

Platts Heath Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118295
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291080
Inspection date	5 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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 on roll	56
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kenneth M Alexander
Headteacher	Ian Priddle
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2002
School address	Headcorn Road Platts Heath Maidstone ME17 2NH
Telephone number	01622 850316
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is average. There is a small number of looked-after children. Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'Untold damage was done to the school last year with the possibility of closure. Numbers fell and morale was at a very low ebb. However, it is now picking up thanks to the determination of staff and parents.' This is how parents sum up the situation, where a proposal to close the school was only dropped at the start of this year following a vigorous local campaign. Morale is now high and parents express overwhelmingly positive views about the school. They particularly appreciate 'the good quality teaching and the caring, friendly environment'.

This is a good school. Teaching and learning are good, and pupils achieve well, but they do notably better in Years 3 to 6 than in the earlier years. Children generally start school with above average capabilities. They make sound progress in the Reception Year and reach standards above those expected for pupils at the start of Year 1. Year 2 test results have not been as high as might be expected, particularly in writing and for the most able pupils. However, standards at the end of Year 6 have risen steadily over the past four years and they are well above average.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good because pupils benefit from good care, guidance and support and because the good curriculum harnesses their enthusiasm. Parents describe how their children 'look forward to going to school each morning'. They say, 'Teachers make the curriculum varied and interesting'. A very good range of clubs enriches the opportunities offered to pupils. These include a Young Farmers' Club where pupils look after livestock. This certainly does not leave them with a sentimentalised view of the countryside. Year 2 pupils explained that they had named their two pigs 'Sausages' and 'Bacon', and both have now been consumed. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 are particularly helped to make progress because they know their targets, which show them how to improve their work. Younger pupils are less aware of what they need to do to do better.

The headteacher and staff have been successful in creating a school where pupils have a sense of pride and where they are increasingly doing well. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school knows that writing is not as good as other subjects and that more able pupils do not do as well as they could in Years 1 and 2, but leaders' monitoring has not focused sufficiently on establishing why this should be.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that school leaders' monitoring identifies why writing and the performance of more able pupils are not better in Year 2, and puts in place measures to further raise standards
- make sure that pupils of all ages know and focus on what they need to do in order to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are well above average by the end of Year 6 and pupils achieve well. From their generally above average start, children make sound progress in the Reception Year so that almost all attain, and several exceed, the early learning goals expected for this Foundation Stage of their education. Standards in the Year 2 assessments have been broadly average, with writing notably less strong than reading and mathematics. Fewer than expected pupils attain high levels in the Year 2 tests. Although the school is aware that this is so, measures taken to

address this issue have not been effective because school leaders' monitoring has not pinpointed exactly why pupils are not making better progress in their writing.

Standards in the Year 6 tests have risen steadily and markedly over the last four years. Able pupils do well in these tests and the school has exceeded its targets for 2007. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress and some especially vulnerable pupils have done exceptionally well because, in the words of their carers, 'excellent provision has resulted in a miraculous turnaround in these children's lives'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are enthusiastic about school and they enjoy their lessons. Attendance is satisfactory. Pupils are attentive in class, but they get restless when they are expected to sit passively for long periods. Pupils describe their school as a place where 'we feel safe because everyone knows everyone really well'. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils of all ages mix and get on well with each other, with older pupils naturally looking out for and helping the younger ones. Behaviour is good. Pupils are confident that bullying is not a problem because if any difficulty arises, it 'gets sorted out'. Pupils' success in the local authority 'Safety in Action' competition shows their good understanding of how to keep safe when outside school. Pupils also have a good appreciation of the need for exercise and a healthy diet. A Year 2 lad bemoaned the fact that the normally healthy school dinners are 'not so healthy on Fridays because they give us chips'.

School councillors point with pride to some of their achievements, including the introduction of sunhats. They formed their own political parties, with the Quality Party beating the Non-Uniform Party in a tightly-fought election. Pupils also involve themselves in the wider community, raising money, for example, for a range of charities. These activities, their brutally realistic understanding of the economic realities of agriculture and their very good key literacy and numeracy skills prepare them exceptionally well for adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their pupils very well as individuals, and the good relationships throughout the school help to motivate pupils to work hard and do their best. Teachers move lessons on at a brisk pace so that the pupils get through a lot of work. Although each class caters for at least two year groups, care is generally taken to match work to ability. As a parent explained, 'My daughter enjoys school because she can work at a level appropriate to her'. Questioning is used effectively both to check on pupils' understanding and to make them think for themselves. Teachers are also careful to direct questions to some of the quieter pupils so that they are not just taking answers from the most enthusiastic volunteers. However, they do not always make the most effective use of teaching assistants during periods of whole-class teaching, for example by having them keep track of which pupils have answered. Although teachers have established orderly classroom routines, even among the youngest children, they do not all demand these are followed consistently, so that sometimes pupils call out and do not listen well when they get overexcited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is made interesting and exciting for pupils by the creative way in which teachers link subjects together. In Years 5 and 6, for example, work in English about persuasive writing was linked to history work on the Tudors by taking as a focus the arguments marshalled by Sir Francis Drake to persuade Elizabeth I to finance his adventuring. The school's strong partnership with parents, many of whom 'enjoy being able to give something back', enables it to offer pupils an impressive range of extra-curricular activities in which they enthusiastically take part. Space is at a premium and the school is not generously resourced, for example for information and communication technology. In part, this is because investment was put on hold during the period when there was still a question mark over the school's future. Nevertheless, the school makes good use of what it has. As a parent commented, 'The teaching and pastoral support far outweighs the less than perfect environment'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents praise highly the high standard of care that the school provides. Arrangements for child protection and for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and pupils and parents express confidence that there is 'always someone they can speak to' if they have any worries or concerns. The school takes a particular pride in the support it has been able to give to some especially vulnerable children, who have made spectacular gains in confidence and achievement as a result.

Pupils have targets that help to identify for each individual what they next need to concentrate on to move their work forward. Although older pupils are very aware of their targets, and their use of them contributes to the good progress that they make, the younger pupils are not all as aware of what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and staff have been successful in creating a school with a positive ethos where pupils are keen to do well. Inevitably, there is less time for leadership and management in this small school than in larger institutions. The headteacher teaches in class for half the week and there are many administrative tasks that eat into the remaining time. All of the teachers share in subject leader roles. Because staff numbers are small, however, any change of staff has a significant effect on leadership. This means that subject leadership roles are satisfactory but still developing, and this will continue to be the case in September when a new teacher joins the school.

Self-evaluation is accurate and the school knows well those areas where it is most successful and those where improvements are needed. Monitoring of teaching and learning has helped ensure good quality provision but it has been less effective in identifying precisely why it is that writing is not better and why able pupils are not achieving better from the Reception Year to the end of Year 2. This lack of thorough analysis means that the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory rather than good.

Governors do a good job. Although they are very supportive, they readily challenge staff. They visit regularly, often with a specific focus, for example 'to observe how handwriting is developed from Reception through to Year 6', so they are not just dependent on the headteacher for information.

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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 quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	3
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	3
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

6 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Platts Heath Primary, Maidstone ME17 2NH

Thank you all for making me so welcome and helping me when I visited you. You and your parents are obviously very proud of your school. You have every right to be. It is a good school and you do well by the time you leave at the end of Year 6. This is because the teaching is good and because you enjoy the way in which teachers make learning interesting. You also enjoy the super range of clubs on offer, many of which your parents help to run. I was particularly impressed to learn about the Young Farmers' Club, though I was disappointed to hear that there was nothing left of 'Sausages' for me to taste!

I was pleased to see how well behaved you are and how well you get on with each other. It was good to see how the older pupils look out for and help the younger ones. I was impressed at your success in the 'Safety in Action' competition. The Deputy Mayor made a point of coming over to show me the trophy she awarded you.

The school looks after you well and I was pleased to see that many of you knew and made use of your targets to help you do even better. Some of the younger children were not so clear about how to improve their work, and that is something that I have asked the school to look at. I know that your headteacher has to teach as well as manage the school, but I have asked him and the other staff to look particularly carefully to find out why some of the ablest children are not doing better in the infant class and why you are not doing better in writing. I think that could help make your school even better. You can help too by continuing to work hard and doing your very best.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when I came to see you.

Yours faithfully, Selwyn Ward Lead Inspector