

Pixies Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117256
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338979
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Clifton

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	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Garner
Headteacher	Terri Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons and observed eight teaching staff. Meetings were held with governors, staff and pupils. Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and at break times. They observed the school's work and looked at school documentation, including development planning, recent monitoring reports, safeguarding procedures and pupils' books. They analysed 76 responses to the parents' questionnaire and took account of the views of parents and carers with whom they spoke during the inspection.

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

- the current picture of learning and progress in Years 3 to 6, particularly for boys and in writing
- how well planning meets the needs of different pupils, especially those who are more able
- the extent to which recent changes to improve teaching and learning are embedded across the school
- how well pupils' progress is tracked across the school so that action can be taken quickly to tackle any underachievement.

Information about the school

This is a slightly smaller than average school with seven classes. The proportion of pupils known to be entitled to free school meals is below average. Most pupils are of White British origin. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, and their needs mainly relate to moderate learning difficulties in relation to literacy and numeracy. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a separate Reception class which has its own dedicated outdoor learning area. Following a local review of school places in 2007, the school now takes pupils from a wider area than at the time of the last inspection.

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

This is a satisfactory school, where pupils' achievement is satisfactory and their attainment is average. Leaders have reversed a recent decline in attainment and this is now rising. Pupils make satisfactory and sometimes good progress from their different starting points. Children make a good start in Reception. Across the school, relationships are very strong and the pupils enjoy their work, particularly when given practical activities. However, planning to meet the different abilities of pupils is not consistently effective enough to ensure good learning. While pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress, there are occasions when the work provided for them is too difficult.

Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes contribute well to their learning. They are known as individuals and cared for well, and as a result they feel safe. Pupils from different groups get on well together. They are polite and very well mannered in school. They comment that any disagreement is quickly sorted out amicably by the teachers, especially the headteacher.

A common feature of most lessons is good questioning, which often elicits articulate and thoughtful responses by the pupils. Pupils have helpful targets which are used well. At times, the help provided by additional adults in the classroom is very beneficial, for example to guide learning and provide specific support for pupils. However, there are occasions when additional support is not deployed well. In such cases, most activities are strongly directed by teachers and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning through extended tasks or investigation.

Leaders have made satisfactory progress in addressing the issues raised when the school was last inspected. For example, marking now provides helpful comments to pupils about how to improve. Leaders track the progress of pupils closely. Review meetings are held regularly to check on pupils' progress so that additional support can be provided if necessary. In writing, a number of good initiatives have been introduced, including a focus on engaging boys. Early signs of their impact are positive, although they are yet to have a full effect on standards. Leaders rightly recognise that teachers miss opportunities to use speaking as a starting point for writing and to promote writing in different contexts across subjects.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, inconsistencies in provision remain and subject leaders are not yet ensuring that the best practice already seen in some lessons is shared across the school. Evaluation occasionally focuses on what teachers are doing rather than how well pupils are learning.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that work is closely matched to the individual needs of pupils
 - deploying additional help in the classroom more effectively
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to develop independence in learning through extended tasks and investigation.
- Develop the role of subject leaders so that they:
 - look more critically at the impact of teaching on learning when monitoring and evaluating the work of the school
 - ensure that change is implemented more consistently to reflect the best practice in the school.
- Improve provision for writing, particularly for boys by:
 - using speaking and drama more widely as a starting point to help pupils develop their ideas
 - ensuring that pupils' writing opportunities cover a broad range of contexts and purposes linked to different areas of the curriculum.
- 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

Children in Reception make good progress in their learning and are prepared well for Year 1. Pupils' learning and progress from their different starting points in the rest of the school is satisfactory. Learning is strong when the pupils are given opportunities to direct learning for themselves, or discuss their ideas together. For example, when planning an investigation pupils quickly took the initiative to explore factors which might affect the growth of plants. Pupils in Year 5 made good strides in developing descriptive language because of good questioning and the use of targets. However, more typically, learning is satisfactory. The match of work given to pupils' needs is not always precise enough, and learning slows when basic ideas are not understood and this results in follow-up work causing confusion. On a few occasions learning is not moved on quickly enough.

Pupils' work in the current Year 6 shows that attainment is now rising in both English and mathematics. While writing skills remain the weakest area, reading skills are strong and pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently. Older pupils express considerable confidence about moving to their next school and say they have been on visits in to prepare them.

The school is orderly and there is a calm working atmosphere. Pupils' response to planning a scientific investigation in Year 3 was excellent, with pupils in different groups

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willing to take on lead roles. Pupils express a few concerns about 'falling out' in the playground, but they say that these are quickly sorted out when adults intervene. Pupils demonstrate their good understanding of being healthy through their active play at lunchtimes and involvement in additional sporting activities. Cycling to school has been successfully encouraged. Pupils know why it is good to eat healthy foods and the possible dangers of drugs. The school council plays an active role in raising money for projects such as the planned adventure playground. Year 6 pupils act as friends to children in Reception. Pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Opportunities are missed for personal reflection in class assemblies.

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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have high expectations about pupils working hard and doing their best. However, planning for different levels of ability is not always effective and this results in a few pupils coasting and some struggling to keep up. In most lessons, there are times when the pace of learning is good, particularly when there is paired discussion or thorough questioning. Teachers vary their approaches to make lessons interesting, for

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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example through practical activities such as weighing or testing out shapes to find symmetry. Collaborative planning for investigation in science shows that the pupils worked well and thought carefully about fair testing, but such opportunities are not frequent enough. The deployment of additional help is typically weaker during whole class teaching. The school has made a positive start in developing the curriculum to improve writing. Word walls and a strong focus on building sentences are helping pupils to improve their writing skills. When given opportunities to use talk as a starting point for writing, the pupils respond with great enthusiasm and their confidence grows. Leaders have rightly identified the need to forge stronger links between different subjects to help writing activities have more relevance. There is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities, which are well attended.

The school provides a positive and friendly learning environment. Pupils are treated with kindness and respect by staff. Leaders have a good understanding of the needs of pupils who are potentially vulnerable because of their circumstances or because they have a medical condition. There are strong links with outside agencies to provide specialist advice and support. The pupils express much confidence in the adults who look after them. The school chases up the reasons for any absence diligently.

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?

The headteacher has a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and is taking positive steps to bring about improvement. Over the past two years there have been concerns about the quality of teaching and considerable changes in staff. New appointments, including to the senior leadership team, have brought additional strength. There is now a secure drive and ambition to move the school forward. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. Planning for improvement addresses key areas, but outcomes to measure success are not always sufficiently linked to improvement in progress or attainment.

Governors are developing their roles securely and are beginning to question more rigorously and hold leaders to account. Many are new and benefiting from training to bring them up to date with current requirements. Links with external advisers, for example in behaviour support, have been very productive. The school ensures that pupils learn in a safe environment through having clear policies and procedures which are effective, and responds well to any safeguarding issues raised by parents.

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Leaders track the progress of different groups carefully. Variations in the performance of different groups remain but gaps in the performance between girls and boys are closing. Provision to secure equal opportunities and tackle discrimination for all pupils is satisfactory, as is the promotion of community cohesion. The school itself is a very cohesive community with different groups getting on well together. Pupils support disadvantaged groups in the local community. However, it is not yet doing enough to strengthen wider links to improve pupils' experience of living in a pluralistic community in the United Kingdom.

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
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
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children start school with knowledge and skills that are broadly in line with age-related expectations. They make good progress across all areas of learning. A good number are now making excellent progress in their writing, which is the weakest area on entry to the school. This is an improvement since the time of the previous inspection. The children are confident and play happily and safely together. They listen well as a whole group and understand the importance of everybody having a turn. The class has recently been hatching out some butterflies and this has produced some remarkable responses by the children. The class diary, written by the children, retells the story of eggs hatching into caterpillars and then turning into cocoons. Children thought it was wonderful when the butterflies were released into the garden area. In the outdoor area the children use the ride on toys confidently and develop physical agility by climbing or using the slides. They choose activities for themselves confidently and these include writing accounts in books, drawing and painting and programming a toy to move in

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specific directions.

Adults move learning on well through prompting questions and discussing the activities with the children. Staff keep very precise records which are used well in planning for learning, particularly to develop children's understanding of letters and sounds. The children's development is carefully recorded through individual 'diaries'. Leaders have plans in place to continue recent work to develop the outside learning area. At the moment the hard surface area is cramped and there are few contrasting areas to promote a more exciting learning environment.

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

The questionnaires reflect a positive relationship with parents and carers. The majority of comments made reflect considerable satisfaction. The questionnaire sent to parents and carers in 2009 by the school identified the need to improve communication. Although the school has taken steps to improve this, the inspection questionnaire still showed this as the main area of concern for a small number of parents and carers. Leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done here and have plans in place to tackle this through the school's website. One parent typically commented, 'The school is friendly, teachers are very approachable, and the headteacher knows all the children.' Inspectors do not agree with the small minority of parents and carers who have indicated that the school does not deal well with unacceptable behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Pixies Hill 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 76 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 196 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	54	35	46	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	53	35	46	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	42	36	47	6	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	47	36	47	4	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	35	46	40	53	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	39	39	51	5	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	42	41	54	3	4	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)	27	36	32	43	8	11	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	39	41	54	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	32	39	51	10	13	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	33	39	51	5	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	29	39	36	48	4	5	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	39	51	34	45	3	4	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



27 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pixies Hill Primary School, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 2BY

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you and were very impressed with your friendliness and how confidently you told us about the school. You go to a satisfactory school. Adults in the school know you as individuals and care for you well. They keep you safe. Satisfactory teaching is helping you to make satisfactory progress. We were impressed by the very positive attitudes that nearly all of you have to learning. Your headteacher and other adults are making changes which are helping the school to improve.

These are some of the other important good things that we found.

You make good start in Reception and are prepared well for the work in Year 1.

Your considerate behaviour and politeness ensures that the school is a happy and welcoming place.

Leaders keep a close eye on how well you are doing in your lessons.

Your teachers use questioning well to help you to learn. The targets that you have in lessons are helpful.

Your teachers have introduced changes which are beginning to help you to improve your writing.

Those of you who are older make a good contribution in helping out around the school and taking on responsibility.

We have asked your headteacher and the other adults to do these things.

Improve teaching by making sure you get work at just the right level, have as much help as possible from adults and have more chances to investigate things for yourselves.

Make sure all adults make changes when asked and then check carefully that they are helping you to learn better.

Help you improve your writing by using speaking and drama more to enable you develop ideas, and then use different subjects more to make the writing more interesting.

Yours sincerely

Peter Clifton

Lead inspector

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