

Applecroft School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117355
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326585
Inspection date	10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Cosway

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)	457
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	Mr Rob Andrew
Headteacher	Mrs Vicky Parsey
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Applecroft Road Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire AL8 6JZ
Telephone number	01707 323758
Fax number	01707 393188

Age group	3–11
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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: the progress made by pupils throughout the school, the progress of girls who were low attaining at the end of Year 2, the quality of teaching across the school and the effectiveness of leadership. They gathered evidence from observations of lessons, discussions with staff and pupils, analysis of parents' views and scrutiny of school documentation and policies, as well as scrutiny of pupils' work. 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

Applecroft School is larger than average. The school population represents a mix of social backgrounds, but pupils are mainly White British. Attainment on entry is close to that expected. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, is slightly above the average nationally and most have specific learning difficulties.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision consists of a Nursery and two Reception classes. The school also has the benefit of community support provision on site, consisting of a newly completed children's centre. The school has won many national awards, including Investors in People and Arts Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This happy and welcoming school provides an outstanding education for its pupils. Pupils' academic achievement is excellent and their personal development is promoted exceptionally well. They behave particularly well in class and around the school, because of the consistent ways in which adults reward good behaviour and refuse to accept inappropriate attitudes, either to work or to other people. Pupils' moral and cultural development is also outstanding. In a Christmas assembly there was a very real sense of awe and wonder as they watched the unwrapping of a present to all the children. As they peeled off the wrapping, they uncovered festive paper for Christmas, birthday paper for Christ's birth, plain paper to reflect the circumstances of the birth and newspaper to indicate the good news that this represented. Their understanding of the significance of these symbols was impressive. Additionally, they were able to associate the Christian festival with those of other major religions.

One girl said that she looks forward to every day at school and this sums up the attitudes to education that the school fosters so well. The pupils learn exceptionally well because they find lessons interesting, challenging and fun. Their enjoyment of school, and the many friendships that they make there, help to keep attendance figures well above average.

The quality of work pupils produce in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, along with the many opportunities they have to collaborate and work in teams, ensure that they are prepared exceptionally well for their futures, both in school and in the work place. This is further evidenced by the achievements of the school council. Representatives are democratically elected onto this body by their classmates and they have made a significant contribution to the working of the school. For example, the council instigated the successful 'buddy benches' in the playground that help lonely children to find friends. Pupils contribute well to the local community and the wider world. They are very aware that some people are not as privileged as they are and they show this by raising money for charities. Their understanding of the need to eat healthily is excellent, as is their commitment to healthy exercise. They rightly believe that the school is a safe and secure place to be and are well aware of potential dangers in the wider world. There are excellent links with the local community, including a community base room and a children's centre. The school works tirelessly to promote community cohesion, including on a national and global scale, and ensure any incidents of racism are extremely rare.

The curriculum is outstanding, not only in its breadth and richness, but also in the ways that subjects are linked together in themes that give purpose and relevance to learning. The children enjoy the way that their current topics, about Romans for example, have become part of their Christmas production. The work that Year 6 pupils are doing on the Second World War in history has become part of their work in many other subjects, such as the study of war poetry in literacy. There are many visits and visitors to enhance their studies and a very good range of after-school activities.

Teaching is almost always good or better and in its impact on learning it is outstanding overall. Teachers plan exciting lessons and ensure that pupils are actively involved, so that they learn by finding out for themselves rather than just listening to instruction. Class control is excellent across the school. One girl told the inspectors that what she likes about the school is how challenged she is in class. This reflects the high expectations that teachers have of pupils and the very effective ways they ensure that the work they set is appropriate for the different needs

and abilities of the children in their classes. Lessons are exceptionally well resourced and information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to help pupils to learn. The pace of learning is brisk and as a result of all this excellent provision, pupils work hard, concentrate well and develop positive attitudes to learning.

The very high quality teaching and curriculum have a significant impact on pupils' achievements. Attainment in the national tests and assessments for seven year-olds has been consistently above average. In recent years, performance in the national tests at the end of Year 6 has been consistently exceptionally high. Many more pupils than nationally gained level 5, above the expected level for their age, in English, mathematics and science in 2007. In 2008, this was true in mathematics and science, and the teacher assessments for English indicate that levels were similar to those of previous years. Pupils make excellent progress from close to average attainment on entry to well above average by the time they leave the school. For the past two years, the school has worked to raise writing standards, realising that these are below those for reading and mathematics. They have improved steadily, but the school recognises that more can be done to help pupils to improve. Teachers mark their pupils' written work carefully and very helpfully. However, this has insufficient impact. The advice is quickly forgotten and there are too few opportunities for pupils to redraft their work in order to improve it.

Almost all parents praise the school, many believing it to be giving an excellent start to their children's education and pleased that their offspring are so happy there. Some parents would like the school to pay more attention to their views. It does more than most schools to solicit the views of parents and to respond to their concerns, but is looking for ways to develop this even further. It has improved significantly in recent years as the result of outstanding leadership, not only from the headteacher and senior team, but all staff with management responsibilities. There is a strong sense of corporate leadership and the many initiatives have stemmed from excellent self-evaluation and analysis of data. Very good strategic planning has led to clear improvements in teaching, planning, parental involvement and the curriculum. The large budget deficit that the headteacher inherited four years ago has been balanced out and the school has made, overall, excellent progress since the last inspection. Governors have significantly developed their roles since then and are involved in all aspects of the work of the school. They support and challenge the school well. These successes clearly show that the school has excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The quality of education in the EYFS leads to children achieving very well indeed, even though some enter with low social and communication skills. A good range of varied and appropriate activities ensures that children enjoy learning and quickly acquire the skills they need. Almost all have reached the early learning goals by the end of their time in Reception. The learning environment is safe and stimulating. The secure outside area is used effectively to extend and develop learning further in all aspects of the curriculum. The children are happy and behave very well. They share, take turns, have above average speaking and listening skills and they enjoy learning. They evaluate their own learning, and staff set them challenging activities. However, the school acknowledges that there is a need to develop the questioning skills of some adult helpers so that pupils develop their problem solving skills. The EYFS is led exceptionally well. There are highly effective assessment systems and very appropriate teaching approaches that help to develop children's confidence and independence. Detailed information

collected on individuals ensures that if children need additional support they are identified quickly and support is given.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make certain that teachers' marking gives all pupils clear and effective guidance on what they need to do to improve and develop their writing skills further.

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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

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	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

11 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Applecroft School, Applecroft Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6JZ

Thank you very much for making us so welcome at your school. It was a pleasure to talk to you and we particularly enjoyed your singing in assembly and your excitement as the gift of merit tokens was unwrapped! We would like to say a special thank you to the children we met at lunchtime, who told us what it is like to be a pupil at your school.

You all told us how much you like your school and of the happiness and friendliness that dwell there. We liked it very much too. Your school gives you an excellent education. You feel safe and cared for because the school looks after you extremely well. By the end of Year 6, you have made excellent progress. You are much better at reading, writing and numeracy than most children in other schools. You behave extremely well and enjoy your learning.

The teachers in charge of the school are leading it exceptionally well. Your headteacher and all the staff are determined that you will have the very best education. We have asked them to make sure that you get lots of advice to help you to raise the standards of your writing even higher and more opportunities to redraft your written work in order to improve it.

Once again thank you for a delightful day. Keep giving of your best and enjoy your time in this outstanding school.

Yours sincerely

Paul Cosway

Lead inspector