

St Paul's Walden Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117144
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358092
Inspection dates	17–18 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Patricia Davies

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	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judy Rowley
Headteacher	Debbie Fenn
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed four teachers during visits to nine lessons. Discussions were held with staff, pupils and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence, including documentation relating to safeguarding and pastoral support, assessment and monitoring information, attendance data and pupils' work. Inspectors also scrutinised 31 questionnaires received from parents and carers and others from staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The success of strategies to improve achievement in writing and mathematics, particularly in Years 3 to 6.
- How effectively lesson and curriculum activities meet the different needs of each year group and of individual pupils, especially in providing good levels of challenge and moving on those at risk of underachievement.
- How successfully subject leaders and the governing body challenge the school's performance and influence improvement.
- The extent to which children in the Reception group initiate their own learning.

Information about the school

St Paul's Walden is much smaller than most primary schools. As a result, pupils are usually taught in classes containing more than one year group. There are some changes to groupings each year to accommodate variations in the size of each year group. Most pupils are from White British families and a very small minority are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. There have been many changes to staff and within the governing body since the school's last inspection.

Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage each September into the Reception class, which also contains pupils in Year 1. At the time of this inspection, this class was being taught by another member of staff while the usual class teacher was absent due to illness. There is a Nursery on the school site, but it is not run by the school's governing body and was not included as part of this inspection. The school holds the International School and Eco-School awards and has Healthy Schools and Active Sportsmark status.

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

St Paul's Walden is a good school. This position represents a strong level of improvement since the school's last inspection, when its overall effectiveness was found to be satisfactory. As a result of securing important improvements to the quality of provision, pupils across the school are making good progress and attainment is above average. Written comments from parents and carers show that they recognise and appreciate how well the school has moved on. Pupils, too, express many positive views about what the school provides for them, its friendliness and, most especially, the care they receive from adults. Their enthusiasm and excellent behaviour contribute much to their good achievement. So, too, does their above average attendance.

The governing body and staff are ambitious for the school and their focused dedication underpins a good capacity to bring about further improvement. In particular, the governing body plays a highly active role in supporting curriculum initiatives and the development of leadership and management. At the same time, it also provides considerable challenge as a result of its detailed knowledge of the school and close monitoring. Indeed, self-evaluation as a whole is well developed. Subject leaders are closely involved in influencing and checking performance. The analysis of assessment data is robust and directs curriculum planning and improvement to academic achievement at whole-school, year group and individual pupil levels. Additional help for those at risk of underachievement is, therefore, carefully targeted. New initiatives have injected further challenge and interest into lessons, leading to a good overall quality of teaching. Confidence in their use still varies to some degree, however, and the sometimes satisfactory teaching lacks the generally good use of discussion and questioning to explore and challenge pupils' thinking. Similarly, while refinements to the marking of pupils' work are developing well, some are not yet fully embedded in practice. For example, opportunities are sometimes missed to provide detailed information, especially in mathematics, and to ensure that pupils always respond to written feedback. The school recognises that staff do not yet make full use of marking to correct and improve pupils' spelling.

Pupils benefit from a rich and varied curriculum. Links with other schools, the use of specialist expertise and projects like the 'Forest School' are all used to expand pupils' academic and personal experience. These opportunities are popular with pupils and a very large majority take advantage of the school's wide-ranging clubs, including sporting activities. They make a considerable contribution to the school, the local community and further afield through, for example, a great deal of collaborative working in school, attendance at local parish council meetings and direct and sustained support for communities in Africa. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their many roles and responsibilities in school, for instance as 'Eco-warriors' and play leaders, and about the school clubs they initiate and run.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good and better, by:
 - making the most of opportunities to question pupils and explore their ideas and understanding during lessons
 - providing as much detail as possible when marking pupils' work, especially in mathematics, so that pupils have a full picture as to how their work can be improved
 - identifying consistently where spelling is inaccurate, so that pupils are aware of mistakes and improve their spelling
 - making sure that pupils respond as a matter of course to feedback about their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils are eager to share their ideas with each other and with adults. They respond well to the chance to share their thoughts with a partner during lessons, and with much animation when their interest has been particularly aroused by a much-enjoyed story, or an exciting topic - like investigating a murder mystery. Such keen motivation slips only when, occasionally, these opportunities are limited. Attention then strays or there is some chatter about things other than the work in hand. Good relationships with adults enable the less confident pupils to be coaxed into demonstrating what they know in front of the whole class, and pupils are unafraid to offer spontaneous observations. Unfailingly, pupils move sensibly to their task and quickly get on with their work. On most occasions, pupils know exactly what they have to do, and there are sometimes high levels of focused concentration in the face of demanding work. Even if they are occasionally confused by instructions initially, they are quick to recover once they understand. These qualities, and their above average literacy and numeracy skills, stand pupils in good stead for the future.

Accelerations in progress are evident in all year groups. Good progress in Reception, for instance, moved last year's group from broadly expected levels on entry to above average attainment by the time they joined Year 1. Attainment in the current Year 6 is above average in English and mathematics, with Year 5 following close behind already. Focused initiatives have led to sustained improvements in writing and more pupils reaching the higher levels in mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the few identified by the school as gifted and talented, make the same good progress as other pupils. The success of the school's interventions with those who have special educational needs has meant that some of these pupils no longer require such a high level of support.

Pupils are confident that they have someone to turn to if they have any concerns, be it an adult or a friend. There is a strong sense of personal safety, and although some are keen to play football in the relative confinement of the playground area when the field is wet, older boys are willing to debate the issues for and against in current writing tasks. During this inspection they played safely together, chatting very amicably in groups or playing small games. Lunch is a very orderly, quiet and relaxed occasion and pupils show sensible choices in their selection of food and a good knowledge of what constitutes healthy eating, including the role of carbohydrates and proteins in their diet.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Much has been done to create a lively and imaginative curriculum, which is adjusted to meet the needs of each year group. New initiatives are embedding well, and assessment information is used increasingly to shape individual lessons, extend pupils' involvement in their learning and link subjects together. Pupils are quick to say how much they enjoy the shared 'enrichment' activities on Friday afternoon. They recognise that the chance for all age groups to mix and work together at this time helps to build important social skills and working habits. Pupils also have opportunities to offer ideas about curriculum topics at the planning stage, to enhance ownership and interest, or draw up questions to ask during visits out of school.

Improvements to teaching include a strong investigative element to topics and lesson activities, which heightens the level of challenge. Where this feature is used most effectively, pupils' scientific thinking is extended in how to change variables when constructing a fair test, for example, or key features of particular types of writing are reinforced by exploring examples of pupils' own work. In English, a focus on spoken language and expression proved to be a popular starting point for work to increase pupils' range of vocabulary.

Rigorous analysis of progress ensures that pupils' individual needs are very well known. This knowledge enables staff to spot where a pupil needs a boost to confidence or self-

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esteem in order to prevent underachievement. Support for the pupils whose circumstances make them most vulnerable is tailored closely to their needs, with the help of external agencies and sensitive contact with parents and carers. Marking and feedback are already well established and pupils' learning is served well by their ready knowledge of their learning targets. Staff are becoming increasingly sophisticated in providing detailed information - although this approach is further ahead in English than it is in mathematics - and in developing pupils' response to comment.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's determination to build the school's effectiveness is a shared endeavour, illustrated in the detailed and frequent staff discussions about pupils' individual progress and their willingness to take on board new ways of working. Staff responses to the questionnaire for this inspection endorsed their contribution to the school's self-evaluation. The role of the teaching assistants has been much extended so that they contribute directly to assessment information, and give increasingly sharply-focused support to those pupils with special educational needs, both individually and in small groups. The school's success in lifting pupils' achievement reflects its strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities and tackling any discrimination.

The governing body makes an exceptionally strong contribution to the school's development. Senior leaders speak highly of its work and welcome the considerable challenge it provides through, for example, performance management targets and work with staff on particular initiatives. There is a considerable range of expertise within the governing body, which it uses to provide direct support and development. One such example is the considerable improvement to the use of information and communication technology since the school's last inspection, so that it is now a valuable feature of all lessons. Another is the strong promotion of community cohesion. The governing body has sought out new and innovative local links to bring the school closer to the community it serves. In addition to strong links abroad, it is now strengthening pupils' experience of other faiths and cultures through a partnership with a school in an urban area in this country that has a wide ethnic mix. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are thorough and secure, with particularly strong features in health and safety procedures, risk assessment and audits of provision.

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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	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Improvement to provision for Reception-aged children has been managed well.

Good progress for these children in all areas of learning is encouraged through many opportunities for investigation and exploration, providing a careful balance between activities children initiate for themselves and those closely directed by adults. Children settle happily into their tasks, quickly identifying what they want to do and getting on. They willingly share resources with others, working together at the computer, for example, or playing side by side in the role-play area. A useful demonstration from adults of the roles they might take as vet, receptionist and pet owner covered a wide range of learning, including opportunities for writing and counting. Children watched the session with much interest and attention, and followed up the learning in their own play afterwards. During discussion in the company of older pupils and adults, children are confident to share their opinions about the school.

In keeping with the school's good pastoral and safeguarding arrangements, children are cared for well. Their introduction into school is carefully structured so that there is a smooth transition from part-time to full-time attendance. Discussions with parents and carers, in school and at home, focus closely on the needs of each individual child. Comments from parents of children in the Reception class endorse the success of these strategies. Very recent building work has enhanced the outdoor learning facilities. The school is in the process of re-establishing learning objectives for activities outside, so that children are clear about their purpose.

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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

The return of questionnaires from parents and carers was above the national average. Responses were mostly positive and did not show the level of concern with progress and communication that was found at the time of the last inspection. Enjoyment of school, the degree to which children are kept safe and the school's support for learning had the highest proportions of agreement, and all confirmed that they were happy overall with their child's experience. Written comments included a small minority of individual concerns related to limitations in opportunities for sport and physical activity. The inspection found that the school was very conscious of the need to provide a range of physical activity and did much to promote these opportunities. In addition to the recommended time allocated for physical education within the school week, a range of sporting and activity clubs are available over the course of the year, and there is swimming for all pupils in Years 3 to 6 in the summer term. The school also reported some competitive events in football and netball.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Paul's Walden 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 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 73 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	58	12	39	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	71	8	26	1	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	19	61	10	32	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	48	14	45	2	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	58	11	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	55	13	42	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	48	11	35	5	16	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	39	15	48	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	52	12	39	3	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	45	13	42	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	48	11	35	2	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	61	10	32	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	55	14	45	0	0	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 all 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



19 January 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Paul's Walden Primary School, Hitchin, SG4 8HX

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed finding out about all it does and it was good to learn how much you enjoy all the many exciting and interesting activities it gives you to do, especially those on Friday afternoons. Your school has made a lot of improvements since it was last inspected and is a good school. Some of your parents and carers wrote to say how much the school improved and, overall, they are happy with the school and what it does for you. Adults in the school continue to work hard to improve it further.

Here are some other things we found out about your school

Progress is good right across the school, and your enthusiasm in lessons, good attendance and excellent behaviour play an important part.

Teaching is good overall, especially when you explore and discuss ideas thoroughly and your work is challenging.

Staff take good care of you and you know that you have someone to turn to if you have any concerns.

Your many responsibilities and ideas for things you could do in school to make it even better, together with your activities in the village and beyond, make an extremely valuable contribution to your school and to communities elsewhere, such as those you support in Africa.

These are the things your school has been asked to do to make it even better

Make sure that your lessons and feedback about your work always help you to make good and better progress, including making the most of chances to explore your ideas, giving you lots of detail about how to make your work better and correcting your spelling mistakes.

You can help, too, by always responding to the information adults give you about how to improve your work.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Davies

Lead inspector

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