

Alconbury CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110809
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	378178
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Marion Wallace

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lucy Hampton
Headteacher	Linda Dove
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed eight teachers in 19 lessons, and held meetings with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its improvement plan and those of the subject departments, minutes of governing body meetings, assessment information and curriculum planning. In addition, they carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work, listened to readers and analysed 78 questionnaires received from parents and carers.

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

- The progress made by pupils of average ability in reading at Key Stage 1.
- How well boys progress in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school.
- The provision made for individual pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the progress they make, given that outcomes have been variable within this group.

Information about the school

Alconbury is an average-sized primary school. Most pupils are White British and a small minority are from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average and two pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, although the percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Their main needs relate to learning and physical difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Reception class.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Alconbury is a good school. Pupils achieve well in both their academic and personal development. Parents, carers and pupils appreciate the good quality care and exciting learning opportunities. One parental comment summed up the views of the vast majority: 'All staff work hard to ensure children succeed academically, develop confidence and a balanced personality.' Pupils were equally positive. One pupil spoke for many when saying, 'We like the school, especially the activities and the library. Learning is fun.'

These are the key strengths of the school.

- Children settle into Reception extremely well and make good progress in all areas of learning because induction for parents and carers and their children is very effective.
- Good teaching enables pupils to make good progress as they move through the school.
- Attainment in English, mathematics and science is above average. Pupils achieve very well in music and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Relationships are strong and the school ethos is supportive and consequently pupils make good gains in their personal development.
- The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in attendance that is well above average.
- Care, guidance and support are strong, so pupils behave sensibly and are enthusiastic learners who have a mature attitude to their work.
- Pupils enjoy the curriculum. Provision for music is a particular strength, and parents and carers appreciate the fantastic music team who provide pupils with opportunities to learn instruments. One commented, 'There is so much enthusiasm and passion children cannot help but be inspired.'
- The headteacher and senior management team are good role models who, together with an active governing body, lead the school effectively and have a clear vision for its future improvement.
- Excellent links with parents and carers support pupils' learning extremely well.
- Good links with the local community and external agencies contribute effectively to pupils' learning and their well-being.

These are the key areas for improvement which remain.

- The register for gifted and talented pupils is not up to date and the number of pupils identified on the register is low by comparison with national standards.

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Many of the pupils identified have only limited provision.

- The provision for pupils to gain awareness of life in multicultural Britain is not as well developed as it is at global, local and school level. Pupils have less awareness of life in parts of the country different to their own.

All staff are committed to providing each pupil with the very best possible education. Equality of opportunity and the elimination of discrimination are pursued effectively. A continual drive for improvement is underpinned by effective systems for evaluating the strengths and further areas for development of the school. The school's good organisation and strong, shared vision underpin its good capacity to continue moving forward.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the contribution made to community cohesion by:
 - developing links with contrasting schools elsewhere in the United Kingdom
 - tracking the impact of the initiatives to improve provision of the national dimensions of community cohesion
 - using the information gained to enhance current provision and hence raise pupils' multicultural awareness.
- Improve outcomes for gifted and talented pupils by:
 - updating the register for gifted and talented pupils
 - extending and improving learning opportunities for these pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

From starting points that are broadly at the levels expected for their age, children make good progress throughout the school and, by the time they leave, their attainment is above average in English, mathematics and science. Lessons are well planned and good relationships contribute to a positive climate for learning. Pupils are provided with opportunities to solve problems and to think for themselves. Writing is good throughout the school, including in subjects other than English. These good outcomes are contributing well to pupils' economic well-being.

Year 6 pupils demonstrate good ability to use their imagination and write lively phrases such as 'The storm is like a war of the gods,' and 'The wind is a roller coaster spinning and turning.' Pupils take a pride in their work, handwriting is neat and well formed, spelling and presentation are good. Inspectors found that boys do as well as girls in reading, writing and mathematics. Excellent teaching in Year 2 enabled pupils to spot deliberate mistakes in sentences. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same good progress as their peers because they are well supported by teaching assistants; most teachers target questions skilfully enabling all to contribute fully to the learning in the lesson. A few parents and carers rightly feel that gifted and talented pupils are not challenged rigorously enough.

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Pupils in Key Stage 1 enjoy books and read confidently and with expression and most can talk about their favourite author and why they like the particular style of the writing. For example, one pupil enjoyed adventure stories best because the author used challenging and powerful descriptions. Average-ability pupils in Key Stage 1 make good progress in reading.

Pupils behave well. A few parents and carers feel that the school does not deal with unacceptable behaviour well. However, pupils say they feel safe because relationships are good and they can discuss any problems they have with adults, and that any occasional friction is resolved quickly by adults and teachers. Pupils talk knowledgeably and enthusiastically about maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and the good range of clubs and activities such as karate are well attended.

Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils think carefully about issues facing the world today. They show great concern for endangered species and suggest what could be done to make the world a better place. Older pupils showed good levels of responsibility as ‘Befrienders,’ looking after younger Reception children during their break times in their first few days at school. They show real enthusiasm for music and art. Pupils learn to make a positive contribution to their school, local and global community by raising money for charities. Opportunities to link with schools in different locations within the United Kingdom are less well developed.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

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

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

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How effective is the provision?

The large majority of lessons observed during the inspection were good and a few were outstanding. Teachers use assessment information well to plan interesting work. Pupils say marking is good and gives them a clear idea of how to improve their work. Teachers use questions well to check pupils’ knowledge and understanding and pupils enjoy well-planned opportunities to evaluate their own learning and that of others. Older pupils know what level they are working at and most can identify what they have to do to improve. Pupils with additional needs are very well supported by teaching assistants in class and small groups so they make good progress. The pupils in the early stages of learning English make good progress because they are well supported by the school and support services. Occasionally, however, gifted and talented pupils are not given sufficiently challenging work.

A strong personal and social education and religious education programme assists pupils’ good personal development, especially their social development. Pupils enjoy the curriculum and this contributes to their enthusiasm for learning. The curriculum is well planned but is not always closely matched to the needs of the gifted and talented pupils. Literacy and information and communication technology skills are used well to support learning in other subjects. Specialist teaching in music is extremely well organised and this contributes to the high standards achieved. Curriculum enrichment is good and the wide range of visits, clubs and activities are popular and well attended. Visiting artists and specialists enrich the provision.

The caring ethos results in happy pupils who enjoy school life. All adults effectively help children and their parents and carers to get the best from learning. The school works effectively with external support agencies to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Induction and transition arrangements for children entering the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage and when moving on to secondary schools are excellent. The school gives sensitive support to its pupils with special educational needs and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Excellent levels of attendance are celebrated with termly 100% awards.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher’s skilful management and efficient leadership have permeated the

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school. All leaders communicate drive and ambition very effectively and they have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Rigorous leadership and management of teaching has ensured that the vast majority of teaching is good or better. There is a strong sense of purpose and desire to overcome any difficulties. All staff are keen to go the 'extra mile', making sure pupils achieve well and aim for high quality in their work. The school tackles any form of discrimination decisively and deploys its resources well, particularly to provide extra support and intervention for pupils who may face barriers to learning. As a result there are no significant gaps in the progress made by different groups of pupils, and leaders are aware of how to resolve the relative weakness in provision for gifted and talented pupils.

The governing body ably supports staff in their work to improve the school. It is increasing the degree of challenge offered to ensure school improvement initiatives are successful. It monitors and evaluates the work of the school effectively but is not always rigorous in establishing formal meetings with designated governors. All safeguarding procedures and checks on adults are thorough; governors monitor the site and procedures rigorously. Tracking of progress over time is thorough and senior leaders quickly identify any dips and develop sensible strategies and interventions to promote improvement. Appropriate developmental areas to improve further the effectiveness of the school are clearly identified in the school improvement plan.

The school has audited the way it promotes community cohesion. It is well aware that while pupils have a strong understanding of the immediate area and do a great deal to help in the local community, they have few opportunities to mix with people from other cultural backgrounds.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in the Reception class in all areas of learning, and overall standards above average when they enter Year 1. Relationships are strong and consequently children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. Behaviour is good. Children make good progress in their speaking and communication skills because teachers encourage them to respond to individual questions and to talk about their ideas. Personal aspects of care and welfare are good and this contributes to a very positive start.

Staff provide interesting activities and children have good opportunities to learn through activities led by adults and those they choose for themselves. Good teaching, excellent links with parents and carers and extremely well-planned induction arrangements contribute successfully to children’s enjoyment of school. Opportunities for using the outdoor area to enhance all areas of learning are well developed. Most activities are fun and challenging. Children made very good progress learning to sing a range of songs such as ‘10 Green Bottles’ and used their fingers well to show how many bottles had fallen from the wall. Even though it was their first day in school children were cooperating well with each other in the role-play fruit shop outside and the space ship indoors. They had a realistic idea of the cost of a bunch of carrots and could indicate how much change would be given from a 50 pence coin. During the circle and snack time they were learning to be kind and to consider the needs of others. Adults occasionally miss opportunities to challenge more-able children to extend writing skills and calculation skills. The provision is led and managed well.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Almost all of the parents and carers who returned questionnaires are happy with the school and feel it is welcoming and friendly. The overwhelming majority say that their children enjoy attending and that they make good progress. Parents and carers regard the school as caring and supportive and say the staff are approachable. They identified a number of strengths including the after-school activities, the music and the excellent induction procedures prior to children starting school in Reception. Most felt that the school meets individual needs well and they are equally well informed about their child’s progress.

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A few parents and carers felt they were not well informed, and the school did not always meet individual children's needs or deal with unacceptable behaviour effectively. Inspectors found individual children's needs were generally well catered for and that the school provides good opportunities for parents to learn about their child's progress. The majority of the criticisms made were offered constructively and were mainly concerned with behaviour and, rightly, the lack of challenge for gifted and talented and more able pupils. Behaviour seen during the inspection was good, and the procedures to deal with unacceptable behaviour were well considered.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alconbury CofE 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 78 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 204 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	53	68	23	29	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	55	71	22	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	41	53	34	44	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	47	32	41	6	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	43	55	32	41	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	45	58	28	36	4	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	51	38	49	0	0	0	0
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)	44	56	30	38	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	35	45	34	44	8	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	36	38	49	8	10	2	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	42	38	49	4	5	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	43	55	32	41	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	53	68	23	29	1	1	0	0

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 8 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.

19 September 2011

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Alconbury CofE Primary School, Huntingdon, PE28 4EQ

Thank you all very much for welcoming us to your school. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and your teachers. We will remember how polite and considerate you all were and how well you all behaved. Your two-part singing in assembly was very good. You and your parents and carers told us that Alconbury is a good school, and we agree. These are the things we found that your school does well.

- You get off to a good start in the Reception and make good progress through the school because teaching is good. You reach above-average standards by the end of Year 6, particularly in music and ICT.
- You all enjoy learning and your attendance is outstanding.
- Your behaviour is good and you are sensible and know how to keep safe.
- You really enjoy and benefit from the many activities, clubs, visits and visitors.
- Your school cares for you a lot and teaches you a lot about how to be healthy and to care for others.
- There are good opportunities for you to take responsibility, evaluate your own work, help others and contribute to helping your school improve even more. The Year 6 'Befrienders' were doing a great job helping the new Reception class settle into school on their first day.
- Your headteacher, senior teachers and governing body work well together and lead the school well. All the staff work effectively together as a team to make sure that Alconbury is a safe and secure, fun place to learn.

There are two things I have identified for staff and the governing body to improve.

- Make sure that your teachers make links with other schools very different to yours in the United Kingdom, and track and record more rigorously how well you learn from these experiences.
- Plan more rigorously for those of you who find work easy and need more challenge.

Thank you for a very enjoyable and memorable visit to your school and best wishes for your future. You can all help by continuing to work really hard.

Yours sincerely

Marion Wallace
Lead inspector

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