

Whitehill Primary School

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	121790
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	314101
Inspection dates	19–20 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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	445
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Steen
Headteacher	Jane Porter
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2007
School address	Sun Lane Gravesend DA12 5HN
Telephone number	01474 352973
Fax number	01474 329007

Age group	3–11
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to factual inaccuracy

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school. The school opened in January 2006 following the amalgamation of the existing infant and junior schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than is found nationally as is the proportion eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils who leave or join the school mid year is high and many of those joining the school have little written or spoken English. The school was given a Notice to Improve at the time of its last inspection in January 2007, particularly to increase achievement in English, mathematics and science so pupils reach higher standards in their work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Whitehill provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. It has improved recently, particularly in the way pupils now make better progress in their work. In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. One parent realistically noted, 'I feel there is always room for improvement, but I am very happy with the progress of my children.'

Senior leaders have injected renewed vigour into the efforts of staff and governors to accelerate the school's improvement since the last inspection. As a result of the focus on improving teaching, learning and checking their progress more carefully, pupils' achievement is now satisfactory. Despite recent improvement, leadership and management are satisfactory rather than good, because other initiatives such as raising pupils' attainment and attendance further are still not yet fully effective. Children have a good start to school in the Nursery and Reception classes and make up ground quickly, but are still below average when they start in Year 1. In the remainder of the school, their progress, whilst generally satisfactory, is uneven. This is due partly to some variations in the quality of teaching and some weaknesses in curriculum planning. Pupils' standards when they leave are still below average but are higher than they were when the school was inspected in January 2007. The short term focus to improve pupils' English skills has been partly successful, but pupils' writing is often too brief and narrow in content. Pupils' mathematical skills have improved, mostly the result of well focused teaching. Science knowledge, whilst improving, is hampered as pupils do not have enough open ended investigative work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well due to the close and skilful support they receive. The increasing number of pupils joining the school at the early stages of learning English also achieve well for similar reasons.

A good atmosphere pervades the school as most pupils behave very well, both within classrooms and in the playground. Most enjoy school and their attendance is satisfactory, but a small number of parents find it difficult to ensure their children attend regularly. This hinders their children's progress. The good care and guidance the school provides help to ensure pupils' personal qualities and general well-being develop effectively. As a result, pupils say they feel safe, know who to turn to for help, and report there is little bullying. Staff keep a close check on pupils' progress, which means that the good start made in the Foundation Stage is being built upon more effectively. However, pupils' awareness of targets to guide their own learning is not developed well enough as pupils have little say in forming or setting them.

A suitable range of curricular activities helps broaden pupils' horizons and develops their personal qualities. Topic based work that combines different subjects is increasingly liked by pupils. As one remarked, 'In design and technology, we really liked designing, making and then testing our model shelters to destruction!' There is a good range of activities before and after the school day to enhance class work. Good links with others in the local community help broaden pupils' awareness and involvement with local events. Effective use is made of professionals beyond the

school to support pupils' well-being. The governors are increasingly becoming aware of the areas that need improving so they can challenge the senior leaders to improve the school's effectiveness further. Given the rate of improvement since the last inspection, the school has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children have a smooth start to school in the Nursery, as they are encouraged to settle in quickly and become independent because of effective teaching. Well organised activities in the Reception classes develop children's abilities across all areas of learning, particularly social and emotional development. Over half of the children are on track to reach the expected goals for learning, but overall standards will remain below average. This reflects good progress given their low starting points. Children are eager to learn because the curriculum is well organised to make sure that learning is enjoyable. Independence, number and language skills are generally taught well through simple games that stimulate their learning effectively. The outside activity area is used regularly to extend their physical and cooperative skills. Parents are especially pleased, as one wrote, 'My son enjoys the Nursery as the staff are very friendly, active and polite.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils in Years 1 to 6 more guidance in improving the breadth and length of their writing, particularly in subjects other than English.
- Devise more motivating activities in science so pupils in Years 1 to 6 want to solve problems using a wider range of investigative approaches.
- Ensure pupils are involved in setting their own targets for learning so they are really motivated to achieve them.
- Help some parents to understand more fully the importance of sending their children to school regularly.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement has improved since the last inspection. It is now satisfactory, given their low starting points. By the time pupils leave, their standards are below average in English, mathematics and science, but have risen since the last inspection. In the Nursery and Reception classes, most pupils make good progress in gaining independence and basic skills. In Years 1 to 6, pupils' written work, whilst improving, is often too brief or narrow in ideas, particularly within other subjects. In mathematics, pupils' progress has shown the most improvement. In science, pupils enjoy practical work, but activities are not planned well enough to foster their investigation skills. The progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good as the school identifies their needs accurately and provides close support. Pupils who are learning English as an additional language also make good progress for similar reasons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development has improved since the last inspection. Pupils are proud of their school, knowing that things have changed for the better. Children in the Foundation Stage settle in quickly and like school. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well. This helps ensure that their behaviour and attitudes are good. As a result, they

say they feel safe. Although pupils enjoy school and their attendance is satisfactory, some parents find it difficult to understand the importance of their children attending regularly. Pupils say there is little bullying or racism. Pupils like being involved in influencing improvements and the school council is active in suggesting ideas. Simple opportunities for pupils to set up their own mini enterprises help foster their preparation for later life, but their relatively lower level of basic skills means this aspect is satisfactory rather than good. Most pupils take regular exercise, aided by a number of sport based extra-curricular clubs. Many say they eat what is best for them so they stay healthy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching has improved since the last inspection because more lessons are taught well. However, there are still some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between classes so it is typically satisfactory rather than good. Most pupils are keen to learn because teaching promotes good relationships and provides collaborative activities to promote discussion. Teachers use audio-visual whiteboards to enliven learning, but some lessons do not capitalise on pupils' natural curiosity to investigate problems, particularly in science. Occasionally, teachers' explanations become laboured, causing the pace of the lesson to slow and pupils then become distracted. A growing strength is the consistent teaching of reading and spelling, but not enough writing is expected from some pupils, particularly within subjects other than English. Those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those just starting to learn English, make good progress as they benefit from close support, often by well briefed teaching assistants. Teachers' marking is generally regular and helpful, but this productive marking is not seen in all year groups and is less effective in mathematics and science.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is starting to become more creative in its planning so that pupils see connections between subjects to aid their learning. However, the school's aspirations to see this in every class or year group are hampered by the need for pupils to make up ground because of their underachievement in basic skills or previous gaps in their learning. Planning extends pupils' English skills well by using drama and multimedia approaches, but some writing activities do not demand enough in their content. Simple reminders, often displayed in classrooms and around the school, promote pupils' general approach to thinking skills. In science, pupils enjoy their practical work, but their investigative work is not sufficiently open ended so they can devise their own approaches. Computer based activities are integrated well in other subjects. The school fosters pupils' health education and healthy eating initiatives well and promotes their activity levels through class based games lessons and by taking part in sports based clubs before and after school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school works hard to keep pupils safe in school. Staff care closely for pupils, who appreciate that they can get help quickly when they need it. The school meets the current requirements for safeguarding pupils. All staff are well trained in health and safety aspects. The school's

focus on the community it serves makes it popular with parents, particularly those children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are learning English as an additional language. The school keeps a close eye on those pupils who struggle with difficult home circumstances. The school has established close links with many families and carers, and the family liaison officer provides a good focal point for information and support. The school has good relationships with outside agencies, particularly in enhancing its support for vulnerable pupils. Procedures for keeping an eye on pupils' progress are good. The use of whole class targets for pupils, whilst partly successful, is not fully effective because pupils are not involved sufficiently in forming them. This reduces their motivation to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, senior leaders have focused with some success upon improving the quality of teaching and keeping a closer eye on pupils' progress. These closer checks are holding teachers to greater account for the progress of pupils in their class. Leadership and management are satisfactory rather than good because, whilst the monitoring of teaching and pupils' work is regular and leads to some improvement, some inconsistencies remain between classes and subjects. This is because the key areas to improve are not always clear as so much information is collected. Senior leaders have used their accurate self-evaluation to set sensible priorities for improvement and targets for action. This includes the views of parents who were concerned at the changes in staff and site security. Governors give the school a good sounding board for ideas, although their focus has been on English and mathematics at the expense of developing a wider view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This means their role as critical friends to the school is not fully effective.

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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?	3
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

21 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitehill Primary School, Gravesend DA12 5HN

Thank you for making us feel welcome at your school when we visited it recently. The school is changing for the better and now provides you with a satisfactory standard of education.

Here are some of the things we found out

- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes settle in well and quickly feel at home.
- You said you feel safe and all the staff make sure that you do.
- You make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science, and are getting nearer to the standards expected in your work.
- Teachers often make lessons interesting and enjoyable for you, but you do not always have enough investigative work to make subjects like science really exciting and meaningful.
- You know about keeping fit and active and most of you are trying to eat a healthy diet.
- Most of you behave sensibly around the school and in lessons.
- Your involvement with charities and local events and church services help you to think about others.
- The headteacher, staff and governors work together well. They have helped you make faster progress but there is still more to be done, such as making sure all lessons are taught really well.

We have asked the school to do four things

- Help you to write longer pieces of work using a wider range of ideas and to use your writing skills in other subjects.
- Plan lessons in science that really stretch your thinking and give you exciting activities that might make you say, 'Awesome, I really enjoyed that.'
- Involve you more in setting your own targets so you are keener to achieve them, which will help your learning.
- Help some of your parents and carers to make sure that you come to school every day.

Best wishes Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge Lead inspector

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Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge
Lead inspector