

Bernards Heath Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117143
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338956
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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 of pupils on the school roll	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Liming
Headteacher	Mrs Sian Kilpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	5 April 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons or parts of lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of information, including data showing the progress made by pupils and samples of pupils' work. Questionnaires returned by 83 parents, 100 pupils, and 14 members of staff were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at:

- the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly in mathematics and science
- the impact of pupils' day-to-day use of information and communication technology (ICT) on their learning
- the extent to which teachers' marking of pupils' work makes a positive contribution to pupils' progress.

Information about the school

Bernards Heath Junior is an average-sized urban school. Most of its pupils are White British. The remainder are from a range of different cultural traditions, with the largest single group comprising pupils of Bangladeshi heritage. However, very few pupils are in the early stages of learning to communicate in English. About 16% of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, a proportion which is below the national average. Most of these pupils have general learning difficulties and/or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Almost all pupils transfer from a nearby infant school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Bernards Heath Junior is an outstandingly effective school which has been transformed under the dynamic leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by staff and governors. The parents are well aware of this. Many of their questionnaires had highly appreciative comments appended, typified by: 'The school has a strong head and great teachers' and 'It has blossomed into an exciting and invigorating place for all children... I have nothing but praise for this amazing school!' The transformation of the school has been brought about through the detailed attention paid to all aspects of its work and the headteacher's uncompromisingly high aspirations for all pupils.

In all classes, pupils make good progress in their learning because of the consistently good quality of teaching provided for them. Other factors that contribute strongly to pupils' learning are their excellent social skills, including behaviour, and their enjoyment of the tasks set for them. In Year 6, progress is rapidly accelerated and is outstanding overall. This is because of the wide range of extra measures, including individual tuition, used to boost pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. As a result, standards are high in English, mathematics and science by the time pupils leave at the end the year. What makes these extra measures highly effective is the rigorous way that information from the excellent system for tracking pupils' progress is used to highlight specific individual weaknesses that need to be addressed, and the high quality tuition provided for the pupils identified.

The curriculum comprises a broad range of well organised, interesting activities that hold pupils' attention and enable them to become confident and articulate learners. One of the key factors in the effective delivery of the curriculum is the teachers' skills in using technology, through the interactive whiteboards in their classrooms, to help illustrate the teaching points to be made. However, the pupils themselves do not make enough use of computers as a day-to-day tool for learning in lessons. A particularly noteworthy feature of provision is the contribution of the school's professional librarian in ensuring that good quality resources are available to help enrich pupils' learning.

The impact of the headteacher's determined pursuit of excellence is seen in the improvement in standards at the end of Year 6 since the last inspection. Data relating to the attainment of pupils in Years 5 and 4 indicate strongly that standards are set to rise further in future years, and demonstrate the school's excellent capacity for sustained improvement. With the exception of the satisfactory promotion of community cohesion, all aspects of leadership and management are good or better. The school has a clear view about the direction it needs to take in order to promote community cohesion, but it is yet to formally monitor and evaluate the impact of its actions in a systematic way.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' access to computers in lessons so that their use becomes an integral part of learning in all areas of the curriculum.
 - Put in place a more structured approach to monitoring and evaluating the impact of initiatives to promote community cohesion.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

It was clear from the lessons observed during the inspection that all groups of pupils, regardless of ability or background, learn consistently well. An analysis of data suggested that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities did not do quite as well as their peers nationally in mathematics and science in the 2009 national tests at the end of Year 6. However, in all of the lessons and group tuition sessions seen, these pupils were making good progress in line with their classmates. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils in the lowest ability group successfully answered challenging questions posed to the whole class about the relationship between numerator and denominator. In a Year 5 science lesson about the human skeleton, the response of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was equally as good as that of the rest of the class. The evidence gathered by inspectors through direct observations was confirmed by a close scrutiny of the school's records of pupils' progress, and also showed that the pupils currently in Year 6 are well on course to exceed the challenging targets set for them and to equal the high level of performance achieved by Year 6 pupils last year.

The good attendance rates reflect pupils' enjoyment of school. In discussions with inspectors and in their responses to the inspection questionnaires an overwhelming majority of pupils expressed positive views about the school. Typical of the comments made are: 'My school is brilliant and fun' ... 'If we are worried about something, there's always someone to help us'...'My teachers help me when I'm stuck and when the work is easy they make it harder!' One of the many things that pupils told inspectors they like about the school is that they feel really safe. All of the pupils and parents who returned their questionnaires confirmed this. Pupils' behaviour is rarely less than good, and in closely supervised situations, such as when entering or leaving assembly, it is often impeccable. Pupils are not concerned about bullying. They say that instances are infrequent, but that when bullying does occur the teachers deal with it quickly and effectively. While pupils clearly know what they need to do to keep fit and healthy, they are the first to admit that they do not always put their learning into practice by helping to promote healthy lifestyles. The pupils are proud of their school, and the older ones in particular thrive on the opportunities provided to take responsibility, for instance as house captains, members of the school council, or as 'peer mentors' by helping resolve disagreements between pupils. Overall, pupils make a very good contribution to the day-to-day life of the school, but they are less involved in activities that have a positive impact within the local community.

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A very clear moral code permeates all aspects of school life, and pupils are unfailingly polite and well mannered. A strong thread of spirituality runs through all activities, as pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own success or to celebrate the achievements of others in reaching the targets set for them. The school's good musical tradition helps develop pupils' cultural awareness, and pupils show an appreciation of the wide range of cultural traditions which contribute to their daily lives. Pupils are well prepared for the next phase of their education and for the world of work. They have excellent social skills and the ability to work either independently or with others. Their skills in oracy, literacy and numeracy are well developed, but they do not routinely make enough use of ICT as a tool for learning.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Inspectors were impressed by the teachers' good skills in managing their pupils and in providing clear explanations about new concepts. Pupils' excellent behaviour and ability to work either independently or with their classmates help create the good climate for learning that was evident in most lessons observed. In all year groups, teaching

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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assistants work well in partnership with teachers. On the rare occasions when teaching is only satisfactory the pace of learning drops, usually because the learning objective lacks clarity and because teachers spend too long on their introduction to the lesson. However, the good quality of teaching in a mathematics lesson for pupils in Year 5 typifies much of what was observed by inspectors. The teacher's good questioning effectively challenged and developed the pupils' ideas. It also helped to sustain a crisp pace to learning. The teacher made clear links with what pupils had learned previously. This helped develop the pupils' confidence in recognising patterns in numbers and in using this knowledge to hypothesise as they carried out their investigations. The pupils' day-to-day use of ICT is limited because the ratio of computers to pupils falls short of the national norm, and pupils do not always enjoy ready access to computers apart from occasions when they are in the ICT suite.

Teachers make good use of their secure knowledge of their pupils' different stages of development to pitch work at the right level, so that all pupils are provided with achievable challenges. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is good. It often provides useful comments to which pupils respond. For example, a pupil in a Year 3 lesson carefully followed her teacher's suggestion to highlight the key words when attempting to solve a written problem in mathematics. This helped improve her problem-solving. The use of assessment is excellent in terms of the rigorous way in which data are used to identify pupils who need extra help and the exceptional impact that this help has on pupils' attainment.

A noteworthy feature of the curriculum, and one that helps address the needs of many pupils, is the school's effective implementation of the national SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) programme. The SEAL programme is fully integrated into the day-to-day life of the school and SEAL targets provide a whole-school focus for each week. This focus is developed well by the pupils themselves as the oldest pupils confidently lead discussion sessions within their house groups. For example, role-play was used well as pupils of all ages in Ruby House, one of the four house teams within the school, explored the theme of 'I can say no without being unfriendly'. One of the Year 6 pupils in this group was particularly effective in using questions to help develop the understanding of the younger ones. A further good feature of the curriculum is the provision of specialist teaching in French.

An outstanding feature of provision is the quality of day-to-day guidance and support provided for pupils. The needs of individuals are well known to all staff, and pupils feel valued members of the school 'family'. There are very clear, well established arrangements to induct pupils into school and to ensure a smooth transition as they move on to the secondary phase of their education. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are exceptionally well supported and their parents are closely involved in frequent reviews of the progress being made towards the targets in their education plans.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

All of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt that the school is led and managed well. The very clear direction provided for the school is strongly driven by the headteacher's ambitious vision for the future. The very capable team of senior managers provides highly effective support by helping ensure that the work of the school is closely monitored and that staff are fully supported in developing their professional practice.

The governors know the school and its community well; they take a close interest in the well-being of the pupils, and are effective in holding the school to account for its actions. They do this through an effective committee structure together with the first-hand information gained as a result of visits to the school. However, on occasions, for example regarding the development of a plan of action for the promotion of community cohesion, governors are not sufficiently well informed.

Significant strengths are the school's work to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination, in particular the respect for and celebration of individual differences, and the rigorous procedures for ensuring the safeguarding of pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1
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Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers were overwhelmingly positive in the views of the school expressed though the questionnaires. There is no common theme within the few negative responses.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bernards Heath Junior School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 83 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 214 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	51	61	31	37	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	53	64	29	35	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	44	53	32	39	6	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	47	57	32	39	3	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	50	61	29	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	46	39	47	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	45	38	46	4	5	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	44	54	30	37	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	48	37	45	5	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	45	54	30	36	3	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	45	37	45	6	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	59	71	23	28	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	53	64	29	35	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



7 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bernards Heath Junior School, St Albans, AL3 5HP

On behalf of your inspectors I would like to thank all of you for being so welcoming and helpful to us when we visited your school. Your parents think that you go to a great school, and we agree. We think that it is outstanding!

These are the reasons why.

By the time you leave at the end of Year 6, the standard of your work in English, mathematics and science is high.

You learn well in lessons and make good progress because you are taught well.

We were impressed by your excellent behaviour and the way you get on extremely well with one another.

Your teachers plan lots of interesting things for you to do.

You feel safe because the staff take excellent care of you.

Your headteacher is doing an excellent job, and all of the people who help to manage your school are giving her really good support.

Even a very successful school like yours has something that could be improved, and this is what we think your school should do next.

We would like your teachers to help you to learn even better by giving you more opportunities to use computers in lessons.

We also think that your governors could improve the way that they check on the work that the school does to help improve its links with the wider community.

You can do your bit to help by continuing to do your very best in lessons and by doing even more to make a difference to the lives of other people outside your school. I am sure that you are ready for this challenge!

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

M Thompson

Lead inspector

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