

Beech Hyde Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117301
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312561
Inspection date	26 November 2007
Reporting inspector	John Paull

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Allen
Headteacher	Mrs Delia Bonner
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Nurseries Road Wheathampstead St. Albans Hertfordshire AL4 8TP
Telephone number	01582 832661
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and focused on four main themes. First, what the school's recent record of accomplishment suggests about its capacity to improve further. Second, the extent to which pupils' understanding of, and involvement in, cultural pursuits are developed. Third, the extent to which pupils receive helpful information about improving their work for themselves; and, fourth, ascertaining the quality and richness of what is taught. The inspector gathered evidence from observations of lessons, samples of pupils' work, discussions with staff, pupils and governors and scrutiny of the main planning and monitoring documents. Some observations and discussions were made about the quality of other aspects of the school's work, but not in detail. No evidence was found to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation are substantially incorrect. Where appropriate these evaluations are included in this report.

Description of the school

Beech Hyde is similar in size to most primary schools and it has its own, on-site, nursery, which also serves another local primary school. Nearly all pupils are from a White British background. Small numbers from a range of minority ethnic groups also attend. Only very few of these pupils speak English as an additional language. About average percentages of pupils have free school meals, experience learning difficulties and/or disabilities or have a statement of special educational need. Pupils' attainment on entry is about average.

The school holds the Investor in People and Healthy School awards and recently became the lead agency for the Wheathampstead and Kimpton Children's Centre (Lamer Fields Children's Centre).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Beech Hyde is an outstanding school where pupils achieve consistently well academically and where their personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is exceptionally strong. The headteacher's powerful vision, which the staff shares fully, is put into practice very effectively. A particularly knowledgeable governing body asks pertinent and helpful questions and offers high quality strategic support and advice. The headteacher and senior staff observe teaching and learning regularly. The results are constructively fed back to teachers, so the consistency with which their preferred systems and methods are applied improves constantly. New members of staff are thereby inducted quickly and soon become part of a strong team. This highly effective monitoring has identified a need for greater emphasis on developing pupils' thinking skills through setting more challenging targets for spoken English and investigative work in science. The teaching of mathematics, led by a leading mathematics teacher, is outstanding and already includes much emphasis on practical skills and problem-solving. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also managed outstandingly well and, as a result, support for these pupils is very effective and they often make remarkable progress.

Because of all this strong teaching, pupils learn well and reach consistently above average standards in English and science by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. In mathematics, standards are often higher still. Results in the Year 6 national tests are consistent with these findings. Children's attainment on entering the Nursery is around what is usually found and they make good progress. However, several of the more able children go on to other schools so, despite further good progress in the Reception class, overall standards are lower on entry to Year 1. This is reflected in results of Year 2 national assessments, which are often broadly average, although achievement is good. This was particularly so in 2007. In this year group, over a third of pupils were identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but standards were still at average levels.

The school's curriculum is exceptionally broad and caters for pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education very strongly. This feature, together with outstanding care, guidance and support, is contributing much to their outstanding personal development. This includes pupils in difficult social circumstances, with emotional or behavioural difficulties or with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All staff support them with great tenacity to ensure that they settle at school and benefit from its provision as much as possible. Statutory requirements for safeguarding and child protection are met. When asked, pupils willingly express their great enjoyment of school, offering reasons ranging from, 'I've got the best teacher in the world,' to 'Because it's a place where the lessons are fun and you're safe.' This high level of enjoyment means that pupils want to be at school, which is consistent with their above average attendance, and they make an outstanding contribution to its smooth running and to the wider community. Year 2 'buddies' support children in the Reception class very conscientiously. Class and school councils provide opportunities for pupils to acquire good ideas of democracy as well as to pass their views about how to improve the school to the headteacher and staff. Pupils raise funds willingly for charities and take part in Wheathampstead Village Days, making and then riding a float which, twice recently, has been placed first in the best float competition. Pupils know right from wrong, their behaviour is good and they show good sense about staying safe. They say that bullying and racial taunts are very rare and are dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils know that eating fruit and vegetables and taking exercise is healthy and will keep them fit.

After-school sports' clubs are very well attended and there are many of them. Pupils also benefit strongly from a rich variety of cultural provision. These take place, both within the school day, including visits and visitors, and in extra-curricular work such as art clubs, a choir which has sung at the Royal Albert Hall, and the provision of instrumental music lessons. Much of pupils' displayed work in art and design is above the levels normally expected. They express very positive attitudes towards cultures different from their own and visit various places of worship, including a mosque and synagogue, as part of their religious education. Pupils' development of skills in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology and their willingness to cooperate are preparing them well for the future. They are involved well in evaluating their own work using a system known as 'traffic lights', which increases in sophistication as pupils grow older and move through the school. Systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, setting targets and measuring achievement are strong. These have improved considerably since the last inspection.

The school's outstanding performance is secured because leadership and management at all levels are outstandingly effective although self-evaluation, while substantially accurate, is sometimes a little modest. The headteacher, strongly supported at all levels of management, together with governors, is very skilful in identifying what needs to be done to secure and maintain high standards. The school provides good value for money. Parents and agencies are very well included in the process of education. Responses in parents' pre-inspection questionnaires were very supportive. Many wrote letters of admiration for what the staff of the school does for their children. Typical of the overwhelming majority, one response stated, 'I know all the children are valued at Beech Hyde because they are happy, helpful, considerate and conscientious, and I know my own are making fast progress because of the teaching they get.' This degree of support, in the light of the school's sustained success, means that its capacity to improve even further is outstandingly strong.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

'The school has a lovely atmosphere and the children are polite and well-behaved. My youngest child has settled really well in the Reception class and loves reading.' This parent's comment is typical of those of the overwhelming majority with children in the Nursery and Reception classes, where leadership and teaching are outstanding. This ensures that progress towards expected goals for the age group is rapid. This is not reflected in the average standards when pupils enter Year 1, because not all pupils stay at Beech Hyde. Planning is very strong, enabling children to experience all areas of learning both in the classrooms and in the outside areas.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' thinking skills, setting more challenging targets for spoken English and investigative work in science, thereby raising standards even further.

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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?	1
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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?	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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	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?	1
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 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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Beech Hyde Primary School and Nursery, Wheathampstead, AL4 8TP

You were all very helpful and polite when I visited your school recently. I should like to thank you for all that you did to make the day run smoothly. I thoroughly enjoyed looking at your work and speaking to you. It was great to find so many children who said that they like school and think it is an excellent place to be. I agree with you. Your school is outstanding - your work is good, and in mathematics it is especially so. You make good progress and your personal attitudes and development are excellent. I especially enjoyed the jokes that the Year 2 'buddies' told me and I was delighted to hear that they shared them with their partners in Reception. They clearly do a grand job, helping the younger children to feel safe and settled. My working lunch with school councillors was also very helpful. They told me all about the excellent things that your teachers plan, so you find work interesting, and how well they look after you all. I agree with them.

Here are some more things I like about your school.

- Your teachers teach you well, sometimes outstandingly.
- The way that children who find work difficult are supported is excellent, so they often make very rapid progress.
- Everyone, including yourselves and your parents, works very well as a great big team, so your school has tremendous opportunities to get even better.
- Your headteacher and senior staff lead the school very well indeed.
- Your school governors help and support your school very effectively.

Here is what I have asked your headteacher, the staff and the school's governors to do to make your work even better.

- Give you lots of opportunities to develop your thinking skills even more than you do now, especially in English and science.

I hope that you will always enjoy your education as much as you do at Beech Hyde.

Yours sincerely

John W Paull

Lead inspector