

Central Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117156
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358097
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Sheridan HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	246
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Francesca Nitamoah
Headteacher	John Mynott (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Ten teachers were observed in 15 lessons. Meetings were held with senior leaders, representatives from the local authority, staff, pupils and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school's improvement plans, policy documents, work in pupils' books, letters to parents and safeguarding documentation. Inspectors analysed the views of pupils, staff and 92 parents through questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effective are the strategies being employed to raise achievement and eradicate underachievement?
- How effective is the current leadership structure at driving focused school improvement?
- How effectively does the school meet the needs of all pupils, including pupils who arrive at school with little or no English and pupils who attend the speech and language facility?

Information about the school

This is an averaged sized primary school with a higher than average proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is high, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Seventeen different ethnic groups are represented in the school with pupils collectively speaking 35 languages. The school has a much higher than average proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. This is largely due to the school including a specialist unit for pupils with speech and language difficulties. The proportion of pupils who move in and out of the school at different times of the year is much higher than is typical. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Nursery class and Reception class.

After a period of absence, the substantive headteacher resigned and, at the same time, a new deputy headteacher was appointed. At present, the roles and responsibility of headteacher are shared between the deputy headteacher (currently referred to as the acting headteacher), an experienced headteacher working in school part-time (referred to as the associate headteacher) and a consultant from the local authority (referred to as the consultant headteacher). Combined they are referred to as the headship team. The school has several accreditations including the healthy school award, Activemark and the international school award - foundation level.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

After a period of considerable turbulence, which saw a severe deterioration in staff morale and relationships with some members of the local community, this school is now recovering rapidly and providing a satisfactory standard of education overall. Many parents, pupils and staff recognise the stability brought about by the headship team. Communication with parents has improved and, consequently, relationships between the school and the local community are being rebuilt. Most parents returning questionnaires state that the school is being led and managed effectively and they are happy with their children's experiences at the school. This is a very cohesive school community where pupils and staff from a wide range of backgrounds noticeably get on together and celebrate their diversity with a respect and curiosity for different cultures, languages and religions.

Pupils are now making satisfactory progress overall, after a period of time when rates of progress for some significant groups of pupils had fallen. Work in pupils books shows that standards of attainment are below average, but not significantly so. There are clear signs that pupils are now making better progress as a result of improved teaching. However there remain some inconsistencies because not all teachers have taken on board the recent improvements as rapidly as others. Marking and guidance remain variable. In the best examples, guidance in books has improved considerably this academic year. This guidance is beginning to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work. Where guidance is less effective, marking and feedback are less focused on helping pupils make improvements in small steps. Consequently, pupils are unclear about the purpose or usefulness of this guidance.

The curriculum is well designed to meet the wide needs and aspirations of the school community in respect of the experiences they receive. Pupils speak fondly about special events such as multicultural weeks and the pirate day. However, opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills through the curriculum are too often missed.

The expertise, ambition and focus brought by the headship team, along with the comprehensive additional support provided by the local authority, have been pivotal in ensuring this school has satisfactory capacity to improve. In a relatively short time, the team has gained the trust of much of the staff and school community. Improvements have been rapid in several key areas including the standards of behaviour, the effectiveness with which the school communicates with parents and the quality of teaching and learning. Their self-evaluation is analytical and very accurate and this successfully informs the relevant and highly focused school improvement agenda. Leadership at other levels is underdeveloped. Middle leaders with established roles have an insufficient understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The headship team is effectively coaching key subject

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leaders but there is still much to do to ensure these roles contribute fully to the school improvement agenda.

Pupils who receive support through the speech and language bases receive good care and pastoral support. They are happy, build confidence and feel safe. Support given to these pupils is effective in supporting their speech and language development. However, in some situations, the support they receive prevents them making the progress they could in other subjects because too much emphasis is placed on what they cannot do rather than helping them develop strategies that support them to make the progress independently.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure pupils are making consistently good or better progress by:
 - improving the consistency of teaching across the school, including in the speech and language bases and the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - developing teachers' skills at providing academic guidance so pupils know the next steps they need to take
 - developing the curriculum so that teachers are clear about the opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills through a range of activities and subjects
 - ensuring that the support for pupils who are part of the speech and language unit enables them to achieve in line with their ability in different subjects.
- Increase the capacity of leadership at all levels by:
 - ensuring middle leaders, including subject leaders, have a good understanding of their role and responsibilities
 - ensuring that leaders use evidence, including performance data, to understand the effectiveness of their areas of responsibility so they are able to develop and lead focused school improvement based on this evaluation.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enjoy their learning and make satisfactory progress as a result of the generally satisfactory teaching. Overall achievement is satisfactory and improving. In a growing proportion of lessons where teaching is good, pupils' learning is more rapid because they are inspired by the interesting subject matter and the imaginative ways they are encouraged to think about their work. For example, in one science lesson, pupils developed their understanding of solids, liquids and gases by moving like molecules in these different states. As a result of this practical exploration, and the teacher's well placed questions, they were able to see and talk about the concept with insight and growing clarity.

Pupils respond to teachers' questions and complete tasks willingly, even when they are not particularly inspiring or challenging. In the few lessons where teachers asked probing questions, pupils demonstrated an increasing ability to think around issues and learned at

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a rapid pace. In a very small number of lessons, pupils did not make enough progress because the work they were given did not provide appropriate challenge and teaching was insufficiently focused to enable pupils to develop their understanding and skills.

Broadly speaking, pupils from different ethnic and gender groups are performing in line with their peers in school. Achievement is improving for all groups of learners, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as a result of improved teaching. Pupils who arrive at the school a different times of the year, including those with limited English, are well supported so they make rapid initial progress and settle quickly. However, pupils from the speech and language bases do not always make the progress they could in different subjects. This is because, too often, the help they receive to support their speech and language acts as a barrier to their accessing the wider curriculum at the appropriate level for their ability in these different subjects.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They understand how to stay safe in a variety of situations appropriate to their age and maturity. Pupils talk positively about strategies that have been developed by the school to help them feel safer. For example, pupils talk very positively about the impact of peer mediators who help resolve issues successfully.

Behaviour has improved considerably around school. Pupils and parents both comment on these improvements and the positive approaches that have been developed this term. However, when teaching is less effective, behaviour slips and, in some cases, slows the pace of learning.

Pupils are very enthusiastic about staying healthy. They have a good understanding of the issues and behaviours that can impact on their health and well-being. Many pupils participate in a range of after-school clubs organised by the school and through the school's sports partnership.

Pupils' cultural development is strong. They have a strong sense of identity and a positive image of their place in the school community. Pupils from different cultural backgrounds settle quickly at the school and feel very much part of an establishment that embraces and celebrates diversity. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Pupils are taking increasing control and responsibility for their own behaviour, decisions and actions in school.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Clear improvements seen in pupils' books show that rates of progress are accelerating as a result of the increasingly well-targeted activities and guidance to help pupils refine their work. Generally teaching is improving. However, improvements are not universal throughout the school and, in a small number of classes, it is clear that some pupils are not making the same accelerated progress because teaching is not sharply focused enough on the full range of needs and abilities.

The curriculum provides a range of interesting and varied activities and opportunities that extend pupils' experiences. Pupils say they enjoy many of the activities and special days within school. Specialist sports, languages and art teachers are used effectively to enhance the quality of provision. The curriculum is adapted well to enable pupils who speak English as an additional language to access the full range of activities while developing their English. While there are some cross-curricular links, too few opportunities exist to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across different subjects.

Care, guidance and support effectively enable pupils to grow and develop in this school. Pupils who are potentially vulnerable are well supported through effective partnerships with a range of agencies. Pupils in the speech and language base are very well cared for and supported pastorally so they develop self-esteem and pride in their achievements. A concerted effort and consultative approach have led to a successful new behaviour policy and set of procedures which are having a striking impact on the behaviour of young

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people. Not only are pupils now behaving better, but they also recognise the importance of behaving well and the rewards that come from displaying positive behaviour.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headship team, with substantial support from the local authority, have provided stability and a platform to continue to build on the impressive amount that has been achieved this year. Their collective expertise, insight and ambition are impressive. Together they form a cohesive team that is driving school improvement at a good pace. They recognise with clarity the significant amount still to do to deliver on their ambitious plans for the school. They acknowledge that to sustain improvements, they need to develop leadership at all other levels in the school. Currently much of the leadership beyond the headship team is ineffective. That said, the overwhelming majority of staff contribute to the improvements being made and middle leaders are working hard to develop their skills and expertise sufficiently to be able to have a meaningful impact on the school improvement agenda.

The governing body is developing at a rapid pace. The chair and other experienced members are proving excellent role models for the significant number of new and inexperienced governors. Governors are organised and increasingly well informed. Governors were rocked by the turbulence last year but have worked hard to ensure that they are now stronger, more organised and able to provide sufficient steer and challenge to the school.

Safeguarding is well organised and effective. All systems are in place and robust. Staff and governors have been given the appropriate training. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding has a clear understanding of the requirements and is very proactive in ensuring that these are met.

The school's engagement with parents is satisfactory overall and improving rapidly. Increasingly, parents are beginning to believe that the school's transparency and openness is a long term change and commitment. The headship team has worked tirelessly to change the culture of the school so that working in partnership with parents is becoming the norm.

The school has worked very effectively with the local authority. Necessary improvements would have been difficult without the support and intervention of local authority officers, advanced skills teachers and lead teachers working alongside the headship team. External

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agencies work closely with the school providing a range of services effectively to support individual pupils and enhance the curriculum.

The school has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and this can be seen in the positive relationships that exist between pupils, who positively celebrate the diversity of the school community. The school collects data that show how different groups are performing academically and socially. However, this is not yet used sufficiently beyond the headship team to target improvements or intervention for groups of learners. That said, the school provides a range of support mechanisms that promote satisfactory achievement for all groups of learners.

The school is a cohesive community with pupils from different backgrounds getting on noticeably well with each other. Links with other schools with different catchments along with a range of opportunities to expand pupils' horizons are all effective in promoting community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage provides a satisfactory range of experiences in a safe learning environment. Children are polite, play well with each other and enjoy the range of activities that are on offer. Children enjoy talking about their experiences and activities. However, on some occasions, particularly when children are choosing their own activities, opportunities are missed to engage children in developing their language and social skills further. Parents, including those who speak English as an additional language, are well encouraged to be involved in their children's learning. The headship team is providing a clear steer for future developments in this area. Staff are suitably trained and experienced, with a sound understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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From low starting points, particularly in relation to language and literacy, children make satisfactory progress over time. However, their skills remain below those expected for their age by the time they enter Key Stage 1.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Most respondents were very positive about the work of the school with several commenting positively about the current direction of improvement in the school. Where parents had concerns, these related to the effectiveness of the school's communication strategies, concerns over long term arrangements for the headteacher position, a fall in standards of attainment and behaviour and one parent highlighted a concern about the vetting of escorts on taxis.

Inspectors found that, while many of the improvements are relatively recent, communication, standards of behaviour and attainment are all improving. Inspectors found that the local authority is making good attempts to resolve satisfactorily the permanent headteacher appointment. However, inspectors also found the current arrangements for headship to be effective in moving the school forward. During the inspection, the school was asked to satisfy inspectors that they receive the appropriate assurances from the local authority that enhanced criminal records bureau (CRB) checks are carried out on escorts. The school was able to provide suitable evidence to demonstrate this.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Central Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 246 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	45	47	52	2	2	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	42	46	48	53	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	28	31	49	54	10	11	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	30	53	58	8	9	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	31	34	56	62	2	2	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	32	49	54	13	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	31	55	60	4	4	3	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	24	26	49	54	10	11	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	24	58	64	6	7	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	29	54	59	6	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	23	62	68	4	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	22	24	57	63	7	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	32	35	53	58	4	4	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 January 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Central Primary School, Watford, WD17 2LX

You may remember that I came to inspect your school with two other inspectors.

We found that your school is giving you a satisfactory education. There have been lots of changes recently and everyone in your school is working hard to make these changes work. We know that you have all been involved in making sure that behaviour is improving in school and several of you told us that you see a difference in how you behave with each other around school. We have asked your school to focus on two areas to improve further. These are:

- to make sure you are doing as well as you can in English and mathematics
- to make sure that different teachers take on responsibility for leading some of the improvements in your school.

You can all help your teachers by continuing to make your behaviour as good as it can be. You can also tell your school councillors how well you think the improvements in your school are helping you.

I would like to finish by saying thank you to all of you who spoke to inspectors, whether in class, around school or in a meeting. Your views and ideas really helped us to understand your school.

You have my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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