

St Paul's Walden Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117144
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312511
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Derek Watts

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	
School	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Geoff Read
Headteacher	Ms Deborah Fenn
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Bendish Lane Whitwell Hitchin Hertfordshire SG4 8HX
Telephone number	01438 871241
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector

Description of the school

St Paul's Walden is a much smaller than average primary school. The school provides education for pupils from the village of Whitwell and for a few from further afield. Most pupils have White British backgrounds and no pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. The school has experienced changes in leadership recently. The current headteacher took up the post in January 2008 after an interim headteacher led the school in Autumn 2007. A significant proportion of pupils leave and join some year groups at different times of the year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of St Paul's Walden is satisfactory. Pupils' achieve satisfactorily from their various starting points. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall but it is good in Years 5 and 6 because of better teaching. In the current Year 6, standards are broadly average. Effective pastoral care and support and a positive school atmosphere lead to good personal development for pupils.

Parents hold positive views about the school and most are pleased with the care and education provided for their children. The positive school atmosphere and the start made by the new headteacher receive praise. A significant number of parents have expressed concern about communication with the school and a few about their children's progress. These concerns are justified and are being addressed by the school.

The new headteacher has a clear vision and provides good direction for the school's future. She has an accurate view of the school's performance and has identified what needs to be done to move the school forward. Assessment and tracking systems, recently introduced by the interim headteacher are effective. The school is successfully building on this initiative. In addition, the school is taking positive action to improve teaching and pupils' performance in writing. A senior teacher provides sound support but the leadership skills of other key staff are underdeveloped particularly in terms of monitoring performance and action planning. Governors are becoming more actively involved in the school. Recent training and better information about the school's performance are enabling the governing body to provide constructive challenge as well as support.

Test results vary from year to year because numbers in each year group are small. Nevertheless, inspection findings show that the quality of teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory. Pupils' progress, particularly in English and mathematics is satisfactory. Across the school, teachers make the purpose of lessons clear and establish good relationships with pupils. Teachers' instruction and explanations are clear and informative. Teaching and learning are stronger in Years 5 and 6 because interesting and varied activities are well matched to pupils' needs. However, this good practice is not consistent across the school. Challenge and pace are not always high enough and learning slows. A few lessons are too teacher-directed and work is not sufficiently well matched to pupils' needs. Individual learning targets, introduced recently, enable pupils to know what they need to do to improve in writing and mathematics. This is having a positive impact on pupils' learning. There are inconsistencies in the quality of pupils' presentation and in the marking of pupils' work.

Pupils' personal development is a strength. They enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance and their keen participation in activities. Pupils are courteous, friendly and relate very well to others. Behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and know how to keep themselves safe. They make good contributions to the school and to the wider community. Pupils enjoy the good range of additional activities that enrich the curriculum.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

In most years, children enter Reception with knowledge and skills broadly expected for their age. They settle quickly and make good gains in their personal and social development. Children

enjoy their learning and relate well to adults and their peers. Satisfactory teaching and a sound curriculum enable children to make expected gains from their starting points in most areas of learning. Children benefit from the teacher's clear instructions and explanations. However, the balance between adult led activities and allowing children to explore and work independently is not secure. Occasionally, over-directed work restricts children's opportunities to explore and work independently. Creative opportunities such as role-play are limited. The school shares the outdoor space for the Foundation Stage with a private pre-school. This limits the school's ability to provide enough outdoor learning experiences for the children and extend main themes of study. The planning of activities does not ensure that assistants are fully utilised. Some of the learning resources are tired but these are being replaced. Children's attainment meets national expectations by the end of Reception.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards further, particularly in English and mathematics, by ensuring that all lessons are consistently challenging and conducted at a brisk pace, and that existing good practice is more widespread.
- Establish policies and guidance to improve the consistency of pupils' presentation and teachers' marking of pupils' work.
- Strengthen the Foundation Stage provision by ensuring that all areas of learning receive good attention and that the outside learning area and skills of assistants are fully utilised.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils achieve satisfactorily from their starting points through to the end of Year 6. Standards vary from year to year because numbers in each year group are small. By the end of Year 2, pupils have consolidated what they have learned in Foundation Stage. They make satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards are often above average by Year 2 although they dipped in 2007 particularly in writing. National test results for Year 6 in 2007 were above average in science and average in English and mathematics. Standards in the current Year 6 are broadly average. Pupils who find learning difficult make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are enthusiastic about school and show very positive attitudes to learning. Attendance levels are above average. Behaviour is outstanding because of clear expectations by staff and very good relationships. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and show a good understanding of the importance of healthy diets and taking regular exercise. Pupils thrive on additional activities. For example, members of the school council, lunchtime monitors and play leaders all take their responsibilities seriously. Consequently, they make a positive contribution to the school community. The raising of funds for charities demonstrates their willingness and success in contributing to the wider community. Pupils are reasonably well prepared for the future because they possess a sound base in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). In addition, they have well developed personal and social skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with consistently good practice in the Year 5 and 6 classes. Teachers effectively share learning intentions with the class so pupils know what they are expected to learn. Strong relationships are a strength of the teaching. Tasks are not always well matched to pupils' ability and needs. In some classes, assessment information is used effectively to do this, but this is not happening in all lessons. Expectations of pupils' presentation skills and the quantity of work to be produced are not always high enough. This leads to unproductive and untidy work. Teachers' clear instructions and explanations promote learning well. Occasionally, lesson introductions are too long. As a result, pupils are not productive enough because the time for them to practise their skills and apply their knowledge is too short. The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. In some classes, teachers provide praise for good work and clear comments to guide improvement. In other classes, marking is sparse or gives undue praise for low quality work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum promotes pupils' personal development well and enables them to make satisfactory progress. To raise achievement in writing, pupils are now provided with more opportunities to write in different styles and for different purposes. However, there is scope to increase the profile of writing further. For example, except in Years 5 and 6, displays of pupils' writing are limited. This suggests to pupils that writing is not as important as other aspects of their work. While there are some good examples of pupils using and applying literacy and numeracy skills in subjects other than English and mathematics, this is not happening in all classes. ICT is used satisfactorily to support teaching and learning. Problems with equipment reliability and inappropriate software are being overcome. A good range of additional activities contributes to pupils' enjoyment and interests. A successful residential visit for Years 5 and Year 6 to Norfolk develops pupils' teambuilding skills. Healthy lifestyles and personal safety education are promoted well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good procedures ensure that pupils are protected, safe and secure at school. Pastoral care is strong. Staff know the pupils extremely well and have developed good relationships with them and their families. Effective systems to assess and track pupils' attainment and progress have recently been implemented but the data emerging is not always used well enough to plan teaching. Most pupils have clear individual learning targets in writing and mathematics, so they know what they need to do to improve. Although only recent, target setting is having a positive impact on pupils' learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are successfully promoting good personal development for pupils. The impact of leadership and management on teaching and on pupils' achievement is satisfactory but positive action is beginning to be taken to improve this. The new headteacher is focused well on improving teaching to raise achievement. Self-evaluation is accurate and realistic. Some subject leaders have not received appropriate training and so skills in data analysis and evaluation are under- developed.

The chair of governors has formed a productive working partnership with the headteacher. Governors have received training recently and are now in a better position to hold the school to account. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

29 February 2008

Dear Pupils

St Paul's Waldren Primary School Inspection,

Thank you so much for welcoming me into your school and showing me your work. I enjoyed my visit and would like to tell you what I found out. Yours is a satisfactory school which is showing clear signs of improvement under the leadership of your new headteacher.

These things are strengths of the school.

- You clearly enjoy school and your attendance is good.
- The school has a positive and pleasant atmosphere.
- Teaching is good in Years 5 and 6 and pupils make good progress here.
- You are friendly and polite and get on extremely well with other pupils and adults.
- A wide range of additional activities are provided, including a residential visit.
- Your behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school.
- You lead healthy lifestyles and know how to keep yourselves safe.
- Staff know you well. They take very good care of you and give you good support.
- Your parents are pleased with the care and education provided.

There are four things the school has been asked to improve.

- Occasionally, your teachers could constructively challenge you more so that you make more progress in English and mathematics.
- Teachers should ensure that lessons move on at a quick pace and that all classes receive good teaching.
- Clear guidance would help you to improve your presentation and consistently good marking would support your learning.
- Learning in the Foundation Stage could be improved by ensuring that all areas of learning receive good attention and that the outside learning area is fully used.

Finally, thank you once again for all your help. I wish you all the best for the future.

With kind regards

Derek Watts

Lead inspector