

Pixmore Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117259
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326557
Inspection date	26 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Jones

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Marian Adams
Headteacher	Mrs Alex Evans
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2006
School address	Rushby Mead Letchworth Hertfordshire SG6 1RS
Telephone number	01462 620555
Fax number	01462 623555

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the current picture of achievement and standards in writing; how effectively the school promotes behaviour and positive attitudes to learning; the impact of academic guidance on pupils' learning and achievement and how effectively monitoring by the school leadership helps to raise standards. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and pupils' work, discussions with the headteacher, governors and pupils, the parental questionnaires and school self-evaluation documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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 this report.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized junior school in Letchworth, Hertfordshire. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is similar to those found in schools nationally. The proportion of pupils at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language is below the national average. Children's attainment on entry is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average. The school has recently gained the Eco Schools Bronze level status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Pixmore is a satisfactory and improving school, in line with the school's own evaluation. On entry pupils have broadly average standards and make satisfactory progress as they move up the school. The current rate of progress in Year 6 and other classes shows some improvement from a dip in standards last year. Standards are now broadly average, although the proportion of boys who reach the higher levels in writing is much smaller than for girls. Pupils who need additional support and those who find learning more difficult make good progress relative to their capabilities. A small proportion of pupils have emotional and behavioural difficulties, and they are successfully supported in lessons and around the school.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good because of the good quality care, guidance and support provided by all adults who work in the school. The pupils feel safe in school, trust their teachers to care for them and happily confide in them. The school is a caring community and all staff are sensitive to the personal and social needs of the pupils. All requirements are met in relation to safeguarding pupils. The school has worked hard to improve standards of behaviour to a good level, and pupils demonstrate an increasing level of responsibility. They are clear about 'The Pixmore Way', a code of conduct consistently applied across the school. Behaviour in classes and around the school is good, although a small minority of pupils need support and guidance in order to behave appropriately. Attendance has improved over the last two years and is now above average, reflecting pupils' increasing enjoyment of school. The active school council has a clear role in supporting school improvement, and its work is understood and valued by others. As one pupil said, 'the work of the school council really pulls us together'. The school offers a range of opportunities for pupils to take responsibility as members of the school community, such as the 'Playground Leaders', who support games and activities at lunchtime. An 'Eco Warriors' club helps to develop pupils' understanding of environmental issues, and the wide and well-attended range of sporting and other after school activities contribute effectively to developing healthy lifestyles and adding to pupils' enjoyment of school life.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, pupils at different levels of ability are challenged well and progress is good. However, in less effective lessons, the level of challenge is not as high as it could be for all groups of learners, thus slowing the pace of learning. Teachers usually begin with a clear explanation of what the pupils are expected to learn, and the range of planned activities often links well with the purpose of the lesson. Under the effective guidance of the headteacher, the school is successfully challenging barriers to pupils' progress, such as addressing pockets of poor behaviour. As a result, the rate of improvement in standards is rising because pupils have a clear idea of rules and their responsibilities, and teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Academic guidance is satisfactory with some good features. There is a growing dialogue emerging in the comments made in books, with teachers providing helpful suggestions on how to improve and pupils responding to show their understanding. This is particularly well developed in writing and mathematics, although it is not as effective in other subjects. Those who need additional support and those who find learning more difficult receive well-targeted support from teaching assistants. This ensures that they maintain a good pace to their learning and make good progress in their work.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is supported by a good range of out-of-school activities and a number of visitors enhance lessons. Pupils from Year 4 upwards enjoy a range of residential visits to enrich the curriculum, making subjects such as history and geography more interesting

and relevant to learning. Pupils of all ages enjoy learning French, and there is a good curriculum in art and design, enabling pupils to progress well. Coverage of key skills in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory and is helping the pupils to reach satisfactory standards. At times, the learning resources available are not well used to support pupils' understanding of new concepts, and these opportunities are sometimes curtailed by the limited space available in the rather small classrooms. Pupils are gaining an awareness of their targets for learning in writing and mathematics. The school regularly tracks pupils' progress, although the level of expectation for what pupils can achieve has in the past been higher for some year groups than in others. The school is rightly looking to forge stronger links between subjects, and to increase opportunities for pupils to practise writing skills across the curriculum. Pupils' personal, social and health education is well planned and contributes directly to their good personal development. The physical education lessons taught by specialist sports coaches help to extend the curriculum and contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school. The school has made significant improvements to information and communication technology provision recently, leading to pupils' satisfactory and improving acquisition of skills. Pupils' attitudes to learning and standards of attainment prepare pupils satisfactorily for the next stage in their educational career.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The dip in standards in 2008 in some subjects was exacerbated by poor behaviour among a small minority of pupils. This is being successfully addressed by the headteacher and staff, who show a common understanding of improvements required and a united approach to implementing necessary changes. Systems to monitor school improvement are developing, and give the school an accurate view of what it does well and where it needs to improve. The headteacher leads the school well, and has had a marked impact on the school since her appointment. Parents appreciate and are pleased with her high expectations of pupils' behaviour and clear vision for the school's future. She has quickly gained the respect of staff and has brought them together as a more effective team, demonstrating that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further. The school is creating good plans to expand its work in improving wider community cohesion and links, but these are at an early stage. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is supportive and developing its effectiveness, so that a wider range of governors take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Quicken the rate of progress for different groups of learners by raising the level of challenge through providing work more carefully matched to their needs.
- Raise standards of writing, particularly for boys, by ensuring pupils develop a range of skills and techniques and use these in their writing across the curriculum.

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.

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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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	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

27 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pixmore Junior School, Letchworth SG6 1RS

Many of you will remember my visit to your school a little while ago. Thank you for making me so welcome. I was pleased to find how keen you were to share your thoughts about your school. This letter is especially for you to tell you what I found out about it.

I think that Pixmore is a satisfactory and improving school. Your teachers help you to make satisfactory progress, and you achieve standards that are broadly average by the time you leave in Year 6. Many of you work hard to help others and improve your school, and you carry out your tasks well. Behaviour is improving because the school is good at helping you to follow 'The Pixmore Way', and you take a pride in the school. Many of you make a very good contribution to your school and I thought the work of the school council was particularly impressive. You told me that you enjoy school and try your best, and I can see this in the things you do. Your parents are pleased with the school and they can see how well Mrs Evans and your teachers look after you and are working hard to make Pixmore even better. All of the adults take good care of you and work to make your school an interesting place to come to.

To help you do even better I have asked the teachers to tell you more about what you can do to improve your writing skills, and to give you lots of opportunities to practise these skills in other subjects. I have also asked your teachers to make sure that the work you are given to do really challenges you to think and work hard.

I hope you continue to enjoy school and work hard for the future.

Ian Jones

Lead inspector