

# Ickniel Walk First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117278
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326561
<b>Inspection date</b>	26 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joanne Harvey

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	313
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rev Ian Smart
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Marilyn Jones
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 February 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Poplar Drive Royston Hertfordshire SG8 7EZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01763 243392
<b>Fax number</b>	01763 244764

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## Introduction

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

- whether measures put in place to improve the standards attained by boys, particularly in writing, have had a positive impact across school and ensured that boys are not underachieving, and whether standards in reading and writing are beginning to rise once again
- whether the curriculum has been suitably tailored to meet the needs of all pupils and whether leaders can demonstrate its impact on the progress that pupils are making
- whether systems for academic guidance are effective in ensuring that all pupils do as well as they can
- whether systems for leadership and management are rigorous enough to give confidence of a good capacity to continue to improve.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, senior staff and governor representatives. In addition, there was observation of parts of several lessons, scrutiny of school information and its self-evaluation statement, analysis of samples of pupils' work, evaluation of parents' questionnaires, and discussions with pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector 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 a larger than average first school with provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage being made in a Nursery and two Reception classes. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few children are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. A below average number are entitled to claim free school meals. Slightly fewer pupils than is found in most schools have learning difficulties and/or disabilities but a similar proportion has a statement of special educational needs. There is a rising number with more severe and complex needs, including autism, and behavioural and physical difficulties. The school has Healthy School status, an Activemark, accreditation from the Hertfordshire Quality Standards for both the Nursery and Reception classes, and is an Investor in People.

The school offers a breakfast club on site to its own children. An after-school club also operates on the school site but this is not managed by the school governing body and is therefore 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

This is a good and improving school. Pupils progress well and often attain standards that are above average in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave the school. The school has exemplary features in the pastoral elements of the care it provides for pupils and in the consequent outstanding personal development of the pupils. Good arrangements are made for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that they progress well.

Good improvements since the last inspection owe much to the determination and commitment of the headteacher, supported by governors, parents, pupils and the staff team who share the headteacher's vision and sense of purpose. These improvements include the strengthening of systems for the leadership and management of the school, the curriculum and further improvements to the personal development and well-being of pupils. Furthermore, though the current headteacher is shortly to retire, coinciding with the departure of the Chair of the Governing Body, a smooth transition has been meticulously planned to ensure continuity for the school. This all gives confidence that there is good capacity to continue to improve.

The positive ethos and happy atmosphere the school community create together are evident on entering the building. It is not surprising that parents are highly appreciative of the school. One wrote astutely, 'I think Icknield Walk is a lovely school that facilitates the development of well-rounded children. It is always thinking of ways in which it can improve.' This comment represents the views of the overwhelming majority who responded to the questionnaire. Pupils echo this sentiment in their demonstration of exceptional levels of enjoyment and outstanding levels of attendance.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding due to strong care and guidance from teachers, and to the carefully thought out curriculum for personal, social, health and citizenship education. Pupils are encouraged to express their opinions and to accept responsibilities, for example, as school councillors and youth speakers, allowing them to grow in confidence. The older pupils in particular, take pride in helping others and in looking after each other and their school, for example, doing their 'SPOT jobs' and as sports leaders. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and how to keep themselves and each other safe within and beyond school. The combination of strong information and communication technology (ICT) skills, good basic skills and highly developed personal skills equips pupils well for the next stage of education and life. Adherence to the strong moral code ensures that the behaviour of the vast majority is exemplary. A very small minority finds it difficult to maintain the high expectations of them without adult support. This is managed well so as not to interfere with the learning of others.

Providing the highest quality of pastoral care is central to the school's ethos and includes systems for ensuring high levels of health, safety and welfare. This applies equally throughout the school and to the before-school childcare provision. A sample of documents inspected, confirmed that safeguarding procedures meet with requirements. Pupils say they feel safe and are confident that there is always someone to help them with any problems. Adults go the extra mile to reduce any barriers to learning and make sure that everyone is included equally in everything that the school has to offer. Those at risk are identified promptly and cared for extremely well. An excellent emphasis is given to promoting social and emotional well-being, for example through drama therapy, anger management and additional programmes to promote social skills. Highly skilled teaching assistants offer individual and group support to those who

find their learning more difficult. Specialist programmes for those with severe and complex needs, often using outstanding partnerships with other agencies, ensure that these children make similar progress to their peers. Good systems for academic guidance have been put in place, including new systems for tracking pupils' progress, for setting targets and for encouraging pupils to be more involved in measuring their own success. However, these are not yet being consistently applied across school.

Teaching has many reliably good features. For example, class teachers and teaching assistants form strong and trusting professional relationships and manage behaviour, resources and classroom routines well. This results in pupils being keen to work hard and behaving exceptionally well. ICT is used well to support teaching and learning and the objectives which pupils are to achieve are always made clear. At its best, teaching consistently involves practical, hands-on and problem-solving activities and pupils are given lots of opportunities to practise what they have learned in meaningful ways through exciting topics. Leaders recognise that this is not yet always the case.

The curriculum is good, and there has been a renewed focus on ensuring the development of pupils' important basic skills. Pupils enjoy themed weeks and days, including an African Art Week and a science day. Visitors to school add enrichment and include artists, dancers and musicians. Visits are regularly planned which include places of religious and cultural significance beyond the pupils' usual experiences. These add considerably to pupils' understanding of life in a multicultural society. A range of extra-curricular clubs include video making and speed stacking. The curriculum planning has been carefully modified with more opportunities for different subjects to be taught together through exciting themes, which bring learning alive for pupils. This approach has already begun to have a beneficial impact, particularly on the engagement of boys and the rate at which they make progress. However, leaders recognise that this approach has yet to be fully developed and consistently and confidently applied across school.

The good leadership and management begin with the headteacher and her able assistant headteacher who are astutely developing the leadership capacity of others in the school so that they can make their full contribution. This results in an accurate view of strengths and areas for development and combines with high expectations to ensure challenging targets are set and met. For example, leaders were quick to note a dip in performance in reading and writing. Evidence in school confirms that performance has improved once again, as a result of the good improvements made, for example, to the teaching of phonics. The next priority for school leaders is to develop further the focus and strategic direction of leadership and management across the Early Years Foundation Stage as a whole, so that the pace of improvement here can be quickened. Careful planning and evaluation leads to a good contribution being made to the promotion of community cohesion in the local area, for example, through partnerships with church, youth groups and local schools. A planned partnership with a school in a different and contrasting country is in its early stages. Governors offer a good deal of practical support and challenge to school leaders. They know the school well and are looking forward to further developing their involvement in monitoring and evaluating its work.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

When they enter the Nursery, children's levels of knowledge and skills are broadly in line with those expected for this age. Welcoming and caring staff settle children quickly into the Nursery and Reception classes, and in partnership with parents, ensure that children's physical, emotional

and social needs are well met. Consequently, children's personal development is good and they soon become confident and ready to learn. Adults model good behaviour, such as turn taking and how to listen. They take opportunities to engage children in conversation and use questioning to extend children's speaking skills. Children quickly become familiar with class routines and expectations. Good provision is made for children's learning and development. Adults get to know children well and planning for activities is conscientiously done, based on careful assessments. This helps to ensure they are given purposeful and engaging tasks, which are often linked together through beguiling topic themes, such as 'On the Move' or 'Pirates' and this allows children to revisit their learning in different ways. The tasks are directed effectively by teachers and teaching assistants who teach and check on the development of specific skills and understanding well. Occasionally, when adults focus closely on the tasks they are directing, opportunities are sometimes lost to intervene and extend children's learning when children are engaged in play activities they have initiated themselves. There are times when the expected outcome of tasks is too rigidly pre-determined. As a consequence, opportunities for children to experiment, investigate and to further extend their own learning at their own pace and level are lost. For example, an over-reliance on pre-produced templates or worksheets sometimes results in all children's work looking the same.

A super start has been made to the regular and rigorous teaching of phonics and this can already be seen to be having a good impact on the rate at which children in the Reception class make progress with their reading and writing skills. Boys have been particularly inspired, as is reflected in their enthusiasm to 'have a go' with their writing. The Nursery and Reception teachers have completed a useful self-evaluation exercise, which has helped them to identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. As a consequence, for example, the Reception outdoor area has been identified for further development and consideration is being given to making even better use of the delightful outdoor spaces for all early years children. However, the absence of a clear vision and strong strategic leadership to provide an overview and drive forward improvements for the Early Years Foundation Stage as a whole, slows the rate at which improvement is made.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Develop and consistently apply the creative approach to teaching different subjects together through exciting topic themes and by using practical and hands-on experiences.
- Improve further the impact of academic guidance by ensuring that all elements are consistently and effectively applied.
- Strengthen leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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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?	1
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 <sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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**

27 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Icknield Walk First School, Royston, SG8 7EZ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. This letter is to tell you what we found out. There are many good and some outstanding things about your school. Some of them are that:

- you achieve high standards and make good progress
- you behave extremely well and work hard to help others
- your knowledge of how to keep yourself healthy and safe is outstanding
- your attendance is outstanding
- you enjoy school a great deal and the school is good at organising interesting things for you to do
- all of the adults in your school make sure that you are extremely well cared for and looked after
- your headteacher and the other people who help run your school are successful at making sure that you get a good education.

We agree with school leaders and your parents that you go to a good school. However, all of the adults in your school want it to be even better. To help them with this the most important things for them to do next are:

- make sure there are even more of the exciting topics that you say you enjoy and you gets lots of first-hand and 'hands-on' experiences
- make sure that you all have targets that guide you well in English and mathematics and that you become very good at being able to check on your own success
- make sure improvements for the whole of the Early Years Foundation Stage are driven forward.

We are sure that the headteacher and all the other staff will continue to do everything they can to help you. You can play your part by continuing to behave so well, working really hard and coming to school every day.

We would like to wish you the very best for the future.

Joanne Harvey

Lead inspector