

Featherstone Wood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131505
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	341152
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2010
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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	174
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brenda Davies
Headteacher	Carol Pratt
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons taught by nine different staff. They held meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, records of their progress, lesson planning, playtime activities and the school's self-evaluation documents, including records of teaching and the main improvement plan. Inspection questionnaires were received from staff, pupils and from 45 parents and carers.

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

- how consistently pupils, particularly those who are potential higher attainers, make progress across the school and whether this is helping to raise levels of attainment
- how consistent and effective the teaching is and how well staff use assessment to plan work for pupils at the right level
- how successful the school has been in raising levels of attendance
- how accurately school leaders, including governors, evaluate the work of the school and whether governors meet their statutory obligations in relation to the promotion of community cohesion.

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average primary school. It serves an area with a high proportion of social housing on the edge of Stevenage. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Nursery class. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is similar to that found in most schools. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Many of these have speech and language difficulties. Of the others, most have behaviour, emotional and/or social difficulties or moderate learning difficulties. The school has experienced a lengthy period of instability in leadership and in staffing, predating the last inspection, and this has had a negative impact upon the number of pupils on roll and their learning and progress. However, relatively high levels of pupil mobility in the past have been significantly reduced. An experienced interim headteacher was in post from January to July, 2009 and the current, experienced 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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Featherstone Wood Primary School provides a satisfactory standard of education. However, it is also a rapidly improving school. Effective, ambitious leadership in the last four terms has had a considerable impact on the school's performance and upon the perception of the school by its community. Stable staffing, good external support and a consistently positive outlook have enabled the school to confront its previous difficulties. Consequently, several aspects, such as the Early Years Foundation Stage and the provision in Years 1 and 2, are now good, and the school is tackling the legacy of underperformance which has most affected the older pupils. Some significant gaps remain, particularly in Year 6, where there has been too little time to make up the deficit and standards remain low. In general, however, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are improving steadily. Although attendance is adversely affected by a core of low-attendees, this does not have a significant impact upon the increasingly good progress of the majority of pupils.

Parents and carers appreciate the school's commitment to the well-being and personal development of its pupils. Consequently, pupils enjoy school, feel very safe and have positive attitudes to learning. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils' engagement with the local community, relatively fragile in the past, is improving steadily. However, while activities such as African Week extend pupils' awareness of the wider world, opportunities to engage with more diverse communities in the United Kingdom are limited.

Progress and standards are most variable in Years 4 to 6, particularly in science, in the recording of history and geography and, more generally, in handwriting. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs has been restructured so that these pupils now make satisfactory progress. However, there is limited provision for pupils identified as gifted or talented. The generally satisfactory curriculum enables pupils to build increasingly sound basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Good extra-curricular provision contributes well to pupils' good personal development. Teachers use some aspects of assessment satisfactorily to check pupils' learning. The marking of written work, while thorough, does not always give clear guidance as to what pupils need to do next.

The engagement with partner institutions, within the local cluster of primary schools and with specialist secondary schools, is satisfactory. Governors are relatively new but have a clear understanding of their role as critical friend and increasingly hold school leaders to account. Currently, the school has good capacity for improvement because self-evaluation is very realistic. Pupils' progress has improved significantly and attainment has risen rapidly in some year groups. The school has much greater stability, enrolment is rising and parental confidence has increased.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build upon the improved progress evident across the school to ensure that standards are progressively raised by the end of Year 6. Ensure, in particular, that:
 - standards in science are raised to at least the national average
 - opportunities for extended writing in history and geography are more fully developed
 - expectations of handwriting and presentation of pupils' work are raised
 - effective, specific provision is made to meet the needs of pupils identified as gifted or talented.
- Work, in co-operation with parents, the local authority and support services, to ensure that those pupils currently identified as having high levels of absence, attend school much more frequently.
- Ensure that pupils benefit from a planned programme of opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding of faiths, cultures and communities different from their own, in other parts of the United Kingdom and abroad.
- 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

Standards in Years 1 and 2 have risen steadily in the last five terms. Attainment at the end of Year 2 is broadly average, reflecting generally good progress. However, attainment in reading is relatively lower than in writing or mathematics. The pace of learning has become increasingly consistent as teaching stabilises and the monitoring of progress becomes more rigorous. While standards are low in the current Year 6 - the group most affected by past instability - this still represents good progress in reading, writing and mathematics given the poor start they had. The school has rightly prioritised these crucial core skills. That said, standards and progress in other subjects, including science, are less consistent. Following the reorganisation of support provision, pupils with additional learning needs are making satisfactory progress overall. Despite the low, but improving, attendance of a small group of pupils, learning and progress are improving rapidly and standards across the school continue to rise.

Learning is never less than satisfactory. While some lessons have lengthy introductions and a lack of urgency, others have a brisk pace and provide good challenge. For example, a well-organised Year 1 mathematics lesson offered a range of activities to move pupils' learning on. Able pupils knew they had been given specially challenging work and were proud to explain their tasks, while the teaching assistant was effectively deployed to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs. A successful Year 4 drama lesson was imaginatively planned to enable pupils to dig deep in their analysis of the main characters. It also contributed to the development of pupils'

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speaking and listening skills. Opportunities for pupils to work independently are not always consistently developed.

The school's calm, positive ethos promotes a strong sense of belonging. At the heart of the community sits Harmony the Elephant, a powerful symbol of pupils' shared commitment to the school's values of tolerance and respect. Pupils really enjoy school and their good behaviour is reflected in the low number of exclusions. The school council provides a good forum for pupils' views. Pupils demonstrate good social skills and are eager to accept responsibility. In these important respects they are developing skills which prepare them well for later life.

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	4
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	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Stable staffing, effective co-operative working between staff and clearly defined expectations have underpinned the good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2. In Years 3 to 6, teaching is not so consistently motivating, so that progress is more erratic. Good relationships and effective management of pupils' behaviour sustain an increasingly positive learning environment. However, learning is

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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occasionally affected when introductions are over extended and the pace slows. Expectations are less consistent outside the core subjects. A system of individual targets has been implemented and, while pupils are not always aware of what is required to reach the next level, this is beginning to give pointers as to what they need to do next. The curriculum satisfactorily supports the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Through a range of intensive programmes, it meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs satisfactorily. However, provision for pupils who are gifted or talented still has a low profile. Cross-curricular topics are being implemented progressively. These engage pupils' interest well. Valuable links with partner schools have contributed well to good provision in French and physical education. However, too little time is given to science, history and geography, so that important skills, including investigative work, are not successfully developed. Satisfactory personal, social, health and citizenship education promotes pupils' personal development adequately - although sessions are often overly lengthy. There is a good range of well-supported extra-curricular activities.

While in general the school cares well for its pupils, support for those with additional learning needs has been inconsistent. However, this has improved recently and the school is monitoring the impact of provision. The school works closely with a range of support agencies. These effectively support the health, social or behavioural needs of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Despite efforts to improve attendance rates, including a wide range of support strategies, they remain low.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

In a relatively short time, the headteacher has had a considerable impact upon the school and has built successfully on the groundwork of her immediate predecessor. The leadership team has been strengthened through some well-judged appointments. She promotes a culture of high expectations and a commitment to improve pupils' personal development and academic progress. Staff share her determination to make the school even better. There has been resolute action to ensure that teaching and learning are effective, based on challenging targets for improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' learning are improving steadily. School leaders carefully evaluate pupils' progress and teachers are held accountable for progress made. Teachers benefit from regular feedback about their performance. They now work closely with colleagues

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to ensure that pupils make consistent and rapid progress. This is a strong feature of the Early Years Foundation Stage and has underpinned the rapid improvements there. Parents indicate that the school is now functioning more effectively.

The governing body has become increasingly effective. Governors understand the school's strengths well and have a satisfactory involvement in shaping its future. They actively monitor progress and ask increasingly challenging questions about the school's performance. Governors ensure that legal requirements are met and this includes satisfactory procedures for safeguarding pupils. Roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding are clearly defined. A high priority is given to pupils' safety and well-being. Potential discrimination is tackled satisfactorily. The school has taken action to ensure that all pupils have the same opportunities. The school promotes links with the local community increasingly well and opportunities to learn about other faiths are satisfactorily developed in lessons. However, provision is much less well developed in relation to giving pupils experience of other areas of the United Kingdom and the wider world.

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
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children enter Nursery with skills and knowledge that are low in relation to the standards expected for their age, particularly in language and communication and in their personal and social skills. Good induction arrangements ensure that all new children are well-prepared for entry, feel safe and settle quickly. They are well cared for and build very good relationships with staff. Children behave well, learn to play together

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confidently and enjoy learning. This year, achievement has improved significantly in both Nursery and Reception because of the changes made, including the improved teaching, more effective curriculum planning and much improved links with, and involvement by, parents. As a result, most children are now making good progress. Currently, attainment by the end of Reception, although slightly below the expected level overall, is, for the great majority, around the expected level in the key areas of language and communication, personal and social development and in physical development. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The new team has worked hard to implement rigorous systems for revised planning and to improve teaching, assessment and observation of children's learning, to raise achievement. Staff have a good understanding of how young children learn and provide a stimulating curriculum, with a well-judged balance between adult-led sessions and opportunities for children to choose their own activities. Teaching is almost always good. Adults work together effectively to foster children's well-being and learning.

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

Although relatively few parents and carers responded, almost all are very pleased with the school and the progress it has made and feel that their children are very happy. One parent said, 'We are extremely happythe change since we joined in 2007 has been remarkable!' Another said, 'The children are proud of their school and themselves - a really big turnaround.' Minor criticisms related to mixed-age classes and their perceived impact on learning and progress, playground supervision and the administration of special educational needs. These were discussed with the school. Inspection evidence indicates that playground supervision is generally effective. The structure of classes is dictated by the number of pupils. However, the school anticipates reverting to single age classes in the next school year. Occasional delays in supporting pupils with special educational needs reflects a period when the necessary records were not diligently maintained. However, parents and carers rightly feel that this is a caring school where pupils' personal development is supported well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Featherstone Wood 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 46 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 174 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	70	12	26	2	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	72	11	24	2	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	63	14	30	3	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	52	19	41	2	4	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	28	61	16	35	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	59	17	37	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	57	18	39	2	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	46	20	43	3	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	50	21	46	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	48	17	37	4	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	52	15	33	5	11	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	29	63	17	37	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	59	17	37	2	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

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

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

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

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' 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.



10 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Featherstone Wood Primary School, Stevenage, SG2 9PP

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and watching you at work. We found that although yours is a satisfactory school overall, it is improving rapidly.

Our main findings are these:

- you behave well and work hard in lessons
- you now make good progress in Nursery and Reception and many of you reach the standards you are capable of by the end of Year 2
- you feel that teachers make lessons enjoyable and support you well
- you feel very safe and have a good understanding of the importance of eating healthily
- you enjoy a good range of clubs and extra activities
- you contribute satisfactorily to your school and the wider community
- those of you who find learning difficult now get better organised help
- school leaders work hard to ensure that you are well looked after.

We are asking the school to make the following changes so that you do even better:

- make sure that you all make consistently good progress in Years 3 to 6 and reach higher standards by the end of Year 6, making sure that you have really good skills in writing and mathematics
- make sure that you all attend school as often as possible
- ensure that you have good opportunities to learn about the different faiths cultures and communities in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world.

You can help by continuing to work hard, attending well and doing your best in lessons. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan

Lead Inspector

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