

Palm Bay Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118583
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339252
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Carole Skinner

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	320
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Crabtree
Headteacher	Mark Cowell
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons and observed 13 teachers. They held meetings with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, looked at the data collected by the school about the pupils' progress, the records of the quality of the monitoring of teaching, and samples of pupils' work in English, mathematics and science. Inspectors analysed 193 questionnaire responses from parents.

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

- the effectiveness of the school's efforts to accelerate pupils' progress in Years 3 and 4
- the impact of initiatives to raise attainment in mathematics and science
- the effectiveness of target-setting and tracking procedures in eliminating underachievement and maximising pupils' progress
- the impact of leadership, management and governance at all levels on driving the school forward and tackling the barriers to good progress.

Information about the school

Palm Bay is a larger than average primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage with a very small minority from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. A few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average and very high in some year groups. A number of pupils join the school during Years 3 to 6 and this represents approximately 20% of the current Year 6. The school has achieved Healthy School status and the Activemark.

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

Palm Bay is a good school that provides outstanding levels of care and support for pupils' health, safety and well-being. As a result, pupils feel very safe and thoroughly enjoy their time at school. The school has forged excellent relationships with parents, many of whom wrote to express their appreciation of its 'warm and friendly atmosphere', the approachability of staff, and the good progress made by their children. Pupils take excellent advantage of the many ways the school encourages them to be fit and healthy. Year 6 pupils run the Fruit Caf   with great enthusiasm and many pupils take part in a wide range of sporting activities.

Through rigorous monitoring of learning, teaching and pupils' progress, senior leaders and governors have a very clear idea of where improvements are needed. They make very effective use of the wide range of expertise amongst staff to implement and drive new initiatives to enhance learning. As a result, the school is successfully closing the gap in attainment between different subjects. Attainment in mathematics and science is rising steadily in response to more effective teaching. The school provides well for the high proportion of pupils who have additional learning needs and, in most lessons, for those who are more able. As a result, all groups make good progress and achieve well. Teachers have an excellent rapport with their pupils and make learning interesting by using a wide variety of approaches and resources. In most lessons, pupils make good progress because teachers plan work that builds on their previous learning. Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding and give them good advice on how to improve. On a few occasions, tasks are not sufficiently fine-tuned to meet the needs of the different ability groups within the class. Teachers' marking is variable in quality and does not always show pupils the next steps in learning. Even where feedback to pupils is of high quality, they are not always given enough time to respond to it. Pupils are very enthusiastic about both the topics they study and the wide range of additional activities the school provides, particularly the very popular after-school clubs and special events. Sharper systems for tracking each pupil's progress have given renewed impetus to the school's drive to raise attainment. Regular assessments are analysed rigorously by senior leaders and class teachers. This leads to prompt action, such as extra support in class or in a small group setting to boost pupils' confidence and increase their understanding, which effectively tackles signs of underachievement. These well-devised initiatives and their impact on pupils' attainment demonstrate the school's good capacity to sustain improvement and pursue its ultimate goal of excellence in all aspects of its work.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eliminate the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress by:
 - ensuring that all lessons meet the needs of the different ability groups within the class in order to maximise each pupil's progress
 - disseminating the best practice in marking so that all pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work and how to do it
 - giving pupils time to respond to teachers' feedback and take steps to remedy misunderstandings and errors.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' enjoyment of learning is evident in the way the pupils take part in lessons with enthusiasm and apply themselves to tasks. Pupils work hard, concentrate well and show pride in their achievements. Good listening skills and sensible behaviour contribute greatly to good progress in lessons. Pupils are enthused by the activities and work well both independently and in pairs and small groups. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe, for example when using the internet, and are terrific ambassadors for healthy eating and the many benefits of exercise. Pupils take a keen interest in issues facing the local community and the environment and are avid fundraisers for a variety of charities, both local and international. The school council is instrumental in suggesting ways to improve aspects of the school, such as the playgrounds.

Over the past five years attainment has been broadly average overall. In 2009 the proportion of pupils who reached Level 4 and Level 5 in English and mathematics exceeded the national average, while science was below average at both levels. There are strong signs of improvement in science as teachers focus on developing pupils' investigative skills. Pupils' good achievement in reading and writing reflects their ability to express their ideas clearly and confidently in discussions and when answering questions. Pupils with additional learning needs achieve well in all subjects and many reach the national expectation for 11-year-olds by the time they leave. The school rightly identified that pupils were making faster progress in Years 5 and 6 than in the previous two years because of inconsistencies in teaching quality which are gradually being ironed out.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Pupils and parents are exceptionally positive about the quality of care, guidance and support the school provides. The warm and welcoming atmosphere is immediately apparent on arrival, and a tour of the school reveals well-ordered and stimulating classrooms that provide a first-rate environment for learning. Carefully planned support for pupils and their families helps many pupils to overcome their learning difficulties and to grow in confidence and self-esteem. The Family Liaison Officer plays a pivotal role in supporting families and encouraging their greater involvement in the school. Excellent arrangements to support pupils when they move into Year 1, Year 3, and then on to secondary schools, help them to settle quickly and adapt to new ways of working.

The school maintains a relentless focus on improving teaching strategies and the curriculum. The introduction of a new mathematics framework two years ago is now bearing fruit as teachers modify planning to maximise learning. More recently, the adoption of a new science curriculum, in partnership with other local schools, is already beginning to accelerate pupils' progress. In both subjects, pupils' learning has improved because of a greater emphasis on practical, investigative approaches. The curriculum is still evolving as teachers create more meaningful links between different subjects. Other worthwhile experiences include learning French, the production of a school newspaper, and visits to places of interest such as Commonwealth Day at Westminster Abbey. One pupil commented, 'We do fantastic things in art and DT (design and technology)', while others said how much they enjoy geography and music.

The well-trained teaching assistants support pupils well, both in lessons and through small group interventions to boost a particular aspect of learning. They work in close

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collaboration with teachers to ensure all pupils understand and can complete their allocated tasks.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership team has been strengthened further since the last inspection and is a strong driving force for improvement with high aspirations for Palm Bay to become an outstanding school. The new deputy plays a key role in ensuring high quality provision for the many pupils with additional learning needs. Key stage leaders work closely with teachers to review pupils' progress and ensure that prompt action is taken if any are falling behind. Subject leaders are proactive in implementing new initiatives to raise attainment and work together with senior staff and governors to evaluate the impact of the actions taken. Rigorous evaluations of lessons and assessment data have clearly identified remaining inconsistencies in the rates of progress pupils make at Key Stage 2. School leaders are working with staff to eliminate the last of the pockets of satisfactory teaching.

The school effectively promotes equality and mutual respect amongst pupils of different background and ethnicity. Senior leaders and governors have reviewed the school's context and taken effective steps to promote community cohesion. Links with parents, partnerships with other schools, and outreach into the local community are already extremely strong features of the school's work. The school is in the process of developing worthwhile links with schools in other parts of the UK and abroad. It promotes good understanding of global issues through supporting organisations such as UNICEF and Water Aid.

Governors have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and know exactly where improvement is needed. They are very supportive of staff while remaining confident to challenge when they feel it is needed. Keeping pupils safe is high on the school's agenda. Governors and staff regularly review policies and procedures to ensure good practice and to meet statutory requirements.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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	
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Attainment on entry has declined over the past few years as more children start school with weaknesses in language and communication, and in skills and understanding of number. The two Reception classes provide children with a good start to their education. In the early stages, a major emphasis on developing children's confidence, independence and social skills prepares them well for learning. Teachers organise an exciting variety of activities, often stemming from the children's own interests, which promote different aspects of learning. During this inspection, children excitedly created a 'bird hide', camouflaged under leaf collages, made posters, and sat quietly in the 'hide' spying birds through the binoculars they had made. Learning is planned around themes and topics, sometimes linked to stories, which engage and interest the children. In one class, children planted bean seeds to help Jack grow his beanstalk and planted a different number in each row, carefully counting as they went.

Such activities help children to make good progress, often from low starting points, across all areas of learning. By the time they enter Year 1, attainment is broadly average, although relatively few exceed the expectations for their age. Planning incorporates an effective balance of activities that are led by adults and opportunities for children to choose and initiate their own learning. These are often timetabled separately and do not always allow for free flow between the classroom and outdoor area. The school has identified outdoor learning as an area for further improvement.

Close observation, frequent assessment and careful tracking of children's progress ensure that teachers know exactly where children are at in their 'learning journey'. Determined and well-informed leadership keeps the provision constantly under review and ensures a clear agenda for improvement.

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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

Approximately 60% of the questionnaires were returned by parents, a very high response rate. Almost all of these were happy with their child's experiences at the school. The overwhelming majority say the teaching is good and their children enjoy school, feel safe, and are supported well to lead healthy lifestyles. The inspection findings echo these very positive views. A very small minority of parents raised concerns that their children made better progress in some years than others and a few attributed this to being taught in the mixed-age classes. The inspectors agree that, although the school has already done much to improve teaching, there are still a few inconsistencies to be ironed out. These, however, are not caused by the mixed-age classes. Teachers plan the curriculum carefully to ensure that it meets the needs of pupils in these classes.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Palm Bay 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 193 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 323 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	125	65	66	34	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	139	72	50	26	3	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	77	40	105	54	8	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	42	92	48	12	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	106	55	76	39	5	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	80	41	94	49	10	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	92	48	96	50	3	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)	87	45	83	43	11	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	81	42	91	47	12	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	78	40	95	49	8	4	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	64	33	97	50	10	5	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	110	57	57	30	8	4	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	113	59	71	37	4	2	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.



21 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Palm Bay Primary School, Margate CT9 3PP

Thank you for welcoming us into your school and for talking to us and showing us your work. This letter will tell you what we learned about your school during our inspection. Many of you and most of your parents told us that Palm Bay is a good school and we agree with you. Here are some of the good points.

- Your teachers make learning fun and give you interesting things to do.
- You work hard and make good progress in lessons.
- The adults do an excellent job of caring for you and keeping you safe.
- We were impressed by all that you do to keep fit and healthy. Well done Year 6 for running the Fruit Café!
- The teachers have made some important changes in the way you learn mathematics and science and this is helping you to make faster progress.
- You thoroughly enjoy school, especially all the after-school clubs and special events, such as Book Week and Geography Day.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors who run the school are always looking for ways to make it even better.
- They work very closely with your families to help support you in your learning.

The school leaders and governors are very keen for Palm Bay to become an outstanding school and know exactly what needs to be improved to achieve this. They have already put many good things in place so we have asked them to do a few more things to help you make even better progress.

- Make sure that teachers always prepare work that matches your ability and builds on what you already know and can do.
- Mark your work in a way that shows you what you need to do next.
- Give you time to read the teachers' comments and go over what you don't understand.

You can help by making sure you know exactly what you need to do to improve your work by reading or listening to the teacher's advice carefully and making sure you remember to use it in your next piece of work.

I hope you continue to work hard and enjoy your time at Palm Bay,

Yours sincerely

Carole Skinner

Lead inspector

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