

# How Wood Primary and Nursery School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117235
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	338974
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 February 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Patricia Davies

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	226
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ian Getley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Meg Macpherson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	Spooners Drive Park Street St Albans
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The majority of the inspection time was spent looking at pupils' learning. Inspectors observed 12 lessons and nine teachers were seen during visits to classrooms. Meetings were held with pupils, senior staff and key leaders, governors and the school improvement partner. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including safeguarding, attendance and monitoring information, assessment data, the school's development plan and pupils' work. In addition, inspectors scrutinised 130 questionnaires returned by parents and other questionnaires from pupils and staff.

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

- The success of strategies to raise achievement in English, especially in writing and for boys.
- How well work is matched to the needs of different abilities, especially in providing sufficient challenge for the more able.
- The impact of subject leaders' work on raising achievement and the extent to which the governing body monitors and challenges the school's academic performance.
- How successfully the school works to promote good attendance.

## Information about the school

How Wood is similar in size to most other primary schools. Children join the Nursery in either September or January and attend part time. All Reception aged children enter at the start of the school year. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities remains below average, but is higher in some year groups than others. Pupils in this group have a wide range of needs. The large majority of pupils are from White British families. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased since the school's last inspection and is now above average. These pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including those from Traveller and Gypsy/Roma groups. A very few pupils are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Among several awards, the school holds Healthy Schools status, Activemark and an 'eco' award. There has been some disruption to staffing in the last two years as a result of illness.

Breakfast and After-school clubs have recently opened on the school site, known as The Time-out Club, which is shared with another school. These facilities are run by a private provider and are inspected separately.

**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

How Wood is a friendly and happy school, providing a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has close links with its local community and continues to offer strong pastoral care for pupils, especially for those individuals particularly vulnerable to underachievement. These qualities are much appreciated by pupils, parents and governors, and recognised by outside agencies and local groups, who wrote to share their appreciation and praise the school. It is, therefore, no surprise that pupils' overall safety and well-being are good. A ready willingness to listen and learn is a notable feature of lessons and pupils happily share their tasks and work together, demonstrating warm and productive relationships. With few exceptions, pupils say they like school and the vast majority of their parents agree. A rich and varied programme of curriculum events - from Black History week and playing the fife, to holding a Roman banquet and meeting a famous children's author - provides much enjoyment and invaluable opportunities for pupils to extend their experience.

Currently, however, the many positive features in pupils' personal outcomes are not matched to the same degree by their academic performance, where progress and achievement are satisfactory. To a large degree, learning and attainment at Year 6 have been considerably disrupted by changes to teaching staff during the last school year and this, and attainment in the current group is broadly average. Pupils' progress over time is also affected by variability in the quality of teaching and learning. After a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes, progress slows to a satisfactory level, before picking up again at Year 5. Most significantly, lesson activities do not always provide the necessary challenging and demanding work for the more able to enable them to reach their full potential.

Staff are hard working, dedicated and keen to do the best for the children. To this end, they have responded positively to new ways of working and greater accountability. Governors provide knowledgeable support and are increasing the good levels of challenge they provide already within committees through improvements to their school visits. The school has responded conscientiously to a decline in its academic outcomes over the last three years and has clearly prioritised key areas for attention. Initiatives to improve writing and widen the range of teaching strategies, for example, are largely embedded in lessons and, where most effective, are lifting achievement. Such factors demonstrate that the school is securely placed for moving on. In addition, new arrangements for assessment are aiding and prompting valuable in-depth discussion about pupils' achievement. This information, however, is not yet being used sharply enough to set realistic and challenging targets for learning and attainment. Monitoring of the school's work is firmly established and leaders check closely that decisions are

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implemented. Such checks, though, have tended to focus on getting new strategies in place and the school has yet to place more emphasis on evaluating the impact on pupils' learning.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and progress are always good or better by:
  - tailoring lesson activities closely and consistently to the needs of pupils with different abilities and particularly to challenge more able pupils so that they reach their full potential
  - always providing pupils with good quality feedback on how to improve their work.
- Sharpen up assessment arrangements in order to:
  - set realistic and challenging learning and attainment targets for pupils
  - involve pupils in evaluating how well they have done.
- Judge the quality and success of teaching by the impact of classroom practice on pupils' learning.
- About 40% of 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

<b>3</b>
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Pupils invariably work hard in lessons, pay good attention and remain focused on their tasks. This is the case for both boys and girls. They are quick to pair up to discuss ideas or complete an activity. Pupils from all backgrounds mix well and all these factors provide a positive foundation for learning. There is considerable engagement and enjoyment when tasks are practical, in art and dance for example, when they are investigative, or have a competitive edge.

Progress is good in some year groups, but the overall picture is sufficiently inconsistent for achievement to be no greater than satisfactory. This is true also for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage varies from year to year. Children begin in the Nursery with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age, which is true for the present group, while attainment is lower than usual for the school in the present Reception group. As a result of good progress in these two classes, attainment is usually above average on entry to Year 1. Progress then slows to satisfactory across Years 1 to 4. Despite the acceleration in progress again at Year 5, standards in Year 6 have been much affected by staff changes, as shown in national test results and current attainment. While still often close to the significantly above average levels of previous years, test results over the last three years have been broadly average. Standards in the current Year 6 are also broadly average, with only limited evidence of the higher Level 5. Currently, these pupils

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are making at least good progress during lessons such that attainment is beginning to lift more at this higher end in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils show a good awareness of the need for a healthy diet and exercise. Although the Friday pizza option is popular, so too are vegetarian sausages! Pupils are confident and courteous with adults and know how to keep themselves and others safe. They behave very sensibly during lessons and some boisterous play outside is largely down to the desire and need to be energetic. With the exception of a few pupils, the vast majority feel safe at school and praise staff for their kindness. Pupils say that most bullying is sorted out quickly and know they have the 'communication box' to post any concerns privately. Their care for others, as 'buddies' for younger pupils for example, activities within the local community and in response to 'eco' projects allow them to take on valuable responsibilities. Attendance is broadly average. The school has put considerable effort into promoting good attendance and there has been a marked improvement in punctuality and fewer holidays taken during term time. Competence in basic literacy and numeracy skills prepares pupils securely for later life.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

<sup>1</sup> 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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The school has put considerable effort into extending its range of teaching strategies, particularly to promote writing. These endeavours are starting to bear fruit, but not yet consistently so across the school. Paired discussion is a common feature of lessons and pupils use these opportunities well, giving everyone the chance to share their thoughts. At its most successful, teaching ensures that activities have a 'real' context and purpose, and pupils are clear about their task and why they are doing it. Such lessons are also challenging, using highly evocative texts, for example, to deepen understanding of sophisticated literary techniques. Teaching of this calibre creates such interest and application that pupils readily offer thoughtful suggestions. In some classes, writing improves markedly as a result of opportunities for pupils to discuss each other's work and subsequently redraft. Investigative tasks in mathematics create challenge and great excitement for all.

Not all lessons share these qualities, however. While work is matched adequately for most, more able pupils in particular sometimes work through tasks they find easy and complete quickly. This is true of textbook activities in mathematics, for instance. Too much direction by adults also limits pupils' participation and provides teachers with too little information about pupils' knowledge and understanding. Marking is strongest in English and work is always checked, but there remains some varied practice and sometimes limited comment to show pupils how they can develop their work further. While there is evidence of learning targets, pupils are not yet secure in what these are, or which National Curriculum level they are aiming for. Such limitations inhibit learning from moving on at a consistently rapid pace.

Some valuable links between subjects allow for the use of literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects, in science for instance. There is some imaginative use of information and communication technology too, but also missed opportunities to develop links further across subjects. The school is particularly responsive to its pupils with very specific needs, working closely with pupils and their families, including those among its Traveller community. Carefully phased introductions into school life have proved successful where needed and work with individual pupils and parents has led to much improved attendance. Adjustments have also been made to the curriculum to support the language needs of Bengali pupils who speak English competently and are in need of further refinement. Those pupils identified as gifted and talented have the opportunity to take part in additional activities - in mathematics, for example.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

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## How effective are leadership and management?

Staff and governors alike show considerable commitment to the school and put much effort into maintaining the pastoral care of the pupils. While this work has done a great deal to ensure equal opportunities for those with specific needs, it has been less successful in providing consistently good progress for all, especially the more able. Team work is strong and leaders have high aspirations. It is this passion that has led the school to judge its work to be more effective than this inspection has found.

Nevertheless, the school has appropriate academic priorities and, to this end, has been tightening up key areas of its work in order to resolve shortcomings in its performance. More rigorous debate about assessment information, for example, is still at a relatively early stage, but has focused attention more sharply on providing demanding and accurate attainment targets. Planning is more consistent and new teaching strategies are becoming embedded. In order to ensure that recently introduced practices are fully in place, monitoring activities have focused rather more on their implementation and not enough on how well teaching techniques influence learning.

Governors know the school well and are proactive in seeking parents' views, planning development and improving their monitoring of school activity. They take safeguarding very seriously and all necessary paperwork, risk assessment and training is thorough and rigorous. Nevertheless, a few parents and pupils feel that where they have had particular concerns these had not always been fully resolved. The school is well aware of its duty in relation to community cohesion. Its work in this area is strong, particularly in relation its own diverse community and the area it serves. Its considerable support for the creation of the breakfast and after-school facilities, and an extended lunchtime session in the Nursery, demonstrates its awareness of the parents' needs. The school has also developed its international dimension, but acknowledges that it has more to do in giving pupils greater first-hand experiences of other communities within the United Kingdom.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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



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<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The Nursery and Reception classes provide a safe, welcoming and purposeful atmosphere, where routines are well known to children and they are happy and settled. In both classes, there are considerable levels of cooperation among children and much discussion, modelled and encouraged by the example of staff. The welfare of children is a high priority. Should any be upset, other children are concerned for their well-being and adults respond quickly and sensitively.

Good progress is the result of several factors. For example, any additional support for learning or other needs is identified and provided at an early stage. Children also benefit much from focused individual attention during learning activities, particularly during those in small groups led by adults. All staff maintain careful observations of achievement and written assessments. Children's 'learning journeys' provide a valuable record of progress and are shared with parents. Children enjoy their activities, be it a social chat at snack time in Reception, discussing the sounds of letters in the Nursery, or that moment of excitement when they spot something through their binoculars. They enjoy outdoor activities, but do not yet have the frequent, free opportunities to use this space throughout the day in order to give them additional opportunities to choose activities for themselves.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
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 returned questionnaires for nearly 60% of children at the school. Most express satisfaction with their child's experience at school. Among written comments received from parents there is praise for staff, the school's caring ethos and its support for families. The most common areas of concern, from a small minority of parents, relate to the impact of staff changes at Year 6 and to issues with behaviour and bullying. Inspection evidence supports parents' anxieties about disruption to Year 6. It found

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behaviour to be good, but a few children were not entirely confident that their worries had been fully addressed. There was also concern among parents about communication. However, this inspection found that the school went to much trouble to communicate with parents, using questionnaires, providing information on its website and using text, email and telephone when necessary.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at How Wood Primary 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 130 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 226 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	90	69	36	28	4	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	88	68	37	28	3	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	58	43	56	43	13	10	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	60	46	56	43	9	7	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	59	45	64	49	6	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	59	45	58	45	8	6	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	58	45	60	46	7	5	2	2
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)	43	33	52	40	21	16	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	31	73	56	12	9	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	46	35	51	39	24	18	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	47	36	53	41	21	16	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	63	48	49	38	12	9	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	71	55	50	38	6	5	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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



11 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of How Wood Primary and Nursery School, St Albans AL2 2HU

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and are pleased that so many of you enjoy school life. Your school is doing the job it should, so that you make satisfactory progress in your work. It takes good care of you too, as many of you recognise. You all work hard during lessons and behave well and, when activities are particularly exciting and demanding, there is a real hum of activity. All the staff and governors are working really hard, too. They have been asked to do some particular things to help them to make the school even better than it is now.

Here are some other important things the inspection found out

There are lots of additional events at school to make learning interesting, like the Roman banquet, visiting authors and trips away.

Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes.

You have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy life style.

Your school has a strong sense of community and is keen to help out those of you with particular needs.

You all mix well in lessons and readily work together to share ideas.

This is what the school has been asked to do to help make things even better

Make sure that teaching and learning are always good or better, especially by ensuring that you are all challenged to do your very best and giving you lots of information about how to improve your work.

Sharpen up assessment arrangements so that there are sensible, but demanding, targets for you to aim for and opportunities for you all to check and discuss how well you have done.

Look closely at how successfully you are learning when looking at how well you are being taught.

With very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Davies

Lead inspector

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