

Peartree Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117172
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326543
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Anna Coyle

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)	129
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	Dr Paul Brewis
Headteacher	Mrs Sherie Hart
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Peartree Lane Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire AL7 3XW
Telephone number	01707 881033
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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 small primary school serves the surrounding area in which many families live in difficult socio-economic circumstances. The majority of pupils are from White British families but a high proportion come from minority ethnic backgrounds, several of whom learn English as an additional language. The main languages spoken at home are Turkish, Polish and Sesotho. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is much higher than that of other schools and many pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally low. The school has many pupils who join or leave at various times of the academic year. It has achieved the Healthy Schools award and an Active Mark award. The school opened a breakfast club in September 2008, which is run by the governing body. It is also a 'Hub' school for the extended schools' consortium in the Welwyn Garden City area.

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, which has a caring, welcoming and friendly ethos. It has experienced staffing difficulties recently during which temporary staffing, some poor attendance and pupils frequently joining or leaving the school have had an adverse effect on learning. Nevertheless, with the close support of the local authority, there are clear signs that it is improving well, and some aspects of its work are now good. Most of the issues from the previous inspection have been dealt with suitably.

Standards are well below average by the end of Key Stage 1 and many pupils have underachieved in the past. This picture is slowly improving and a rising trend can be seen over the last three years. At Key Stage 2, the most recent results show that standards are also rising and were just below national average in mathematics and science in 2008. However, standards were well below average in English. Throughout the school, handwriting and presentation skills are weak and many pupils have poor pencil grip. The school has rightly identified that this subject is an area upon which to focus. Pupils with specific learning needs and those who learn English as an additional language receive effective support to help them make sound progress. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. It is developing well under the careful eye of the deputy headteacher, and pupils achieve satisfactorily. However, many do not reach the expected goals by the time they leave the Reception year and the curriculum is not fully extended across Year 1 to help them achieve the skills they need.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but vary across the school. The best lessons challenge pupils, whatever their ability, and these result in good progress. Where this is not the case, learning slows and progress is limited. The specialist teaching of music is excellent and is a strength of the school. The satisfactory curriculum is being adapted carefully using materials that take good account of the school's new approach to social and emotional aspects of learning. The school provides good care and support for its pupils. It meets their pastoral needs well. Consequently, personal development is good. Pupils enjoy school and make safe and healthy lifestyle choices. They develop satisfactory skills to aid their future well-being and contribute effectively to the work of the school by taking on roles that benefit others, such as those of the school council. Academic guidance is satisfactory. New assessment systems in place check how well pupils are doing and set targets for them, but marking is inconsistent and does not help pupils to know how well they are doing or what to do next to improve their work.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory overall. Under the careful guidance of the headteacher, who is the driving force within the school, it is turning itself around and is now on an upward trend. The senior management team has been instrumental in helping staff to focus on raising the achievement of specific groups such as those with learning difficulties and those learning English as an additional language. Subject leadership is satisfactory but not all staff take sufficient responsibility for monitoring and managing their subjects. Consequently, self-evaluation is satisfactory overall but not yet wholly accurate. Even so, the high level of commitment and energy shown by the headteacher and deputy headteacher are having a positive impact on developments and ensuring satisfactory capacity for improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children settle quickly into the Reception class because of the good care provided by the staff. Adults get to know the children well and help them feel confident and valued as unique individuals. From very limited levels of attainment on entry, especially in communication, language, literacy, numeracy and social skills, children begin to develop some of the basic skills needed to prepare them for the future. Children learn and develop satisfactorily, but they do not attain all of the expected goals because they have so much to learn. Learning opportunities are suitably matched to children's needs in the Reception year, especially for those with learning difficulties and language needs. However, the curriculum is not sufficiently extended into Year 1 to ensure that the children attain the necessary basic knowledge, understanding and skills before starting their National Curriculum studies. Nevertheless, they develop their personal and social awareness appropriately through activities that are planned carefully to provide a good range of adult-led and free-choice opportunities, indoors and out. Staff focus well on children's welfare and keep them safe. They liaise carefully with parents and carers to ensure that they are kept informed of how well their children are doing. The provision is led and managed well by the deputy headteacher who has taken on the responsibility for overseeing the provision and is keen to develop it further. She is dedicated to the children and provides a good role model for colleagues.

What the school should do to improve further

Accelerate progress and raise standards in writing throughout the school by;

- extending the use of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum throughout Year 1
- encouraging pupils to hold pencils and pens correctly
- improving the standard of handwriting and the presentation of pupils' work.

Improve the quality of teaching and learning by;

- spreading good practice across the school to ensure greater consistency
- improving the quality of marking to help pupils know how well they are doing and what to do next to improve their work
- continuing to rigorously promote good attendance.
- Extend the roles of the subject leaders by encouraging them to take a stronger lead in managing and monitoring their subjects.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

From very low starting points in Year 1, pupils make satisfactory progress overall and achievement is satisfactory by the time they reach the end of Year 6. Standards are well below average at the end of Year 2, and school leaders recognise that pupils have not achieved well enough in Years 1 and 2 in previous years. Effective measures have begun to improve the provision and to eradicate underachievement amongst all groups, including those with language needs and learning difficulties. Consequently, progress is beginning to quicken. At Key Stage 2, standards have risen steadily in mathematics and science but they are still significantly below

average in English: weak handwriting and presentation skills and poor pencil grip exacerbates this situation. Nevertheless, despite there being so much catching up to do, an increasing number are reaching higher standards and some are already on target to achieve the levels expected for their age by the time they leave school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. Spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is also good. Pupils have very positive relationships with adults and each other. They behave well in lessons and at playtimes. Most pupils work and play well together and are keen to take part in the broad range of activities offered, including ball games during playtimes and lunchtime music tuition on instruments such as the clarinet. Many pupils show a willingness to learn and enjoy their education, although attendance is still well below average despite the school's extremely rigorous efforts to improve it. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe. They adopt healthy lifestyles and enjoy a good range of physical activities in lessons and after-school clubs. The school council contributes well to the life of the school by encouraging pupils to learn about teamwork and take on responsibilities in the classroom and around the school. Pupils participate well in a wide range of events in the local community, such as fund-raising for the local hospice, distributing produce to the elderly and participating in 'Family Fun' events. They also raise funds to support a school in Africa. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for their future well-being by developing their skills in numeracy and information and communication technology satisfactorily, but their literacy skills are weak.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Satisfactory teaching and learning predominate the school. Most lessons are characterised by detailed planning which identifies clear learning objectives. The best lessons feature knowledgeable and confident teaching in lively, imaginative lessons in which pupils make good progress, such as that seen in a Year 4 mathematics lesson and in music tuition. In less effective lessons, planning does not take enough account of the need to increase pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills, which slows progress. Teaching assistants are deployed well to provide good support for pupils with language needs and learning difficulties. Most lessons have clear assessment criteria so that work is matched well to pupils' needs. However, marking is inconsistent and does not always offer enough advice to pupils on the next steps in learning to help them know what to do next to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum includes all subjects of the National Curriculum as well as religious education. Additionally, French is taught in Years 3 to 6. Learning is enhanced effectively by a strong focus on developing the social and emotional aspects of pupils' learning. The good use of commercial materials for these aspects is having a strong impact on pupils' personal development and well-being. Personal, social and health education is supplemented by a good range of visitors such as the local police and fire officers. The school provides a wide range of after school clubs; for example, pupils enjoy football, netball, tag rugby and speed stacking.

Music has a high profile within the school and the choir has achieved much success under the expert tuition of a specialist visiting teacher; for example, pupils recently enjoyed taking part in the national 'Sing Up' at the Royal Albert Hall which raised their self esteem and confidence tremendously.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good pastoral care and effective relationships mean that pupils feel valued and happy in school. The procedures for safeguarding pupils meet all the legal requirements. Individual pupils are well known by the teachers and are cared for sensitively. Vulnerable pupils are particularly well cared for and treated with respect. The school works extremely hard to promote good attendance by carefully monitoring the situation and liaising frequently with pupils and their families, as well as the educational welfare officer. A new formal system for tracking pupils' progress is now in place and an analysis of data is being used to identify underachievers and introduce intervention strategies. The information and communication technology manager has worked very hard to devise this system and is currently embedding it within the school. He offers effective support to staff to help them become accustomed to its use. The full impact of this work is yet to be seen but information is being used well to check the progress of all groups of pupils, including the large number with learning difficulties and those who learn English as an additional language to ensure they achieve satisfactorily.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is the driving force within the school and is firmly at the helm. Her friendly, cheerful welcome and commitment to the pupils are reflected in the caring ethos of the school. With close support from the local authority, she has set clear strategic direction for staff to ensure that underachievement is tackled and challenging targets are used to help raise standards, especially at Key Stage 2. The deputy headteacher and senior management team work well with the headteacher to steer the school and provide support for colleagues. However, middle management is not yet well developed because some subject leaders do not take full responsibility for monitoring their subjects to help quicken the pace of school improvement. Governance is satisfactory. Individual key governors are supportive and contribute effectively to the school but others are not sufficiently pro-active to hold the school to account. Nonetheless, the school's effective strategy for community cohesion helps it to foster effective partnerships with the local neighbourhood and promote harmonious relationships within its diverse multi-cultural society. Its role as a 'Hub' school for the extended schools' consortium enables it to reach out to the local community and provide many services for families in need. Very few parents responded to the questionnaire but most of those who did were positive about the school's provision.

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
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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?	3
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?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
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	4
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	2
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?	2
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

20 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Peartree Primary School, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3XW

Thank you for being so helpful and making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I am writing to let you know what I found out.

It was good to hear how much you like coming to school and enjoy learning, although some of you do not attend school regularly enough. I was pleased to hear that you say you are happy in school and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried. You behave well and you know a lot about keeping healthy and safe. Those of you involved in the school council take your responsibilities seriously and try hard to look after the school environment. Well done!

I think that you go to a satisfactory school. Your teachers and other staff help you to achieve satisfactorily, although many of you could do much better in English. The school takes good care of you and keeps you safe. The curriculum and the after-school activities are satisfactory.

I have asked your teachers to help you to improve your skills in writing. You can all help by trying really hard to write neatly and carefully. I have also asked your teachers to make sure that there is more good teaching in the school and that the subject leaders check on this regularly. The headteacher, staff and governors want the school to become even better and I hope you will play your part by attending regularly and continuing to work hard and do your best.

I wish you every success in the future.

Best wishes

Dr Anna Coyle

Lead inspector