

Wheatfields Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117268
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338982
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Tusha Chakraborti

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	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ruth Wallace
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Whitehurst
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2007
School address	Downes Road St Albans Hertfordshire
Telephone number	01727 859978
Fax number	01727 832807
Email address	admin@wheatfieldsinfants.herts.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited nine lessons in Years 1 and 2, and five short sessions in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, checked arrangements for safeguarding and scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's data on pupils' progress, monitoring and evaluation records, governors' minutes and planning for school improvement. Ninety-six questionnaires from parents and carers were received and analysed.

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

- the standards reached and progress made by all groups of pupils
- the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' learning
- the effectiveness of leadership and management and the way in which the new strategies are driving improvement.

Information about the school

This is a large infant school in which the large majority of pupils are White British. A very small minority of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average. A very few pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The school has received re-accreditation for Investors in people, Active mark and School Travel Plan Gold award. The current headteacher took up her post in September 2009.

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

Wheatfields Infants and Nursery is a good school. Central to the school's work is the way it supports all pupils to develop good personal and social skills and grow up as confident learners because of the caring ethos of the school. Comments such as, 'My child goes into school very happy and returns very happy', 'Our children have English as an additional language and find much support in school' and 'My daughter has complex special needs but is very much a part of the school,' reflect parents' and carers' trust and confidence in the school's work. Pupils thoroughly enjoy attending this school and are proud of their involvement in making decisions. They behave well and develop good independent skills. They have a very good awareness of how to keep themselves safe and to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Pupils thrive in their academic development. Children, starting in the Nursery at or above the level typical for their age, make good progress during their stay in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make good progress in Key Stage 1, having reached well above average standards at the end of the Reception year. Pupils achieve high standards in teacher assessments in reading and mathematics. In writing, although well above average, standards are not as high. Inspection evidence shows that standards in current Year 2 are not as high as they should be because these pupils made slower progress last year in Year 1. However, appropriate actions have been taken to ensure that standards in writing, particularly for boys, rise further to match those in reading and mathematics.

Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work. They are continually seeking ways to enhance pupils' learning experiences. However, pupils do not always have the opportunity to assess their own learning to understand how to improve. The school is now using a new assessment system for learning and this has begun to address this issue effectively. Teachers place strong emphasis on extending literacy and numeracy skills and ensure that pupils make good progress consistently. Pupils' information and communication technology skills (ICT) and planning for links between subjects are not sufficiently developed. However, teachers are now successfully planning appropriate ICT and cross-curricular links through the revised curriculum programme.

The new headteacher provides a very clear direction for the school and ensures that staff, governors, parents and carers share a common vision for the good of the pupils. She, supported by senior leaders, has re-evaluated the school's performance and revised the school improvement plan which is driving further improvement. There is clear focus on developing the roles of the subject leaders. Governors are very supportive of the school but some aspects of their role are at an early stage of development as a result of the appointment of several new governors. Both the Chair and the Vice Chair are new to

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their posts and recognise this as an area for development. They already have a clear plan in hand and have begun monitoring the school's work. An action plan for community cohesion is in the process of being developed to enhance this provision and ensure that pupils are given a greater understanding of their place in the wider world. All recent strategies which are in the process of being implemented indicate clearly that the school has good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - ensuring that planning clearly identifies more challenging activities that enable all pupils to apply their learning across the curriculum
 - making better use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning
 - spreading the existing good practice to ensure that pupils assess their own learning.
- Develop the monitoring and evaluating roles of subject leaders consistently.
- Improve governance by:
 - developing the role of governors in monitoring the performance of the school
 - promoting community cohesion beyond the school community and, thereby, deepen pupils' understanding of their place in the wider world.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Achievement is good for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language. Children enter the Nursery with skills that are average or above average for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy and number skills. They make good progress and the majority of them achieve well above average standards by the time they enter Year 1. Overall, they continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1 and reach standards that are high, especially in reading and mathematics. However, analysis of teacher assessment results and inspection evidence show that the current Year 2 did not make such good progress last year when they were in Year 1. Results also show that boys did not always achieve as well as girls, especially in writing. Strategies have been put in place to develop writing skills across all subjects and these are having a positive impact on boys' writing. Attendance is good and pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school. They say they feel safe at school at all times. They are confident that any rare incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. This fosters a positive learning environment where pupils work well together and respect each other's values and beliefs. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and most adopt this with enthusiasm. They undertake responsibilities willingly and contribute well to the smooth running of the school. They have a strong sense of morality and their social skills are very well developed. They apply their basic skills well to enhance their learning and are well placed to continue their education. However, their

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knowledge and understanding of the wider world is underdeveloped.

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	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan a range of activities that interest and engage pupils in their learning. Very good relationships provide a secure learning environment that enables pupils to make good progress. Teachers know pupils well and use questioning effectively to assess their progress. Teaching assistants are very skilful in supporting pupils' learning, especially those with special educational needs. Teachers assess pupils' progress but do not as yet ensure that pupils learn to assess their own learning to understand how to improve. The new assessment for learning is beginning to address this issue. Planning is generally good and sometimes linked well to other activities. This was seen in an assembly where Year 1 pupils presented their work on 'Aliens', enhancing their literacy skills as well as their knowledge of different planets. Interactive white boards and computers are not used systematically to support pupils' learning.

The curriculum generally meets the learning needs of all pupils effectively. It contributes

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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well to pupils' personal development and their enjoyment of learning. There is stronger emphasis on teaching literacy and numeracy than other subjects. This means planning for cross-curricular links, and the teaching of ICT, are less well developed. A new thematic approach for planning is being implemented to ensure a more balanced way of teaching of all areas of the curriculum. This is beginning to have a positive impact. There is a good range of clubs to enhance pupils' learning experience and the participation rate is high.

The school provides a very happy and welcoming environment and pastoral support for all its pupils is very effective. The learning needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are regularly assessed. Carefully targeted interventions for vulnerable groups are very well supported through a whole school approach and through skilled support assistants. As a result, these pupils achieve as well as others. The arrangements for transferring children between the classes within the school as well as between Year 2 to the junior school are good.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has undergone several changes at the leadership and management level. The headteacher, ably supported by staff and governors, provides strong and collaborative leadership which is driving improvements. She has evaluated the school's performance accurately, identified the areas for development and revised the school improvement plan to develop the capacity of the leadership team further. A revised assessment system is being used to raise standards. Her vision is clearly shared by the newly restructured leadership team along with subject leaders and other staff who are fully committed to school improvement.

The school is highly committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all its pupils. Satisfactory safeguarding procedures are in place to ensure that pupils are protected. Community cohesion is satisfactory as the school is still developing an action plan and assessing the impact of its work. Although the school actively promotes community cohesion within the local community, its engagement with the wider community is limited. The school is successful in liaising with outside agencies and local schools, including the adjacent junior and secondary schools.

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	3
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	3
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

Children get a good start to their education in the Nursery and make consistently good progress during their stay in the Nursery and Reception classes. They start school at or above the level typical for their age in all areas of learning with many already having acquired above average skills in communication, language and literacy and number. By the end of Reception, almost all reach the expected levels, with a high proportion reaching standards that are well above the national average.

Teaching is consistently good. A good range of practical and hands-on-activities are planned to develop confidence and independence, as well as extending literacy and mathematics skills. Children are given good opportunities to choose their own independent activities when they arrive at their classes. They quickly engage in their chosen activities with interest and enthusiasm. Children love browsing through books and enjoy discussing story plots with adults and each other confidently and in an articulate and mature manner. For example, in a group session on measuring, children confidently discussed and explained the effect of placing heavy or light objects on a scale. An attractive learning environment with vibrant displays and a good range of resources interests children and stimulates their imagination. As a result, children greatly enjoy their learning. They develop good co-ordination and personal skills as they explore the well organised indoor and outdoor activities. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well integrated and benefit from very good support from skilled nursery nurses and teaching assistants.

The school ensures good relationships and close contact with families before children start through an effective induction system. As a result, parents get involved and children settle quickly into the daily routines. Staff ensure that children feel happy and

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secure and pay very good attention to their health and safety. Planning has been reviewed recently and a new planning and assessment system is being implemented to improve the provision and the quality of teaching further. Children are assessed in the Nursery consistently and effectively.

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

A very large majority of the parents and carers responding to the questionnaires stated that they are pleased with the school and appreciate the fact that it keeps their children safe. Several commented on the way the recent changes in leadership and management have improved communication with them. A very small minority feel that they are not sufficiently informed about their children's progress and that the particular needs of some pupils are not met. Inspectors find that the school supports its pupils well and works well in partnership with parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Wheatfields 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 96 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 331 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	80	83	15	16	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	68	71	27	28	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	53	55	36	38	5	5	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	54	56	36	38	4	4	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	58	60	35	36	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	64	31	32	3	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	61	64	33	34	2	2	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)	50	52	31	32	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	60	27	28	8	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	54	34	35	4	4	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	43	45	44	46	4	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	46	48	48	50	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	72	75	20	21	3	3	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.



23 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wheatfields Infant and Nursery School, St Albans, AL4 9NT

Thank you all very much for welcoming us to your school and being so friendly and helpful. We enjoyed talking with you and watching your performance as 'Aliens' in an assembly. You and your parents told us that Wheatfields is a good school and we agree.

You work hard in lessons, make good progress and achieve good standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You help the school to run smoothly and work very well together. We were impressed with your good behaviour and were pleased to see you enjoying playtimes and lunchtimes together and eating healthily. Staff teach you well and find lots of interesting things for you to learn, and everyone looks after you particularly well.

Your new headteacher is doing a good job in running your school and improving it further. All staff and adults who work in school are also always trying to make improvements to your school. We have asked them to improve your work even further. In doing so, they will need to set you more challenging work and to make sure that you understand how to improve further. We also would like you to learn more about people in different communities outside your area. We feel confident that you will enjoy a higher challenge and respond well to it.

Yours faithfully

Tusha Chakraborti

Lead Inspector

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