

Crabtree Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117287
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326564
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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)	241
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Wilde
Headteacher	Mr Ian Pattrick
Date of previous school inspection	29 June 2006
School address	Crabtree Lane Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 5PU
Telephone number	01582 623501
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

This inspection was coordinated with the inspection of the infant school on the same site. Pupil progress was a key focus in both establishments.

Description of the school

Crabtree Junior School is a large, two form entry school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Attainment on entry to Year 3 is well above average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including pupils with a statement of special educational needs, is below that found nationally. These pupils have, for example, moderate and specific learning difficulties, or behavioural difficulties. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and they all speak English. The school has gained Investors in People accreditation, Healthy Schools Award, Active Mark and the local authority gold award for its Travel Plan.

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 in which pupils achieve extremely well and where standards are exceptionally high year-on-year. A key strength of this school is the willingness to recognise pupils' high level of attainment on entry and to build on their strengths. Consequently, pupils attain high standards and make excellent progress across a very wide range of subjects and in their personal development.

The headteacher was relatively new to the school at the time of the previous inspection. Since then he has shown great determination to improve all aspects of provision and raise standards. He has built a strong team of teachers and support staff, who are highly committed to ensuring the school's effectiveness, and he has enabled them to develop their professional skills to do their jobs to a high standard. As a result, key aspects of the school including standards and achievement, pupils' personal development, the quality of education and leadership and management have all improved and are now outstanding. Because of this record of significant improvement and the exceptional quality of leadership and management, the school has an excellent capacity to sustain further improvement. Although in some instances, school's self-evaluation is a little cautious, it is highly effective. This caution adds to its impact because it means that the school leadership is never complacent.

The quality of education is outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent and, because work is interesting and challenging for those at all levels of attainment, pupils readily engage in learning. Emphasis on building confidence and self-esteem makes sure that pupils develop a very mature and confident approach to school life. As one pupil said, concerning the national tests, 'We knew we'd be comfortable with what was coming.' This confidence is reflected in all aspects of school life and supports all their accomplishments, including exceptional sporting achievement and high quality musical performance.

The school maintains excellent links with the community. There is very strong relationship with parents, who recognise and very much appreciate what the school does for their children. Comments such as 'My daughter is always happy to go to school and buzzes with all the things going on' or 'My son's progress has been brilliant. He has been given an amazing amount of support and opportunity.' all pay tribute to the commitment shown to the academic progress and well-being of all pupils in this school. The junior school has a similarly strong relationship with the neighbouring infant school, which helps to maintain the continuity of achievement as pupils move from one to the other. Parents comment favourably on the smoothness of transition. However, there are further opportunities to enhance continuity of educational provision between the two schools that share the site, notably in music and physical education, where the sharing of areas of excellence across the foundation subjects would maximise curriculum continuity for pupils.

Pupils themselves make an outstanding contribution to the community through the school's many cultural, charitable, sporting and musical activities. This contributes strongly to their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Although pupils show a secure knowledge and understanding of diversity through their studies, they have little opportunity to experience this at first hand through meeting people from different cultures than their own.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish links with schools in the wider community to provide pupils with first-hand experience of people from a range of cultural backgrounds to improve their already good multicultural knowledge and understanding.
- Extend links with the neighbouring infant school by sharing areas of excellence to maximise curriculum continuity.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Test results in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 have improved since the previous inspection and are now consistently very high. However, national test results do not give the full picture of attainment and progress. Pupils' work samples show that a significant proportion of pupils in Year 6 are working at a level higher than the highest level measured by the tests in reading and writing, and in mathematics. This means that pupils' progress, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with their own particular talents, is outstanding. Excellent standards in writing are reflected in other subjects such as history, geography and science, where pupils use an appropriate style and highly accurate vocabulary to express themselves very clearly. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are excellent and add a significant quality to pupils' work. Pupils' performance in music and in physical education is notable. Singing and instrument playing are exceptional and the school's orchestra and choir have had significant success. Similarly, the school excels in sporting achievements, at both local and national levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy coming to school which is confirmed by their very high level of attendance. Behaviour is excellent, both in lessons and around the school. Pupils feel safe; they say that there is no bullying. When, occasionally, pupils have disagreements or more serious differences of opinion, they are well served through the very effective pastoral system. Pupils themselves contribute to this as mediators, and effectively settle minor differences. The pupils adopt a healthy lifestyle as a result of the school's outstanding sports programme, general physical activity both in lessons and after school, and the strong focus on healthy diet which is well understood by the pupils. The preparation for the next steps in their education is outstanding: they achieve high standards not only in literacy, numeracy and ICT, but also in entrepreneurial skills. Pupils organise many charitable activities themselves. Pupils' views have significant influence on school life. The school council feels that it is seen as a key force for discussion, with regular meetings and consequent action. For example, refurbishing the toilets throughout the school was in direct response to their concerns. This gives pupils a clear message that the school treats them respectfully and listens to their views.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers use a wealth of data about pupils' standards and achievements to monitor their progress. This enables them to provide effective interventions

where pupils require support and to set very challenging learning tasks. Lessons are exceptionally well planned and work is often set at four different levels so that pupils of all attainments have the opportunity to succeed and be equally challenged. Expectations of what pupils can do are exceptionally high in the great majority of subjects. What pupils should aim for in their work is clearly explained at the beginning of lessons, along with the criteria by which pupils can assess their own performance. Pupils are, therefore, clear about what to do and the standards that are expected of them. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and confidence and so learning is often rapid. Marking is thorough and tells pupils accurately about their progress and what they have to do to improve. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and provide an exceptionally effective lead in lessons, without taking away pupils' opportunities to excel themselves. Similarly, teaching assistants are skilled in supporting learning. Pupils say they find lessons interesting and are being fully involved as active learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

In planning the curriculum, the school makes particularly good arrangements to take into account pupils' interests and varying learning needs. There is very good provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT. The school provides an exceptionally rich curriculum by ensuring a breadth of learning opportunities that takes it well beyond National Curriculum requirements. There are excellent arrangements to develop pupils' personal, creative and physical skills through the extensive range of opportunities for all of them to engage in sporting activities and to learn to play musical instruments. The school ensures that pupils identified as needing extra support, or in need of further challenges, are provided for exceptionally well. The school shows great thought in planning its support programmes, which extend for example, to short courses to build pupils' confidence in their own athletic skills. The curriculum is organised on a topic approach, which links subjects together in engaging ways, which adds relevance, interest and enjoyment to learning. ICT has a strong position in the curriculum and strengthens pupils' learning opportunities very well. Curriculum enrichment is excellent. An exciting and extensive range of visits and visitors and highly effective links with other schools, including the secondary schools to which pupils move, add greatly to pupils' interest in learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care and support makes a significant contribution to pupils' excellent academic achievement and personal development. Each pupil's progress across all subjects is very carefully tracked. This enables staff to quickly identify those in need of support or who would benefit from having their work extended or learning accelerated. Pupils and parents are kept fully informed of progress. Pupils know the standard of their work and what they should be aiming for. Support is outstanding for pupils with specific needs, whether these are emotional, behavioural or any other difficulty in learning, or gifts and talents. Procedures for safeguarding and to ensure pupils' health and safety are fully in place. Pupils say that they can rely on all adults to look after their welfare. The school has extensive and well-established links with external agencies to meet pupils' varying needs and to raise their awareness of health issues, such as the dangers of drugs, so they are able to make their own wise choices. The school's excellent website helps everyone keep up-to-date with school. It keeps parents informed about their children's homework and enables them to keep track of their children's progress. Transitions

are handled well, both for pupils entering Year 3, and Year 6 pupils moving on to secondary school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is an exceptionally strong leader. He has focused the professional development of all staff and governors so that they have the skills to play significant roles in monitoring and evaluating school performance and identifying areas for school improvement. The senior leadership team, subject leaders and governors work together exceptionally well to evaluate and improve school performance. Leadership roles are clearly defined and the staff have a shared vision of the school's direction and priorities. Subject leadership has been a focus for development this year and leaders at this level are passionate about providing the best they can for each pupil. There is a strong sense of teamwork. Governors play an important role in leadership and management. They are very focused and their organisation and responsibilities mean that they monitor key areas of school development, including priorities in the school improvement plan. They support the school exceptionally well, whilst still holding staff to account for their performance.

The school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well. It has a detailed audit of the school's context, locally, nationally and globally. Pupils are involved in wide variety of activities, significantly through sport and music and charity, in the local community. Strong themes through the curriculum help pupils to understand something of what it is like to live in other cultures which are strengthened by links with Nigeria and Hong Kong, although their first-hand experience of different cultures is limited. The school itself operates as a very cohesive community, with many responsibilities taken on by pupils, specifically the democratic election of candidates to the school council, and the excellent work done by peer mediators to help break down possible barriers within the school.

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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?	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

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	1
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**

21 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Crabtree Junior School, Harpenden, AL5 5PU.

Thank you all for making us welcome when we visited you recently and for helping us find out all about your school. Special thanks go to those of you who we had the opportunity to talk to. We were very impressed by the level of maturity in the way you all conduct yourselves. We thoroughly enjoyed listening to what you had to say. You are all excellent ambassadors for the school and the way you go about school life helped us decide just how good your school is. We found these opportunities, visiting lessons to watch you work and finding out what you think about school very valuable indeed.

You go to an excellent school and you spoke highly of your time there. All staff work exceptionally well together to provide you with a high quality education. You make excellent progress in lessons, achieve outstandingly and reach very high standards in a very wide range of subjects.

You help a great deal by behaving exceptionally well and trying very hard to do your best. We were impressed by how well you respond in lessons, showing lots of interest and enthusiasm. We liked the sensible way in which you make friends, care about each other and show really good manners. You help to make pupils feel safe in school. It is clear to visitors just how much you love school and find lessons and the other opportunities to learn enjoyable. You are prepared very well for the next stage of your education.

While your school is outstanding, there is always room for improvement and we have asked the staff and governors to:

- give you more opportunities to meet people from cultural backgrounds different from your own
- share with the infant school next door what you do exceptionally well so that all children benefit from this excellent practice.

We wish you all the best in the future.

David Speakman

Lead inspector