

# Palace Wood Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	135106
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	316312
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 May 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Selwyn Ward

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>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	398
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Geoffrey Garrett
<b>Headteacher</b>	Denise White
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Talbot Road Allington Maidstone ME16 0HB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 750084
<b>Fax number</b>	01622 753474

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<b>Age group</b>	4-11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Palace Wood Primary opened as a new school in January 2007 following the amalgamation of previously separate infant and junior schools. It is larger than average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. These pupils mostly need extra help with speech, language and communication. A very small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Palace Wood Primary provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The headteacher and senior leadership team have been successful in bringing two schools together and steering the new school through its first year. Parents are especially pleased with the result and they and the pupils are confident that their views are listened to and taken into account. Many point to improvements over the new primary school's first year and they are especially pleased with the school's 'welcoming family atmosphere'. Pupils greatly enjoy their time at school. They particularly like the many exciting opportunities within its curriculum and are keen and attentive in lessons. Their behaviour is exemplary and they have a very good understanding and appreciation of the need to lead healthy lifestyles. This good personal development and sense of well-being is the result of a curriculum that has helped to stimulate their interest and imagination, coupled with the good arrangements for pupils' care, guidance and support. Pupils' personal targets give them a clear guide on the points they need to focus on to improve their work. However, not all marking is as helpful. Some offers encouragement but little practical guidance on what the pupil has achieved or how they can move their work on. Children make rapid progress in their Reception Year and standards are above average by the start of Year 1. Standards are also generally above average in Years 1 to 6, with most on track to attain the nationally expected level in the current Year 6, but only an average proportion expected to attain higher levels. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and this mirrors the progress pupils make in lessons. School leaders monitor lessons regularly and their feedback to teachers has helped to improve the quality of teaching, so that an increasing proportion is good. They have not, however, focused their observations sufficiently on gauging what pupils are learning and how well they are making progress. This has contributed to a sometimes overly favourable view of the effectiveness of teaching. Teaching throughout the school is characterised by good relationships; pupils are motivated to try hard because they like and want to please their teachers. Teaching assistants are deployed well, helping those pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties, for example, to make similar progress as the others in the class. In some lessons, however, teachers do not expect enough of their pupils. This can sometimes mean pupils working at a pedestrian pace. In lessons where different work is set for pupils of different abilities, it is not always matched closely enough to their learning needs. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to evaluate their own and each other's work. Leadership and management as a whole are satisfactory. Nevertheless, the headteacher, governors and the senior leadership team in particular have set a clear direction for the school and it has come a long way in a short time. They acknowledge, however, that some of the changes are still work in progress. Arrangements for leading the development of individual subjects are already being reviewed to make them more effective. Senior leaders have a broadly accurate view of most aspects of the school and this shows the school's sound capacity for improvement.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Parents are especially pleased with the good start that their children make in the Reception Year. Several comment on how their children were helped to settle and praise staff for 'going the extra mile' so that children 'are very happy and flourishing'. Systems used to keep track of children's progress are extremely comprehensive. The well chosen mix of direct teaching and child-initiated activities helps the children to make rapid progress. They start with standards that are in line with those expected for their age and achieve standards by the end of the

Reception Year that are above average. Children's social development and their confident spoken language are especially good, while their emerging writing skills are average. Above all, children are happy in the Reception classes. As a parent explained of her son: 'He always walks out with a smile on his face, so I always know he has had a good day.'

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Focus school leaders' monitoring of lessons on how well all pupils are learning and making progress.
- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can do, so that lessons move at a faster pace, work is more closely matched to ability and pupils are more involved in evaluating their own and each other's success.
- Ensure that all marking gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. 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**

The standards attained in the national tests and in pupils' ongoing assessments reflect the satisfactory progress they have made during their time at the school. In 2007, for example, the Year 6 pupils' test scores, although above average, were only at the level to be expected given the high standards of their previous work. Their current work shows that pupils of all abilities make broadly satisfactory progress, but only a relatively modest number are expected to attain higher levels (Level 5) in the Year 6 tests. Pupils with speech and language and other learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well and helped to make similar progress to others in the class.

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

### **Grade: 2**

'We're really proud to wear this uniform.' This comment from a pupil sums up their positive attitudes and how much the pupils love their school. Pupils are friendly, polite and welcoming to visitors. They work cooperatively and are happy to help each other. Their behaviour in lessons and on the playground is excellent. Pupils want to take responsibility and influence what happens in school. Year 2 pupils are proud to be 'Helping Hands' and older pupils take their responsibilities as 'mediators' and school councillors seriously. Pupils show care for others through their support for charities and they are very keen to develop the sense of the school being 'one community'. Pupils learn how to keep safe and they say that they feel safe, although some younger pupils complain that children sometimes pass unkind remarks. Pupils all feel confident that there is someone to help them if they have problems. They are extremely knowledgeable about how to lead healthy lives and a large number of the older pupils take advantage of the many sports activities offered outside the ordinary school day. Standards achieved in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, and their good attendance, give pupils, in the words of a parent: 'a solid and substantial base from which to go to secondary school'.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Teachers get on well with their pupils and are effective at motivating them to try hard and to work with concentration. They use the interactive whiteboards well in lessons, especially in their introductions. Teaching assistants provide good support for specific pupils, and particularly those pupils with additional learning needs because of speech and language difficulties, or because they are new to learning to speak English. When teachers and pupils recap on what they have learnt previously, this provides a good platform for the learning that is to take place in the lesson. Teachers generally build on this with clear explanations and demonstrations. However, introductions to lessons can be limited to hearing answers from just some pupils to teachers' questions and this does not challenge all pupils, leaving a significant minority remaining silent and passive. There are not enough opportunities for pupils, and especially older pupils, to discuss and evaluate their work with others. Work is not always matched well enough to the different levels of ability in the class and this means that some pupils struggle to complete their work. When more able pupils finish work early, they are sometimes just given extra easier work to fill the time, rather than tasks which challenge them to make further progress.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

One of the reasons pupils enjoy school is because of the good curriculum provided for them. They particularly like the opportunities it gives them to learn through practical activities linking, for example, art with their work in history. Year 4 has so many 'Tudor portraits' on display that a casual visitor might think Henry VIII had at least 15 wives! The curriculum meets statutory requirements and contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is good use of outside expertise to enrich the curriculum, for example circus performers. Pupils also have the opportunity for residential trips which build teamwork, independence and initiative. Days focused on developing and celebrating the strengths and talents of each pupil and member of staff enable pupils to appreciate that all individuals have got talents. The school's very good outside facilities even include a stage to encourage informal performance. There is good provision for after school activities, but these are mostly for older pupils. They afford pupils an opportunity to excel in areas such as football and netball.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

The school provides a caring and supportive learning environment, which is strongly valued by parents and pupils. As one parent said: 'Palace Wood is a very caring school where every child is treated as an individual.' Pupils are very confident that they will get help if they have problems. The school provides good support for vulnerable pupils and also to their parents. However, the school has been unable to access specialist support to supplement the assistance it gives to the very small number of pupils who are at an early stage of acquiring English as an additional language. There are good systems in place to help pupils who find learning more difficult. This helps them to progress at a similar rate to their peers. Safeguarding procedures are in place and risk assessments are carried out as necessary. Procedures for tracking individual pupils' progress have improved over the past year, but the school recognises that it has further to go before these are as thorough as those in the Foundation Stage. Pupils have individual or group

learning targets in English and mathematics and these are making a positive contribution to the progress that pupils make. However, not all marking is as helpful as it could be in telling pupils how they can improve their work.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The strong direction provided by the headteacher, senior leaders and governors has been significant in helping staff to work together well on improvement and to share and benefit from each other's expertise. All staff work within an assigned team. Although senior management has correctly identified shortcomings within the current team structure, such as the leadership of subjects, these teams have been instrumental in building the teamwork necessary for further improvement. The school's own evaluation of its work is satisfactory, with key priorities being identified from this process and actions planned for the year ahead. However, not enough is being done to ensure that the evaluations of the quality of teaching focus enough on how well pupils are making progress in order to help define the areas for further development. The school is developing further processes to track the progress of pupils, which are already proving successful. Governance is good. Governors know the school well and take effective action to ensure that they see for themselves what improvements are being made. They ask relevant questions about proposed developments in the school and want to know the intended benefits arising from them. The school still holds in reserve a substantial contingency fund to cover the cost of amalgamation. Governors have agreed plans for spending this to improve facilities and benefit the pupils' education.

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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	NA
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	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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	1
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	2

### 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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<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	2
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

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

16 May 2008 Dear Pupils Inspection of Palace Wood Primary School, Maidstone, ME16 0HB  
Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. Palace Wood Primary School is giving you a satisfactory education. Some aspects of the school are good. You told us how proud you are of your school. We were delighted to see how very well behaved you are and how you all get on with, and help, each other. The children in the Reception classes get off to a good start. Although you reach above average standards in the rest of the school, you do not make quite such rapid progress as those of you in Reception. We think you could do even better if teachers made sure you always get through lots of work in lessons and that your work is always challenging. You can help too by being more involved in assessing for yourselves how well you are doing. We were pleased to see that you all have targets, and these are helping you to make progress, but we have also asked the school to make sure that marking gives you similar help in telling you what you need to do to do better. One of the reasons you enjoy school so much is that you like all the interesting things you get to do in lessons. Because the school takes good care of you, you also feel safe and secure. Staff and governors have done a good job bringing the old infant and junior schools together to create your new school. There is still more to be done, including some further improvements the school is planning to the buildings and facilities that the school has the money for and is planning for the coming year. You and your parents also told us of some of the improvements there have been already over the past year or so. To continue these improvements, we have asked school leaders to make sure that when they visit lessons they look not just at how well you are taught, but especially closely at how successfully you are learning and making progress. Best wishes, Selwyn Ward  
Lead inspector

**Annex B**

16 May 2008

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**Inspection of Palace Wood Primary School, Maidstone, ME16 0HB**

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Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Selwyn Ward".

Selwyn Ward  
Lead inspector