

Prae Wood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117315
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326572
Inspection date	17 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Marianne Harris

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)	221
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 Sam Othen
Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Stephenson
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	King Harry Lane St. Albans Hertfordshire AL3 4HZ
Telephone number	01727 751930
Fax number	01727 751931

Age group	3–11
Inspection date	17 March 2009
Inspection number	326572

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

- how successful the school has been in raising the standards in writing
- the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- how well community cohesion is promoted.

Evidence was obtained from lesson observations, discussions with staff and pupils, looking at work and talking to representatives of the governing body. 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 its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Prae Wood Primary School is average in size. Most pupils enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge close to expectations for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils are mostly of White British heritage, although some are from mixed minority ethnic backgrounds, but none is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, is close to average. The needs of these children vary, but are mainly moderate learning and medical needs, and speech and language difficulties. Most of the teaching staff joined the school in September and the headteacher has been in post since January. The high cost of housing makes recruitment and retention of teachers difficult in this area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Prae Wood Primary School provides a good standard of education for its pupils. Many parents comment on the 'wonderful atmosphere' and refer to 'the close-knit family feel where everyone looks after one another'. Parents also comment on the good management of staff turnover and report that their children's education has not been disrupted in any way.

National tests for pupils in Year 6 show that standards have been above average and these look set to be maintained, with indications that this year about half of the pupils will reach the higher levels in English and mathematics. Teacher assessments for pupils at the end of Year 2 show that standards are above average; these also look set to continue. Much emphasis has been put on raising the standards of writing across the school and there has been a systematic approach to promoting the skills pupils need to become confident writers. Programmes have been put in place and assessments have improved so that pupils have the opportunity to write for a range of purposes and know what they have to do in order to improve their work. All groups of pupils achieve well, whatever their starting points, because they make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported so that they can have full access to learning and achieve well.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. Behaviour is exemplary and there is a culture of respect and helping each other in the school. Pupils are extremely polite and friendly, and welcome visitors into school with a smile and a greeting. The older pupils willingly look after the younger ones so that the family atmosphere in the school is maintained. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to eat healthily, the importance of exercise and how to keep safe. Many of the pupils take an active part in the many and varied sporting activities provided. Some come into school early so that they can participate in the very energetic 'Streetdance' sessions. Links with the local supermarket have resulted in cycle racks for pupils and many cycle to school. The school council is very proactive and has many ideas for improving the school. School council representatives are confident that their views are being listened to and that their idea to have lockers for pupils in Year 6 is being taken seriously. Attendance is above average because pupils are extremely enthusiastic about learning and very keen to come to school. Pupils are very proud of the part they play in the local and wider community. They raise a lot of money for local and national charities, as well as raising funds for particular school projects. They take part in musical events with other schools, and learn about schools in Uganda through well-planned links with that country. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the beliefs and cultures of others. They confidently talk about a wide variety of faiths and respect diversity. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The staff have embraced the recently reviewed curriculum that was put in place before many of them arrived in the school. They work together very effectively, sharing ideas and experiences to provide lessons that are enjoyable and meet the needs of all pupils in their class. Consequently teaching and learning are good. The purpose of each lesson is clearly explained so that pupils know what it is they are going to learn. Teachers explain carefully what they expect from the pupils and, as a result, pupils are beginning to assess how much they have learnt and understood. The marking of pupils' work is good, and includes praise and ideas for improvement. Teaching assistants are skilful at supporting pupils with additional needs so that they can achieve well in lessons. The curriculum is creative and enjoyable for all pupils. Opportunities to write are incorporated wherever possible and this strategy is having a positive impact on writing standards.

Planned themes interest pupils and enable them to participate in many trips and extra activities. Pupils in Years 5 and 6, for example, enjoyed a visit to the Imperial War Museum as part of their work on World War Two and have learnt about many aspects of life during this time. A wide range of clubs further enhances learning. Many pupils join in with the sporting activities, musical events and quieter activities, such as learning to play chess. This creative curriculum has resulted in high standards in art and design. Pupils have many opportunities to explore various techniques and are confident when producing work such as close observation drawings.

Staff take excellent care of the pupils of all ages. All requirements are in place and the school has a very welcoming atmosphere. Child protection procedures are very robust and the school follows the local authority's policy for recruiting staff. Pupils report that incidents of inappropriate behaviour are rare, but quickly dealt with. Teachers have set individual targets for each pupil in English and mathematics. Pupils are very aware of what these are and know what it is they are aiming for in order to reach higher standards. Pupils with particular needs are extremely well cared for. Where relevant they have individual education plans with targets that are attainable yet challenging so that they can make good progress. Other needs, including personal or medical, are addressed extremely well. Where necessary families are supported so that their children feel very safe and valued in school.

The school is well led and managed. Many parents comment on the seamless transition when established staff move on and new ones join the school. This is a testament to the systems that have been put in place to ensure that good provision continues for the pupils. The governing body has had a major role in this and seeks to recruit staff with particular skills in order to meet the school's needs. As a result, staff who join the school know exactly what is expected of them and willingly take on arrangements already in place. The new headteacher has made a very good start in building her team of staff and ensuring that all agreed programmes are implemented. The senior leadership team now acknowledges that all of the current programmes and procedures need to be evaluated in order to ensure that they are effective and helpful in continuing to raise standards. While current assessment arrangements are effective and include tracking the progress of each pupil and putting in place plans for improvement, arrangements are complex with several systems running in parallel. The school is now trying out a few assessment approaches and plans to evaluate them as a team, to see which is the most effective. The school promotes community cohesion well, having carried out an audit and encouraged classes to look further afield to learn about children in other countries. The pupils know much about the local area and good links with local businesses and other schools help them to understand about others.

Since the time of the last inspection there has been a complete change of teaching staff. Nevertheless the issues identified at that time have been tackled successfully. Assessment procedures have improved and standards are rising. The enthusiasm of the headteacher and her staff and good governance indicates that there is good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the Nursery children have access to a wide range of activities that cover all areas of learning. There is a strong focus on teaching the basics of numbers, letters and sounds as well as providing exciting creative opportunities. The learning area is bright and stimulating, encouraging children to be excited about learning. The garden area is used well so that children can learn outside as well as inside. Children make good progress overall and achieve well. Children happily make

the transition into the Reception class because there is a shared area for both classes and children in the Nursery quickly become accustomed to the Reception staff. Children continue to make good progress in the Reception class because there is appropriate emphasis on developing early reading, writing and numerical skills. All areas of learning are covered and children learn to work together well and respect each other. When they leave the Reception class they have reached standards that are a little above those expected for children of their age. However, the learning environment in the Reception class is not as positive as that in the Nursery. The classroom is not as well organised, or as rich in language and number displays, as the Nursery. The new coordinator of the Early Years Foundation Stage has recognised this and her good leadership and management skills are leading to improvements. Staff have recently begun a learning journal for each child, each of which gives a useful picture of a child's progress. Although this innovation is in the early stages of development children are excited to see their journals, to which parents will be encouraged to contribute.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the learning environment in the Reception class so that it is as vibrant and exciting as that in the Nursery.
- Evaluate the programmes in place to enrich learning and assess progress, to judge which are the most effective.

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
---	----------------

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?	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?	2
The standards ¹ 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

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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	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?	1

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	1
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

18 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Prae Wood Primary School, St Albans, AL3 4HZ

Thank you for welcoming us into your good school recently. You helped us find out about what school is like for you and I am now writing to let you know what we found out.

You are extremely well behaved and respect one another. Some of you told us about all of the activities you take part in and about the money you have raised for charity. You have an excellent understanding about healthy eating and keeping safe and your teachers take exceptional care of you all. You know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of others.

We looked especially at writing and found that this has improved recently. You work hard in lessons, make good progress and are enthusiastic about learning. The amount that you write is impressive because your teachers have thought about what interests you. They give you many opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and they mark your work well. They let you know what it is you have to do to improve your work and you all know your targets.

We looked at the work of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and found that they make good progress, too. We have asked your headteacher to make sure that the classroom for the children in the Reception class is as bright and exciting as that for the children in the Nursery.

Many of your parents commented on the many staff changes that have happened recently, and said that this did not affect your learning. We know that there have been many changes recently to the curriculum and the way in which your work is assessed. We have asked the headteacher to make sure that teachers think carefully about all the changes and decide which ones are the best for helping you to learn and achieve well.

Thank you once again for your help. We wish you good luck in the future.

Best wishes

Marianne Harris

Lead inspector