

# Ashtree Primary School and Nursery

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117352
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	338994
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 March 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Robert Drew

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>	439
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr William Spicer
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Elizabeth Kirwan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	Chertsey Rise Stevenage SG2 9JQ
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The large majority of inspectors' time was spent looking at learning. 23 lessons were observed and 19 teachers seen. Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, staff and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at its improvement plans, self-evaluation document, its performance data and all key policies. Thirty-four parental questionnaires were scrutinised.

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

- why standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 and progress between key stages vary significantly from year to year, and whether there is a rising trend evident in current data
- what factors might be hindering the emergence of outstanding features in this school, given its apparently well-established good qualities.

## Information about the school

The school is much larger than average and serves a mixed residential area of Stevenage. The great majority of its pupils are White British, with small numbers from several minority ethnic groups. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Most children entering the school's Nursery have skills that are below what is typical for their age. The school holds the Healthy Schools award.

**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

This is a good school. It has some outstanding features and shows a good capacity to improve.

It has been especially successful in helping pupils adopt very positive attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is outstanding. The school generally ensures that pupils reach above average standards by the time they leave Year 6. This represents good achievement in relation to their starting points since, overall, they enter the Nursery with weaker skills than is usual. The very large majority make good progress across the school, though it can vary on occasion. Teaching is good. Occasionally it is outstanding, while a small minority is satisfactory, lacking the impressive pace seen in the best lessons. Improving this is the key task for the school in the immediate future. The apparent variability in results is essentially a dip in 2008, the reasons for which are specific to that year group. Standards returned to above average in 2009 and are at the same good level amongst the current Year 6. Long term achievement rates are improving and progress in lessons is good.

Leaders and managers have shown that they can produce improvements because their self-evaluation is accurate. They have recently created a much more stimulating curriculum, restored Key Stage 2 results to an above average position and introduced new measures to sustain rising standards, especially the well-chosen booster and catch-up activities for Year 6 pupils. Leadership of subjects is good, with fresh approaches to raising standards in writing and mathematics that are having a good impact. The governing body is well organised and shows a very clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors have taken the initiative on several recent developments and offer good support and strategic direction.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. In addition to extremely impressive behaviour, pupils show they are good at acting responsibly, caring for other pupils and are willing to contribute to the community through charitable giving and practical activities in the local area. They take the initiative on many matters, for instance in organising a 10 km run for charity. They are well prepared for the next stage of education, not only because their key academic skills are good but because they show good team skills, enterprise and reliability. All this reflects well on the outstanding care, guidance and support offered to pupils.

The school is to be credited, along with parents, for these positive features. In addition, the rate of academic progress is also good. Progress is good in the Nursery and sustained well through to Year 6, though it is still not as high as the school would wish. Assessment arrangements have recently improved and now satisfactorily promote

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progress, though teachers' marking is not always consistent. Teaching is good overall, but its strengths are more obvious in the Nursery and Year 6. Elsewhere, a small minority of satisfactory lessons occur. They lack the high level of challenge and well-timed change of activities that characterise the best lessons. This leads to some achievement that does not fully reflect the eagerness of pupils to learn.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that by the end of 2011 it is good or better in at least 70% of lessons and outstanding in at least 15% per cent. Do this by:
  - ensuring all lessons have the brisk pace, active involvement of pupils and effective provision of work for all abilities already evident in the school's best practice
  - offering constructive written comments and assessments on pupils' work, along with regular opportunities for them to respond to this advice in subsequent work.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Pupils learning and progress is good and is consistently helped by the very positive attitudes of pupils. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is typically above average. These levels have been restored after a dip in 2008. Current attainment in Year 6 is above average and data for Year 5 confirms that good attainment is being sustained. The above average performance is most clear in mathematics and science. Recent improvements to the teaching of writing are having a good impact on the quality of pupils' work and their enjoyment of extended writing.

Other changes to the way underperforming individuals or groups are encouraged are also proving successful and above average standards are the norm. This represents good achievement for pupils since they generally enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge that are below what is typical. Their very rapid progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is built on by good progress in lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2. Lower ability boys make clearly better progress than their peers, reflecting the well-targeted, high-quality support they receive. Standards in physical education are well above average, prompted partly by good specialist teaching and coaching. The girls' football team is regularly highlighted for its successes in the region.

Pupils enjoy lessons immensely and work very hard. Around school, they are unfailingly polite to adults and to each other. Many are involved in helping younger pupils in school or contributing to the local community by singing at events or visiting the elderly. Pupils say that they feel safe and they know how to choose healthy lifestyles. They are helped in this by the breadth of sporting activities and a welcome extended to all. Large numbers participate and with a great deal of success at all levels. The collaborative skills of pupils and their positive attitudes, along with their good academic skills, leave them well prepared for the next stage of education. While attendance is average, levels are

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rising and absences are closely linked to a small number of extended family holidays or periods of illness, rather than any lack of enthusiasm for school amongst its pupils.

Overall, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' awareness of right and wrong, and preference for the former, is well developed. They are reflective and aware that life includes more than the immediate and material.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</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>2</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?

Teaching ensures that pupils make good overall progress. Relationships are consistently excellent and staff succeed in obtaining very positive attitudes to learning from their pupils. A majority of lessons also have good pace and brief, purposeful starters. Tasks are broken down into short, manageable activities that hold pupils' attention easily, make learning enjoyable, and they offer challenge for all abilities. Occasionally, these factors combine, with excellent results. At other times, teachers can spend too long on explanations or interpreting pupils' comments, which limits the pupils' active participation. In a small minority of lessons, teaching is satisfactory rather than good because tasks are too long, the pace of learning drops and the provision for able pupils

<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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is limited. Teachers often talk with pupils about how to improve their work, but not all make written comments in their books or give them the opportunity to respond in their next piece of work.

The curriculum stimulates pupils well. It has recently begun to include a growing number of special events, such as an archaeology day or science day, which fire up enthusiasm and promote good written work afterwards. There is good support work for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, but less that is designed to promote gifted and talented pupils' learning.

A major strength of the school is the excellent quality of care, guidance and support it provides. Staff commitment to pupils' needs is exceptional and is backed up by well-organised systems and procedures. The impressive behaviour and attitudes stem from the examples set by staff and the principles they consistently reinforce. Pupils are given every possible opportunity to reflect and be considerate. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families are supported very effectively by specialist staff. Safeguarding is well organised. All possible steps are being taken to sustain the upward trend in attendance, which already matches national levels.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The leadership and management of the school help pupils to acquire excellent attitudes to learning and ensure that they make good progress. The school's self-evaluation is reliable and guides improvement planning well. It also acknowledges that the good progress between Year 2 and Year 6 could be even stronger, so that fresh measures to raise standards have been put in place by the school. The capacity to improve is good because new approaches to the curriculum, promoting pupils' writing and the use of booster classes have already lifted attainment to above average. While monitoring ensures good teaching overall, it has not yet lifted the small minority of satisfactory practice to a good level. The governing body is well informed and its members are on site frequently, giving helpful support to staff. Governors act as a 'critical friend' very effectively. Middle managers, some new in post, have a clear sense of their accountability for standards and are good at motivating colleagues to improve their practice. The approach to equal opportunities is good, as exemplified by the focus in personal, health and social education on role play and debates, which offer practical ways to counter discrimination. Safeguarding matters are very efficiently managed. The

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school's links with parents and with other partners are effective. Many parents contribute to clubs and out-of-school provision as well as support in school and this tallies with the strong support shown in questionnaire returns. Some parents attend family-learning sessions on the premises. The school is good at collaborating with social care agencies and other local schools. Self-evaluation is right in judging community cohesion to be satisfactory, but plans are clear and the school is committed to extending existing areas of good practice, such as links with the local community. While long-term planning is in place and good areas of provision exist, there is not the comprehensive coverage required to broaden pupils' understanding of religious and ethnic differences in the United Kingdom and globally.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Children enter the Nursery with skills and competences that are below what is typical for their age. Children make good progress in their skills and all areas of understanding because the quality of provision is good. Personal, social and emotional development is especially good. They demonstrate excellent behaviour, curiosity and a real love of learning. Self-motivation is a strength, but they are also good at cooperative activities. Major aspects of Nursery provision are outstanding. The Nursery offers a highly stimulating and welcoming environment. Two Nursery Nurses and other support staff give the classteacher very effective help. A planned and purposeful day provides a good balance between children's choices and activities guided by the teacher, and there is also a good mix of indoor and outdoor work. Links with parents are very effective. These



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strengths continue in Reception, where good gains in mathematical skills and in communication, language and literacy are made. Effective teaching in these classes also promotes physical and creative development well. Both areas are well led with imaginative planning and strong team work. Children feel very secure and flourish: as a result they enter Year 1 matching expectations in all aspects of their development.

*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 expressed very supportive views of the school. On most items on the questionnaire, over 90% of respondents believe that the school is doing a good job. They are especially pleased with the way healthy lifestyles are promoted and the safety, enjoyment and good teaching their children experience. A significant minority feel that there are ways in which changing year groups or schools could be handled more effectively. Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents, but found no evidence to suggest that transfer arrangements are lacking in any way.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashtree 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 inspection team received 34 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 439 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	44	17	50	0	0	2	6
The school keeps my child safe	14	41	18	53	0	0	2	6
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	41	18	53	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	53	13	38	1	3	2	6
The teaching is good at this school	17	50	15	44	2	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	44	16	47	3	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	41	20	59	0	0	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)	12	35	14	41	5	15	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	35	19	56	1	3	2	6
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	38	17	50	2	6	2	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	35	17	50	2	6	2	6
The school is led and managed effectively	11	32	20	59	1	3	2	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	47	16	47	0	0	2	6

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.**



Thursday 18 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashtree Primary School and Nursery, Stevenage, SG2 9JQ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us during the recent inspection. We were pleased with many things and agree with you and your parents that you are at a good school. We were especially happy to find that:

- you make good progress between Nursery and Year 6
- your behaviour is excellent, you feel safe at school and are good at helping others in school and the wider community
- your attainment is above average, especially in mathematics and science
- the headteacher and other senior staff lead the school well
- the school is outstanding at several sports, especially girls' football
- many lessons have good teaching.

If the school is to improve further it needs to:

- make more lessons good or outstanding by ensuring that all of them have the features we saw in the best ones: the lively pace, work to suit all pupils and helpful written comments in your books, and that you are given time to respond to those comments.

Best wishes for the rest of your time at Ashtree.

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew

Lead inspector

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