

Ickniel Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117186
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338964
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Judi Bedawi

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	258
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judith Candy
Headteacher	Jackie Egan
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 20 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and the manager of the children's centre. They observed the school at work, looked at pupils' books, a range of school documentation and policies, monitoring records and data on pupils' achievement. Inspectors received and analysed 51 parental questionnaires.

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

- pupils' attainment and progress in writing
- attendance
- teaching and learning
- pupils' involvement in assessing their own progress.

Information about the school

Icknield is slightly larger than other schools of its type. Most pupils live nearby and pupil mobility is low. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, but an above average and increasing number are from a range of minority ethnic groups. Six per cent of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of educational need, is low. At the start of the autumn term, the school admitted 32 pupils across all year groups, from a local school that is now closed. In 2008, the school gained Healthy Schools, Active Sports Mark and Extended Schools awards. The governing body is the lead agency for the recently established on-site children's centre, catering for children from birth to five years old.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Icknield Infant and Nursery is a satisfactory school. It has several noteworthy features, in particular, the headteachers' good pastoral leadership that enables pupils to feel cherished because they are nurtured so well. As a result, their confidence and self-esteem blossoms, so that they enjoy school and are eager to learn.

Children get off to a flying start to learning in the Nursery due to the good ongoing focus on developing their communication and language skills. The school's emphasis on speaking and listening impacts well, so that older pupils can clearly express their often imaginative ideas. However, pupils' academic attainment and achievement are satisfactory. This is because pupils have too few planned opportunities across the curriculum to practise and develop their basic skills, particularly in writing.

Attainment at the end of Year 2 is broadly average and most pupils make satisfactory progress from their starting points. Pupils enjoy mathematics and the school is working effectively to improve reading. However, results at end of Year 2 dipped in 2009, most evidently for higher attaining pupils. Teaching and learning is satisfactory, because expectations and the challenges set are not always high enough to meet pupils' needs. Staff are not yet fully confident in using the new procedures to accurately pinpoint pupils' progress in order to set individual targets to help pupils know their next steps in learning. Too many pupils think that their work is often too easy, while a few say it is too hard.

Pastoral care is good, including support for vulnerable and needy pupils and children who are looked after by the local authority. Parents are largely pleased with the school, and typically say 'Our child has settled happily since starting in September' and 'My son has progressed really well into a nice little boy'. One pupil, echoing others' views of the school, said 'It's lovely, it's wicked!'

Pupils' personal development is mostly good and their attendance has improved. Pupils behave well and respect their teachers and other adults who help them. The school works well to enhance pupils' personal development through its work with parents and partnerships with other agencies, including the children's centre.

The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. The headteacher and the leadership team have successfully addressed issues from the previous inspection. Senior leaders are well supported by the governing body. Boys were identified as being less involved in learning so sound strategies were adopted to secure their interest. The admission of pupils from a nearby school that closed has been managed well. Teamwork at all levels, including middle managers, is secure with a sound impact on the school's work. The leadership team has a satisfactory balance of skills to move the school on. Provision for

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safeguarding is good. The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is broadly accurate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attainment and achievement in writing by:
 - providing further opportunities for regular, extended written work across the curriculum
 - developing pupils' skills in sentence structure, punctuation and spelling, ensuring that written work is always neatly presented.
- Increase staff confidence in using the new assessment system through:
 - developing skills and accuracy in their analysis, monitoring and review of pupils' work and progress
 - rigorous setting of individual challenging learning targets for each pupil
 - enabling pupils, through use of consistently informative marking, to know what they need to do next, so that they can improve their work independently.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

While pupils' enjoyment and eagerness to learn is good, with many saying that learning is fun, other important outcomes, including their academic achievement, are satisfactory. Attendance continues to improve and is satisfactory. Pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the school, from generally below average attainment on entry, although there is some variation year on year. Attainment has been broadly average in recent years. However, 2009 results based on teacher assessments dipped, particularly in writing and reading, with higher attaining pupils not doing as well as expected. Written work seen confirms that pupils of all abilities do not have enough opportunity to practise and improve their writing. The school has made steady progress in developing learning to interest boys and this is starting to impact positively, especially in reading. Attainment in mathematics is broadly average and pupils mostly make satisfactory progress. It is too soon to see the impact of very recently adopted strategies aimed at raising standards in reading, and other interventions for pupils who require extra support. Across the school, the few pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress satisfactorily due to well-focussed support. The increasing group of pupils with English as an additional language also make sound progress in developing their understanding of English. The very few gifted and talented and higher attaining pupils are clearly identified, and some, including those from minority ethnic groups, do particularly well in creative areas. Work in other subject areas is not consistently matched to their needs, however, so they do not always make as much progress as they should.

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Pupils' personal development is good. They say they feel safe and, although a few are occasionally troubled by bullying, they feel confident that they can ask for help. Their behaviour is good and they say they have many friends: one pupil even said, 'The school is a good friend'. Pupils enjoy sporting activities and understand why they need to stay healthy. They like their nutritious school dinners. Pupils make a good contribution to the school community and readily undertake befriending and other responsibilities at breaktimes. The school council meets regularly in the adjacent children's centre and pupils often raise funds for charity. Pupils' acquisition of skills to foster their future economic well-being is satisfactory. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, seen in the way that pupils are tolerant and supportive of others and show pride in their school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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?

Good aspects of teaching include staff teamwork, secure subject knowledge and positive relationships between pupils and staff. In the best lessons, there is a lively pace, planning is good and questions challenge pupils' thinking, with high expectations of

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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what pupils can and will achieve. In these cases, pupils buzz with pride in their achievements and are often reluctant to stop working. However, these positive factors are not consistently embedded and shared. Teaching is satisfactory because teachers tend to talk for too long so that pupils just sit listening, and time for the real business of learning is reduced. Challenge, planning and expectations of what pupils can do are hindered by teachers' lack of confidence in assessing and providing work and learning targets to enable all pupils to accelerate their progress, particularly in written work, sentence composition, handwriting, spelling and presentation. A very few lessons overrun, so that sometimes following lessons are too short to be meaningful. A few parents feel that their children could make better progress.

The developing creative curriculum provides pupils with a satisfactory range of practical and academic activities. It is particularly well adapted to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are at an early stage of learning the English language, aiding effective progress especially through one-to-one support. Work to develop reading skills has proved particularly successful and pupils enjoy reading, as a result of focussed phonics sessions. In contrast, there is insufficient opportunity for the development of writing across a range of subjects. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of additional learning opportunities. There are many lunchtime activities which pupils enjoy, particularly the gardening club, which effectively raises pupils' awareness of environmental issues from an early age. Regular local community visits and visitors enhance pupils' experiences and enjoyment. Year 2 pupils talk enthusiastically about the multi-skills club and their enjoyment of basketball and football.. Colourful artwork adorns the school walls, reflecting British and multicultural heritages.

Staff know and care for their pupils well. They use this knowledge to build pupils' self-esteem and to improve their social skills so that they are ready to learn. The school has successfully improved attendance by working closely with parents and outside agencies to promote the benefits of sustained attendance. The school works well with external agencies to support pupils' individual needs, including those of more vulnerable pupils. The developing children's centre offers a growing number of invaluable services to support families in raising their children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

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

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The headteacher ensures that pastoral care is given particular emphasis, so that parents feel secure, content that their children are well looked after while in school. Teamwork amongst the staff is strong, particularly in relation to pupils' care and well-being. All staff are working hard and successfully to ensure that pupils who have just arrived from a local school that closed are settled happily. Parents feel that the process has been managed smoothly.

Priorities for improvement are known, shared and mostly accurate. Senior leaders work soundly with middle managers and are beginning to involve staff more in raising pupils' attainment and achievement and in planning for improvement. Analysis, monitoring and review of pupil performance are satisfactory.

Governance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well. In addition, they have an astute overview of the schools' strengths and weaknesses, increasingly holding both the school and themselves to account through their rigorous action plan and training programme. Safeguarding procedures, policies and practice are good and meet current government requirements. Partnerships with local schools, multi-agency support and the use and ongoing development of the children's centre to support families is good and already impacting positively on pupils' outcomes. The school is valued by parents, who mostly feel well-involved, although a few would like better information about their children's progress.

Equality of opportunity is satisfactory, with racial harmony amongst pupils and promotion of diversity in learning reflected in school policies. There are effective intervention and nurture groups for those pupils needing learning or emotional support. The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory in terms of the school and local area but senior leaders, rightly, acknowledge that there is more to do in developing the school's work in the wider and global community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3
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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children get off to a flying start to their learning in the Nursery, settling happily to a well planned range of learning through play activities. This successfully develops their social, communication and language skills that are generally in line with age related expectations, although children's early mark making is less well developed. Children soon make friends and really enjoy discovering new skills such as using computers. They like playing and learning together and their behaviour is good. Teaching is better in the Nursery than in the Reception classes, where planning and assessment are less focussed on building on prior learning, so that children who are ready for more challenge tend to mark time. Children's attainment is broadly average as they move into Year 1. Provision is satisfactory with strengths in children's well-being and personal, social and emotional development. Appropriate use is made of the outdoor classroom. Parents know the staff with responsibility for their children well, so that there is regular communication between home and school. Safeguarding practice and procedures are robust. Leadership and management is satisfactory. Staff are aware that raising achievement and focussing on developing skills in emergent writing are the most important priorities.

The children's centre provides a good and increasing range of facilities and outside agency support for families with children and babies from birth to five years old. It is highly valued in the local community and has a good impact on improving outcomes for young children and their families. There are informal drop-ins where parents can seek advice or join groups, for example, baby massage, toddlers club, and parenting skills. There is a home visit midwifery service for young mums. Additionally, provision for children on the autistic spectrum and access to local college courses for families with English as an additional language, are good. Twice weekly, school staff take a handful of children to use the facilities. Centre accommodation is very small for its purpose, limiting the services the centre is able to offer, for example, parents cannot leave their children in the care of staff. The centre provision complies with requirements for registration. Leadership and management of the centre are good. It is led by a forward thinking manager, and addresses the needs of children and families in the area well.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

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Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents are satisfied with the work of the school. Most parents feel that their children are happy, safe and well cared for, and that their children are making good progress in their personal development. A few parents think that their children could make better progress in their learning and the inspectors agree with them. Parents would like more information about their children's progress and learning, and help in supporting their work. Most think teaching is good. Inspectors judged teaching to be satisfactory. Parents feel that their children are enabled to be healthy and most feel they are soundly prepared for the future. A few parents think that behaviour could be better. The inspectors found observations of pupils' behaviour in lessons and at breaktimes to be good and did not agree with parents' views on this. A few parents would like more notice taken of their comments and suggestions. There is secure evidence that partnership with parents is good and that parents value the support offered by both the school and the children's centre. Inspection findings are mostly in agreement with parents' views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Icknield Infant and Nursery 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 51 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 258 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	63	16	31	2	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	63	16	31	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	39	26	51	5	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	41	26	52	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	21	41	28	55	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	37	25	39	4	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	47	23	45	4	8	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)	23	45	22	43	5	10	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	35	32	63	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	33	29	57	4	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	39	24	47	4	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	22	43	25	49	3	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	55	23	45	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.



2 October 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Icknield Infant and Nursery School, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 4UN

We want to thank you for making us so welcome and being so polite and helpful when we visited your school recently. You told us a lot about what you like doing, including reading, sport and learning new things. It is clear that you like your school and your teachers.

You make sound progress in learning from your various starting points because teaching is satisfactory. Your school does a satisfactory job in helping you to learn. Although your behaviour and the way that you make friends is mainly good, your achievements in your work are satisfactory. The school is working towards improving your learning especially in writing, but some of its ideas are new and are not yet showing that your work is getting better. However, we are very impressed by your enthusiasm for adopting healthy lifestyles and helping each other.

There are two areas where the school needs your help to get even better. The first is to make sure that you all work really hard to improve your writing and to check your spellings and to remember to make sure your work is always neat and tidy. The second is to help your teachers by asking them about your learning, so that you know how to improve your work independently and understand how well you are doing.

We are sure that you will enjoy working with your teachers to achieve these goals.

Yours faithfully

Judi Bedawi

Lead Inspector

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