

Blackthorns Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	125946
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	381156
Inspection dates	29 February–1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Julie Sackett

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 of pupils on the school roll	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Nicholls
Headteacher	Ruth Schofield
Date of previous school inspection	5 May 2009
School address	3 Blackthorns Close Lindfield Haywards Heath RH16 2UA
Telephone number	01444 454866
Fax number	01444 414670
Email address	office@blackthorns.w-sussex.sch.uk

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Julie Sackett

Additional inspector

Jon Carter

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The team observed 12 lessons taught by 9 teachers. Discussions were held with senior staff, teachers, members of the governing body and pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including the school's development plan, policies and records of pupils' progress and attainment. The inspection team considered 116 questionnaires from parents and carers, as well as questionnaires from staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Blackthorns Community Primary School is a smaller than average primary school. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who come from minority ethnic groups is lower than average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school other than at expected times is in line with the national average. The school has a local authority funded Special Support Centre (SSC) for pupils with additional needs, all of whom have statements of special educational needs. The school has a number of awards, including Green Flag and Investors in Health. The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school where effective teaching enables pupils to make good progress. Pupils play their part to the full in helping make the school an enjoyable place to learn and work. Inconsistencies in how well learning is matched to some pupils' needs and the rigour in which teaching is monitored prevent the school from being outstanding. The headteacher's dedication to securing the best for pupils is shared by the staff and the governing body and is appreciated by parents and carers, the vast majority of whom are supportive of the school. One wrote, 'Our children are having the time of their lives at Blackthorns. They are happy, safe and progressing academically.'
- Pupils make good progress overall so that, by the time they leave Year 6, attainment is above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment in mathematics is higher than in reading and writing.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. The school recognises the need to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that information about pupil progress is reliable and is used systematically to match learning accurately to individual needs.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and makes a strong contribution to pupils' learning and to the school's ethos. Attendance rates have improved since the last inspection and are above the national average, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school.
- Systems are in place to monitor pupil progress and leaders use these to build a better picture of pupils' achievement over time. However, occasional inaccuracies in the data can give a skewed picture and the information is not always used as rigorously as it might, to ensure that variations in pupil progress are identified and addressed promptly. The leadership of teaching, including the management of teachers' performance, has been successful in securing improvements in teaching. However, this process is largely undertaken by senior leaders, with missed opportunities to involve middle leaders more fully in supporting developments in teaching and accelerating progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Lift the quality of teaching and learning from good to outstanding by:
 - increasing the role played by leaders at all levels in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and in supporting developments in teaching.
 - ensuring that pupil progress data are accurate and used rigorously and consistently by all members of staff to monitor pupil progress and address any variations promptly so that pupil progress is maximised.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The vast majority of parents and carers rightly feel that their children make good progress in their learning. Inspectors agree and confirm that pupils reach above average standards at the end of Year 6.

Children start in Reception Year with levels of understanding and development which vary quite markedly from year to year. Whatever their starting points, children make good progress overall, leaving Reception Year with the majority having met or exceeded the early learning goals. Much of this is due to the stimulating learning environment which enables children, regardless of background or ability, to thrive academically and socially. Children make good progress in how letters and sounds are linked (phonics) because of the systematic and lively teaching. Learning activities are often meaningful and engaging. For example, a recent visit to a local farm was used to stimulate children's writing about farms. This good start is built on in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, where all groups of pupils make good progress. Progress at Key Stage 2 is at times excellent. Attainment overall at the end of Year 2 is generally above average in reading, writing and mathematics. By the time that pupils leave the school, attainment is consistently above average, and sometimes well above average, in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs, including those who attend the Special Support Centre, also make at least good progress because specialist expertise ensures that provision is carefully focused and responsive to individual needs. This is particularly successful in enabling pupils who attend the Special Support Centre to develop the skills necessary to help them in their future education. For example, they rapidly develop the confidence and maturity to concentrate for extended periods of time and to work independently of an adult when appropriate.

The school is effective in ensuring that pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills at a good rate. Regular activities to promote reading and writing skills are carefully planned to ensure that they are purposeful and stimulating. For example, the use of resources such as sound boxes mean that pupils are well motivated and given good opportunities to verbalise their ideas before committing them to paper. In mathematics, opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding ensure that they consolidate and build on their learning well. Pupils make particularly

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good progress in their mathematical learning when teachers actively listen to pupils' contributions and modify learning during the course of the lesson to address their needs. For example, during a Year 6 lesson, the teacher picked up on pupils' uncertainty about how to represent a 'recurring' digit and used it as a teaching point to develop pupils' understanding of decimal places. However, variations in the effectiveness with which teachers use assessment information across the school mean that opportunities are sometimes missed to consistently match learning to need and to maximise pupil progress.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is consistently good, and sometimes outstanding. As a result, all groups of pupils achieve well over time. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children are well taught. Inspection activities confirm that this is the case. Typically, teachers' high expectations and confident subject knowledge are used effectively to interest and engage pupils throughout the school. The curriculum is well planned to ensure that pupils acquire knowledge and skills in a progressive manner. As a result, pupils quickly develop the confidence to apply their knowledge and understanding to a range of stimulating activities and this underpins their good progress. For example, during the inspection, specialist music teaching ensured that Reception Year children were actively involved in linking music with actions and emotions, whilst pupils in Year 3 enjoyed the challenge of writing step-by-step instructions on how to put on a jumper. There is a consistent and effective approach to the teaching of reading, which is given a high priority. Parents' and carers' comments in pupils' home/school reading records indicate that pupils read to an adult regularly and that parent and carer support makes a valuable contribution to the development of pupils' reading skills. Pupils who attend the Specialist Support Centre are skilfully and sensitively supported when they attend lessons in the mainstream classes, so that they are able to transfer their skills to enable them to work confidently and successfully alongside their peers. Generally, learning is well matched to individual needs, as seen, for example, when pupils of varying abilities in Year 5 were successfully supported to consider and explore everyday examples of probability and so made good progress in the development of mathematical knowledge. However, this is not always the case because whole-school information about pupils' progress is not always used by all teachers as fully as it might be to match learning accurately to pupil needs and so maximise progress. Information and communication technology is used well to enliven learning and to motivate pupils. For instance, during the inspection, pupils in Year 4 successfully consolidated their knowledge and understanding of capacity and scales whilst completing a computer game. Teaching is used well to ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted through different subjects of the curriculum.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Almost all parents and carers consider pupils' behaviour in school to be good. Evidence considered during the inspection supports this view and suggests that the

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good behaviour seen during the inspection is typical over time. Pupils are proud of their school. They are polite and courteous and demonstrate respect for adults and classmates alike. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is consistently good, from the youngest children through to Year 6, and makes a strong contribution to their learning and to their positive experiences of school. Pupils told inspectors that the school is a friendly, well-behaved and safe place and inspection findings confirm this. Pupils have a good, clear idea of what constitutes bullying, including different categories of bullying. For example, they know what 'racism' is and understand how hurtful name-calling can be. Their assertion that bullying is extremely rare is supported by school records. Pupils have a secure understanding of what they can do if they are worried and are confident that adults in the school will look after them well. A few parents and carers expressed concern about the way the school responds to concerns about bullying but the vast majority feel that the school is a safe place for their children to learn. School policies and records indicate that the school responds promptly and appropriately to any concerns. Procedures to support attendance are rigorous and this, combined with raised expectations, has resulted in improved pupil attendance, so that it is currently above the national average.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's commitment to instilling a love of learning in pupils and to providing a well-rounded education is shared by staff and is in strong evidence across the school, from the high quality multi-media artwork displayed with care and creativity by teachers to the independence and maturity displayed by many pupils. The balanced and well-developed curriculum, which incorporates many opportunities for pupils to benefit from visits and visitors, makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Pupils build important skills as they move through the school that prepare them well for their future education.

Systems for self-evaluation and for identifying and addressing areas for improvement are well established and involve the whole school community, including the pupils. Since the previous inspection, the school has maintained pupils' good achievement, raised attendance and used professional development successfully to secure consistently good teaching. This demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve. Systems introduced by the school to track and evaluate pupils' progress are satisfactory. However, there are some inconsistencies which mean that progress data is not always used robustly to evaluate pupils' progress. For example, occasional inaccuracies in data are not necessarily picked up and this can cause confusion about the quality of pupil progress across the school and about the effectiveness of teaching in different subjects and year groups. The school recognises the need to ensure that pupil tracking data are reliable and are used rigorously by all members of staff to maximise pupils' learning. There are effective systems in place for monitoring and evaluating teaching that have brought about improvements. Much of this has been done by senior leaders with the recognition that this now needs to be extended to include subject leaders so that they can play a more influential role in improving provision and achievement.

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The school is facing a challenge caused by the rapid growth in the number of pupils attending the school. The headteacher's commitment to the school and her positive and proactive attitude to change are shared by her staff, and morale in the school is high. Members of the governing body have considerable expertise and are very well placed to offer informed challenge and support. School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding policies and procedures are securely in place. Leaders and staff effectively promote equality of opportunity and are proactive in tackling discrimination.

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.



2 March 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Blackthorns Community Primary School, Haywards Heath
RH16 2UA**

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and visiting your lessons. You are proud of your school and feel safe and secure. Your parents told us that they are pleased with the way the school looks after you and with the way that teachers help you to learn. You and your parents are right to be pleased because we found your school to be a good school.

Your school is a friendly, happy place where each of you is known as an individual. We were impressed by the respect you show each other, as well as adults in the school, and also with your positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour. We are pleased that you go to school as often as you can because this shows how much you enjoy school. Adults care for you well and this, along with good teaching, helps you to make good progress. This means that by the end of Year 6, your attainment is above average and you are well prepared for secondary school. Your headteacher and other leaders do a good job and are determined to improve your school still further.

We have suggested some ways in which we think your school could improve. We would like your headteacher and staff to:

- measure your progress more closely to check how well you are doing and make sure that you are doing the best you possibly can
- provide more opportunities for leaders in your school to check that you are being taught well so that they can help to make sure that you experience the very highest standards of teaching more often.

All of you can help the school move forward by continuing to work hard. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Julie Sackett
Lead inspector

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