

Wheatcroft Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117328
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312570
Inspection date	12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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	341
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bob Brown
Headteacher	Mr Alisdair Skinner
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003
School address	Stanstead Road Hertford Hertfordshire SG13 7HQ
Telephone number	01992 587899
Fax number	01992 586725

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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 progress made in literacy, numeracy and science. Evidence was gathered from classroom visits, discussions with staff and pupils and examination of school documents, especially assessment data. 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 school is larger than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. Attainment on entry to the school is in line with national expectations. The school has an Activemark award.

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. There are some outstanding features. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is exceptionally good. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils report that lessons are fun and that they thoroughly enjoy school. Attendance is significantly above average. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. They reflect on their learning and are eager to succeed. They are exceptionally courteous and sensitive to the feelings of others and wholeheartedly support charitable fund raising events. Pupils have a keen sense of justice and fair play. They take their responsibilities towards the wider community seriously and they support recycling and energy saving projects enthusiastically. Teachers encourage pupils to become confident learners.

Pupils make good progress and attain standards that are above average. By Year 2 standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. By Year 6 standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils make exceptionally good progress in reading. This is a particular strength and pupils enjoy reading a wide range of good quality literature. Pupils who find learning difficult are supported well and make good progress. Faster learners are appropriately challenged and also make good progress. Pupils develop a wide range of skills in information and communication technology (ICT).

Many factors contribute to the school's success. Teaching is good and there are some examples of outstanding practice. Interactive whiteboards are used well to support teaching and learning. Video clips and material from the internet are used well to enrich lessons. Pupils' enjoyment of learning helps them to achieve well. They rise to the challenges set and are proud of their achievements. They are so well motivated and so engaged in their work that behaviour in class is simply not an issue.

Care, guidance and support are good. Pupils receive good guidance about personal issues and about how to stay safe. They report that staff are very approachable, 'You can say anything to the teachers without embarrassment and you know that they will sort out any worries.' Pupils receive good guidance on what they need to do to improve their work, particularly through helpful dialogues with their teachers. The school has experimented with several methods of setting targets for pupils' learning. It is currently refining its practice to give pupils a clearer understanding of what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning.

The curriculum provides pupils with a well rounded education. Music and the performing arts are well represented. Pupils enjoyed the opportunity to sing with other schools in a concert at the Royal Albert Hall. There are excellent links with local secondary schools and these allow extra expertise to be brought into the school to support learning, especially in French, mathematics, science and sports. Pupils are intrigued by the topics they study. Special events, such as Roman Day, Flight Workshops and Digital Microscopy sessions add impetus to learning. Pupils enjoy a wide range of after school activities. A particularly good initiative is 'Forest Schools' which allows pupils to engage with their own outdoor environment and build their learning on practical experiences. They love sitting on logs in the woods, high above the school, to discuss social issues or to discover more about local flora and fauna.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher gives excellent leadership. Together with his deputy he has successfully engineered a substantial number of improvements. The quality of education provided has improved and standards are much higher than they were. After an unsettling period of staff turnover that interrupted pupils' learning, there is now

greater stability in the teaching team. There has been a groundswell of improvement across the school and it is now poised to make further advances. The capacity for further improvement is good. Pupils' progress is checked meticulously in order to ensure that all are making good strides and are on course to meet the challenging goals that are set for them. The management of the school is well structured such that four distinct areas, Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, and Lower and Upper Key Stage 2, work together collaboratively in teams. This is a powerful system for promoting consistency in teaching and learning and in identifying pupils with particular needs. The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is accurate. The most important priorities are described in the school development plan and there is a clear focus on raising standards further. The governing body monitors the work of the school closely and effectively. The overwhelming majority of parents are delighted with the education provided for their children. One comment was typical, 'The school is improving year on year and my children have made excellent progress, especially in reading'.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle happily in the Nursery and Reception classes. They receive a warm and friendly welcome and soon develop a good understanding of school routines. Staff visit children in their homes before they start school and this is an enormous help in creating a partnership in learning between home and school. Staff are passionate about providing an environment that is in tune with how the youngest children learn best. Children make good progress in all areas of learning. There is a strong emphasis on teaching children the links between letters and the sounds they represent (phonics). Their well developed phonic knowledge gives them a flying start in early reading and writing skills. The outside learning environment is used well, particularly for imaginative activities, such as building tunnels and cooking over the camp fire. The area is rather cramped but the school has plans to develop this area to make it even more inviting and effective as a source of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the outdoor learning environment for children in the Foundation Stage.
- Provide pupils with clear targets that give them a clear understanding of the next steps in their learning in English and mathematics.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	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	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	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?	2

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	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	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

14 December 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Wheatcroft Primary School, Hertford, SG13 7HQ

What a lovely school! I thoroughly enjoyed my short time with you. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful. I particularly liked sitting up in the woods. It really is a magical place. There are lots of good things about your school. Here are some of them:-

- Your headteacher is an excellent leader who helps all the staff to make sure that you all make good progress and learn lots of new things.
- The teachers and support staff work hard and find interesting ways to make lessons fun.
- You are extremely pleasant and kind to each other and this makes the school a happy place to be.
- You are keen to learn and are good at English, mathematics and science; you make exceptionally good progress in reading.
- You are good at sport and music and develop a good range of computer skills.
- You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves.
- You are sensible and take your responsibilities seriously.
- Your parents support the school wholeheartedly and are keen for you to do well.

There are two things that should lead to further improvements. Teachers are going to introduce a different system of target setting in English and mathematics so that you all know exactly what stage you have reached in your learning and know exactly what you have to do next. The outside learning area for the children in the Foundation Stage is a bit cramped and needs re-vamping to make it even more exciting.

I wish you every success in the future and hope that you continue to enjoy your learning.

All best wishes

John Messer