic, and, despite recent changes in staffing, she has built up an effective senior and middle management team which share her drive to promote all round excellence. The headteacher is well supported but also challenged by the governing body and other senior staff. Despite her absence for part of the inspection and the absence of the deputy headteacher who was leading a Year 6 residential visit, the school continued to function smoothly. Leadership and management are good overall. Monitoring procedures are exceptionally good and there are good self-evaluation procedures. Together, these provide a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop. The school's work is clearly focused on raising standards. However, this is not made explicit in the current improvement plan, which makes monitoring its implementation more difficult.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and have confidence in its work. One wrote, 'We are very happy and proud to have our children attend this school and we are sure that it will continue to thrive and do well.' Pupils say that they enjoy school. The good care that all adults show means that pupils feel safe and secure and are ready and willing to learn. They are fully aware of how to stay safe and have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. Their appreciation of the importance of physical fitness is very good indeed. Attendance is average. Pupils' good literacy and numeracy skills, allied to good social skills and their excellent contribution to the community, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

The good development of pupils' personal skills helps to promote their good attitudes and behaviour and supports the good progress which they make. For most children standards are below and for some, well below, those expected for their age when they begin in the Nursery. They make consistently good progress as they move through each phase of the school. Provision in the Foundation Stage is excellent. Children get a good start to their school years and reach standards that are broadly in line with national expectations for their age when they begin Year 1. In 2006, standards at Year 2 were above average and at Year 6, well above average with pupils having made very good progress in science and outstanding progress in mathematics. However, while indications are that standards in both Year 2 and Year 6 in 2007 are likely to be lower, this still represents good progress for these particular pupils. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is effective because monitoring procedures are very robust and expectations are made very clear and followed through. Strong features of learning are that pupils know clearly what they have to do and also how to make their work better. Teaching assistants are used very effectively to support pupils with learning difficulties who make excellent progress. Excellent use is made of assessment data to set targets for pupils and to track their progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Procedures in other subjects are still in the process of being developed. The curriculum is good. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are promoted well and further opportunity is well provided for through a wide range of visits, visitors to the school and different curricular foci.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the school's main development priorities are more clearly identified in its improvement plan.

- Further develop the procedures for tracking the progress which pupils make in subjects other than English, mathematics and science.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and those at an early stage of learning English, achieve well in each phase of the school. In the Nursery and the Reception classes, children make good progress to reach standards which are in line with those expected nationally by the beginning of Year 1. Standards in Year 2 have been above average recently and achievement has been good. Although standards are likely to be lower in the current Year 2, achievement is still good given pupils' starting points. In recent years standards in Year 6 have been consistently above average. In 2006, they were above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. Progress between Year 2 and Year 6 in mathematics was outstanding. Indications are that standards in the current Year 6 are likely to be lower than those of the previous year. With the excellent provision, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve exceptionally well in comparison with similar groups nationally.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Most pupils behave well and thoroughly enjoy school. A few pupils display challenging behaviour, but staff deal with them effectively to minimise the disruption they cause to other pupils. Pupils develop a good spiritual, moral social and cultural understanding through the caring ethos and the many opportunities they have to learn about their own and different cultures. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and enjoy many opportunities for physical activity, both within the school day and after school. They know how to stay safe and their good basic skills equip them well for their future lives. Attendance is satisfactory. The school takes attendance issues seriously and is doing all it can to improve this further. An effective school council gives pupils of all ages the opportunity to influence what happens in the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The school has worked hard to ensure that there is a consistency of approach and expectation. Teachers in the Foundation Stage meet the differing needs of the young children exceptionally well. Other strengths in teaching are the way in which the focus of each lesson is clearly set out in teachers' planning and shared with the pupils, and how well the teachers' thoughtful marking shows pupils how to improve. Teachers successfully encourage pupils to behave well and in the best lessons pupils are engrossed in what they are doing. A very strong feature is the support given by knowledgeable and effective teaching assistants. However, occasionally, the pace of learning drops when pupils are preparing for their lessons or when they change activities and sometimes too much time is spent on introductions to activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It gives appropriate emphasis to literacy and numeracy and a balanced approach to other subjects. It is well planned to bring out links between different subjects and these are further explored during events such as the personal, social and health education week. These contribute well to pupils' enjoyment of school and the good progress they make. Literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are being developed well in other subjects, particularly through special 'hot-spot' weeks where cross-curricular links are particularly emphasised. A wide range of visits, visitors and out of school activities helps make learning interesting and fun. Curricular provision for pupils with learning difficulties and for the more able is good. Provision in the Foundation Stage meets the needs of young children exceptionally well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school has a very caring ethos and this helps pupils feel valued and safe. Teachers and able support staff know the pupils well and the care provided for individual pupils is strong. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety and protection are firmly established. Procedures for tracking pupils' academic progress are outstanding in English and mathematics but are not yet as fully developed in other subjects. In English and mathematics, all pupils are given clear targets for what they should achieve next and this is helping to raise standards. The needs of those pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities, or who need extra support for other reasons, are identified and they are supported well. As a result they achieve exceptionally well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall, and the headteacher's contribution is excellent. The rigour which she has brought to monitoring and evaluation processes since her appointment has resulted in a year-on-year improvement in pupils' overall achievement. The headteacher has a very clear vision of excellence in all aspects of the school's work and she transmits this effectively to other leaders. The monitoring of teaching and learning is regular, robust and comprehensive and the school's work is clearly focused on ensuring that high standards are maintained. There is no complacency and all leaders are seeking ways to make the school better. All the initiatives that the school is undertaking are shown in the current school improvement plan. While the plan is at the heart of the school's work, further improvements to its monitoring procedures are needed to drive progress forward even more. Governance is good. Governors have good procedures for supporting and challenging the school through an effective committee system.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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	1

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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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

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	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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

23 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of How Wood Primary and Nursery School, Spooners Drive, Park Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL2 2HU

Thank you for making my colleague and me so welcome when we came to the school recently to see how well you were doing.

Here are the things that we think are best about your school:

- You work hard and do well. The progress that some of you made recently in your mathematics work was exceptionally good.
- Your headteacher and other senior staff work very effectively to make sure that you are all well looked after and doing the best that you can.
- The way that teachers check how well you are doing in reading, writing and mathematics is very good indeed.
- Those of you with learning difficulties are supported and encouraged well.

There are two things that we thought could be better.

- The way that teachers record your progress in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics, so that they can clearly see how much improvement you are making.
- The school's plan that shows everyone what they are working towards to become even better.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Missin

Lead Inspector