

Cunningham Hill Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117279
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326562
Inspection date	4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Alison Pangbourne

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	180
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 Tessa Burges
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Bettridge
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cell Barnes Lane St. Albans Hertfordshire AL1 5QJ
Telephone number	01727 857524
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Age group	4–7
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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:

- how effectively the new leadership team is integrating new staff into their roles and ensuring that they fulfil the school's very high expectations
- the impact of grouping pupils by ability for mathematics on their standards
- the impact of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) on standards and achievement.

Inspectors gathered evidence from observing work in classrooms, scrutinising school documentation and records of pupils' achievement and progress, as well as discussions with senior leaders, governors and pupils.

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 size infant school. A large majority of pupils are White British with over one quarter from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small but increasing minority are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average and the number with a statement of special educational needs is below average. Most of these pupils have speech and language difficulties. The attainment of children on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage varies from year to year. In the past it has been broadly as expected for their age, although children's social skills have been less well developed. More recently children's attainment on entry has changed, and most of the current reception class started school with skills that are a little below what is expected for their age. The school has gained National Healthy School status and the Activemark. It was one of the first schools in the country to be awarded the ICT Mark in recognition of the way that information and communications technology (ICT) is used to support learning. The new leadership team of the headteacher and assistant headteacher has been operating since September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that has maintained the exceptional quality of its work over many years. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about it. One, typical of many, wrote, 'This is a fantastic school with great leadership and excellent staff. I could not wish for more.' The pupils agree saying, 'Our school is the best ever! It is perfect!'

Fundamental to the school's success is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher and assistant headteacher. Although both are new to their posts they are established members of staff and are highly committed to building on the school's strong foundations, based on their thorough knowledge of what makes their school so successful. Neither they nor the outstanding governing body, who share their vision and hold the school to account very well, are complacent. They know that they cannot rest on their laurels. They take every opportunity to introduce new initiatives to further improve provision. For example, pupils have a special mathematics lesson each week where they are taught in 'sets' according to their ability from across the classes in Year 1 and Year 2. This is because the school recognises that standards in mathematics are not as high as those in reading and writing. Records of progress show that this is having a positive impact on standards. Everything that the school does is closely monitored, evaluated and improved to ensure that it is of high quality.

Leadership and management overall are outstanding. Subject leaders fulfil their responsibilities extremely well and have an excellent understanding of their subjects through regular monitoring of the school's work. There have been several staff changes this year and the challenge now is to ensure that high quality is maintained and then further improved. An excellent start has been made. New staff speak with enthusiasm about the way they are being inducted into the school through regular training, mentoring by senior staff and the 'working lunch' with the headteacher where they can share their ideas.

Given this very firm steer from the leadership of the school, it is hardly surprising that pupils' achievement is excellent. When children start school their attainment varies year by year and their social skills are often underdeveloped. This year most children in the reception classes are on course to do better than expected for their age even though many started school with skills that were a little below age expectations. Pupils continue to achieve extremely well from their starting points as they move through the school. Standards have been exceptionally high for many years. In 2008 teachers' assessments show that standards were exceptionally high in reading and writing and above average in mathematics at the end of Year 2. An above average proportion exceeded the expected level in all three subjects. This year Year 2 includes a higher than usual proportion of pupils who find it harder to learn, but similarly high standards are predicted with more pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics. Pupils who need extra help with literacy and numeracy and those who speak English as an additional language make excellent progress because they are given plenty of high quality support.

Other factors help pupils to do so well. Teaching is outstanding and challenges them. Excellent use of questions encourages pupils to think and to give reasons for their answers. Pupils show a very good understanding of what they are learning because teachers tell them the purpose of the lesson and how they will know if they are successful. Activities are exceptionally well planned to meet the needs of all pupils and to match their interests. As a result, pupils show an enthusiasm for learning and a quest for knowledge that is unusual in such young children. They are encouraged to work independently and do this successfully. The progress of individual

pupils is regularly assessed to make sure that help is provided for any who are falling behind or forging ahead. The use of ICT underpins the outstanding curriculum. There is an impressive range of resources, including digital camcorders and many recording devices. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed making a moving model as part of their homework and confidently demonstrated how they had recorded what they did on a 'talking tin' device. Much emphasis is placed on speaking and listening because the school knows that this helps pupils to do well in their writing. Pupils develop a range of skills across many areas of the curriculum and staff take care to link these together in an interesting way that motivates the pupils. It is not only the basic skills that are promoted so well. There is a strong emphasis on music and during the inspection a professional musician shared his skills as part of a regular programme of teaching. Pupils played and sang extremely well. Art too has a high profile with much work on display that is of a high standard.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding, reflecting the excellent support, care and guidance they receive. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, based on a very strong ethos of respect and care for others. They are encouraged to be responsible and independent. Consequently, they are extremely polite and their behaviour is excellent. They take their responsibilities seriously and enjoy helping in the smooth running of the school. They have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Regular opportunities for cooking help them to understand healthy eating and basic food hygiene. The school promotes community cohesion extremely effectively by fostering a strong sense of community, both within school and outside it. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of local and global communities through their work across the curriculum, the visits they make and the visitors who share their knowledge and skills.

The school has built excellent partnerships with other schools and national agencies. For example, it has regularly worked with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) on its cross-curricular teaching and assessment. It has featured in videos used to support teachers in their practice nationally. Most recently, it has worked on a project linking religious education and ICT. All these opportunities give staff the chance to reflect on and further develop their practice, showing their commitment to building further on what is already of very high quality. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and the excellent progress made since the previous inspection shows that it has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Parents are delighted with the flying start their children make. One commented, 'My children enjoy going to school and are very positive about all their experiences'. This sentiment was echoed by others. The children are accommodated in two classes and excellent leadership ensures that they work very effectively together. Staff ensure that all children are welcomed and included. As a result, the children settle quickly and establish very good relationships with each other and with the adults. They are very friendly and their behaviour is excellent. Teachers plan work that is exciting, based on themes that cover all areas of learning. There is a good balance between adult led and child initiated activities. The activities take account of the children's prior experiences, learning needs and interests. The children join the school from a high number of pre-school settings.

Children make excellent progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage. Their achievement is outstanding. They make particularly good progress in their personal and social development and in problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. The current year group is on track to exceed the early learning goals set for them nationally by the end of the year. Children do so very well

because the teaching is of very high quality and the good use of ongoing assessment means that tasks are very well matched to their needs and interests. Never complacent, staff are revising their systems for monitoring and assessing the children's progress to ensure the effectiveness of their practice is maintained. The exemplary provision for the children's welfare ensures they feel safe and well cared for.

Early reading and writing skills are taught effectively so that the children are soon confident to begin to write for themselves and enjoy sharing their work. They enjoy problem solving, reasoning and numeracy activities and are developing a good understanding of number. Their understanding is consolidated and extended through the wide range of practical activities which engages and sustains their interest. Very good use is made of the outdoor area as a natural extension of the classrooms. It is used well to support the children's knowledge and understanding of the world and their physical and creative development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that leadership and management at all levels maintain a high degree of vigilance to make sure that the quality of provision continues to improve.

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?	1
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	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

5 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Cunningham Hill Infant School, St Albans, AL1 5QJ

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. We would like to tell you what we found out.

You and your families told us that you go to an excellent school where you make new friends and learn lots of interesting things. We agree with you. You make excellent progress because your teachers give you work which is just right for you and they make it interesting. You do much better than many children of your age. The teachers watch to see how well you are doing and give you extra help if you need it. We enjoyed seeing the wonderful moving models that you made for your half term homework and listening to how you made them on the 'talking tins'. We thought that you use all the ICT equipment extremely well, especially the camcorders. Thank you to those in Year 2 who showed me how to use the digital microscope! You all work very hard and your behaviour is excellent. We thought you were always very sensible when you were doing your work and that you know where to find everything that you need to get on. It was good to hear that you know how important it is to eat fruit and vegetables and that you feel safe in school. Your headteacher and the governors work very hard to make sure that your school is a lovely place to be.

You know that your headteacher and assistant headteacher are new to their roles this year. You know them very well because they have been teachers in your school. There are also some new teachers who have come to join you. I have asked the headteacher to make sure that they all know about the things that make your school so successful so that the school can get even better. You can help by continuing to do your best.

We hope you carry on enjoying your time at Cunningham Hill Infant School and do well in your next school.

Best wishes

Alison Pangbourne

Lead inspector