

Aycliffe Drive Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117335
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312576
Inspection date	23 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall

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	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T Douris
Headteacher	Mrs M Green
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	Aycliffe Drive Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP2 6LJ
Telephone number	01442 404008
Fax number	01442 404013

Age group	3-11
Inspection date	23 April 2008
Inspection number	312576

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the achievement of children especially in the Foundation Stage
- the extent to which teaching meets the needs of all groups of children
- whether the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school is rigorous enough to identify areas for further improvement.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with staff, governors and children, brief lesson observations, a scrutiny of documentation and samples of children's work. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included, where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This larger than average sized primary school serving an urban area on the outskirts of Hemel Hempstead is popular and several children attend from outside the usual area. The number of children entitled to free school meals is average. The large majority of children are of White British heritage with almost all those from other ethnic groups having bi-lingual skills. The proportion of children with specific needs including those with moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social needs is below average. The school holds a National Healthy Schools 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. Although there are some areas that are excellent, other aspects are not as effective as they could be and this means that the school is not yet quite reaching its own evaluation of outstanding overall. Children very much enjoy coming to school and say there is little that they would change. Parents are generally very pleased with the quality of education and care provided. Several rightly note that the school has improved considerably in the last few years and is a very happy and stimulating place to be.

Key to the recent developments is the highly effective leadership of the headteacher. Her total determination to continually improve the quality of education and care is shared by the deputy head and senior leadership team. This confident and committed group steer Key Stage 1 and 2 exceptionally effectively and ensure there is a clear focus on improving standards. However, the relative weakness is in the quality of provision in the Foundation Stage and, in particular, in the quality and use of assessments to support children's learning. This is an area that the school has identified and has started work to improve, especially by strengthening the leadership of this phase. However, many of the changes that have been made are relatively recent and have not yet had sufficient impact.

Children enter the school with mixed early experiences and skills that are close to those normally expected for three- and four-year-olds. They make broadly satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage so that, by the time they enter Year 1, most achieve the targets expected of their age. Progress accelerates in Years 3 to 6. In Key Stage 1, children make good progress. Standards at the age of seven have been in line with national averages in recent years but children's current work and assessments indicate that they are set to rise further this year. In Key Stage 2, and particularly in Years 5 and 6, children often make excellent progress and reach standards that are above average overall. This is because a growing number of children are exceeding the expected standards for their age. In relation to their starting points, achievement over time is good. Children who need additional support and those from minority ethnic groups make similar progress to their classmates.

The school promotes children's personal development exceptionally well, because it specifically focuses on this area in many school activities, including governors' meetings. Children enjoy coming to school enormously and their behaviour is excellent. Children say they feel safe and think there is no bullying at all. Many have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and particularly enjoy physical exercise. The midday staff have introduced 'Huff Puff' physical activities at lunchtimes and the recent Healthy Lifestyle show was extremely well received by children. Staff provide excellent opportunities for children to take on responsibilities in and around the school. Older children act as monitors at play and lunchtimes and the buddy system is effective in encouraging older and younger children to work together. Children particularly enjoy being part of the house system and wear house badges with pride. These features enable children to become 'team players' and grow in confidence, which helps prepare them extremely well for their future. There are clear strengths in the moral and social development of the children, which is excellent. However, staff sometimes miss opportunities in assemblies to develop spirituality further. The school strongly discourages holidays in term time, but not all parents support this push. Consequently, attendance is average.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and there is outstanding practice, especially in upper Key Stage 2. Teachers have excellent relationships with their classes and very high

expectations of behaviour, which ensures lessons are conducted in a calm and purposeful manner. Staff plan carefully in year groups and for mixed age classes. Work is usually well matched to the different abilities of children. However, some staff could expect even more of children and at times the overuse of worksheets limits how they set out and record their answers and ideas. The curriculum is good with excellent enrichment activities. The wide range of extra-curricular opportunities supports learning very well. There has been considerable improvement in provision for information and communication technology, which is now well established as a learning tool across the school. However, the curriculum for the Foundation Stage is no more than satisfactory.

The care, guidance and support for children are outstanding. Pastoral care, including for those in the Nursery, is a strength and praised by parents. The school has excellent links with a wide range of external groups who help support children, including those with specific needs. Children of all ages feel that staff look after them well and there is always someone to turn to. Procedures to safeguard learners' welfare are very thorough. During the past year, the school has focused upon improving marking and feedback to children. The marking of children's work is exemplary and the excellent use of individual and group targets ensures that all children can clearly identify what they have to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management are good. Senior staff have an excellent vision for improvement because the monitoring undertaken by leaders at all levels is thorough and results in accurate identification of areas for further development and effective school improvement planning. However, with only limited knowledge of, and expertise in, early years education the leadership team has been a little slow to identify weaknesses in the Foundation Stage. Governance is good. Governors have a standard programme of formal meetings but there are well-developed focused visits by governors and excellent features in the recording and actioning of priorities. Overall, the school is close to, but not yet achieving, its aim of providing an outstanding education for all, but with an excellent leadership team and a new and very able, enthusiastic Foundation Stage leader, the school is exceptionally well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Nursery having often attended the on-site pre-school group. The school took over management of the pre-school earlier this year and money and time have been spent to good effect to link these two groups and improve the learning environment. Children make broadly satisfactory progress as they move through the Foundation Stage but this is considerably better in the Reception class than in the Nursery. In the Nursery, the indoor and outdoor environment has improved since the recent inspection of the pre-school provision and is satisfactory, though somewhat unimaginative. In Reception, the more stimulating environment does much to encourage speaking and listening skills and personal and social development alongside other areas of the development. Teaching, learning and the curriculum are satisfactory overall, although in both groups, staff miss the opportunities to model and use key vocabulary. The pastoral care of the children is very good and parents are confident that their children are well cared for and very happy. However, the key weaknesses are in the unreliability of initial assessments and a subsequent lack of activities that are challenging enough to promote good progress. The new Foundation Stage leader has huge enthusiasm and clear commitment to bringing about improvements but, as yet, with limited impact.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment and overall provision in the Foundation Stage to ensure all children make the best possible progress.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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	3
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	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	2
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	3
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	1

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
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

24 April 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Aycliffe Drive Primary School, Hemel Hempstead HP2 6LJ

Thank you very much for looking after me when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed meeting you in lessons, at lunchtime and when I spoke to the school council. I think the school provides a really good quality of education for you.

These are some of the best things about your school:

- Mrs Green and the staff work really hard, including with people outside the school, to keep on improving things for you.
- The staff look after you very well so you are safe and happy.
- You enjoy coming to school and most of you try hard and want to do well.
- You older children do well in national tests because you are very well taught.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you are very sensible when you do things to help others in and around the school.
- The staff mark your work very well and use targets with you so that you know exactly what you need to do to improve.

This is what that I think should be improved:

- Staff in the Foundation Stage could check more carefully what the children know and can do, so that activities are not too hard or too easy.

To help your school go on improving, please try to make sure you come to school regularly and remember to eat healthily.

Yours sincerely

Sue Hall Lead inspector