

Cherry Tree Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117339
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312577
Inspection date	25 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Best

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	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Chappell
Headteacher	Ms Jessie Bruce
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2002
School address	Berry Avenue Watford Hertfordshire WD24 6ST
Telephone number	01923245490
Fax number	01923230710

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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 following issues:

- standards in writing;
- the way in which the school uses information about what pupils know and can do to set them targets and help them improve their work;
- the school's action to improve attendance; and
- the involvement of different members of the school community in monitoring and evaluating its work.

Evidence was gathered from observing lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and the school's documentation, and discussions with pupils, parents, staff and governors. 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, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools. Pupils come from a mixture of privately owned and rented houses and flats. The proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school other than at the usual times is higher than average and the school roll is rising. The proportion of pupils taking free school meals is below average. Nearly half the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above average, and many are at the very early stages of their learning.

Children attend the Nursery on a part-time basis before commencing full-time in the Reception class. When they start in the Nursery, children's skills and experiences are well below those expected for their age, with communication and language skills particularly low. The proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with statements of special educational need, are broadly average.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have taken up their appointments since the last inspection. The school holds the 'Healthy School' and 'Activemark' awards.

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 and improving school which provides well for its pupils. Pupils agree and a recent arrival says: 'I've made lots of friends and the teachers are nice.' Parents report that children feel safe and happy. The school strives to be, a family-friendly, caring school. It rightly identifies its overall effectiveness as good, and it provides good value for money. Staff and governors have responded well to the changes the school has faced since the last inspection, especially the increasingly diverse needs of pupils joining the school, both in the Nursery and at other times. The school's capacity to improve further is good. Through good provision for their care, support and guidance, staff successfully promote pupils' confidence as learners and their development as individuals. At the heart of this lie good leadership and management. The headteacher, ably supported by her deputy, actively promotes high expectations in all aspects of school life. Staff enthusiastically encourage the school's 'can do' approach and pupils rise well to the challenges they meet.

Pupils make good progress in their academic work and achieve well because teaching is good and their learning effective. There is good provision for children in the Foundation Stage and they make good progress, from increasingly lower starting points. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1. In spite of a drop in attainment on entry to Year 1 as a consequence of children's lower starting points, the school's results in the tests at the end of Year 2 have been maintained. Overall standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are slightly below the national average, with those in mathematics higher than in reading and writing. Pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress and achieve well. Over a third of pupils who took the statutory tests at the end of Year 6 last summer joined the school after the start of Year 3. A high proportion of this year group had learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their overall standards were just above the national average. Although the 2007 results were lower than those for 2006, the overall trend in standards at the end of this key stage is rising. The school is particularly pleased with the recent science results, which were above the national average, attributing pupils' success to the increased emphasis on practical activities and investigations. In English, overall results were average; pupils, particularly boys, did better in reading than writing. In mathematics, results were average. Across the school, variations in the progress and standards of boys compared with girls are not generally significant. Pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve well. Those for whom English is an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress as a result of the good support they receive from school staff and visiting teachers.

Staff plan and provide well for pupils' differing needs. Lesson introductions are brisk and teachers ensure that pupils are well aware of what they are going to learn in each lesson. These learning goals are clearly displayed and regularly referred to in questions and discussions as lessons progress. Occasionally, those set for the more able, gifted or talented pupils are not sufficiently challenging. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards in lessons and pupils participate well in sharing ideas and answering questions. They apply themselves well to their work and willingly help each other. A good range of learning and other opportunities support pupils' academic and personal development. The school follows the national schemes for teaching literacy and numeracy, and staff provide regular opportunities for pupils to use their information and communication technology skills to support their learning across the curriculum. Although the school has identified pupils' communication and language development as a priority throughout the school, links between subjects to help improve pupils' writing are not yet fully established. Pupils receive good guidance from staff and each other as to how

they can improve their work. They take these comments seriously and this is making an important contribution to raising standards further. The school makes effective use of information from tests and other assessments to set challenging and realistic targets, and has good systems to monitor pupils' progress toward these. This is improving the identification and support for those who need additional help at an earlier stage.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. A good range of visits and visitors successfully support their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour in and around the school is good. Pupils know how to keep safe and say that staff deal promptly with their concerns. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and have recently achieved a national 'Healthy Schools' award. Discussing the recent introduction of a 'water only' policy for drinks, one member of the school council observes: 'Behaviour after lunch is better - people are much calmer.' Pupils make a good contribution to the community through their responsibilities in school and charity fund-raising. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Although the school has good procedures in place to promote regular attendance and punctuality, attendance is below the national average because a significant minority of parents take their children on holiday, sometimes for extended periods, during term-time.

The governing body is well led and holds the school to account effectively. Governors are supportive of the school, and contribute a rich mix of skills and experience. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet the latest guidance and all statutory requirements are met. Procedures to tackle discrimination and promote equal opportunities are good and implemented effectively. Senior staff collect a lot of information about how well the school is performing and identify strengths and shortcomings. The targets in the school improvement plan reflect its priorities for development. The school is developing its self-evaluation procedures but some subject leaders, governors and other stakeholders (including parents and pupils) are less involved than others in monitoring and evaluating its work.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When they start in the Nursery, children's skills and experiences are well below those expected for their age, with communication and language skills particularly low. The school's records show a significant downward trend in the skills and experiences children bring to school. The well-managed provision in the Foundation Stage provides children with a rich range of practical learning activities. The Reception and Nursery classes share an exciting and stimulating outdoor area, with a covered paved area giving all-year-round access to play equipment and large-scale activities. Classrooms are well organised to provide children with plenty of opportunity to take part in individual and group activities. The smooth transition from part-time to full-time education is underpinned by staff working closely together throughout the year. Children make good progress, with many making outstanding progress in their personal and social development. Nonetheless, many children are still working towards the expected levels in their communication, language and literacy development, and in their mathematical development, by the time they start Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement in writing in English and in how writing is used in other subjects throughout the school.

- Improve attendance by reducing the number of school days missed by pupils taking term-time holidays.
- Increase the role of subject leaders, governors and other stakeholders in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

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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 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	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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	3
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

26 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cherry Tree Primary School, Watford, WD24 6ST

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed hearing about all the exciting things you do in school and how much you enjoy school. I congratulate you for achieving the 'Healthy Schools' award and I am pleased to hear your support for the recently introduced 'water only' rule for drinks. You behave well in lessons and around the school and know how to keep yourselves safe. You help each other in lessons and help people outside the school by fund-raising for charities.

You work hard in lessons and make good progress. The staff take good care of you and want you to do well. They expect a lot of you but you certainly rise to the challenge - well done! Your teachers make sure you know what you are going to learn and they regularly check that you understand what you are doing. I am pleased to see that you know what you need to do to improve your work and that you appreciate the valuable help you get from adults and each other. I am glad to hear about the exciting things you do in science and that you make regular use of computers to help you learn.

I have suggested three important things for the school to do to improve further. The first one is to help you improve your writing, not just in English lessons but also in other subjects. Next, it is very important that your parents ensure you spend as much time as possible in school rather than taking you away on holiday during term-time. Thirdly, your headteacher already keeps a close check on how well you are all doing but it would be great if other people - including teachers, governors, parents and yourselves - could be more involved in helping the school plan for the future.

You have an important part to play in all this. Cherry Tree school is a 'can do' school and you're just the people to do it! Keep working hard and enjoying school.

Yours truly

Mike Best

Lead inspector