

Fern Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131097
Local Authority	Kingston Upon Thames
Inspection number	315716
Inspection date	25 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Christopher Gray

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	461
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jessica Palmer
Headteacher	Miss Diana Brotherston
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2004
School address	Richmond Road Kingston Upon Thames KT2 5PE
Telephone number	020 8247 0300
Fax number	020 8247 0309

Age group	3-11
Inspection date	25 June 2008
Inspection number	315716

© 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 inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: how well pupils progress in their writing skills, especially in Years 3 to 6; the effectiveness of middle managers; pupils' personal development. He gathered evidence from records of pupils' attainment, samples of pupils' past work, observations in lessons and around the school, meetings with staff, governors and pupils and an analysis of 132 responses to the parents' questionnaire. 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 larger than other schools of its type. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average though none are at the early stages of learning English. The largest group is made up of pupils from a variety of Asian backgrounds. A smaller than average proportion of pupils has a statement of education need or are on the special needs register. The largest group is pupils with specific learning difficulties. A well below average proportion of pupils is entitled to receive free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that gives its pupils an excellent all-round education. One parent described Fern Hill as, 'An excellent school, led by a head who aims to get the best from all the children through a dedicated team of teachers and assistants'.

Pupils' achievement is outstanding both in terms of their personal development and their academic progress. They begin Nursery with skills that are above those expected for their age and reach high standards in Year 2 and by the time they leave Year 6. There has been an upward trend in standards in both key stages since the last inspection, evidence of the school's outstanding capacity to improve further. The school has worked hard to get standards in writing as high as they are in mathematics and science. This has included initiatives such as inspiring boys who are reluctant writers and the use of drama to give greater depth to pupils' thought. The impact of this is seen in the rising standards in writing, and the school is set this year to have a similar number of Year 6 pupils achieving the higher Level 5 in English as in mathematics and science. Sometimes, pupils' presentation of written work suffers in their haste to get it all down. However, the quality is clear, as in this extract from a Year 6 pupil's work on Hamlet's Dilemma: 'On one hand I should just tell all about my father's murder, but I have no proof of my uncle's guilt. Mother would hate me, for she sees him as honest and true'.

Teaching and the curriculum are outstanding because they harness pupils' interest and enthusiasm; an example is seen in the development of pupils' outstanding scientific skills. A Year 6 lesson was observed where pupils were dissecting owl pellets to extract the bones of small rodents that the owls had consumed. Every pupil was absorbed in the task, hunting carefully so as not to break the bones, rinsing them and then using hand lenses to identify the parts. 'I've found a mandible', exclaimed one pupil. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes were outstanding in this lesson, despite the novelty and unappetising nature of the task (it was just before lunch).

This is typical of pupils' personal development across the school. A member of the school council summed up behaviour honestly: 'The majority are very sensible. Just occasionally a few are slightly silly'. Pupils have a mature appreciation of what is important in life, stressing the need for everyone to make up his or her own mind. 'You're your own person and you don't have to go down a path if you don't want to', said one girl. Pupils say they feel secure in school and that the 'worry box' is used really well if people need advice or help. This is a result of the school's excellent procedures for care, guidance and support. Pupils' contribution to the school is outstanding. Older pupils recently quizzed governors on their function and others were involved in interviewing applicants for a post in senior leadership. Their excellent understanding of economic well-being is illustrated by pupils' annual project to improve school life for children in a Congo primary school - they recently built a water cistern. One parent commented, 'My children have been very happy at Fern Hill. They have given them confidence and teach them right from wrong'.

Leadership and management are outstanding because they enable everyone - adults and children alike - to fulfil their potential. The headteacher and her senior team give an excellent lead. Their thorough and rigorous use of tracking data means that any underachievement is quickly spotted and remedied. Middle managers have a high level of accountability and the successful impact of their work is seen in the improved standards in writing in the Foundation Stage and across the school. This is just one example of the thorough effectiveness of the school's

self-evaluation. Governors give very good support to the work of the school and their level of involvement is high. They evaluate the success of initiatives, but their development plan does not include enough measurability in determining success.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children begin school with above average skills in personal development and aspects of number but broadly average skills in language and communication. They enjoy a rich and lively curriculum designed to meet the needs of all, resulting in outstanding teaching. During the inspection, Reception children were working on all aspects of 'piracy'. As well as role play in the pirate ship, children were writing messages in bottles. These were produced to a very high quality, then inserted into bottles for experimenting with floating and sinking. Boys particularly enjoyed digging up buried treasure in a special part of the school garden, which they then photographed to illustrate later writing. Assessment procedures are outstanding and give very detailed pictures of individuals, which are then used effectively to extend future learning. Parent 'drop ins' enable teachers and parents to work together to understand how each child learns best, and the impact of this is clear in the excellent home diaries which children and parents write. This is an example of the excellent partnerships that the school has built up. Leadership is outstanding and enables all staff to be fully involved in every aspect of children's learning, so that, by the time pupils enter Year 1, their attainment is well above expectations.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen governors' evaluation of the school's work, through the use of measurable criteria for success.

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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	1
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?	1
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?	1
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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

03 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fern Hill Primary School, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 5PE

I enjoyed my visit to your school and thank you for all the help you gave me. Even some of the very youngest children remembered my name and this made me feel very welcome.

You are clearly very fond of your school and make very good ambassadors for it. Many of your parents also wrote to say how much they appreciate all the school does for you. I found that yours is an outstanding school. Not only do you reach high standards in English, mathematics and science by Year 6, but you also are learning to be sensible and caring people. I could see this from the work you do to help an African primary school. You have an unusually large range of after-school activities and the group who met me in the afternoon were keen to tell me all about them. You take part in many competitions across the Borough; I was very interested to read the reports in the corridor of all who had taken part in the speaking competition.

The teaching is outstanding and your lessons are mostly very interesting. Drama plays a big part in helping you to write well and this is something many of you love. You all have targets and you use them well to improve; as one person said, 'The target helps because it takes you up to the next level'. Writing has been a big focus recently, and, in the main part of this report, I quote something that I found in a Year 6 literacy book about Hamlet. I wonder if you will recognise it? Sometimes, some of you need to slow down your writing in order to make it neater.

All the adults take very good care of you so that any problems you might have are sorted out. Your headteacher and all her staff run the school really well. To make it even better, I have asked the governors to devise ways of testing if their plans are successful. They give very much support to the school and, with the staff and all the pupils, make it the success it is; as one of your parents wrote to tell me, 'Fern Hill is a truly special school'.

I hope your concert went well on the night of the inspection and that you will all continue to enjoy your time at Fern Hill.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Gray

Lead Inspector