

Alban Wood Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134685
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	341499
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Stafford

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	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Ford
Headteacher	Mrs G M Leonard
Date of previous school inspection	2 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited eight lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including the tracking system to monitor the pupils' progress, the work pupils were doing in their books, the school improvement plan and the 38 questionnaires completed by parents, and those from staff and a sample of pupils.

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

- the rates of progress made by pupils throughout the school, and the way it supports the needs of those from all backgrounds, and enables boys to make similar progress to girls in writing
- how the school's leaders, including the governors, have demonstrated the capacity to bring about improvements through developing systems for monitoring and evaluating performance
- how the school has devised a system to identify weaker performance and successfully implemented measures to correct it.

Information about the school

Alban Wood Primary is average in size and serves a diverse population. The socio-economic circumstances are very varied but average overall. Nearly one third of the pupils are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is above the national average. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are a few pupils from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few are at an early stage of learning English. The school has the Healthy Schools award and the Sportsmark. The school has received external support for the last year. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is through flexible provision in the Nursery, and one Reception class. The school offers before and after hours care, and the provision extends into holidays.

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 achievements of pupils leaving the school at the end of Year 6 have varied in recent years, but are broadly satisfactory. The headteacher has correctly identified weaknesses in attainment in mathematics, and these have been successfully resolved. More recently, writing was identified as a weakness, and action taken has led to improvements across the majority of classes. The weaknesses in writing were caused by the narrow range of tasks provided, with a lack of opportunity for pupils in Key Stage 2 and the more-able in Key Stage 1 to write at length. Also, insufficient guidance prevented other pupils in Key Stage 1 and lower attainers in Key Stage 2 to develop their skills at the expected levels. Very recent improvements in the quality of teaching demonstrate that teachers have an understanding of this issue and that most have the strategies to carry out improvements, but as yet there has been insufficient time for these to have a significant impact on standards.

Pupils' progress is broadly satisfactory from their below expected levels on entry to the school. Currently attainment is broadly average. In some subjects, such as information and communication technology, French and physical education, progress is good, and attainment is higher than that expected. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress due to effective planning to meet their needs and good support from teaching assistants. Other groups of pupils, such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those eligible for free school meals, also make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Effective support, for pupils who speak English as an additional language, enables them to achieve satisfactorily and use English with increasing competence.

The school is a happy, friendly place where pupils behave well and where there are good relationships between pupils and adults. There is a healthy bustle early in the morning in the school as large numbers of pupils gather for the popular breakfast club. Pupils feel very safe and the school takes all necessary steps to ensure they are. They experience a broad curriculum in which productive use is made of the excellent and varied school grounds that enhances learning.

Changes in approach have strengthened senior leadership and teaching. The headteacher's leadership is dedicated. She is approachable, and respected by parents, pupils and staff. She has motivated staff to examine their practice and identify aspects in need of improvement. While there is an accurate view in the self-evaluation of the school, and of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, some aspects of monitoring lack the necessary rigour to promote rapid improvement. For example, there is insufficient precision brought to the scrutiny of the assessment of pupils' progress and the consistency of teachers' marking. For these reasons, and the continuation of the

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external support, the school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. Leaders and governors have correctly identified weaknesses and have taken action to remedy them. In some significant areas, such as the quality of teaching, attainment in mathematics and progress for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, initiatives have already led to good improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of pupils' writing by ensuring that:
 - they are given motivating tasks that enable them to develop the full range of writing skills
 - tasks are presented in ways that enable them to produce the best writing of which they are capable at that stage of their development
 - older and more-able pupils are given more opportunities to write at length, enabling them to develop writing styles that are appropriate to the subject and audience for whom they are writing.
- Improve the quality of curriculum planning to ensure that:
 - pupils' weaker performance is addressed rapidly and effectively
 - the organisation and structure of lessons, and links across subjects, make certain that learning opportunities are not lost
- Improve the impact of monitoring pupils' progress by:
 - rigorously scrutinising assessment data to identify strengths and weaknesses in order to focus teaching appropriately
 - ensuring that marking and other guidance consistently shows pupils how to improve their work.
- 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 say that teachers help them to learn in 'an interesting and fun way'. Boys' attainment through the school is generally not as high as girls', but when compared with their starting points and individual needs, boys make similar rates of progress to girls. Attainment for Year 6 is broadly in line with national averages. Performance in the Year 2 assessments has risen sharply, particularly in mathematics and writing for both boys and girls, from below national averages last year to be currently close to average. In the lessons seen during the inspection, pupils were making good gains in their skills. For example, in an English lesson, Year 6 pupils quickly learned how to create suspense in their creative writing through careful planning. Pupils know and understand their targets; however, it is too early in the school year to assess if pupils are on course to meet the challenging targets set for them.

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The elected school council makes a positive contribution to improving the school community and develops good understanding of citizenship. The strong sense of the school as a community contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They have good awareness of different cultures, for example through the study of world religions and respect differences between each other. Pupils' attendance is average and the school is sustaining the good progress made in tackling punctuality and those with poor attendance. Vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress because of the close support they are given by teaching assistants and through specialist programmes. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and enjoy growing vegetables in the school allotment. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning and good social and team-building skills give them a satisfactory foundation for the next stage of 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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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?

The school's monitoring of teaching and learning indicates that teaching last year was not consistent across the school and led to varying rates of progress. Improvements

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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have occurred because the school has used a well-directed programme of professional development to strengthen the quality of teaching. Teaching in several of the lessons observed during the inspection was good, but it will take time for pupils to make up for slower progress in the past. Key features of teaching and the curriculum are teachers' good subject knowledge, which helps them plan to meet the needs and abilities of most pupils in their classes. Pupils' basic skills now develop systematically. Work is usually appropriately challenging, although there are occasions when the expected learning for individual groups is not identified clearly enough and pupils are not clear about what is to be learnt. Some teachers give pupils good advice on how their work could be improved, but this is inconsistent across the school.

Activities and materials are stimulating, developing pupils' capacity to work things out for themselves. For example, when younger pupils recorded the measurement of their hands in centimetres and millimetres, they quickly determined whose were the largest. Pupils enjoy the curriculum themes which link subjects, especially when computers are used. They also particularly enjoy similar links made across creative and enrichment aspects such as specialist sport and music lessons. However, the curriculum planning, for a range of varied activities, in a minority of lessons leads to learning opportunities being lost. Extra-curricular activities include many sports opportunities for boys and girls. These are well supported through partnerships with local coaches and clubs. The range of activities is increased by the school's extended services and includes drama and street dance, as a response to pupils' interests and talents. Personal and social education effectively contributes to pupils' successful development and well-being.

Pastoral care is strong and consistent across the school so that pupils are confident to ask for help when it is needed. Marking, and other guidance about how to improve, is not consistent across the school. Those pupils and families who need extra support are identified early and given appropriate help, often by skilled teaching assistants, to resolve problems or accelerate learning.

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 determined leadership of the headteacher places the school in a strong position to raise the expectations and aspirations of staff and to tackle the key weaknesses. The latter are already known to the school as a consequence of effective monitoring and accurate self-assessment. Some effective action has been taken, for instance in

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improving standards in writing and the quality of teaching. Analysis of data and the tracking of pupils' progress, especially by the leaders of the key subjects, are beginning to be used well to identify slow progress or weaker performance.

The school is effective in promoting equality and tackling discrimination, as is shown by the good progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The governing body is well led by the knowledgeable and experienced chair. It is becoming more effective in challenging and supporting the school. It meets its statutory duties well, for example, in ensuring that all requirements to keep children safe are in place. The school works well with a range of partners such as the Watford Schools' Trust and other schools to enhance pupils' learning and personal development.

Although the school, itself, is a harmonious community, leadership does not promote community cohesion sufficiently at a national or global level. Parents are largely supportive of the school and are particularly complimentary about the staff's approachability and the positive ethos. Although many of the outcomes are good, and the school's self-evaluation is accurate, because of the current weaknesses in standards of writing and some aspects of the provision, the school is currently providing no more than a satisfactory value for money.

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	2
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

Children enter the nursery class in the Early Years Foundation Stage with a variety of experiences and skills but their range of abilities is well below that expected for their age. Most children enjoy what they are doing and go on to make satisfactory progress

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during their time in the Nursery. Progress is inconsistent across the areas of learning. Children make better progress in their creative and physical development than in their personal and social development and language skills.

Provision is satisfactory. Levels of staffing are high and resources are adequate. Children settle quickly into the routines established in the Nursery because staff are skilled at ensuring that they understand what is expected of them. Opportunities are provided each day for adults to work with children, either as separate groups or on an individual basis, to observe and assess their knowledge and skills. Assessments do not always fully feed into planning for individuals or groups. This leads to satisfactory progress in the Reception Year and children enter Year 1 below average, particularly in their language skills.

Staff contribute positively to the caring and supportive environment and this effectively promotes children's safety, welfare and social skills. Children spend an appropriate amount of time choosing their own activities and the wheeled toys in the outdoors areas are very popular. The outdoor area is often used well to promote most areas of learning and children's ideas are valued. In the classroom, the younger children are expected to sit on the carpet for too long and opportunities to divide the group and have a range of different activities are missed.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear understanding of what is helping to raise achievement, for example in the teaching of phonics, although there is more to be done on developing aspects of writing where progress is not as good as it might be. Staff work seamlessly together in supporting all children and they are working hard to develop effective links with parents.

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 are largely supportive of the school, which they describe as, 'friendly with a great community spirit', indicating that community cohesion locally is strong. Their children want to go to school to learn. Parents feel positive about staff, and as one parent commented 'my child adores her teachers'. Most feel behaviour is good, although a few have concerns about supervision in the outside areas. Inspectors' evidence is that supervision is at least adequate and often good. Parents rightly believe their children are kept safe.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alban Wood 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 38 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 234 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	20	53	17	45	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	17	45	20	53	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	42	21	55	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	45	18	47	3	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	45	20	53	1	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	37	22	58	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	53	15	39	2	5	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)	14	37	19	50	3	8	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	42	21	55	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	37	18	47	4	11	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	32	22	58	2	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	45	18	47	2	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	48	19	48	0	0	1	3

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.



22 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alban Wood Primary School and Nursery, Watford WD25 7NX

We enjoyed meeting you when we visited your school. We would like to thank those of you who gave up your time to talk to us. Yours is a satisfactory school. What we liked most about it was your good behaviour and the way you look after each other. You know how to stay healthy and safe and the adults look after you well. Children in Reception get a satisfactory start to school.

You make satisfactory progress in your work and reach average standards by the time you leave Year 6, although your writing could be improved. Everyone in class is respected, so you feel you can say what you think and you are very good at explaining things. Some of your work is really good. I was especially impressed by hearing Year 4 count up to 20 in a French song. You also know and understand your targets that are aimed at getting you to improve your performance.

The headteacher, staff and governors run the school as a calm and purposeful place to learn. They have lots of good links especially with sports clubs and other schools, so you will feel confident when you go to secondary school. Your parents think well of the school because the staff take good care of you and respect their views.

We have asked the school to do three things:

- help you to improve your writing, and we have suggested some ways they might do this
- plan lessons to give you the opportunity to do as well as possible
- check your work more carefully so that they are clear about what you need to do to improve.

You can help by politely telling the teacher when you do not understand what to do, or asking how to improve your work, especially your writing.

Good luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Stafford

Lead inspector

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