

Bernards Heath Infants' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117135
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326533
Inspection date	30 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Kathleen Yates

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	208
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	Mrs Rachael Houlden
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Thomas-Burton
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Sandridge Road St. Albans Hertfordshire AL1 4AP
Telephone number	01727 852106
Fax number	01727 774271

Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues;

- How well pupils achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The quality of teaching and learning.
- The impact of leadership and management in raising standards and achievement.

Evidence was gathered from observing work in classrooms, scrutiny of school documentation and analysis of records of pupils' attainment and progress. Discussions were held with governors, senior leaders and pupils. An analysis of the parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire was also taken into account. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors 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 the report.

Description of the school

This is an average size school which caters for children aged from three to seven years. The number on roll is rising rapidly. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision for pupils in a Nursery and three Reception classes. Numbers of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are set to increase further next term because the Nursery's capacity has been increased to 52 places. The school offers the opportunity for all children to spend a year in the Reception classes, regardless of when their birthday falls. Most parents take advantage of this.

The proportion of children from minority ethnic groups and of those who do not speak English at home is above the national average. The number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a little below average.

The school has gained the Eco School silver award and a Healthy Schools award. There is a breakfast and after school club on site that is not managed by the governing body. This is inspected and reported on separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bernards Heath Infants' School provides pupils with a good, all-round education. A very important feature of the school is the warm, secure ethos and the high quality of relationships that adults have with pupils. It is therefore no surprise that all Reception classes are full in this very popular school. Good links are made with the community, neighbouring schools and outside agencies, which the school is working hard to improve further. Children from different backgrounds and cultures work and play together in harmony. All individuals are respected and everyone's contribution is valued. There is a particularly strong partnership with parents and their attendance is high for concerts, open days and curricular events. Parents are very appreciative of the 'many excellent changes that have taken place' and are full of gratitude. All work together well to the benefit of pupils' academic progress and personal well-being in support of the school's logo, to be 'united in learning'.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy school and feel safe. This is reflected in their attendance, which is above average. School rules are implemented in a consistently positive way so that behaviour is excellent. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay fit, healthy and keep themselves safe. The actions of the school council have had a positive impact on improving the school environment, which offers pupils many active choices at playtimes. Pupils contribute well to the school community and frequently visit the junior school for plays, sports and transition events. They regularly take part in fund raising for those who are less fortunate. Community cohesion is promoted well so that pupils develop respect for others' faiths and ways of life. By the time they leave, the pupils are well prepared for moving on to the junior school as confident young people with positive attitudes and good basic academic skills.

Children achieve well and leave the Early Years Foundation Stage reaching standards that are in line with those typically found. By Year 2, standards overall have been consistently above average. This is also true for current pupils. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in discussion so that they are confident speakers. They read well and enjoy the support of parents when sharing books at home and in focused guided reading sessions in school. Consequently, achievement is good and standards are highest in reading and writing where pupils meet, and in some cases exceed, the school's challenging targets. Standards attained in mathematics, although average, have consistently been lower than in reading and writing. Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory. The school has sought outside help to address this and improving mathematics is now the top priority. All current pupils, including those who find learning difficult and those who have English as an additional language, are achieving well and making good progress overall.

Teaching is good and promotes good achievement. Expectations are high. Adults are very courteous and consistently present good role models so that there is a positive climate for learning. Adults value pupils' contributions, they listen carefully to what pupils have to say and foster their self-esteem effectively. Lessons are carefully planned to meet pupils' needs. They are often presented as a fun activity, which helps to engage and motivate pupils. The school acknowledges the need to provide more opportunities in mathematics for pupils to develop investigative approaches and to sharpen their skills in problem solving activities. Staff are beginning to make more use of assessment information to ensure their targets and planning are more precise.

The quality of the curriculum is good. A broad range of activities, promotes enjoyable learning opportunities, where pupils learn to work well together and to help one another. A wide range of visits and visitors makes learning come alive and enhances pupils' writing skills, as in the seaside project studied by Year 1. There is a high take up for the wide range of additional activities. For example, lunchtime clubs run by staff members include singing, art, construction and chess. After-school activities include 'mad science' and multi sports, where pupils receive tuition from community instructors. These make a positive contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being.

The school provides good care, guidance and support. It is outstanding in fostering pupils' pastoral development. This is because all staff understand the needs of their pupils well and have very good relationships with parents. Pupils and their parents know that any concerns they might have will be dealt with swiftly. Pupils with specific needs are targeted for extra help and skilled teaching assistants, some of whom are bi-lingual, support them well. Parents of pupils who attend school for short periods are full of praise for the warm welcome both they and their children receive. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and for their health and safety are robust. Pupils have a good understanding of their targets in reading and writing and this leads to the good progress they make. They are less familiar with their targets in mathematics.

At the heart of the school's success are the excellent leadership and management of the headteacher. This is recognised many times over in the parents' responses. She is held, quite rightly, in the highest regard by all staff, governors, parents and pupils. She has a very good understanding of where the school is now and of how to take the school forward. She fosters very good teamwork and gives a strong lead to the staff and governors. The senior leadership team provide good support. Overall, leadership and management are good. The assessment co-ordinator has worked very hard to set up an effective assessment system. She is supportive to all staff and governors who are getting to grips with how useful a tool this is. However, the system is still relatively new and has yet to become embedded, so that all staff make effective use of the data collected, both to inform their future planning and to track the pupils' progress.

Governance is good. Many governors are new to their roles. Nevertheless, they are diligent in ensuring the school spends its money wisely for the benefit of the pupils. They wholeheartedly applaud the decision of the senior leadership team to use the services of an external adviser to help raise standards in mathematics. Governors have been very involved in overseeing the building projects. They are active in challenging decisions and thus ensure the best learning environment is provided for the growing numbers of pupils. The grounds are extensive and well maintained and the managers and leaders of the school have exciting plans to improve them further.

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Self-evaluation is accurate. The school has a good track record of improvement since the last inspection and there is a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Nursery with knowledge and skills that are similar to those expected for their age, except in writing where they are a little less well developed. Achievement is good, so that by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, most children reach average standards in all areas of learning. This year many children have exceeded these levels, most notably in their literacy and numeracy skills.

Comprehensive induction procedures ensure children settle happily and thrive in a safe and secure environment. The strong partnership forged with parents helps them to be involved in supporting their children's learning. Good use is made of the remodelled indoor area and the spacious outdoor environment. They are well resourced. Transition from Nursery to Reception classes and into Year 1 is very smooth because children have regular opportunities to work and play together.

Personal development and well-being are good. Routines are firmly established so that all children are clear about the expectations adults have for them. They behave well and enjoy being at school. Learning and development are good. There is a good balance of whole class, group activities and those chosen by the children. Staff interact well with children, continually promoting their enquiry and language skills. In Reception, children are grouped by ability for daily letter and sounds lessons. This ensures that children at all levels of ability are able to work at their own pace.

Leadership and management are good. Staff work well as a team and regularly assess children's learning, carefully guiding them to their next steps. The school's assessment leader is helping to collate assessment information so that staff have a clearer overview of the amount of progress children make across the year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in problem solving and investigative approaches in mathematics, so that the standards they reach match those attained in reading and writing.
- Embed the use of the newly developed assessment system, so that all staff make effective use of the data collected to track pupils' progress and inform their planning.

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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?	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?	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	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	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 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**

1 July 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Bernards Heath Infants' School, St Albans, AL1 4AP

Mr Passant and I would like to thank you very much for the very friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching your lessons. Your views were very helpful in giving us a picture of your school.

These are some of the best things about your school

- Your headteacher is an excellent leader. All the staff, the governors and your parents know this and we agree with them.
- All the adults treat you with great respect and make lessons enjoyable. You respond well and your behaviour is excellent. Well done!
- The staff take excellent care of every one of you. Your parents are very appreciative of this and we know that you are all happy in school, get on well together and come to school as often as you can.
- You do well in your reading and writing so that you reach standards which are higher than average.
- You have a good understanding of how to keep yourselves fit, safe and healthy and of how other people's lifestyles are different from your own.

We have asked the school to make two improvements

- Give you more opportunities to investigate and solve problems in mathematics so that you will do as well in this subject as you do in reading and writing.
- Make better use of information about your progress so that teachers can plan future work that really builds on what you already know.

We agree with your parents that you are very fortunate to have such a good beginning to your life at school. We wish you well for the future and we know that when you move on you will have very fond memories of your time here.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Kathleen Yates

Lead inspector