

Hertingfordbury Cowper C of E Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117563
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312654
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Milton

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jeremy Bartlett
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Richards
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Birch Green Hertford Hertfordshire SG14 2LR
Telephone number	01992 583239
Fax number	01992 505656

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This small village school includes a Nursery whose children form part of a Foundation Stage class together with Reception children. Although some of its pupils come from the local village, a significant proportion come from nearby towns. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. A very low proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well below average. The school has the Active Mark, the Healthy Schools Award and the Hertfordshire Quality Mark for the Foundation Stage.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hertingfordbury Cowper is a good school. It has some outstanding features as well as aspects for further improvement. One parent wrote: 'This is a lovely school with a committed head and teachers. It doesn't get much better than this!' The highly professional headteacher provides excellent leadership and all staff are working hard to make the school even better. Accurate self-evaluation and extremely thorough analysis enable the school to identify the key priorities for improvement, and actions are then taken to bring about rapid improvement as the school is ambitious for all pupils to achieve as well as possible.

Pupils enter the Nursery and Reception classes with the knowledge and skills typically expected for their ages. They make good progress during each stage of the school and reach exceptionally high standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. They have attained these very high standards over the last five years. Standards are also high in music, dance and swimming. All pupils make consistently good progress, including the gifted and talented and those with particular learning, behavioural or sensory needs, because of all aspects of the school's provision and their own outstanding personal development. Pupils' attendance is above average, their behaviour is exemplary, they really enjoy school and are very keen to learn. They lead extremely healthy lives because they eat sensibly and participate keenly in sport, drama and dance. The adults take exceptional care of the pupils who, in turn, take very good care of each other. Pupils feel secure, and report that staff resolve any isolated incidents of bullying quickly.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons make effective use of the interactive whiteboards, and teaching assistants are used well to help pupils learn in all parts of lessons. There is some outstanding marking when pupils receive precise feedback on how to improve their work as well as being involved in assessing their own work, but this very good marking is not consistent in all classes.

The outstanding curriculum includes a wide range of very well-attended clubs, regular visits and visitors, residential journeys for all older pupils, and regular opportunities for creative and active learning. As well as the strength of what is taught in English, mathematics and science, pupils have rich learning opportunities in physical education, music and dance. There is a very good range of provision for pupils who have learning needs for literacy and numeracy, communication needs, behavioural and emotional needs, and sensory needs. The care, guidance and support of pupils is outstanding. The progress of individual pupils and particular groups of pupils is monitored thoroughly in reading, writing and mathematics, and good actions are taken to help any pupils who are underachieving.

Leadership and management are good. The school sets challenging targets for each pupil's progress and carefully monitors progress towards these. These challenging targets are usually achieved. Governance is effective, and the governing body has played a particularly important role in the improvements to the buildings. The leadership of subjects has improved a great deal but is not yet consistently good for all subjects. The school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress and achieve well during both the Nursery and Reception years. Almost all exceed the national goals set for children by the time they start Year 1. The well planned curriculum covers all of the areas of learning, and a range of assessments helps to ensure that work is well matched to the children's differing learning needs. There is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities, and effective use is made of both the classroom and outside learning areas. However, use of the outside area is dependent on the weather as it lacks a canopy. The adults work effectively as a team, and teaching and learning are good. Pupils work with a good range of resources that are organised into different learning areas. There are very good relationships amongst pupils and new children settle quickly to start learning confidently and enjoyably. There are also very good relationships between adults and children, and adults interact effectively with children to extend their learning. Plans are being implemented to use computers to record assessments and this will make it easier to monitor children's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve subject leadership so that it is at least good for all subjects, and ensures that all aspects of marking are consistently good.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils start Year 1 with above average standards. They make good progress during Key Stage 1 and achieve significantly above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Good progress continues during Key Stage 2. So that standards are consistently high by Year 6. A group of pupils choreographed their own dance and their performance was assured and imaginative. In music, an older class sang beautifully in two parts without accompaniment. Pupils develop their information and communication technology skills year on year, but their standards do not yet match those in English, mathematics and science. The school has improved its provision because it identified slower progress by some more-able boys and girls and, as a result, their progress has improved significantly. Pupils with learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy receive a good range of effective support and most are making good progress. Pupils with more complex learning needs and disabilities who receive the support of external specialists have some very good provision. As a result, most of these make good progress and a few make very good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils love coming to school and are thirsty for knowledge. Strong Christian principles provide a very effective foundation for pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils appreciate well how people from different faiths and countries live. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep fit, healthy and safe. Pupils are particularly mature, sensible and aware of how their actions may impinge on the enjoyment or learning of others. They care for and support each other very effectively. Pupils make an impressive contribution to the school's smooth running by taking a very wide range of duties, such as play leaders, councillors, class 'guardians' or mediators, and house captains. They contribute really significantly to the wider

community by singing and dancing at local events and through their involvement with the parish church. Pupils' preparation for the next stage of their education is excellent because of their outstanding social skills and very high standards in the key skills of English and mathematics.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Common strengths of all teaching are effective classroom management that helps pupils to behave and work exceptionally well, good matching of work to pupils' differing learning needs in the mixed-age classes so that all pupils achieve well, and the effective use of talk partners which pupils say help them to learn more. In one lesson seen, there were very small weaknesses that resulted in a slight reduction in pupils' learning. For example, in one lesson the meaning of some vocabulary was not explained. Teaching is at its best when pupils assess and improve their own and other's work using specific criteria for good work, questioning keeps them on their toes and extends their thinking, and pupils have the opportunity to explore ideas and learn independently. In some classes marking is exemplary, so pupils know exactly how to improve their work and are enthused to do even better. However, this very good marking is not consistent across all classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Teachers tailor the curriculum extremely well to meet pupils' differing learning needs, including those who face difficulties with literacy and numeracy. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning because the curriculum provides plenty of opportunities for creativity and developing their investigative skills. One boy exclaimed, 'I really love science because we do lots of experiments ourselves.' The school plans very carefully for the mixed-age classes to ensure that pupils' learning in each year builds on and extends their previous learning. Projects and special events, such as the science and Caribbean weeks for the whole school and the days in one class when the curriculum focuses around socks and camping, make very interesting links between subjects and promote skills of research very effectively. There is an excellent range of clubs and outings to enliven learning and promote pupils' understanding of safe and healthy living.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff know the personal and academic needs of individual pupils extremely well. The school looks after the welfare of pupils with great care, particularly for those who are vulnerable. This high quality care helps pupils learn effectively and to thoroughly enjoy school. There is a very effective system of merits with a weekly celebration assembly. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place and meet requirements. Pupils and parents are confident that pupils' health and safety are paramount to the school. One parent wrote that she would like to 'highlight the sensitivity and professionalism' of staff in looking after her child. Teachers are extremely accurate in monitoring the progress of each pupil. As soon as any pupil is not achieving as well as they should, the school is quick to find effective ways to bring them back on track.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's accurate self-evaluation involves parents, pupils, staff and governors. It is used well to identify the correct key priorities for improvement that are included in the well structured, rigorous and robust improvement plan. The school monitors and improves its performance well, for example, the quality of teaching and provision for pupils who face learning difficulties and disabilities. There are very good records for the monitoring of lessons but records for the scrutiny of pupils' recorded work are ineffectively evaluative. The leadership of subjects has improved significantly and although most subjects have their own good quality self-evaluations and improvement plans, leadership of some subjects is not fully developed. The governing body agrees and effectively monitors the school improvement plan, monitors pupils' progress and holds the school to account for the quality of education it provides.

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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	1
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	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	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?	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?	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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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

30 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hertingfordbury Cowper C of E Voluntary Aided Primary School, Hertford SG14 2LR

We really enjoyed visiting your school and meeting Mrs Richards, some governors, the staff and many of you. We enjoyed talking to you in lessons, at lunch and in meetings with the school council and members of Year 6. We particularly enjoyed hearing the excellent orchestra play in assembly, hearing class 5 sing so beautifully after the end of their English lesson, and seeing the team of pupils dance so imaginatively before going to perform in Hertford.

It was interesting to hear from you that you like school a great deal, that it is a very friendly place, that you feel safe, that the school council does a good job in contributing to the improvement of the school, and that learning partners help you to get more work done in lessons.

You make good progress with your learning right through the school because of the good teaching and the interesting work you do with plenty of visits and visitors. By the time you leave the school, your standards are very high in English, mathematics, science, music, dance and swimming. The school helps you to grow in self-confidence and to develop many personal skills. Many of you have responsibilities on school and class councils, as 'guardians', on the 'buddy bench' and as the 'duty crew'. All the adults take exceptional care of you, and you care and support each other. The school is well led and managed. Mrs Richards and the staff have been improving the way that teachers lead different subjects and we think it is good that they plan to continue with these improvements.

You can help the school to improve even more by continuing to behave and work so well, by thinking carefully about how you assess your own work, by acting on your teachers' comments about how to improve, and keeping up your good levels of attendance.

With all good wishes for the rest of the school year,

Mike Milton

Lead inspector