

Bell Wood Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134738
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	381724
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2012
Lead inspector	Patricia Metham 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	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carole Hardy
Headteacher	Rosemary Wiles
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 December 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

Graham Saltmarsh

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 16 lessons, observed 13 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and pupils, and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and reviewed curriculum plans, policies, the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. They evaluated pupils' attainment over three years, listened to pupils in each key stage reading and discussed examples of work with selected pupils. They considered 102 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers, 90 responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 27 responses from staff.

Information about the school

Bell Wood is of average size and most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free schools meals is high. A higher-than-average proportion of pupils are on the School Action Plus programme or have a statement of special educational needs. Predominantly, these pupils have language and communication difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social issues. More pupils than is usual join or leave the school part-way through their primary education. Current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress, are not being met. At the last inspection, the school was put into special measures, with raising attainment, accelerating progress, and increasing the proportion of good teaching as key issues. Since then, there have been four different heads of school.

The school is now in a hard federation with a neighbouring primary school, led by an executive headteacher, who will become executive principal when the two schools convert to academy status in April 2012. At the same time, a substantive head of school for Bell Wood will take up her post. Since September 2011 she has been the inclusion manager and assistant headteacher across the two schools. There have also been changes in the middle leadership; the literacy and numeracy coordinators are both new in post since the last inspection.

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	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' attainment and progress.
- A period of instability inhibited the school's ability to tackle issues raised at the previous inspection, but leadership and management are now secure and increasingly effective, with an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The positive impact of recent interventions, for example, on teaching and attendance, indicates satisfactory capacity for further improvement. Clearly defined expectations and well-directed professional development have complemented decisive action to eliminate inadequate teaching. All teaching is now at least satisfactory and more than a third is good or better.
- While showing improvement, achievement continues to be unsatisfactory, except in Nursery and Reception, where children make good progress. More pupils across the rest of the school are now making expected progress, and well-managed interventions ensure that no group lags behind. However, this is not yet compensating for a legacy of underachievement, especially in reading. Numeracy and literacy, including extended writing, are not consistently supported across all subjects. Pupils are, however, keen to do well: 'We are all learning proper stuff, stuff that will help us go to good secondary schools and get good jobs.'
- Teachers ensure pupils understand what is to be learnt and tailor activities to meet most needs. Planning is well structured and regularly reviewed in response to pupils' progress. Teachers successfully engage pupils' interest and help them understand that making mistakes is a valuable part of learning.

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Expectations are not, however, high enough to challenge the more able. Marking is uneven in quality and its impact lessened when pupils are not required to reflect and respond. Opportunities are sometimes missed to encourage independent thinking and creativity.

- Overall, behaviour is satisfactory, although adults do not always respond effectively to the few pupils who occasionally become distracting. Pupils respond well to adults and most work well together. They follow advice about keeping safe. Improved attendance supports pupils' confidence that 'now we enjoy everything about our school'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attainment and progress by ensuring that:
 - choice of texts and regularly reviewed strategies strengthen pupils' enthusiasm for and competence in reading
 - opportunities are extended for pupils to read, write at length and practise problem-solving across the curriculum
 - marking more consistently combines praise with specific guidance and time is given for pupils to reflect on and respond to the advice given.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by ensuring that:
 - teachers more consistently provide challenging activities which encourage active, creative and independent learning
 - adults' response to occasionally disruptive behaviour by a few pupils is consistent and effective in maintaining the momentum of others' learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and personal development well below age-related expectations. They make good progress, responding with enjoyment to more formal learning, for example phonics (letters and sounds) and numbers, and to opportunities to apply and extend what they have learnt through role play and games, both indoors and outside. Well-directed prompts from adults ensure that play is purposeful. For example, boys in Reception were encouraged to develop hectic play with model cars into a systematic investigation into the relationship between the cars' sizes and the speeds with which they rolled down a ramp.

Reading, writing and mathematics levels at the end of Key Stage 1 were just below the school's targets in 2011. However, they remained below national averages, and few pupils gained the higher levels, especially in mathematics. Best progress is being made by previously underperforming groups, for example, girls, pupils known to be

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eligible for free school meals, and those with special educational needs. This has been in response to interventions such as one-to-one reading support, booster sessions and small group teaching. Those on the School Action and School Action Plus programmes now match the progress of similar pupils nationally. Gaps between groups in the school are closing steadily. Regular assessments show that progress in mathematics and reading across Key Stage 2 is patchy and reading levels at the end of Key Stage 2 are still below average. Pupils' responses in class and the quality of their written work indicate that weaknesses are being tackled with varying success. In a Year 4 class, pupils enthusiastically and often perceptively explored how poets use imagery and patterns of sound to convey emotions and mood.

In reviewing examples of their work with inspectors, pupils spoke confidently of progress they had made with encouragement and guidance from teachers. Pupils in all classes work well in pairs and small groups. They listen and discuss cheerfully and often successfully combine their contributions to answer the challenge set. In a Year 6 class, for example, pupils worked in ability-based groups on a range of tasks well suited to their different levels. More-able pupils showed a confident appreciation of the sentence structures and vocabulary best used in the framing of rules and instructions as they prepared to lead a part of the next day's follow-up lesson. Another group evaluated the school's rules, conducting a survey of their classmates' views, to be analysed and presented to the class. As well as developing language and communication skills, the activity prompted serious thought about individual and shared responsibilities.

Four out of every five parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children are making good progress and that their individual needs are well supported. Inspection evidence does not support this positive view.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is improving and there are examples of good practice across the curriculum. Strengths include: sound subject knowledge, often enthusiastically presented; a productive rapport with pupils; lesson planning that establishes what is to be learnt and sets out strategies for supporting pupils' diverse needs and learning styles; careful deployment of teaching assistants; an inclusive approach; and extensive pair and group work. While opportunities to extend pupils' reading, writing and calculating skills are not always fully exploited, teaching skills enhanced through consultancy, sharing of good practice and targeted training are increasing pupils' engagement and progress in all year groups. Teachers can be creative in their efforts to engage pupils in learning. The successful impact of this was seen in a mixed-age Year 1 and Year 2 class where the teacher intrigued even restless and potentially disruptive children by placing a challenging mathematics investigation into a drama about an immovable king, a round table, three knights and a dragon. Amidst the laughter and the role play, pupils grasped the mathematical principles involved and worked out how to apply them.

In less effective lessons, pupils' progress is compromised by lack of challenge,

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especially for the more able, by limited scope for independent learning, experiment and enquiry and by missed opportunities for pupils to learn from reviewing their own and others' work. Much marking is thorough and constructive but not all combines praise with clear guidance on how pupils can do better. The impact of well-pitched advice is diminished when pupils are not given time to try out the improvements suggested and to correct mistakes.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well both in and out of the classroom: explicitly, for example, through discussion of Fair Trade ethics as part of the 'Chocolate' topic, and implicitly, through the example set by teachers and support staff.

Most parents and carers responding to the questionnaire judged teaching to be good. This reflects their justifiable pleasure in their children's growing enthusiasm for school and their wish to do well. A nursery parent's response was typical, and endorsed comments made by older pupils: 'You make my child want to learn.' Inspection evidence acknowledges the improvements to teaching but concludes it is satisfactory rather than good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has been a concern in recent years, commented on by parents and carers and by pupils. This was largely because there were few well-embedded strategies to deal with the small number of pupils whose behaviour at times disrupted the learning of others. Behaviour has much improved since September 2011, driven by strengthened expertise on the senior leadership team. Incidences of unkind or disruptive behaviour are now generally responded to promptly and effectively. Pupils are well aware of the different forms of bullying and are happy that they know how to respond and that they will be well supported. Even the small number of pupils who sometimes have difficulty in maintaining concentration and working calmly with others understand and accept the school's clearly defined code of conduct. Pupils helped to shape this set of expectations, rewards and sanctions and they take it very seriously. Older pupils play a well-respected role as trained mediators. Behaviour observed during the inspection supported pupils' confidence that leaders, teachers and support staff are successfully creating a safe and largely orderly community: 'We feel that they care about us and they do want us to pay attention.'

Almost all the parents and carers responding to the questionnaire are confident that their children are safe in school, and rightly so. Safeguarding and risk-assessment procedures are thorough and staff well trained. Rates of attendance are rising, partly in response to pupils' increasing appreciation of what the school offers and partly in response to rigorous action taken in dealing with unauthorised absence.

Leadership and management

Recent improvements in teaching, learning, behaviour and attendance have been

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driven by the incisively led governing body and highly effective executive headteacher. Staffing changes, regular monitoring, and an intensive programme of whole-staff training and individual coaching are systematically tackling weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Staff morale is buoyant; almost all responded to the inspection questionnaire and all who did were emphatic that leadership and management are now doing everything possible to improve teaching and learning. The professional development programme has focused on planning, assessment and approaches to literacy and numeracy. Well-directed steps are being taken to eliminate inadequate teaching, raise expectations both in school and in pupils' families, and revise the curriculum. Capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. Performance is monitored very carefully. Regular lesson observations and detailed analysis of pupils' progress set priorities for whole-staff training and for targeted support and coaching. However, as senior and middle leaders have identified, pupils' overall achievement remains low, especially that of older pupils who are most affected by the legacy of poor provision and low expectations. Strengths developed in Nursery and Reception are beginning to work through the school.

The school's effective commitment to equality of opportunity and the avoidance of any form of discrimination are demonstrated in many facets of its everyday life; for example in the manner respect underpins planning and implementation, the successful engagement of vulnerable pupils and the very small number of bullying and racist incidents. The school builds constructive relationships with families and collaborates effectively with agencies to maintain contact with and reintegrate children who have had time out of school. There is sensitive and sustained support for the high proportion with communication and language difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social issues. Careful tracking shows that many of these children progress as well as others, both in their personal development and in their learning.

The curriculum is being well developed. The move to a topic-based approach is encouraging pupils to make connections across subjects, exploring wider issues that range, for example, from the impact of extreme weather in other countries to differences and similarities between major world cultures and creeds. This contributes positively to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as it enables all pupils to participate and learn. Parents in the playground were emphatic: 'We think the school has got better. We're really pleased now.'

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



24 February, 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bell Wood Community Primary School, Maidstone ME15 9EZ

Mr Saltmarsh and I appreciated the friendly and helpful way you welcomed us into lessons, answered our questions and showed us your work. We agree with you that your school is improving; however, too many of you are not yet making rapid enough progress to reach the levels expected of pupils your age. We have told your headteacher and governors that more needs to be done to speed up your progress and raise your levels of attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy.

It is helpful that you have confidence in your teachers and feel that you are learning a lot. It is clear that you enjoy activities that are well matched to your different ways of learning, especially when you work with partners or in small groups. Although a few of you find it difficult to pay attention and to work well with others, most of you behave sensibly and safely and treat each other and adults with respect. In Nursery and Reception you make good use of all the resources inside and outside to practise and build on what you have been learning.

So that your attainment and progress improve more rapidly, we have asked your headteacher to ensure that:

- in lessons you are always encouraged to be active and independent learners
- you are set challenging targets which encourage you to think independently, try new things and be imaginative
- even more is done to help you enjoy reading and become better at it
- you are encouraged to read, do extended writing and work with numbers and problems in most of your lessons
- when teachers mark your work they make it clear how you can do better and give you time to make corrections and respond to their suggestions
- disruptive behaviour is not allowed to spoil the learning of others.

All of you can help by aiming high and working hard to make good progress.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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