

# Fir Tree Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123071
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	314479
<b>Inspection dates</b>	31 January –1 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mary Sinclair

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	169
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ms L Pebworth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms L Ryman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 March 2004
<b>School address</b>	Radnor Road Wallingford OX10 0NY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01491 836341
<b>Fax number</b>	01491 834918

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<b>Age group</b>	7-11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school is smaller than average and many pupils are from advantaged home circumstances. Fewer pupils than usual take free school meals. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average, but is average for those with statements of special educational need. There have been many changes to the teaching staff in the last year.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education and has an ethos which promotes and celebrates achievement. As a result, pupils' behaviour is exceptionally good and they are keen to learn. Relationships are good and pupils feel safe. Parents say 'Fir Tree is a happy and exciting school', and 'I feel very fortunate that my child has been able to attend this school'. These comments reflect parents' confidence in the school. This has been sustained, despite a challenging period of staff instability in the last twelve months, because the headteacher and governors managed a difficult situation well. The school was clear that its priority was to improve the quality of teaching. This set a clear direction and generated a momentum for improvement that has halted a downward trend in results. Standards have started to rise and pupils are now making satisfactory progress.

The school recognised that its self-evaluation process had not been rigorous enough to identify all the steps required to bring about improvement and took action to improve this. Systems are now in place to assess pupils regularly and to track their progress in English and mathematics. This information helps teachers to identify pupils who are underachieving and require additional support to make the progress expected. The school has forged good links with the local authority and outside agencies to develop strategies to drive standards up and to address pupils' specific needs. These initiatives have helped to raise standards to the national average by the end of Year 6. Teachers set class targets, but do not set personal targets. This is not helping the pupils to understand each stage of their learning.

Monitoring and evaluation revealed that teaching was not sufficiently well matched to pupils' needs to enable them to make good progress and reach high standards. To address this issue, the headteacher developed her role as lead teacher, helping teachers to use assessment information effectively to plan lessons that build on pupils' earlier learning. This has increased the pace of learning in many lessons. Despite this, teaching is not consistent enough to ensure good, steady progress for all pupils because some teaching skills are underdeveloped.

The school is developing its satisfactory curriculum to make it more engaging and relevant, particularly for boys and more able pupils, who were not making the progress expected. Links between subjects have been strengthened and exciting opportunities provided for pupils to develop their problem solving skills through real-life situations. However, curriculum coordinators do not have sufficient opportunities to monitor and evaluate the curriculum to gauge its effectiveness in raising standards and to identify areas for further development. The actions taken to address issues raised at the last inspection and the impact of recent initiatives demonstrate the school's satisfactory capacity to make the necessary improvements.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Develop teaching skills to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good.
- Enhance the role of all coordinators to broaden the drive for improvement.
- Raise achievement by ensuring that pupils are set challenging personal targets.

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**

Attainment on entry has risen in the last two years and is now above average. Pupils achieve satisfactorily throughout the school. Standards fell at the end of Year 6 between 2004 and 2006, because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. National test results show that standards improved significantly in 2007. This has been sustained as pupils are on course to reach standards that are in line with those expected by the end of Year 6. One reason for this improvement was the introduction of an effective system to track pupils' progress. Early identification of underachieving pupils has helped teachers to take prompt action to address their needs. In 2007, standards in English showed a significant improvement over the previous year because the school had focused upon improving the quality of pupils' writing. Assessment data indicates that the school is on track to consolidate its recovery in standards at the end of Year 6, aided by improvements in reading, following the introduction of well-targeted support programmes. Good support from teaching assistants helps pupils with moderate learning difficulties to make satisfactory progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is exemplary and the school's caring ethos makes pupils strongly aware of the needs of others. Attendance is above average and pupils enjoy lessons. Pupils say that they feel safe and find adults very approachable if they have any concerns. They get on well with each other and with adults. Pupils understand well the need to eat healthily and to take regular exercise. They have a voice in the compilation of lunch menus and they take turns to run the healthy snack bar. School council representatives are enthusiastic about their roles and keen to represent the views of others. Pupils' personal development is enhanced through good links with the local and wider community. For example, the choir and orchestra perform at a local day centre while Year 4 pupils learn about life during World War II from those in the community who experienced the war. The school hosts an annual visit from Belarus and contact is maintained throughout the year. As a result of the wide range of their experiences, and their enthusiastic involvement, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teachers have benefited from the headteacher's support in classrooms. There is a positive climate for learning in all classes and teachers have clear expectations for behaviour. However, teaching is not consistent enough to enable all pupils to make good, steady progress. Most teachers are clear about the purpose of each lesson and share this with their pupils but this is not a consistent feature of lessons. All teachers now use assessment effectively to identify appropriate starting points for each lesson that engage pupils. Most provide pupils with a well-matched sequence of tasks that move the learning forward. However, in a minority of lessons, the activities that follow do not provide manageable steps to help pupils build on what they have already learned. Teachers do not always use their skills well to show pupils how to

approach a problem or develop an idea, so that pupils know how to proceed. Pupils work well in pairs, supporting each other to develop their ideas.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum has been adapted to ensure that tasks are pitched at the right level for all pupils. Links between subjects provide interesting topics that excite and motivate the pupils. However, its implementation is too recent to gauge its impact upon pupils' achievement. Analysis of assessment information has prompted some curriculum developments to support groups of pupils. The school provides targeted additional support for pupils at risk of underachieving in mathematics, reading or writing. More able mathematicians receive greater challenge by joining older pupils in some mathematics lessons. However, the curriculum is not well balanced. The school does not allocate the recommended time to physical education. Pupils receive only one session each week. Visitors, a choir and orchestra, and a range of clubs enrich the curriculum well.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

The staff are committed to ensuring that pupils are well cared for and that the school is a safe place. The school complies with child protection and health and safety regulations. It applies its successful behaviour policy consistently and this contributes to pupils' exemplary behaviour. A comprehensive programme for personal, health and social education promotes the need for healthy eating and regular exercise. Staff work hard to improve pupils' confidence and self-esteem and encourage them to take responsibility. As one parent wrote, 'All pupils are made to feel good about themselves and their achievements'. However, teachers do not give pupils personal targets to involve them in working towards the next steps in their learning. Marking does not provide sufficient guidance for pupils to help them to improve. The school makes sound provision for pupils who have specific learning needs.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The headteacher presents a clear vision of a school where effective teaching enables pupils to make good progress and reach high standards. To facilitate this, she and the chair of governors have changed the management structure of the school and governing body. The headteacher has devolved some administrative responsibilities to the school manager, releasing time to develop her role as lead teacher. The governors established a pupils' progress working party, which involves all governors in monitoring the impact of initiatives to raise standards. The headteacher listens and consults with pupils and parents so that all feel involved in moving the school forward. The school council contribute by identifying aspects of teaching that help them to learn effectively.

Although the school's self-evaluation process is becoming more rigorous, it is not yet comprehensive. Despite this, governors have developed a good understanding of their strategic role and they hold leaders to account. The senior management team has improved systems to track pupils' progress towards their targets. This data is analysed well and teachers are accountable for the progress made by pupils. The headteacher monitors and evaluates teaching

rigorously, identifying areas for development. The impact of all these initiatives has contributed to recent improvements in standards. However, middle management is not sufficiently involved in the drive for improvement. This is because coordinators do not have sufficient opportunity to monitor and evaluate the curriculum and identify areas for development.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	3

### 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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	3

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
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	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**

13 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fir Tree Junior School, Wallingford, OX10 0NY

This letter is to tell you about the recent inspection and to thank those of you who gave up your time to talk to inspectors. It was good to see your enthusiasm for the book corner competition!

You enjoy lessons and you are enthusiastic about the extra challenges that your teachers have given you since they introduced 'The mantle of the expert'. At the moment your school is providing a satisfactory education for you but your headteacher plans to make it even better.

Over the last year, your headteacher and teachers have made many changes to give you opportunities to do well in lessons. These have helped you to make more progress in English and mathematics. We have asked teachers to teach the strategies you need to use to carry out the tasks that you are given in lessons. This will help you to make consistently good progress.

The headteacher and teachers are working together to make more improvements. We have asked them to get all teachers who have responsibilities more involved in making improvements. I know you are keen to be involved too. We have asked your teachers to set you personal targets so that you are clear about what you need to learn next. This will help you to know exactly what you need to do to make even faster progress.

We enjoyed visiting your school and hope that it continues to improve and helps you to do as well as you possibly can.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Sinclair

Lead Inspector