

Bells Farm Junior and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103383
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323811
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Alison Grainger

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	250
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	57
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Lovegrove
Headteacher	Michelle Hooper
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	8 April 2008
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bells Farm Close Druids Heath Birmingham B14 5YG
Telephone number	01216 758666
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils are White British. Although about a fifth are from other ethnic backgrounds, no pupil is at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and much higher in some year groups than others. These pupils' needs are varied, but most have moderate learning difficulties. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The school is bigger than when it was last inspected and a significant number of pupils have joined the school other than at the customary time. There have been many changes to the teaching staff since the last inspection. Three new teachers joined the school in September 2008 and two in September 2007.

In December 2007, the governing body took over the management of Little Bells Neighbourhood Nursery. The provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) includes full-day care for children under three years of age, pre-school education for children aged three to four years, and a Reception class. About a quarter of children who attend the pre-school education transfer to the Reception class each year. Other children join the school at the start of the Reception Year. The governing body managed children's centre also provides before- and after-school care and full-time care during school holidays, for older children as well as those of EYFS age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. It ensures that pupils' achievement is satisfactory and it does some significant things well. Children get off to a good start in the EYFS because of high quality care, good teaching and a stimulating curriculum. As one parent of a child in the pre-school provision said, 'I cannot thank the staff enough for what they have done for my child. He is so different now, so bright now.' Another parent with a child in the Reception class commented that her child 'has really settled in well' and that 'the children really feel at ease'. Parents are rightly delighted with the EYFS provision that has developed tremendously in recent months. Much credit for these developments is due to all the EYFS staff and to the school's senior leaders.

Care, guidance and support for pupils are good. Pastoral care is a particular strength and contributes much to pupils' good personal development and well-being, helping them to grow in confidence and self-esteem. A strong focus on values develops qualities in pupils such as respect for others and an awareness of the importance of friendship. It also ensures that the school is calm and racially harmonious. Pupils feel safe at school. They say that all staff are approachable and can be trusted should they have worries they need to share with an adult. Almost all pupils enjoy school a lot and behave well all of the time. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles well and point to the effectiveness of the guidance they are given to do so.

Children enter Nursery and Reception with skills below the level expected. They make good progress and reach average standards by the end of the Reception Year. Standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 have been below the national average in recent years and standards are below average now, particularly in writing, mathematics and science, across the school. In some year groups, the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities affects the overall standards, but there has also been underachievement in the past. Currently, pupils are making satisfactory progress. However, the school rightly recognises that progress has to accelerate if standards are to be raised.

Progress is now satisfactory in Years 1 to 6 because teaching is satisfactory. There is some good teaching and features of good teaching can be found in almost all classes across the school. Marking is good in many classes, helping pupils to improve their work. However, not all teaching is closely enough matched to all pupils' needs to give them the right level of challenge in all lessons and to promote progress at a good rate. The satisfactory curriculum also has some good aspects, such as the wide range of visits, visitors and clubs that broaden pupils' experiences. Initiatives to raise standards, such as an increased focus on basic skills in writing and mathematics, are having a reasonable effect, but subjects such as science, geography and history are not covered in enough depth to help pupils achieve well.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have promoted satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The school has moved on well in some areas. Not only has it ensured that EYFS provision is good but also, for example, it has raised the attendance rate to above average and developed information and communication technology (ICT) as a subject. These developments show that the school has sound capacity for further improvement. However, the school's evaluation of its effectiveness is too generous, particularly with regard to how teaching and the curriculum contribute to pupils' progress. The school recognises that its self-evaluation requires more rigour to help it to move forward more quickly.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children do well throughout the EYFS. The ratio of adults to children is high and each member of staff is well aware of the developmental needs of each child. Much is done to stimulate the interest of babies and toddlers in the world around them and to develop their self-image. Good progress is made in all areas of learning. Even at this early stage in the school year, it is clear that children are moving on at a rapid pace, and those in Reception are likely to reach the goals expected for their age.

Teaching is consistently good in the EYFS. All adults have high expectations of the rate at which children are capable of progressing. They interact with children in a purposeful way to promote good learning and development. The indoor and outdoor curriculum in the EYFS stimulates a real enthusiasm for learning. There is a good balance of adult-led activities and those that children select for themselves. Children with weak language skills, or who are less confident than others, are given sensitive support.

Links with parents are good and parents are given much feedback on their children's development. Arrangements for settling children in work very well, no matter at what point they join the EYFS. The same good level of care and attention to developmental needs is evident in the before- and after-school care. The nursery is efficiently led and managed. Good links are made between the provision for babies, toddlers and pre-school aged children. Links between the pre-school and Reception provision and between Reception and Year 1 are less well established to support children's seamless development, although these are beginning to come into place.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress in Years 1 to 6 and raise the standards they attain, particularly in writing, mathematics and science.
- Match teaching closely to all pupils' needs in all lessons to provide each pupil with the right level of challenge.
- Increase the depth of coverage of subjects such as science, geography and history.
- More rigorously evaluate the impact of provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, on pupils' progress.

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

In the school as a whole, achievement is satisfactory, although standards are below average, particularly in writing, mathematics and science. Not all pupils have made adequate progress in the past, but currently pupils are moving on at an acceptable rate throughout Years 1 to 6. Recently, standards at the end of Year 6 have risen to broadly average in reading. The proportion of pupils getting to the level expected for their age is increasing in writing and mathematics, although the number of pupils reaching the higher level is still low. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and this begins in the EYFS. Pupils are sensitive to the needs of others and form positive relationships. They know that each person is unique and respect others' differences. Almost all pupils are very courteous and polite. Pupils as young as those in Year 1 have a good understanding of the behaviour policy and say it is fairly implemented. Bullying is rare and pupils say that, if it does happen, 'the school gets to the bottom of it and it stops'.

Pupils' understanding of how to stay safe is good and, for example, they follow correct procedures in physical education lessons. They make a good contribution to the school community, in particular through the school council and by diligently undertaking responsibilities as school prefects. Prefects are proud of the help they give about the school and that they are recognised for having 'exemplary behaviour'. Pupils also contribute well to the wider community, for instance, by raising funds for charities. Although they have many good personal attributes, pupils' below average skills in mathematics and writing result in them being only adequately prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

While the influence of teaching on pupils' progress is satisfactory in Years 1 to 6, there are some examples of good teaching. Strengths in most lessons include the clarity with which the purpose of the lesson and activities are explained. Usually, each activity builds securely on that which has gone before. Although teaching assistants are well deployed, usually to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, teaching is not always closely enough matched to pupils' individual learning needs. This means that the level of challenge is not always right for all pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

In Years 1 to 6, there is an appropriate focus on English and mathematics. A whole-school emphasis on the basic skills is helping pupils who underachieved in the past to make up lost ground. ICT has developed well as a subject since the last inspection. However, the coverage of some subjects, such as science, geography and history, lacks the depth necessary for pupils to achieve well. Too little attention is given to practical and investigative science. A good focus on personal, social and health education contributes well to pupils' personal development and well-being. Enrichment of the curriculum is good. One parent observed that the clubs are 'just brilliant, with different subjects from building self-esteem to science and gardening'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Very good pastoral care creates a calm environment. Pupils feel well looked after and relationships between pupils and adults are characterised by mutual trust. Arrangements to support vulnerable pupils are good. Procedures for health and safety, first aid and for vetting adults who come into school are all robust. The school is a clean and welcoming environment.

Good attention is given to children's welfare in each part of the EYFS provision and in the childcare for older children. Many strong partnerships with outside agencies ensure pupils' welfare needs are met well.

The guidance to pupils on how they can improve their work is at least satisfactory in all classes and often good. Much marking is thorough and is helping to accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in Years 2, 5 and 6. Comments in pupils' books are sensitively worded and often related to their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leaders and managers give good attention to pupils' personal welfare. The assimilation of a neighbourhood nursery and childcare provision into the school has taken place smoothly. This, together with the appointment of new staff, has led to some significant improvements in this area of the school's provision. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion and is racially harmonious.

The influence of leaders and managers on pupils' academic progress is satisfactory. The headteacher has dealt in a determined way with past weaknesses in teaching. A new leadership and management structure, which has been put in place this term, has potential to speed up improvements. The new subject leaders have clear agendas for developing provision but many initiatives are still at an early stage, for example, to improve practical and investigative science. Action already taken by senior leaders, such as an increased focus on basic skills in English and mathematics, is already bringing reasonable improvement in these areas.

Governors have increased their involvement in the school since the last inspection. They are now better informed and are supportive, although their role in constructively challenging senior leaders over standards is still underdeveloped. Although the school is working on the right areas for improvement, its self-evaluation has been too generous in judging the overall effectiveness of provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, on pupils' progress. Nevertheless, the school's development since the last inspection shows that it has the necessary capacity to become more 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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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 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

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	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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

16 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bells Farm Primary School, Birmingham, B14 5YG

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school. You were very welcoming, friendly and polite. We saw that almost all of you behave well all of the time and that you enjoy school a lot. Your attendance is good. You told us that the adults look after you well and that you feel safe at school.

You know a good amount about how to stay fit and healthy. You told us that you make sensible choices about what to eat because your school gives you good guidance on this. You make a good contribution to your school through your school council and by being such sensible and helpful young people.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. Little Bells Neighbourhood Nursery is now part of your school. The babies, toddlers and children in the pre-school are making good progress in their learning and development. Reception children also make good progress.

You make satisfactory progress throughout Years 1 to 6. This is because teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory. There are some examples of good teaching and, in many classes, teachers give you good advice on how to develop your work. You have fantastic opportunities to learn new things through the clubs, visits and visitors.

The adults in your school give a lot of attention to your personal development and ensuring your well-being. They want to help you to make more progress with your work. To help, we have asked them to do these things.

- Speed up your progress and help you to do better, particularly in writing, mathematics and science.
- Match lessons more closely to your different needs so that your work is hard enough for you and makes you think.
- Cover subjects such as science, geography and history more thoroughly.
- Look more closely at how well the adults in school are helping you to learn.

Thank you once again. You can help by always doing your best.

Yours sincerely

Alison Grainger Lead inspector