

The Lea Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117327
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338992
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Mary Summers

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Briggs
Headteacher	Sharon Swinson
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time observing learning, visiting all five teachers and nine lessons altogether. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school policies and plans, records of pupils' progress and attendance and the 41 questionnaires submitted by parents and carers.

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

- the achievement of more able pupils in mathematics and science at Key Stage 2
- the achievement of White British boys
- the impact of adults on children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- pupils' achievement in writing at Key Stage 1.

Information about the school

Pupils come from a wide area to attend this small school. The majority are from White British backgrounds and the remainder represent a wide range of different ethnicities. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is growing steadily. Fewer pupils are entitled to free school meals than is typical in a school of this size. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average and is very high in some year groups. Many of these pupils have social and communication difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or moderate learning difficulties. A high proportion of pupils start or leave the school mid-way through the year.

The school has won the Activemark award recently for its work in promoting fitness and healthy lifestyles. There has been a high turnover of staff in recent years and a high proportion of the current staff are relatively inexperienced.

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

The school is providing a satisfactory level of education but is showing clear signs of improvement. Pupils reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the school. Their progress is satisfactory but is improving because of a more relevant and interesting curriculum, rigorous assessment procedures and better quality support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These initiatives are being driven well by the headteacher and other senior leaders. Although a fairly new team, they have assessed the school's performance accurately, set a clear direction for improvement and are monitoring the impact of their work closely.

Teaching is satisfactory but improving because of the input and advice of senior leaders. Teachers are planning lessons more carefully, assessing pupils' work more accurately and providing useful guidance to pupils about how to improve. Some good and outstanding lessons were seen during the inspection but too much of the teaching remains satisfactory. This is because pupils spend too much time listening to the teacher rather than being actively engaged in their learning. They lose concentration and this affects their progress. In addition, the information gained from assessments is not always used well enough to make sure that the work provided accurately meets pupils' needs, including those who are more able. This affects their progress, especially in mathematics and science at Key Stage 2, where few pupils gain Level 5 in the national tests in Year 6.

Parents, carers and pupils agree that the school provides good levels of care and support. 'The school feels safe, friendly and welcoming,' wrote one parent. New pupils are welcomed warmly and quickly feel confident to take an active role in school life. This reflects the positive and open nature of the pupils, who value and respect one another's ideas and opinions.

Good partnership with parents and carers has contributed significantly to improvements in attendance. Parents and carers of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are also closely involved in planning strategies and reviewing their children's progress. There are good links with the local community but links with the wider United Kingdom and overseas communities are not strong enough to help pupils appreciate what life is like for people in places outside their own experience.

Leaders and governors have made satisfactory progress in addressing key issues from the last inspection. They have a realistic understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and work effectively in partnership with many outside specialists. Teaching, while showing some improvement, remains satisfactory rather than good. Nonetheless, the improvements shown in other aspects of the school's work show that there is a

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satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the proportion of good teaching in the school by:
 - ensuring that information from assessment is used to plan activities that closely match the needs of individuals and groups of pupils
 - ensuring that pupils spend more time actively involved in learning rather than listening to the teacher
 - improving teachers' questioning skills to ensure pupils of different abilities are effectively involved.
- Increase the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 in the Year 6 national tests in mathematics and science by ensuring that the more able pupils receive challenging activities in lessons.
- Strengthen community cohesion by forging links with the wider United Kingdom and overseas communities to ensure that pupils gain a fuller understanding of communities beyond their own.
- 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

Pupils' learning is satisfactory. Their achievement depends strongly on the extent to which they are given opportunities to be actively involved and contribute to their own learning. When pupils are offered good opportunities to contribute, they are engrossed in the tasks and they make faster progress in their learning. For example, Year 3 pupils learned how to draw diagrams to show the relationships between different numbers. The tasks set by the teacher were challenging and she asked searching questions which made the pupils think carefully about their work. All pupils were engaged, alert and responsive. In such lessons, pupils make faster progress than in some others where they spend too long listening to the teacher rather than doing things for themselves. Pupils' attainment is average at both key stages, although it varies considerably from year-to-year because of the small numbers of pupils involved and their abilities when they start in the Nursery or when they begin at The Lea in other year groups. They make satisfactory progress from broadly average starting points. Pupils do best in English, reaching standards which are a little above average in Year 6. Attainment in mathematics and science is broadly average but not enough pupils reach Level 5 because the tasks set are often not challenging enough for the more able pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in lessons but good progress in some of the intervention groups that have been introduced to help them catch up. The progress of White British boys is in line with that of other pupils. Pupils at Key Stage 1 make satisfactory progress in reading, writing and

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mathematics.

Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, pupils considered the impact of Martin Luther King, offering their ideas about how he had influenced their own lives through his work. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through the school's efforts to gain the Activemark award. A good number enjoy the nutritious school meals, although a few pupils continue to bring crisps in their lunchboxes. They contribute appropriately to the school community as school councillors and to the local community through their efforts to support the environment. However, they have yet to gain a really clear understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Attendance is now broadly average after several years in which it was low. A few pupils take too much time off school to go on extended trips abroad, and this affects their progress. The satisfactory progress pupils make towards learning basic skills prepares them adequately for the next stage of their education.

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	3
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?

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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Teachers and assistants have good relationships with pupils. Pupils are well cared for and are given strong support and encouragement. They are not afraid to make mistakes as they know adults will value their efforts and help them improve. One pupil said, 'The teacher writes pink comments in our books to show us what we have to do to make our work better.' In some lessons, there is a brisk pace to the learning, with good opportunities for pupils to contribute. For example, Year 6 pupils worked extremely well in groups to design their own investigations to prove that force exists. In some other lessons, the pace slows and pupils lose concentration. This is often the case when pupils spend too much time listening to the teacher or when the lesson is not pitched at appropriate levels for individuals and groups of pupils, including those who are more able. Teachers' questioning skills are sometimes weak, and result in less able pupils being unable to answer and more able pupils not being stimulated to develop their understanding further.

Teaching assistants give good support to pupils with additional needs in small intervention groups outside the class. They develop their own expertise in working with pupils with different needs, for example speech and language difficulties, through working alongside a range of professionals who provide expert advice.

The school has recently adapted its curriculum to make it more interesting and relevant to pupils. Pupils clearly enjoy topics such as 'airports,' which stimulate research into baggage handling and security and provide good opportunities for them to practise their writing skills. They enjoy the visits and visitors organised to make their learning interesting and the sound range of clubs and activities outside the school day which help them to develop particular skills at higher levels. Year 4 and 5 pupils benefit greatly from weekly violin tuition in the mixed Year 4/5 class. Information and communication technology is used well to enhance the curriculum and help pupils practise and refine their skills in literacy and numeracy.

The school has worked successfully to improve attendance which has been low in the past. Though currently average, the school is maintaining a close check on the absence of particular groups of pupils.

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 created a happy, cohesive school and has the strong support of parents, staff and governors. School leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures are

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effective and that pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They promote equality of opportunity adequately, ensuring that all pupils, whatever their background or needs, make satisfactory progress overall.

Senior staff and governors have a realistic understanding of their school's strengths and areas for improvement. The drive for improvement is satisfactory at present but is improving. There is a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and the new senior leadership team has begun to support the headteacher well in this. The school has tackled some of the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection, for example by improving standards in writing at Key Stage 2 and improving teachers' marking. Subject leadership continues to develop. There is a clear and well organised monitoring cycle in place but subject action plans lack enough focus and detail to ensure that actions have a real impact on pupils' achievement.

Governors provide satisfactory support and are improving systems to monitor the school's performance. They are marketing the school actively within the local community and this is beginning to have an impact on admissions, especially to the Nursery and Reception class. Senior staff and governors are aware of the need to promote community cohesion more vigorously. At present, community cohesion is promoted appropriately within the school and immediate local community but links with the wider United Kingdom and overseas communities have yet to be developed to support pupils' understanding of different faiths, cultures and backgrounds.

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	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
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

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

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Children make satisfactory progress in the Nursery and Reception class. Good induction procedures help them to settle in quickly and provide a positive start to building strong relationships with parents and carers. The environment is pleasant and welcoming and children come in enthusiastically each morning. They know the routines and quickly organise themselves, practising writing their names or sharing books together on the carpet. This makes for a pleasant and purposeful start to the day.

The children develop independence and confidence quickly because of the support and encouragement they receive from adults. They learned to skip and jump out of the path of 'crocodiles' during a movement lesson in the hall, showing good coordination and awareness of space. Adults were on hand to help those children who found the tasks more difficult so that they too were able to participate successfully.

Adults take great care to ensure that Nursery children receive an appropriate range of experiences for their age. They develop well alongside their older Reception classmates, often gaining better personal and social skills than would be expected for their age. Careful records are kept of children's progress. This information is used appropriately to plan the activities that are led by adults so that children with different needs and abilities can take the next steps in their learning. The activities that children choose for themselves often lack a clear purpose and this limits the learning that takes place.

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

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are very positive, commenting that their children greatly enjoy all the school has to offer. Many parents and carers commented on the high levels of care that the school provides, especially for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A few parents and carers expressed concern about how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour but inspectors found that the school had clear systems in place which were clearly understood by pupils and staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Lea Primary School and Nursery 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 inspector received 41 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 121 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	61	15	37	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	63	13	32	2	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	51	18	44	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	44	20	49	2	5	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	20	50	19	48	1	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	50	18	45	1	3	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	49	19	46	1	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)	15	37	23	56	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	54	17	41	1	2	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	54	15	37	3	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	46	21	51	0	0	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	25	61	14	34	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	59	15	37	1	2	1	2

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.



20 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Lea Primary School and Nursery, Harpenden, AL5 4LE

Thank you so much for welcoming us to your school recently and telling us your opinions about your school. Your views, along with everything else that we saw, helped us form a clear view about how well your school works. This is what we found.

Your school is giving you a satisfactory education which means that some things are good and some need to be improved.

Your school keeps you safe. All the adults take good care of you.

You understand what it means to be healthy and many pupils enjoy the nutritious school dinners but packed lunches often contain crisps - not a healthy option!

You are happy in your school and support and respect each other well. However, we have asked the adults in charge to develop more links with different communities in the United Kingdom and overseas, so you can learn what life is like for children in other places.

Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school.

You make satisfactory progress. Most of you do well in English but not enough of you reach Level 5 in mathematics and science. We have asked those in charge to make sure that teachers always give you tasks that help you do your best.

You really enjoy lessons that involve you in doing things for yourselves. We have asked the teachers to make sure that you spend as much time as possible doing practical tasks so that you are learning for more of the time. We have also asked them to make sure that all your tasks are matched to your individual abilities and really make you think.

You can play your part in helping your school become even better. Make sure you work hard and continue to behave well. Try to attend school every day because your education is important and will help you do well in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Summers

Lead Inspector

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