

Walkern Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117154
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338957
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karl List
Headteacher	Anna Marshall
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching by six teachers and practitioners, visiting nine lessons. The inspectors held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, which included the school's analysis of pupils' progress, teachers' lesson plans, the school's improvement plan and also pupils' work. In addition, 39 questionnaires from parents and carers were analysed and their responses taken into account.

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

- the strength of pupils' progress and learning in mathematics
- how well teachers meet the needs of more able pupils
- how well the curriculum has developed since the previous inspection
- the extent of the role that teachers with responsibilities play in the school's monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Information about the school

Walkern is much smaller than most primary schools and is over-subscribed. About two thirds of the pupils live in the village with the rest coming from nearby villages and hamlets and also from the nearby town of Stevenage. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage and none speak English as an additional language. An above average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most of these find learning hard. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. About half the pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 to move to a nearby middle school. Usually, the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher in Years 5 and 6 than in other year groups, though this is not currently the case for Year 6 pupils. Following the resignation of the previous substantive headteacher, an interim headteacher served in the school from January to September 2009. The new headteacher has been at the school since the beginning of the current school year. The school has expanded in the past two years to provide for 20 pupils in Year 1 and the Reception year. It has been accredited with a number of awards, amongst them Healthy Schools and the Sports Active Mark.

The school provides breakfast and after-school care which is managed by the governing body. In addition there is a pre-school which is not managed by the governing body and is subject to a separate inspection report.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Walkern provides a good standard of education. There is a highly positive ethos that stems from the outstanding care, guidance and support for pupils and this results in them making good progress in their personal development. The new headteacher, who is very ably supported by the two senior teachers, has made an outstanding contribution to the school's provision and pupils' achievement in the short time that she has been at the school. This is rightly recognised by parents who are unanimous in saying that they are happy with their children's experiences at the school.

There has been significant improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage since the previous inspection, and children make a good start in the Reception class and achieve well from below expected starting points. Good progress is maintained in the rest of the school, with pupils at the end of Year 4 reaching above expected levels of attainment. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 make good progress and attainment is set to rise to above average levels in English and science. However, throughout the school higher attaining pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics. This is because pupils' mental and oral skills are not sufficiently well developed and, in the past, too few opportunities have been provided for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge in practical situations. Nonetheless, achievement is good overall and there are many contributing factors. Teaching is consistently good with all adults having good relationships with the pupils which ensures that classrooms have a positive and strong learning ethos. However, teaching would be even better if staff ensured that there was more challenge in the activities set for more able pupils in mathematics. There is a rich curriculum that makes learning fun. Staff engage effectively with parents and carers and this impacts in a positive way on pupils' learning. The highly successful 'Dads lunch' held during the inspection gave rise to much pleasure and enthusiasm in both the dads and their children and helped to forge close links between home and school. The school is a very cohesive community. It is at the heart of its local community and touches the lives of pupils and their parents and carers in a positive way. The school is a hub of the local community through its childcare provision and other facilities with many community groups using the school's accommodation. Even though pupils have many opportunities to learn about life in other parts of the world through the curriculum, the impact of community cohesion at a national and global level is under-developed.

Pupils are great ambassadors for their school. They behave outstandingly well both in lessons and around the school and they take responsibility enthusiastically. They undertake their role as school councillors seriously and older pupils enjoy helping younger ones as play leaders or helping out. Pupils are clear about how to stay safe and their understanding of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles is good. Both pupils

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and their parents say that they enjoy school, but leaders have to work hard to ensure that rates of attendance are maintained at average levels. By the time that they leave the school, pupils are mature and reflective, have good social skills and are confident and secure.

The new headteacher has successfully built on the many strengths found at the time of the previous inspection. There is strong team work and high morale amongst the staff. The headteacher's determination and commitment to further improvement is evident and is based on accurate self-evaluation. These factors, when linked to good improvement in the areas identified as weaknesses at the last inspection, demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement, with staff and governors being well placed to realise their ambitions for further school development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress of more able pupils in mathematics by:
 - improving teachers' planning by ensuring that all activities provide challenge
 - consolidating the recent developments to strengthen the pupils' mental and oral skills
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills in practical tasks.
 - Prepare an action plan to improve the effectiveness of the promotion of community cohesion.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and their achievement is good. They have very positive attitudes to learning and this contributes well to the good progress made in most lessons. For example, pupils responded very positively in a good Year 2 literacy lesson to an activity in which they were role playing different characters taken from the book they were studying. This enabled the pupils to gain an excellent understanding of characters and setting because they were confident and enthusiastic in their small group role play. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn well in lessons because they are supported well by the effective teaching assistants. These pupils make good progress towards their clearly defined targets. The school has rightly focused on providing more opportunities for pupils to carry out practical mathematical activities and this is starting to pay dividends. However, because teachers do not always provide sufficient challenge in the activities set for the more able pupils their progress in mathematics is limited to satisfactory. This is not the case in other subjects as these assessments are used well to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress. In reading, progress is outstanding.

Pupils are very proud of their school and are warm and welcoming to each other and visitors. They show good sensitivity for the needs of others by raising funds for charity and they behave exceptionally well.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Excellent attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support. Adults place the pupils' well-being at the centre of their work and they do all they can to make school a happy and safe place to learn. The very well-attended breakfast and after-school clubs give pupils an excellent start to the start or end of the day and are greatly appreciated by pupils, parents and carers.

Teachers manage pupils' behaviour exceptionally well and generally meet their differing needs effectively. There is a strong and successful emphasis on ensuring that pupils are clear about what is to be learned and what they have to do to meet lesson objectives. Assessments are generally used well but sometimes work is too easy for more able pupils in mathematics. This is because pupils are given easier work to tackle before they are provided with extension activities rather than being given work that challenges them from the start. Teachers make very good use of modern technology to demonstrate new skills. For example in an outstanding letters and sounds session in Reception, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard exceptionally well to enliven and demonstrate the words and sounds being taught.

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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There have been improvements in the curriculum since the previous inspection. Teachers' planning is now much more thematically based which helps to provide opportunities for pupils to develop their basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology when learning across a range of subjects. In addition, the recent move to check pupils' knowledge of topics being learned and then encourage them to raise questions to be studied helps to make learning more meaningful. Pupils get many opportunities to learn musical instruments and to take part in the many sporting activities provided. This helps to promote healthy lifestyles and is reflected in the Healthy School status.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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?

The new headteacher is ambitious for the school and is committed to further improvement. This vision is shared by governors and staff. Together, they are determined to achieve the best for the pupils and this drive for improvement is firmly embedded across the school. Because monitoring and evaluation process are well-established, a robust and honest view of the school's strengths and weaknesses has been developed and this has ensured that the priorities for improvement are well founded. Teachers with responsibilities make a good contribution to the processes for checking progress and provision. Staff are clear about which pupils need additional support or intervention. The very good tracking of learning is enhanced by recently introduced systems to hold meetings in which every pupil's progress is reviewed on a termly basis. This supports the good commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination because any unevenness in progress between different groups is quickly identified. Governance has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now good. Governors are helped to gain a thorough understanding of the school's strengths by their involvement in checking provision which is then reported well to the full governing body. This results in governors' being able to provide suitable challenge and support for the school. Safeguarding procedures are of good quality and meet all current regulatory requirements. Governors are aware of the need to strengthen the school's actions to promote community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

There have been improvements in provision and children's progress since the previous inspection. This is because of the dedication and skill of the Early Years Foundation Stage leader. When they join the school, many children are working at levels below those typically expected for their age. They make good progress from these starting points and this results in almost all meeting the expected goals when they enter Year 1. Progress has quickened due to the improving provision and the determination to tackle weaker areas of children's development. For example, children are responding well to the very structured approach to the teaching of letter sounds and this is having a very positive effect on reading and writing skills. Children are helped to feel very safe and secure from the time they start because there are strong links with the pre-school, which is adjacent to the Reception class, and they have many opportunities to taste life in the school before they start. Activities are well-organised in a bright and stimulating learning environment and are very well matched to their learning needs. There is a buzz of chatter and interest when children choose activities for themselves and because the adults ensure that the children are motivated, they thrive in their learning and quickly become confident and secure whether learning indoors or outside. A good balance is provided between activities directed by the adults and those that the children choose for themselves.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They are unanimous in their support in some areas and there are no areas of significant concern. A few parents expressed a concern about the number of changes that the school has gone through in the past year. Inspection findings confirm that the school provides a good standard of education and there is no evidence of any legacy of uncertainty resulting from the changes.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Walkern Primary 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 39 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 93 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	38	23	59	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	33	26	67	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	36	22	56	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	38	21	54	2	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	16	41	22	56	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	36	24	62	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	31	27	69	0	0	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)	10	26	20	51	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	23	29	74	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	26	26	67	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	21	27	69	2	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	28	23	59	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	33	25	64	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.



25 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Walkern Primary School, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 7NS

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. You were very polite and friendly and we enjoyed talking to you. We agree with you that your school is good and you learn well. I particularly enjoyed watching so many of you play with your parents during the Dads' lunch but I do think that you are much better with the pom-poms when cheerleading than your Dads were though it was good to see them having a go!

The teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and they plan lots of exciting activities for you to do. This helps you to make good progress in your learning. The youngest of you settle very quickly and well in Class 1 and you also do well. Those of you that find learning hard make good progress because the teaching assistants support you well. You told us that your school is a very happy place and that the adults look after you really well. We agree with you and so do your parents and carers. We were very impressed by how well you get on together. Your behaviour is excellent, you have a good understanding of being healthy and also you feel very safe in school. We think that your new headteacher is doing an excellent job and she is greatly helped by all the staff. They are always checking on how well you are doing because they want you always to do as well as you can.

Even in a good school such as yours, there are some things that can be improved. We have asked your headteacher and staff to make sure that you make more progress in mathematics - particularly those of you that find learning easy. We have asked your teachers to do this by making sure that the work challenges you in all lessons and that your mental mathematics is improved. We have also asked your headteacher and governors to make sure that they help you all to understand how different groups of adults can get on well together whether they live in your village, the United Kingdom or the rest of the world. I know that your teachers make your school a special place for you. You can help by continuing to be positive, working hard and enjoying your school.

Yours sincerely

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector

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