



Skyswood Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117240
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290766
Inspection dates 6–7 March 2007
Reporting inspector Keith Sadler

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection of the day care was carried out under Children Act 1989: Part XA (as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000) and, where (funded) nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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| Type of school | Primary | School address | Chandlers Road |
| School category | Community | | St. Albans |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 | | Hertfordshire AL4 9RS |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01727 854164 |
| Number on roll (school) | 241 | Fax number | 01727 854164 |
| Number on roll (day care) | 8 | Chair | Mr Robert Foster |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Headteacher | Mr Robert Bridle |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 January 2003 | | |
| Date of previous day care inspection | 1 January 1900 | | |

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| Age group | Inspection dates | Inspection number |
| 3–11 | 6–7 March 2007 | 290766 |

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Introduction

The school inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors, one of whom carried out the inspection of childcare.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school with a new headteacher, who started in September 2006. There is a Nursery class which is known as 'Woodland Nursery'. This provides part-time places for up to 30 children in each of the morning and afternoon sessions. In addition, the school operates day care in 'Twigs @ Woodland Nursery' which is shared with the Nursery in the afternoon of each day. The large majority of pupils come from the immediate area. Almost all are from White British backgrounds. Most pupils come from advantaged backgrounds and the proportion entitled to free school meals is low. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. Attainment on entry is at nationally expected levels, though slightly above average in communication, language and literacy.

Key for inspection grades

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| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Skyswood is a good and improving school that provides good value for money. There is a positive atmosphere of care and support which helps pupils to achieve well and develop a love of school and learning. Progress in personal development is rapid. Pupils' behaviour, attitudes to school and each other are outstanding. As one parent said, 'Respect and courtesy from the staff promotes and nurtures high self-esteem so all kinds of learning are made possible'. Parents are unanimously supportive of the school. They are appreciative of the many enriching opportunities made available by the good quality curriculum. A parent encapsulated these strengths by saying, 'Skyswood has given my son a little bit of magic in his childhood'.

Children settle quickly and well in the Nursery. They develop confidence and play and learn happily in a safe and fostering environment. However, even though the quality of teaching and learning in the Nursery and Reception Years is outstanding, accommodation limits the opportunities provided. This is because neither class has an outdoor cover to enable children to play and learn outdoors when it is either raining or hot. Nonetheless, the Foundation Stage provides children with a strong and effective start from which they progress well throughout the school. Standards are high in Year 2 and good achievement is maintained in Years 3 to 6. By the time that they leave school, standards are exceptionally high in English and mathematics, and significantly above average in science. Although pupils thoroughly enjoy their information and communication technology (ICT) lessons, their progress is hampered by lack of opportunity to use ICT equipment because the school's resources are limited. As a consequence, standards in this subject are similar to those in other schools at the end of Year 6 and achievement is satisfactory.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are made interesting and teachers provide a good range of activities that are matched well to pupils' needs. There are some outstanding features. Relationships are excellent and support staff make a strong and positive contribution to learning. However, as yet, teachers do not make individual targets for improvement sufficiently clear and hence pupils do not always know what they have to do meet them, particularly in writing and mathematics.

The new headteacher has made a positive start and already provides good leadership and management. He has brought significant rigour to the school's provision and its management. As one parent said, 'Mr Bridle has made a positive impact already. He has made many positive strides forward and we are very pleased to have him leading Skyswood'. He is supported well by the deputy headteacher and by teachers who have responsibilities. They make a positive contribution to the school's good procedures for checking pupils' progress and the school's provision. This enables the school to have a good understanding of its strengths and points for development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide a cover outside the Nursery and Reception classes.

- Raise standards in ICT by ensuring that there are sufficient resources available to both teachers and pupils.
- Ensure that individual targets are set for pupils in English and mathematics and their progress towards them are checked regularly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in all areas of learning in the Foundation Stage. As a result, on entering Year 1, the large majority of pupils has attained the expected goals and a significant majority exceed them, particularly in their communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional skills. This good pace of learning is maintained and achievement is good in English, mathematics and science throughout the school. By the time pupils reach Year 6, standards are well above average. In the 2006 tests, standards were exceptionally high in English and mathematics. In science, standards were significantly above average. All pupils gained the expected level in science, though a smaller number gained the higher level. However, the current Year 6 pupils are on course to attain exceptionally high standards in English, mathematics and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being, including the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Excellent provision enables pupils to become balanced, well-rounded individuals, with a positive outlook on life and learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. One said, 'Lessons are fun and there is lots going on in our school'. Pupils understand that punctuality and good attendance are important and enable them to make the best use of their time at school. As a result, attendance is significantly above the national average. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils' outstanding self discipline and good manners result from a close liaison between the school and parents, which is a positive improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to their community. The work of the school council is taken very seriously by pupils and staff. The council has heavily influenced the school's organisation. For example, pupils are very clear that balanced eating and regular exercise promote a healthy lifestyle. This led to the introduction of 'children's choice' at mealtimes, gave pupils involvement in decision making and increased the uptake of healthy school meals. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe. They know that they can improve their safety awareness and confidence through initiatives such as cycling proficiency and have a keen understanding of the dangers of talking with strangers. Accurate knowledge about vital social issues like health and safety, sex education and drugs education are gained through lessons. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning are good. There are some outstanding features. Teachers plan lessons exceptionally well. They make their expectations, for both what the pupils will learn and for their behaviour, very clear at the beginning of lessons. Teachers question pupils well. This helps to boost their speaking and listening skills and also enables them to assess progress during the lesson. Staff use the resulting assessment information well to amend future lesson plans. Generally, a good range of activities is set to match the differing learning needs of pupils. However, on occasions, teachers are too reliant on published worksheets, and these do not always provide exciting and challenging activities. Behaviour management of pupils is excellent and relationships are outstanding. At the moment, only two classes have interactive whiteboards available for them to use, enhancing learning and enlivening lessons well for these classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. Work for vulnerable pupils and those that find learning hard is planned well. Programmes for these pupils draw together the skills of the school staff in tandem with the many experts and agencies that support the school. The curriculum for ICT is hampered by a lack of resources, although statutory requirements are met. However, the opportunity to make use of ICT within other subjects is also limited.

The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of educational visits that enhance learning in topics being studied exceptionally well. Many arts activities are supported, such as by a concert at the Royal Albert Hall and dance workshops. In addition, regular visitors to the school enhance the curriculum in the areas of the arts and sports. There is an exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides high levels of care. There is a positive and supportive atmosphere and staff ensure that all are included in what the school provides. All statutory arrangements for safeguarding pupils are met in full, and there are robust health and safety and child protection procedures. The strong sense of teamwork means that all adults, and pupils, take responsibility for ensuring that all others are safe and well cared for. There have been recent improvements in the arrangements to provide academic guidance for pupils and a new system has been put into place to check their progress as they move through the school. However, as yet, the arrangements to provide clear targets for improvement in literacy and mathematics are at an early stage. Apart from in Years 5 and 6, pupils are not clear about what they have to do to meet

the targets that have recently been set for them. There are good quality and clear learning plans for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. These involve the pupils well in understanding their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has built well on the many successes identified in the previous inspection. Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher has already made a positive impact. Rigorous checks are made to monitor the school's provision and there are good arrangements for the performance management of the staff. He has a clear vision for the future which has been shared and developed as a result of consultations with staff, governors and parents. The school has good systems for checking how well it is doing and this involves all staff and governors. It has tackled the issues raised in the previous inspection report effectively. Governance is good and governors play an important role in checking progress against targets by frequently visiting the school and asking helpful questions about how improvement targets are progressing. A real strength of the school is the high quality of teamwork and commitment, which ensure that everyone plays a part in improving the school. This, linked to the effective newly reconstituted leadership team, means there is good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of registered day care

Grade: 2

Twigs @ Woodland Nursery provides good quality child care. Children play in a bright room with delightful displays of their work. The environment is clean and welcoming with a good variety of areas including a small library. Children feel secure and are well behaved because they are cared for by familiar staff, who offer thoughtful support. Staff provide a good range of activities, such as imaginative play and listening to stories. For example, children enjoy playing in a make-believe doctor's surgery because resources are used well. Planning does not always record ways to assess how children will be successful in a particular activity. Children enjoy physical activities in the garden because interesting equipment has been purchased to play on such as climbing apparatus. Staff plan activities satisfactorily to develop children's understanding of other cultures but occasionally more could be done to deepen children's understanding of our multi-cultural society. The children are encouraged to be independent effectively. They choose which healthy snack they will eat and can serve themselves with water at anytime from the drinks cooler. The premises and play area are always secure. Children know how to evacuate the premises safely and drills are always recorded.

Children are handed over to staff safely. A very good partnership with parents is in place, with an informative handbook being available that contains brief policies. Staff are always available at the end of sessions to talk to parents. An open evening and small report is given to parents every term. Although staff tell parents about accidents they do not always ask them to sign the accident record. The manager has a teaching

qualification and another member of staff has an appropriate qualification. All staff hold an up-to-date first aid qualification. Staff are not clear about how an allegation in connection with child protection about a member of staff would be handled.

There have been no complaints made to Ofsted since registration in August 2006.

The school is required to keep a record of complaints about the registered day care made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints about the registered day care other than those made to Ofsted.

Recommendations or actions to improve the registered day care

- Ensure that the accident record is always signed by parents.
- Ensure that all staff are clear about the child protection procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation being made about a member of staff.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|-----------------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

| | |
|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

The effectiveness of the registered day care

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| The quality and standards of the registered day care | 2 |
| How effective is the day care in helping children to be healthy? | 2 |
| How effective is the day care in protecting children and helping them to stay safe? | 2 |
| How effective is the day care in helping children to achieve and enjoy their learning? | 2 |
| How effective is the day care in helping children to make a positive contribution? | 2 |
| How effectively is the day care organised? | 2 |
| Does the day care meet the needs of the range of children for whom it provides? | Yes |
| Has the day care improved since the last inspection? | NA |
| Does the day care require enforcement action? | No |
| Does the day care require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

15 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Skyswood Primary School, Chandlers Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 9RS

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We were really impressed with your friendliness and excellent behaviour, your very sensible and helpful attitudes towards each other, and how well you do in your work.

Here are some of the really good things we found about your school:

- your behaviour is excellent
- you thoroughly enjoy school and lessons and you play together exceptionally well
- all the adults work hard to make sure that you are safe and cared for
- lessons are good and your teachers work hard to give you interesting and exciting things to learn about
- your headteacher is doing a good job and he is helped well to make your school even better by the other teachers and governors.

We have asked the school to work on three things in particular to make your school even better:

- provide shade and cover outside the Nursery and Reception classes so the children can play and learn outside when it is raining or hot
- raise standards in information and communication technology (ICT) by making sure that there are enough computers available for you to use both in the suite and your classrooms
- make sure that you have targets set in literacy and numeracy and that you know what you have to do to meet these targets

You can all help by continuing to work hard and to keep your targets constantly in mind so you can achieve them as quickly as possible.

With best wishes

Keith Sadler

Inspector