

Margaret Wix Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117188
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326547
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Philip Mann HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	169
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 Sue Merenyi
Headteacher	Mrs Sally Bishop
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Oaks St. Albans Hertfordshire AL3 6EL
Telephone number	01727759232
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Margaret Wix Primary is a smaller than average school located in a mixed residential area of St Albans with some pockets of socio-economic disadvantage. The children's starting points in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are generally below average overall. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average as is the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups. A quarter of pupils are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average but fluctuates from year to year. The school holds awards for the promotion of healthy living and sport and continues to hold Investor in People status. A playgroup not managed by the governing body occupies part of the school site and was inspected at the same time.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. However, clear strengths are beginning to emerge. During the past year the newly appointed headteacher has provided strong leadership and a clear sense of direction for the school's work. This is a view shared not only by the inspection team but by staff, governors and the vast majority of parents. Comments such as, 'The progress is brilliant and you can see the difference every day,' and 'The school creates a good atmosphere for the children, allowing them to enjoy school and therefore making learning easier,' are just some of the many positive things parents feel about the school's recent development.

All pupils are responding well to the positive and inclusive climate for learning that has been established. They feel safe and secure at school. Many pupils now display a thirst for learning and are proud to share their achievements with others. Behaviour is good overall, but when lessons become dull or too easy pupils become inattentive and lose concentration. Pupils are developing healthy lifestyles. Citizenship skills are developed well through the activities of the school council and pupils value being part of the school community.

The overall levels of achievement are satisfactory but rates of progress vary from year to year and between different groups of pupils. Where teaching is excellent, progress is rapid and pupils make significant gains in their learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Despite good or better teaching in several classes, there is still too much teaching that is only satisfactory. As a result, variations in pupil progress remain. Teachers work hard to ensure lessons are planned effectively but sometimes time and resources are not always used to best advantage and the behaviour of pupils is not always managed well. The curriculum is satisfactory, with a strong focus on basic skills. A growing number of interesting activities provide good levels of enrichment for pupils. Pupils are well cared for and safeguarding arrangements are robust. Procedures for monitoring the academic progress of all pupils are very comprehensive and data is used well to identify those pupils who need extra support and set challenging targets for teachers to work to. Some teachers mark pupils' work in considerable detail but this is not common practice across the school.

Good leadership and management are providing the necessary impetus to raise pupil standards and the reputation of the school locally. Procedures for monitoring the school's work are comprehensive and used effectively to identify the correct priorities for improvement. Many improvements are already becoming noticeable and the school's capacity for further improvement is good. Community cohesion is promoted well through planned activities, festival assemblies and the increased involvement of parents. Governance is satisfactory overall, with governors playing an increasingly more effective role in monitoring the school's work.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in the EYFS. From below average starting points overall, they make good progress and achieve well, especially in their personal, social and emotional development by the time they move into Year 1. They settle into school routines quickly, play happily together and learn to share and make choices. This is because careful integration of the Nursery and Reception groups ensures children learn to mix with each other, developing

their social skills very effectively through a wide range of well-planned and purposeful play activities. Children gain an increasingly broad understanding across all areas of learning. They learn to apply their knowledge gained from one area to another because activities are imaginatively planned. For instance, after listening to a story about the 'Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch' the children made the climbing frame into a lighthouse, attached a washing line to it and discovered that by pulling down on the line to make it slope they could send lunch down to the lighthouse keeper! Aspects of language, such as speaking and listening, are developed well through re-enacting traditional stories.

Good teaching results in children being enthusiastic about learning and this stems from staff taking excellent care of the children and making sure they are safe at all times. The teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills is based firmly on practical tasks that really appeal to the children and a good mix of indoor and outdoor adult-led tasks and activities that children choose for themselves. Adults assess and monitor the progress of all children carefully to ensure all move on well in their learning. The newly appointed foundation manager's innovative and good leadership and management provide clear direction for the EYFS unit. Effective links exist with the playgroup on site and with Year 1 to ensure continuity in learning. Parents are very pleased with the start their children make and typically say, 'Margaret Wix really is a great school now and I would not send my child anywhere else.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the rate of achievement for all pupils across the school.
- Tackle the inconsistencies in teaching and learning to ensure that they are at least good in all classes.
- Improve the quality of teachers' marking so that all pupils know clearly what they need to do next to improve.

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

Achievement is satisfactory overall. From broadly average starting points in Year 1, pupils make generally satisfactory progress to attain broadly average levels in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. However, standards have fluctuated because of factors such as the high proportion of pupils who enter or leave the school, low numbers of pupils in each year group, a period of staffing instability and inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Consequently, rates of progress vary between different groups of pupils and year groups. However, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress because of the effective levels of support carefully matched to their needs. Variations in progress are particularly noticeable in writing. However, these inconsistencies are being addressed successfully, with improvements in the pupils' work already evident. This is particularly so in Year 6, where participation in a local authority project and outstanding teaching have given these pupils the confidence and ability to write with imagination and expression. Prose such as, 'The overjoyed computer sings to the beat of his clicking mouse,' and 'If only I could seize a humming bird and protect it in my casket to light up my dark days,' illustrate the improvements being achieved. However, the full impact of such initiatives is yet to be fully realised in other classes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' positive attitudes towards school are reflected in their enthusiasm for their work. Personal development is good. Pupils respond well to the positive climate for learning and the consistently good role models of adults around them. Behaviour in lessons and around school is usually good and sometimes exceptional. However, behaviour can deteriorate when teaching becomes less effective. Pupils feel happy and safe. They state that there are few incidents of bullying and staff handle these well if and when they happen. Their spiritual, moral and cultural development is good and enhanced by regular lunchtime visits by the local church that provides reflection time for children of all faiths and cultures. Relationships between adults and pupils and pupils relationships with each other are very positive. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves fit and healthy. They enjoy their morning fruit snack, nutritious school lunches and physical activities. Pupils are confident and play a full part in the life of the school. The school council has a high profile and meets regularly with the headteacher. They feel their views are respected by the headteacher and they value being involved in the school's development. Overall, attendance is broadly average and this has been achieved by working closely with parents and pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. However, teaching varies considerably across the school from barely satisfactory to outstanding. When teaching is good or outstanding, lessons are very well organised and resources such as interactive whiteboards are used to good effect to make learning interesting for the pupils. In the less successful lessons, younger pupils sit on the carpet for too long, the tasks are sometimes too easy, and consequently pupils become restless. This leads to disjointed learning and wide variations in the progress pupils make.

Despite these weaknesses, the positive relationships between staff and pupils are an emerging strength recognised fully by many parents. Support staff make an important contribution to lessons by providing effective levels of support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. However, not all teachers recognise the full value of detailed and informative marking and it is inconsistent in quality across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum with some good opportunities for enrichment. Significant emphasis is placed on literacy and numeracy as a key priority for improvement. The school now recognises the need to develop a more meaningful and creative curriculum that will provide greater opportunities for pupils to make links between subjects while allowing them to use the basic skills they acquire to support their learning. Staff actively seek to enhance the curriculum now by using a range of visits to local places of interest, visits to the theatre and museum and by using the skills and talents of specialists, such as those in the performing arts; for example in music, an African drumming group.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a very caring school that continually revises the arrangements for keeping the pupils safe and addresses problems promptly as they arise. Staff know their pupils very well and are quick to pick up any worries they may have. As a result, all pupils are confident about approaching any adult knowing that they will be listened to. All statutory safeguarding arrangements are fully met. Staff are trained to deal with pupils who are at risk or have medical needs. Health and safety measures are appropriate and good risk assessments are carried out for all activities. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely with other professionals to support those pupils who speak English as an additional language or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The rigorous tracking of pupil progress ensures that support is matched effectively to pupil need. However, not all pupils know their targets for improvement and the quality of marking varies from class to class.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Transformational leadership and a culture of improvement result in the staff being motivated to improve the quality of provision for all pupils. All staff work as a cohesive team and subject leaders play a vital part in identifying the areas for improvement. Self-evaluation is very thorough and used effectively to identify the correct priorities for improvement and set challenging targets. Previously recognised weaknesses in teaching and learning are being addressed but the school leadership recognises that further improvements are required. Performance management is robust and teachers are set clear targets for improvement. Governors are supportive, demonstrate a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are starting to play a greater role in monitoring its work.

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?	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?	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	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	3
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?	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	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 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Margaret Wix Primary School, St Albans, AL3 6EL

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you all for making us feel so welcome. We both really enjoyed visiting your school and are pleased to see how well you all get on with each other, both in lessons and in the playground. You clearly enjoy being at school and are keen to talk about your experiences.

Many of you told us that Mrs Bishop has really made a difference to the school since she started a year ago. We agree with you. She manages the school well and under her good leadership, all the staff work hard as a team to make sure that you are looked after and encouraged to work hard. We noticed that many of you behave well in lessons. However, when these lessons are not as interesting or too much time is wasted, then you lose concentration and find it difficult to behave as well. You will find that your teachers in the future are really going to try and make sure that all of your lessons will be as good as the best ones we saw during the inspection. This will ensure that you all make at least good progress.

We were also impressed with how well some of the teachers mark your work and how they involve you in setting targets for you to achieve. We have asked that all of the teachers should do this for you because it will help you to improve your reading, writing and mathematics skills more quickly.

Thanks again for making us so welcome and I wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector