

Pirton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117128
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326530
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Jones

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)	127
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Starling
Headteacher	Mrs Jeni Houghton
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Pirton Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 3PS
Telephone number	01462 712370
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school located in the village of Pirton in Hertfordshire. There are very few pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and the proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or with English as an additional language are also low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The ratio of boys to girls is uneven in some year groups. Children begin school in the Reception class of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), with abilities slightly above those expected for their age. The headteacher is also the permanent headteacher of Hexton Junior Mixed Infant School. The school has been accredited with Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Building on its achievements at the time of its last inspection, Pirton provides a good education for its pupils and shows a good capacity to continue this rate of improvement. This progress is due to the skills and abilities of those who lead and manage the school, from the headteacher and the leadership team to the active governing body. Careful management together with high aspirations and a commitment to supporting each individual child ensures that pupils achieve well. The good personal development and well-being of pupils is a priority for all staff, who know the pupils well and provide them with effective care and support. Parents are happy with the school, typically saying that the staff are, 'very approachable and willing to discuss any concerns that we have.' Pupils enjoy school and say that their 'teachers are kind and take a real interest in you as a person', reflecting their excellent relationships with staff. Behaviour and attendance is good and pupils work hard. They respect their teachers and their classmates and make a positive contribution to the school community.

Children make good progress in the EYFS, reaching standards that are above expected levels by the time they join Year 1. Pupils continue to make good progress through Key Stage 1 and reach standards that are often well above average. The rate of progress has recently improved at Key Stage 2 and is now good, so that by the time pupils leave in Year 6, standards are usually well above average. Pupils who need additional help with learning receive effective support from teachers and support staff and make good progress from their starting points. Achievement is good because of the good quality of teaching and learning and the improving curriculum. Lessons are frequently lively and interesting, made enjoyable and relevant by increasingly good links between subjects. Skills learned in information and communication technology (ICT) are used well to support overall learning. Lessons are usually well taught and occasionally outstanding, but on occasions, opportunities to develop independent learning skills such as collaborating in groups to tackle problems, are not taken. Pupils receive good guidance in lessons and through high quality teachers' marking. This is well developed in the core subjects, particularly in English, where detailed guidance regularly informs pupils of the next steps to take in their writing and has helped quicken the rate of progress.

Leadership and management are good. Governors effectively hold the school to account for its work and know the school well. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's outcomes by governors and staff are good and they have a clear view of where improvements can be made. Subject leaders are committed and hard working, and have a growing influence on driving forward school improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Reception class and standards are above average by the start of Year 1. They do well because of the good teaching and high expectations of what they can achieve. Children settle quickly into this happy and stimulating environment and the good support and staff knowledge of pupils make children and their families feel valued, secure and confident. Children regularly enjoy creative and stimulating lessons, which have a major impact on their learning. Staff evaluate children's progress in learning appropriately and plan activities to meet their learning needs well. They give particular emphasis to developing personal, social and communication skills, and pupils' personal development is excellent because staff care for their welfare extremely well and guide them very effectively. Children are encouraged to play

well independently, demonstrating a good understanding of what they are learning. The leadership of this stage of education is good. Parents are very positive about the care and support provided, and staff are currently considering how further to improve their partnership with parents.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by further developing opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge to practical situations.
- Enhance opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above, and sometimes well above average. Pupils are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding at a good rate across the key stages. At the end of the EYFS, most children reach levels of attainment that are above those expected for their age. This good rate of progress is maintained through Key Stages 1 and 2, resulting in the high standards reached. The school's effective tracking system is a useful tool. It enables support to be given promptly to pupils and ensures that they make good progress across the curriculum in relation to their capability and starting points. Very effective provision for reading results in high levels of attainment across the school. Writing has been a focus for school improvement in recent years and progress is now good across the school. Standards in mathematics have risen this year as a result of a focus on improving pupils' problem solving skills, although the school recognises there is further work to be done in this area. The high calibre of physical education provision enables pupils to reach high standards, and contributes very effectively to their excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. Those pupils who receive additional support to avoid potential underachievement or those who find learning more difficult, make good progress throughout the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils appreciate and enjoy school because of the friends they make and the strength of their relationships with teachers, who look after them so well. Attendance is good. They are eager to learn, have a clear sense of right and wrong and behave well. Pupils have a strong awareness of how to stay safe and speak with great confidence of the importance of living healthily. They show their maturity as they explore topics such as relationships and perseverance and are never afraid to ask questions to make things clearer. Pupils are confident and respond well to opportunities to implement their own ideas. They develop a good awareness of their community, particularly by making improvements to their school through the school council or by raising funds for charities. Pupils act responsibly when carrying out a range of duties independently and this makes a valuable contribution to school life. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. They are well prepared for the future and develop good literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers prepare lessons well to meet the varying needs of learners. Relationships between adults and pupils in classrooms are strong because there is a mutual respect shown. Clear learning objectives ensure that pupils know what they have to do in their work. Lessons are frequently interesting and stimulating, and this holds pupils' attention and adds to their enjoyment. Pupils learn quite well independently, although opportunities to work together in pairs or larger groups to find solutions to problems are not always taken. Teaching often includes skilful questioning to encourage pupils to think more deeply, and this keeps them interested and engaged in their work. Questioning is not as effectively used in all lessons. Marking is well developed, particularly in English. Comments clearly explain what pupils have achieved and what they need to do to improve, and this helps to engage pupils in their learning. Pupils demonstrate mature attitudes to their lessons and concentration is very good, particularly when they are actively involved in their learning. The good support offered by teaching assistants ensures that pupils who find learning more difficult make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Curriculum planning has been recently improved to provide a well-balanced range of experiences within mixed-age classes without repeating learning. Planning for a greater focus on creativity and linking many subjects of the curriculum, while at an early stage, is becoming increasingly effective in extending pupils' skills and knowledge. Pupils' personal, social and health education is well planned across all years and contributes directly to the positive outcomes in personal development. There is a good range of additional music tuition. The physical education lessons delivered by specialist sports coaches help to extend the curriculum and contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school. Take up for the wide range of sporting and other extra-curricular activities is high. These support learning well and add to pupils' enjoyment of school life. The school has made significant improvements to ICT provision in recent years and this has led to a good acquisition of associated skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a strong commitment by staff to all aspects of pupils' health, safety and welfare. The headteacher, along with the school's Business Manager, has a good oversight, ensuring the school fulfils its legal requirements. Safeguarding and recruitment procedures meet requirements and are reviewed and updated regularly, as are those for child protection. Care and support are effective. Those who need additional help or those who find learning more difficult are supported well because the school identifies such pupils quickly and continues carefully to guide their progress. The very good personal, social and health education programme effectively promotes pupils' personal and emotional development and consistently adds to their excellent awareness of how to keep fit and healthy. The school has well developed procedures for tracking and analysing progress. Although pupils have personal learning targets, these are not regularly referred to when their work is marked.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads well, with high expectations of what the school could achieve and a clear vision for its future. She is well supported by other senior leaders, although some are new to the post and have not had the necessary experience to enable them to take the lead in school improvement. Nevertheless, self-evaluation is accurate and the school's track record shows its success in identifying weaknesses and introducing measures to rectify them. For example, when Key Stage 2 standards dipped in English in 2007, the school successfully improved the quality of teaching and learning and curriculum planning. These moves proved very effective, and standards have improved impressively as a result. The school is developing links with Hexton and other schools and these links help to enhance pupils' participation in sporting rallies and various extra-curricular activities. The school promotes community cohesion well. There is a strong commitment to, and involvement in, a range of local activities and initiatives, such as the Village Fair, Hitchin Festival and the regular Pirton archaeological dig. Local people are regularly involved in a range of school events and the school provides good opportunities for pupils to learn about others from a range of faiths and ethnic backgrounds. The enthusiastic and knowledgeable governors support the school well and effectively hold it to account.

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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?	2
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	2

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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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**

14 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pirton School, Pirton SG5 3PS

Thank you for making me feel so very welcome when I visited your school recently. I would like to tell you what I think about how well you are getting on and how well your school is helping you to learn. There are many good things about your school. I was particularly pleased that:

- you get on well with each other and all the adults at school
- all of the adults in your school make sure that you are well looked after
- you have an excellent understanding of what it means to be fit and healthy
- you behave well
- you achieve high standards
- you learn a lot in lessons and make good progress because the teaching you receive is good
- all the people who help run your school make sure that you get a good education

I agree with your parents that you go to a good school. All of the adults in your school want it to be even better. I think that the most important thing to do is get even better at mathematics by having more opportunities to learn how to solve problems well. I have also asked the school to continue to support you to become independent in your learning, so that you have plenty of opportunities to investigate, research and work together in your lessons. You can help by always working hard and doing your best.

I hope that you will all continue to do well.

Ian Jones

Lead inspector