

Cunningham Hill Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117250
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290770
Inspection dates	19–20 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Marie-Clare Scherman
Headteacher	Mr Richard Dawson
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2001
School address	Cell Barnes Lane St. Albans Hertfordshire AL1 5QJ
Telephone number	01727852911
Fax number	01727859255

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized junior school where free school meal entitlement is close to the national average. A quarter of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is above average but very few are at an early stage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is similar to other junior schools and a few pupils have statements of special educational needs. Attainment on entry varies and has been above average in recent years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The inspection supports the view of staff and governors that this is a good school that provides good value for money. It has some outstanding features, particularly in the pupils' personal development. Pupils are very happy in the school. They speak with much pride of the many areas of school life that they enjoy. Their very positive attitudes to learning and strong relationships help to make this a harmonious place in which to learn and develop. Parents are very supportive of the school and speak highly of all that staff and governors are doing for their children.

Achievement has improved over the last few years and is now good. Targets are challenging and are generally met. Pupils make good progress during their time at the school and standards are significantly above average in most areas by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. Pupils in Year 3 make slower progress than other years in English and mathematics, when compared to their Key Stage 1 results. The school has started to strengthening links with the infant school, although these are at an early stage of development and have scope to be extended further.

Teaching and learning are good and are a major factor in the pupils' progress. Pupils say they look forward to school because as one put it, 'lessons are fun and we have a chance to try things out for ourselves.' The individual learning needs of pupils are carefully identified and effective programmes introduced to support their academic and personal achievement. As a result, pupils with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress. A variety of much valued activities has been introduced in conjunction with other schools to enhance the experiences of gifted and talented pupils. However, teachers do not always consistently extend and challenge the thinking of these pupils throughout all lessons.

The good curriculum and the school's effective care, support and guidance promote the pupils' personal development well. Pupils feel very safe and free from any forms of harassment. They say there is always someone to turn to if they have a problem. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding. The pupils participate enthusiastically and in large numbers in the wide range of interesting activities provided during and beyond the school day. They show great care for each other and enjoy working together in groups. Attendance levels are very high. The pupils' academic standards, enjoyment in their learning and their teamwork skills mean that they are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their education.

The school has moved forward because of good leadership and management from an experienced headteacher, a committed staff team and a well organised governing body. They have an accurate view of the school and use this to identify priorities for improvement. The school has tackled the shortcomings identified at the last inspection and has developed in many other areas. For example, pupils now benefit considerably from teaching in science that focuses on learning through enquiry and investigation. The leadership role of other staff has developed considerably in recent years and they now play a greater part in securing high standards in their subjects. These features place the school in a good position to secure further improvements and meet its future challenges.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen links further with the infant school to ensure as smooth a transfer as possible for pupils.

- Build on the additional programmes provided for pupils identified as gifted and talented by challenging and extending their learning more consistently in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls or pupils of different ethnic backgrounds. Pupils who left Year 6 in 2006 made much better progress in mathematics and science than in English. Progress for these pupils was outstanding in science and good in mathematics. Test results rose sharply and were very high in both subjects. Progress was slower in English, largely because of shortcomings in aspects of writing. Test results in English were close to the national average, although the results in reading were well above average. Writing results were lower, and a significant number of pupils very narrowly missed reaching the nationally expected Level 4. In response, a programme was implemented immediately to improve writing throughout the school. This is having an impact: pupils are now making more secure progress and standards of writing are improving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils involve themselves enthusiastically in lessons and the school's wide range of enrichment activities. They attend very regularly and are punctual to school. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respect the cultures and traditions of others and reflect on their own performance and how they might do better. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils take their many responsibilities very seriously whether helping at lunchtime in the school office or being 'class buddies'. They fully understand what is needed to adopt a healthy lifestyle and make very sensible choices about food, drink and exercise. They appreciate the very significant voice they have in school developments such as the purchasing of interactive whiteboards, and are keen to investigate how school dinners could be improved further.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Some teaching is outstanding significantly enhancing the pupils' learning, although this is not evident in all classrooms. Teachers use many strategies and probing questioning to keep learning lively. Activities and methods are generally matched well to pupils' needs. However, teachers do not always extend pupils' thinking in all lessons. Pupils learn especially well when they discuss ideas with each other and have the chance to link their learning with everyday experiences. Interactive whiteboards are a welcome addition to classrooms, but not all teachers are using them to their full extent. Marking is thorough and pupils generally follow up their teacher's suggestions to improve their work. Teaching assistants are well briefed, carefully deployed and make a significant contribution to pupils' learning in class or in withdrawal groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good range of learning experiences to meet the needs and interests of its pupils. Weeks dedicated to a particular theme enliven learning and considerably benefit

pupils' achievement in many subjects. Basic skills are promoted well, although some opportunities to find more creative ways to develop the pupils' writing in more subjects are missed. The promotion of the pupils' personal development, especially their understanding of how to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles, is particularly effective and results in very mature and sensible pupils. There is an excellent range of clubs to support and extend their sporting, musical and creative interests. Well-developed links with nearby primary and secondary schools help to extend the experiences and interests of pupils with particular talents. However, the very brightest pupils are not always fully extended in their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school looks after its pupils well so that they feel at ease and can learn well and works closely with parents for the pupils' well-being. Pupils feel confident to turn to an adult should they feel worried or concerned. Procedures for first aid and medical care are good. Appropriate processes for ensuring the safeguarding of the pupils are in place. Systems to assess how well pupils are progressing academically have improved in the last year. Closer monitoring of pupil progress enables teachers to identify quickly pupils who are falling behind and find a way to help them. Pupils are very clear about what they need to do to get even better and they work diligently to reach their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is supported well by his senior team and governors in giving the school a clear direction and tackling any identified shortcomings in provision or performance. Ensuring that all groups of pupils can achieve, whatever their background, is central to the school's activities. Senior staff and governors have a good understanding of the school's overall qualities but are not always clear enough about how pupils' are affected by action taken. The weaker writing results in 2006 have led the school to reflect on some of its practices and rigorous systems for tracking pupil progress in relation to their targets have been introduced. A full evaluation of the system and what it is showing about pupil progress has not yet been undertaken. Governors are fully involved in planning for the school's development and monitoring its progress. In securing good value for money, they have used funding skilfully to improve resources, enhance the accommodation and provide more teaching assistants, all of which are having a beneficial effect on achievement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

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 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

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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	1
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	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cunningham Hill Junior School, St Albans AL1 5QJ

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school. You were all very helpful. We enjoyed talking with you and your teachers and watching you learn. There are many aspects of your school that we judged to be good. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that you go to a good school.

You make good progress during your time at Cunningham Hill Junior School. Most of you achieve well, and nearly all of you meet the standards expected by the time you move on to secondary school, particularly in science, mathematics and reading. Your progress in science is particularly impressive. Your teachers provide a wide range of interesting activities to help you learn. You thoroughly enjoy school, attend regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. You clearly enjoy all of the clubs, trips and visits provided for you. The care and support you receive is good. You are learning how important diet and exercise are for a healthy lifestyle. You take your responsibilities very seriously and make a very considerable contribution to the life of the school.

Your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. There are some areas where we think that improvements could be made. The learning of those of you with particular talents could be extended more in lessons. We also feel that your learning could be helped more when you enter Year 3 if there were closer links with the infant school. We are sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make this all happen.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector