

Tower Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117275
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312552
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Michele Messaoudi

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	137
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Allen
Headteacher	Mrs Carole Thorpe
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Tower Road Ware Hertfordshire SG12 7LP
Telephone number	01920 411000
Fax number	01920486613

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Tower Primary is a smaller than average sized primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a few are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than in most schools, and so is the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. A small minority of pupils have English as an additional language. There are fewer girls than boys in the school. Owing to varying numbers in year groups, pupils in Year 1 to Year 3 are taught in two mixed-age classes. The school received the Active Mark for physical education (PE) in 2007 and the Travel Plan Award in 2008.

A privately managed childcare provision, Pals Pre-school, operates from the school site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Tower Primary is a good school. Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding because they are underpinned by exceptionally good pastoral care, support and guidance. Under the headteacher's strong leadership, the school is successful in creating a very warm and caring ethos in which all pupils can flourish and achieve well. The governors play an outstanding role in improving the educational provision by supporting pupils' learning in class, monitoring various aspects of school management assiduously and challenging and supporting the leadership team. The school is very active in developing a strong community spirit within its premises and beyond. It tirelessly seeks to engage adults in their children's education and welfare. For example, it provides family learning courses such as 'Come read with me' and it helped develop the provision of a new children's centre that opened on its site in January 2008. The staff form a cohesive team that establishes very effective working relationships and promotes excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. Over 50 per cent of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and the vast majority of these expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school. Many commented very positively on the school's inclusive ethos and on the approachability and dedication of all staff.

Pupils love their school and express its impact on their lives saying, 'This is a school that will give you plenty of good memories when you're older.' Over the last few years, attendance has improved and is now good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and the staff manage the behaviour of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties very effectively. Pupils feel exceptionally safe and free from bullying and exclusions are rare. They develop a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives through balanced diets and they enjoy lots of physical exercise. They make outstanding contributions to their communities. They work to improve their school community through the school council and participate in a local citizenship scheme. They give choir performances in residential homes for the elderly. They gain a good understanding of wider citizenship action and raise money for charities to help those less fortunate than themselves.

Good leadership from the headteacher and subject leaders has enabled the school to make effective improvements since the last inspection. The good quality of the school's self-evaluation reflects its capacity to make further improvements. The senior managers track pupils' progress rigorously and set challenging targets. This information is used well to provide good academic guidance to all pupils and support for those who need extra help. Consequently, pupils achieve well from their low starting points in the Nursery. By Year 6, pupils attain standards that are broadly in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science.

Teaching and assessment are good and some teaching is outstanding. Marking is used consistently to show pupils how to improve. However, pupils are not sufficiently involved in determining and understanding success criteria against which they can assess their work to progress at an even faster rate. The leadership has improved the balance of the curriculum since the last inspection, resulting in good provision for religious education (RE), information and communication technology (ICT) and good development of literacy in most subjects.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get to a good start to their education and enjoy their time in the Nursery and Reception. The learning environment is warm and welcoming and children settle in quickly. Staff establish

effective relationships with children and promote their personal development well. They foster children's independence by encouraging them to help themselves to water, set up the tables at snack and lunch times and select the resources they need for play. As children gain confidence, they become competent learners. Three Nursery children could explain how they had made lemon curd tarts using appropriate vocabulary and reviewing steps in the correct sequence. Children enjoy a good balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities and have direct access to the outdoor areas. They develop a good understanding of hygiene and healthy eating and take regular exercise. The teaching of reading skills is strong from the Nursery onwards. The adults engage children in conversation to encourage them to improve their speaking skills. However, there are missed opportunities to extend children's vocabulary and knowledge and understanding of the world through play.

Leadership and management are good in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Owing to effective self-evaluation and tracking of children's progress, children achieve well from very low starting points and standards have risen over the last three years. Standards of personal and mathematical development were above national expectations in 2008 and standards of communication, language and literacy were just under. Boys are not progressing as fast as girls and the leadership is rightly focusing on making the curriculum more boy-friendly. Parents are welcome to receive daily feedback on their children's progress. However there are no visual records of their children's individual learning journeys. The leadership ensures that children's welfare and safety are promoted effectively and staff have an up-to-date qualification in first aid. However, this does not include a specific first-aid qualification for young children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend EYFS children's vocabulary and knowledge and understanding of the world through play.
- Share visual records of children's individual learning journeys in all areas of the EYFS curriculum with their parents.
- Ensure that planning indicates how specific success criteria against which pupils can assess their work might be generated so that pupils gain a sufficiently deep understanding of what to do next to accelerate their progress further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress by the time they leave Year 6 in relation to their low starting points. Pupils who have additional learning or linguistic needs achieve as well as their peers owing to the very effective support they receive from teachers and skilled teaching assistants.

Pupils make good progress from Year 1 to Year 2. Standards at the end of Year 2 have been significantly below average over the past few years. They rose in 2008 and matched national expectations in reading and writing. They were above average in mathematics. The attainment of pupils with learning difficulties was higher than national expectations. However, these results relate to a small group of pupils.

By the end of Key Stage 2, standards have been broadly in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science since the last inspection, albeit with some fluctuation reflecting the varying starting points of these groups. In 2008, Year 6 assessments indicate that standards dipped to below the national average; even so, pupils' progress was good in relation to their very low starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils and parents identify the excellent role models provided by the staff and the school's inclusive ethos as key to pupils' personal development and well-being. 'Staff are very polite and exceptionally helpful,' say pupils. Pupils appreciate the positive atmosphere, free from bullying, and enjoy harmonious relationships. Their enjoyment is reflected in their good attendance, outstanding behaviour and excellent attitude to learning. They have full confidence in the school's systems to ensure their security and well-being and understand the sensitive treatment of pupils who have behavioural and emotional difficulties. They show high levels of maturity, self-discipline and a great capacity for reflection, fostered by excellent class discussions and assemblies. For example, Year 6 pupils discussed how to agree and disagree by considering what might hurt people's feelings and what constitutes constructive criticism. Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy lives successfully and participate in many physical activities. They develop excellent experiences of citizenship by contributing to their communities at various levels. They improve school life through the school council, for example designing interesting areas for outside play. They take part in local radio programmes and school presentations, which develops their confidence and speaking skills. Key Stage 2 pupils participated in the campaign to recruit a crossing patrol warden and the development of a travel plan. Pupils' cultural and multicultural development is very well enriched by educational visits, residential trips and the teaching of French in Key Stage 2. The good skills they develop in literacy, numeracy, ICT and team work, coupled with their self-confidence and sense of responsibility, prepare them well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is effective in helping pupils to achieve well, underpinned by a shared understanding of good teaching and assessment techniques, the strategic deployment of skilled teaching assistants and clear direction from subject leaders. Staff ask open questions that make pupils think deeply for themselves. They show pupils how to improve through constructive verbal feedback and written comments. However, whilst they share learning objectives with pupils, they do not always plan how specific criteria against which pupils can evaluate their successes might be generated. Consequently, marking does not always help pupils gain a sufficiently deep understanding of what to do next to accelerate their progress further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Since the last inspection, the curriculum has been re-balanced to give better coverage to subjects other than English and mathematics whilst maintaining a strong focus on raising standards in speaking, reading and writing. The new framework for mathematics is embedded with a current focus on developing pupils' problem-solving skills. The consistent planning of cross-curricular links makes learning a more coherent experience, gives pupils valuable opportunities to develop literacy skills in most subjects and has improved standards in history, geography and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The planning of the curriculum in the mixed age classes is satisfactory. The provision for RE is now good and contributes to pupils' understanding of the major world faiths. Improved ICT resources have enabled pupils

to develop good ICT skills and enjoy a greater variety of work. The school has succeeded in maintaining a good quality of provision for pupils with learning or linguistic difficulties in the face of an increasing proportion of these pupils. A wide range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits enhances pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

All staff offer pupils an exceptionally high level of care and arrangements to safeguard them in all circumstances are robust. The success with which they support pupils' personal needs and welfare is measured by the high level of parental satisfaction and trust in the school's systems and the impact on pupils' personal development. Parents say that their children thrive whatever their backgrounds, abilities and needs. Pupils settle in quickly when they join the school at any point because they are very well supported. They receive good academic guidance through verbal feedback and marking. The termly tracking of pupils' progress is effective in identifying pupils who would benefit from further support. The school works hard with parents to improve the attendance of the small core of pupils who are often absent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong leadership and she is very well supported at the senior level by the governors and deputy headteacher. The governors provide a wide range of expertise and experiences and fulfill their responsibilities as critical friends very effectively. They know the school very well through their regular practical involvement. Financial management is strong and value for money is good. Resources are used effectively to improve the quality of learning, in particular, interactive whiteboards and laptop computers. The middle managers develop their subjects and areas of expertise carefully to improve standards. The leadership monitors the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum effectively and ensures pupils make good progress by setting challenging targets. Although marking is consistently good and shows pupils how to improve, written comments do not always relate to sufficiently specific success criteria and so do not help pupils progress at an even faster rate. The school makes an outstanding contribution to uniting the community by finding varied ways to engage parents in their children's learning and helping develop much needed community services.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
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 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

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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

1 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Tower Primary School, Ware, SG12 7LP

Thank you to all of you for making me so welcome, and a special thanks to those of you who gave up part of their lunch break to tell me about your school. I enjoyed watching you work and play, and talking to some of you. I agree with you that your school is a good place to be and you are fortunate to attend such a happy and friendly school. Good things about your school include the fact that:

- you really enjoy all the things you do at school
- staff care for you exceptionally well, listen to you thoughtfully and give you the support you need
- staff make the school very safe for you and you behave exceptionally well
- you are inspired by the excellent role models provided by the staff and you are kind to others, thoughtful and well-mannered
- you enjoy the curriculum, especially using ICT in many subjects and the educational visits
- teaching is good and encourages you to take an active part in lessons
- you make good progress in your work because staff show you exactly how to improve
- you contribute very actively to school life and to the wider community
- the school and your parents work closely together for your benefit
- your headteacher and teachers have good ideas about ways to improve the school and help you learn even better
- the school governors work exceptionally hard to ensure that the school does its best for you.

I have asked your school to look at how they can make things even better. The most important things are to ask staff to:

- extend the vocabulary and knowledge and understanding of the world of children in Nursery and Reception through play
- prepare photographic records of the progress made by the children in Nursery and Reception in all areas of learning to share with their parents
- plan how to make you aware of specific success criteria against which you can assess your work so that you can make even better progress.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Michele Messaoudi

Lead inspector