

Painters Ash Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118491
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312964
Inspection dates	15–16 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Russell
Headteacher	Tricia Sherling
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2003
School address	Masefield Road Northfleet Gravesend DA11 8EL
Telephone number	01474 568991
Fax number	01474 363698

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Painters Ash is a large primary school. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small proportion speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The headteacher joined the school in September 2006 after a period of staff changes and instability in the leadership.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Painters Ash is a satisfactory and improving school, with some good features to its work. Parents have confidence in the school and are positive about recent improvements, making comments such as, 'Since the arrival of the headteacher, the school is happier than before' and 'There are more activities and more focus on learning.' Pupils, too, are upbeat about the changes. This was evident as older pupils talked about lessons being more enjoyable, particularly when they are 'doing things' rather than learning from books. Providing effective care and guidance for pupils to develop personally is central to the school's values. It is successful in achieving this, so that pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The warm interactions between pupils and staff mean that the school is a pleasant and harmonious place. Pupils express their views confidently in the knowledge that their opinions are taken seriously, giving them the confidence to try new things.

Staffing difficulties after the last inspection deflected the school from its focus on pupils' achievements, which led to a decline in standards and progress. This situation has now been reversed. Achievement is now satisfactory, although pupils still have gaps in their knowledge and understanding because of earlier inconsistencies in teaching. Standards are improving and are moving securely towards national averages again throughout the school. This is because teaching and the curriculum are now satisfactorily developing pupils' skills and knowledge. Teachers are working effectively as a team and beginning to gain the confidence to improve teaching further by sharing good practice. The curriculum is undergoing significant development, making it more interesting for pupils and giving them more opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. The school recognises that these changes are at an early stage and would benefit from further development. In spite of the robust approach the school has taken to improving attendance by not authorising absence for holidays, a small minority of pupils are taken out of school during term time, which has an adverse effect on their progress.

Staff and governors understand the school's strengths well and have clear plans to address identified weaknesses. The headteacher has used her significant leadership strengths to push ahead on the school's key priorities at an optimum speed. There is a real sense of urgency about the need for improvement and this is being achieved at a good rate. The result is a major culture change in the ethos and values of the school, so that staff, governors, parents and pupils 'will accept nothing less than the best', demonstrating the school's ongoing capacity for further improvement. Pupils' achievements are monitored regularly against individual targets and action taken quickly if a pupil begins to fall behind. Assessments and tracking data are beginning to be used to identify more closely the inconsistencies in pupils' skills and knowledge, but there has not been enough time to implement the plans to address the needs of individual pupils.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the school with a variety of pre-school experiences, mostly in local playgroups. As a group, their skills are below expected levels, with many children having limited language skills and understanding of number. Staff provide good care to ensure that children's welfare is promoted effectively. A wide range of activities enables them to enjoy learning and make good progress. Children develop very positive attitudes to learning and a good awareness of the world around them. The good development of children's social skills is demonstrated in

their excellent collaboration in activities, such as making a life-sized model from their hand prints. An intensive speech programme is beginning to address weaknesses in communication, enabling children to develop their speaking and listening skills well. Children's numeracy skills are developing at a good rate so they are on course to meet the standards expected nationally when they move into Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Eradicate the gaps identified in pupils' learning which currently slow their progress.
- Implement the plans to increase the range of opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy in other subjects.
- Take more opportunities to share the most effective teaching across the school to hasten its impact on raising standards and pupils' achievements.
- Attendance by making parents fully aware of the effect that absence has on their children's progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement has not been good enough in recent years, leading to standards being significantly below national averages in the national tests at the end of Year 6. School data shows that effective action has been taken to address this and last year the school met most of the targets set for pupils' performance in the Year 6 national tests. Pupils are now making much faster rates of progress and the decline has been reversed. The emphasis on literacy last year resulted in a significant improvement in pupils' achievements in English. The school is bringing the same energy to improving mathematics. Many pupils now make good progress but, given earlier underachievement, are still making up lost ground. There are clear indications of improvement, particularly at the lower end of the school. As a result, because of the good start they had last year, pupils in Year 1 are working at levels in line with national expectations. Pupils in Year 6 have made better progress over the last 18 months than previously and are now on course to reach average levels by the end of the year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Initiatives under way to develop their personal skills and understanding further are having a positive impact. For example, the recent 'Healthy Eating Week' has improved pupils' understanding of health issues. Changes to the physical education programme mean that pupils take regular exercise. The improvement in literacy and numeracy levels is already boosting pupils' self-esteem to ensure that they are adequately equipped for the future. Older pupils are confident about moving into secondary education. Pupils are very polite and courteous and have positive attitudes to learning. School life takes place within a well understood moral code and pupils remarked that 'teachers are fair' and 'teachers know how to handle those with behaviour problems'. Pupils make a significant contribution to their community, for example, by representing the views of others at the school council or as peer mediators. Individual pupils commented particularly on how mediators had helped them to sort out friendship difficulties when younger, which has given them the desire to become peer mediators as they grow older. Pupils develop their social skills and cultural understanding well in the many extra-curricular clubs and activities. The overall average attendance masks the fact that a significant number

of pupils are taken on family holidays during term time. The school has taken a robust approach, reinforcing the message that absence is a severe barrier to pupils' achievements. To date, this has only had modest success in bringing about significant improvements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils' improving standards are a direct result of changes made to teaching and learning. Teachers have enthusiastically engaged in activities to develop their skills and understanding of current thinking nationally and are applying this effectively to their practice. There are now many examples of good teaching. Pupils have good study habits and the sense of enjoyment in classrooms makes a good contribution to pupils' learning. However, earlier gaps in pupils' understanding of mathematics and a lack of subject vocabulary sometimes disrupt and slow learning and lead to pupils lacking confidence. These gaps are now being identified more regularly by teachers so that weaknesses can be addressed more quickly. Because pupils' literacy skills are not yet strong enough, they are often reluctant to write at length in subjects other than English, which lowers the quality and quantity of their work as a whole. Teachers' marking is satisfactory and improvements are apparent since the beginning of the academic year. Pupils are being encouraged to evaluate their own work, which is giving them a much stronger understanding of the quality of their work. Opportunities are still missed to improve achievement further because pupils are rarely required to correct their work or respond to teachers' written suggestions about how their work could be improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has adopted new national guidance on literacy and numeracy to bring about further improvements in both subjects. Since September, the curriculum has been planned around themes, making learning more interesting and relevant for pupils. Planning is focused on the progressive development of pupils' skills across all subjects. Much of this work is at a relatively early stage and the school is aware that it requires ongoing development, particularly to give pupils more opportunities to practise skills learned in English and mathematics in other subjects. Already, pupils use their information and communication skills well across the curriculum, addressing weaknesses found in the last inspection. The addition of specialist physical education, more visits, visitors and themed events provide good enrichment to pupils' experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Adults provide good pastoral care and guidance and pupils appreciate that they are well known and safe in school. They know how to stay safe and where to go if they have any concerns. Procedures for safeguarding children are fully embedded in the work of the school. Extensive support from the team of teaching assistants ensures that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language are catered for well. The school makes good use of outside agencies when specialist expertise is required. The improved systems to assess and track pupils' progress are used well to ensure that prompt action is taken if a pupil begins to fall behind. Teachers are using assessment information to identify more precisely the gaps in pupils' knowledge and are beginning to use this information to plan their

teaching programmes and to set individual targets. Pupils generally know their targets and what they have to do to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The weaknesses in management at the time of the last inspection have been addressed and the school is now benefiting from strong and effective leadership. The headteacher has used her excellent leadership skills, high drive and reassuring personality very effectively to pilot the school through a difficult transition period. The sense of teamwork is strong, enabling staff to take responsibility and drive change in their areas. Senior leaders have developed thorough systems to keep the school under review and provide good support for colleagues. Many middle leaders are new in their posts and recognise that they have still to develop their skills further to become more effective in developing the curriculum, but they are approaching this with energy and vigour. Staff's enthusiasm for change has enabled them to develop a momentum and rapid pace, adequately making up for time lost after the last inspection. Governors are ambitious for the school and supportive of it. They know its strengths well and how it needs to improve. They demonstrate the necessary resolve to take the strategic decisions to ensure the future success of the school.

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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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	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

18 January 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Painters Ash Primary School, Gravesend, DA11 8EL

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited recently. I would like to thank the school council and Year 5 and 6 pupils for giving up part of their lunchtime to talk to us.

- We agree with you that there are a number of good things about the school and that you have a satisfactory education.
- You have good attitudes and we are pleased that you find learning interesting.
- The Reception children are learning new things at a good rate.
- You behave well and this helps to make the school a happy place.
- Many of you enjoy the wide range of clubs and the sports activities that help you to keep fit and healthy.
- Adults take very good care of you and help you to sort out problems well when they occur.
- The school council does a good job to help to make the school even better.
- The headteacher and the staff think very carefully about how well the school is doing and are making improvements to make learning more enjoyable and your work more interesting.
- We agree with your teachers about the most important things to do next. These are:
 - To help you to fill in the gaps in your learning.
 - To share with each other the learning activities which help you to make the best progress.
 - To make even more changes to the curriculum like those introduced this year, particularly to give you more opportunities to use your literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.
 - To improve the attendance of some pupils.

You can help by using every opportunity to improve your writing when you have a chance to do this in other subjects. Those of you who do not attend regularly can help by getting to school every day that you possibly can.

I wish everyone at Painters Ash every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings Lead inspector

Annex B



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Helen Hutchings
Lead inspector