

Flax Hill Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124135
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328062
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Moore

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gordon Watson
Headteacher	Nick Price
Date of previous school inspection	13 July 2006
School address	Chestnut Avenue Gillway Tamworth B79 8QZ
Telephone number	01827 475675
Fax number	01827 475680

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average size school. Its pupils are drawn from almost entirely White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds and the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Flax Hill Badgers after- school club which is not managed by the governing body was inspected separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This popular school provides a satisfactory education. It has a number of good features. Elements of the pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. There are strengths in the quality of pastoral care and support that pupils receive with one parent accurately commenting, 'Staff really care about our children.' This is an important reason why pupils' personal qualities are developed well. Pupils' smiling faces and enthusiasm for learning demonstrate their good enjoyment of school. Attendance is above average; pupils are well behaved, polite and friendly.

Achievement is satisfactory overall because not all pupils make consistently good progress. Greater gains are made in reading, and recently introduced strategies are leading to improved progress in mathematics. By the time pupils leave school in Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are broadly average.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons are lively, engaging and interesting, but at times teachers' expectations about how much progress pupils can make are not high enough. Teaching effectively promotes positive behaviour and learning. Despite some good examples, teachers' marking does not always consistently tell children what they need to do to improve their work.

The school's good curriculum is enhanced well by many visits, visitors and well attended extra-curricular activities. Pupils greatly value these, particularly opportunities to participate in sport and music. Such experiences, along with other parts of the curriculum, have led to pupils showing an outstanding understanding of the importance of following healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is reflected in pupils' good relationships with each other, staff and visitors; relationships are a real strength of the school.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Although the leadership of the school is successful in promoting pupils' personal development and well-being, there is still work to be done to ensure that all pupils make good progress all of the time. Although senior staff monitor progress and standards in school, they do not have a sufficient understanding of how well the pupils are performing when compared to others their age. However, recent successful developments in mathematics have been brought about by improving leadership.

Parents are very supportive and the school has forged a strong partnership with them. They hold the school in high regard, typically saying things like, 'Flax Hill ensures that my child develops socially and emotionally.' Good links have been formed with outside agencies that provide valuable support for pupils. Close partnerships with local schools help pupils make a strong start at the school and then move on successfully to the next stage in their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the rate of pupils' progress by raising expectations of what they can achieve.
- Ensure teachers' marking consistently informs pupils on what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure senior staff check the pupils' performance against a much wider range of measures than at present.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged as satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils join the school with standards that are broadly average and make satisfactory progress to reach standards, by the time they leave, that are in line with the national average. Faster progress is made in reading, and in science. The school rightly identified the need to improve the teaching of mathematics and recent developments have led to pupils making faster progress in this subject. Boys still outperform girls in mathematics but the gap between the two has narrowed. However, teachers' expectation of what pupils can achieve is not high enough for all to make good progress all of the time. Too often, achievement is about the progress the pupils are expected to make rather than progress against more challenging targets. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress that is comparable with that of their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

There is a delightful happy atmosphere at the school. Pupils' behaviour is good; they show responsibility and work well alongside one another. At all times, pupils are welcoming, polite and go out of their way to be helpful. They form good relationships with one another and report that no bullying takes place, which is a view shared with their parents. They are respectful and knowledgeable about other cultures. Pupils have an outstanding understanding of how to live healthily and participate, in large numbers, in sporting events that help to promote this. Similarly, their understanding of how to keep safe is outstanding. Through activities such as the school council, pupils make a good contribution to the school community. They enthusiastically raise money for good causes. Attendance is above average and pupils arrive at school on time. The development of skills to work independently and in using information and communication technology (ICT) contributes well to their sound preparation for further education and later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching, which is satisfactory overall, has positive features in all classes. In their lessons, pupils are well engaged and motivated, helping them to work successfully in groups and independently. Teaching promotes good behaviour and an enjoyment of learning. Teaching assistants work well with pupils who find learning more difficult so that they make satisfactory progress. However, work is not always closely tailored to the pupils' needs so that at times it can be too easy or too hard. Expectations of what pupils can achieve within their lessons are not always high enough which means that teaching leads to satisfactory progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils and parents greatly value the wide-ranging experiences provided by the school's good curriculum. A very strong feature is the additional activities and experiences that it provides for pupils. Extra-curricular clubs, particularly sporting ones, are very well attended and pupils achieve well against those from other schools in competitive events. Children speak of their

enjoyment of gardening club and musical experiences are a further strength with pupils singing well. Provision for literacy and numeracy enables pupils to make satisfactory progress in these areas. The curriculum helps to promote pupils' good enjoyment of school and their outstanding grasp of how to live healthily and stay safe. Experiences are well planned and adapted to meet the needs of pupils. Educational visits and visitors to the school also contribute well to a curriculum that effectively promotes the pupils' good personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils' welfare is a high priority for the school and leads to good personal development. Pupils find staff caring and approachable which results in staff having a clear understanding of their needs. They provide very sensitive support to help pupils deal effectively with needs and issues. At the time of the inspection, the school fulfilled government safeguarding requirements. Risk assessments, to ensure pupils are kept safe both in school and on visits, are carried out in a thorough manner. Parents rightly value this high level of care and pupils see the school as a happy 'family'. The academic guidance pupils receive is inconsistent. Despite some good examples, marking does not clearly guide all pupils to understand how they can improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Senior staff and governors are rightly proud of the welfare, guidance and support offered to pupils which enables them to develop good personal qualities. They have created a caring school and successfully promote an enjoyment in learning. Their leadership has brought about a good curriculum which greatly enriches the pupils' personal development. Good work has been undertaken to ensure recent improvements in mathematics but improvement in other subjects is much steadier. Pupils' progress is not rapid enough with targets lacking challenge and expectations of what pupils can achieve not high enough. Although involved in introducing new strategies, senior staff are not always clear about how well pupils perform against their counterparts nationally. Therefore, at times, the school's understanding of its performance is undermined by this perspective. Checking of the school's work lacks necessary rigour. Recent improvements in mathematics indicates that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further. Governors show a good understanding of the school's work and are involved in helping to improve it. The school has formed good links with parents who hold it in high regard. An effective start has been made to the school's contribution to community cohesion and there is an appropriate strategy in place to reach out to other communities.

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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?	3
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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**

12 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Flax Hill Junior School, Tamworth, B79 8QZ

Thank you for being so welcoming and friendly when we visited your school recently. You were very polite and well behaved. We enjoyed hearing about the clubs you like taking part in and how you have raised money for good causes. We found that your school is providing a satisfactory education. This means that it has a number of good and a few outstanding features as well as things to improve. This letter is to let you know about some of the things we found out about your school.

In your work, the progress you make is satisfactory and by the time you leave standards in English, mathematics and science are average. You make faster progress in reading and recently, a number of new approaches have helped you to do better in mathematics. We have asked your headteacher, staff and governors to speed up learning by expecting you to achieve even more. We were impressed by your knowledge of how to stay safe and live healthily. We thought your behaviour was good and attendance is better than the average. We noticed how much you enjoyed your lessons, were well involved in your learning and worked well together. However, we have asked your teachers, when marking your work, to make it very clear about what you need to do next to improve it. You are lucky to have so many visits and visitors to the school to help you learn. We also were pleased that you are good at taking responsibilities. The staff in charge of the school care a great deal about you and provide much support. This has helped you to feel safe and very happy; we learnt that you do not worry about unkind behaviour such as bullying. As one last thing, we asked the staff in charge to check your progress carefully against that made by pupils in other schools nationally.

The headteacher, staff and governors are all keen that the school should improve. You can help by continuing to work hard, aim to do even better and remain so wonderfully enthusiastic about your school.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Moore

Lead inspector