

Meeching Valley Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114440
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	378860
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2012
Lead inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Bradbury
Headteacher	Davina Wakelin
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 December 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings

Additional inspector

Anthony Byrne

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed different aspects of the school's work including 18 lessons and activities such as guided reading involving nine teachers, an assembly and the after-school club. They held discussions with members of the governing body, staff and a group of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, looked at documents including those relating to safeguarding, and scrutinised pupil assessment information and pupils' work. They analysed inspection questionnaires from 49 parents and carers, as well as those completed by a sample of staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Most pupils in this average sized primary school come from White British backgrounds, although a variety of other ethnic backgrounds are represented in small numbers. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above that found nationally, and the proportion of pupils who hold a statement of special educational needs is high. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in the Reception class. An above average number of pupils join the school part-way through their primary education.

The school runs an after-school club. A privately managed on-site pre-school and breakfast club are subject to separate Ofsted inspections. Since the last inspection, there has been significant staff turnover, including at leadership level. The headteacher took up her post in September 2011 and the deputy headteacher joined the leadership team in November 2011. The school meets the government's current 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	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	4

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 special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.
- The school is not satisfactory because teaching is not good enough to ensure satisfactory achievement for all pupils, and leaders have not had enough impact on improving teaching.
- Since the last inspection, pupils' achievement has been in decline, particularly in Reception and Key Stage 1, and is inadequate. Although pupils make better progress through Key Stage 2, this is insufficient to make up for their earlier underachievement. Attainment in English and mathematics throughout the school is low. Pupils' writing skills, including their spelling, punctuation and handwriting, are weak. Their reading skills develop too slowly because the teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) is not rigorous enough.
- There are too many lessons where pupils make insufficient progress or where progress is no better than satisfactory. Consequently, teaching is inadequate. Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan work that ensures at least satisfactory progress in closing the gap in the pupils' knowledge and understanding when compared with all pupils nationally.
- Behaviour is satisfactory and pupils speak of how newly introduced routines have made the school a much more settled place. Although parents and carers report that there have been instances of unacceptable behaviour disrupting learning, pupils indicate that this is now rare.

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- Due to inexperienced leadership across the school, the headteacher has had to manage performance and lead much of the improvement alone. As a result, the school has not made enough progress since its last inspection and does not demonstrate the capacity to sustain improvement. The governing body and headteacher have secured some key improvements this year. These include pupils' behaviour, developing the partnership with parents and carers, and the systems to evaluate the work of the school, including the collection and use of performance data. However, these have not had sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching promotes pupils' achievement well by:
 - developing teachers' understanding of the teaching of phonics
 - developing an effective whole-school approach to the teaching of spelling, punctuation and handwriting
 - ensuring that there is a clear analysis of gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, and that this information is used to match tasks and support in lessons to meet pupils' needs
 - providing success criteria so that pupils' progress can be assessed accurately at a range of levels
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length in a range of subjects
 - ensuring that introductions to lessons are not overlong and encouraging pupils to develop the skills to work independently
 - ensuring teachers' questioning is challenging and probes pupils' understanding.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at senior, governor and middle management level by:
 - developing leadership capacity to give teachers the support they need to improve their skills
 - improving the use of data so that pupils' progress is monitored accurately and the information used to ensure that individual needs are met
 - increasing the involvement of the governing body in strategic planning in order to improve its role in raising pupils' attainment.

Main report**Achievement of pupils**

Children's attainment on entry to school is well below that typical for their age, particularly in their communication skills and emotional development. While provision in Reception helps children to develop an enjoyment of school, there is an insufficient range of activities to develop their early literacy skills effectively. Continuing slow progress through Key Stage 1 means that pupils' attainment in

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reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 is low. For example, although higher attaining Year 2 pupils recognise letters and their sounds, they are not confident in blending these to work out unfamiliar words, while lower attaining pupils are uncertain about the sounds of letter combinations.

Most parents and carers indicate that they are happy with their children's progress. However, the improvements in pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6, which were evident when the school was last inspected, have stalled and attainment is beginning to show a declining profile similar to that in Year 2. Although progress is satisfactory in Key Stage 2 it is not rapid enough to make up lost ground. There is some evidence of improvement this year in most Key Stage 2 classes, but pupils are capable of making faster progress than is currently the case. Consequently, pupils' attainment remains low and too many pupils are working below the minimum levels expected for their ages. Very few pupils are working above these levels. The underachievement is widespread and is not related to any particular ability group or to pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, such as disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those learning English as an additional language progress at a similar rate to their peers.

The recent focus on mathematics is gradually improving pupils' numeracy skills, which have, until now, been weaker than reading and writing. For example, in a Year 6 lesson on data handling, pupils' group work was matched well to take learning forward from their different starting points. The activity engaged them well because they knew exactly what they had to achieve to reach the next level, including more challenging work. In Key Stage 2, pupils' spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills are weak because these are not developed systematically across the school. For example while handwriting practice is undertaken, this is irregular and, as a result, pupils lack the confidence and fluency to record their ideas quickly in writing. Marking does not routinely pick up spelling errors and, consequently, pupils do not always understand how the technical aspects of their writing can be improved. Because pupils are often taught in groups closely supervised by an adult, they willingly complete the work expected of them. However, this gives them a false sense of what they can do for themselves, and they do not develop the learning skills to work well independently. Although pupils use their writing skills in other subjects, including history and religious education, they do not have enough opportunities to practise their skills by writing at length. Significant weaknesses in pupils' literacy skills mean that they are not well prepared for secondary education.

Although records have been kept of pupils' attainment, many staff changes and a lack of attainment information for those pupils joining the school has meant that some of these have proved unreliable. Consequently, the disruption to pupils' learning and their underachievement has not always been picked up quickly. More regular analysis of pupils' progress has been undertaken this year and a range of strategies are now used to boost their performance. The early indications are that these actions are beginning to make a difference.

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Quality of teaching

Teaching is inadequate overall because it is not consistent enough throughout the school to enable pupils to close the gap between their performance and the national average. Often introductions to lessons are overly long, which slows the pace of learning because pupils do not have enough opportunity to consolidate their understanding. Questioning does not always probe pupils' understanding by requiring them to think things through for themselves. However, there is some good practice and this provides the basis for other teachers to learn from more effective practitioners. For example, Year 5 pupils were given good preparation for a writing task when they debated in groups about whether or not war is always wrong. Pupils participated enthusiastically as the activity built well on the class visit to Newhaven Fort linked to their study of the Second World War. Although teachers usually provide a good stimulus for imaginative writing, they do not always set high enough expectations for the quality and quantity of the writing to be achieved. Pupils are motivated by the curriculum themes teachers follow, and the way teachers often link learning in English to the 'Learning Journey' theme, and this shows in the way they work successfully in pairs and small groups. Such approaches support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Similarly, good use is made of the locality in topics such as 'On Our Doorstep', which makes learning relevant and interesting.

Teachers' planning does not routinely take sufficient account of the wide range of needs within the class, often because teachers do not have an accurate understanding of the gaps in pupils' learning. Consequently the more able pupils are not challenged well enough to reach higher levels, while the steps for lower attaining pupils are not sufficiently mapped out. Even though the work set for groups may be at different levels, the success criteria shared with pupils do not reflect the different learning expectations. Similarly, planning does not identify the specific support to be provided by teaching assistants, other than general support for a group, which sometimes limits their impact. Where training for them has been most effective, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution, for example in guiding reading.

While most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were positive about teaching in the school, a small minority is rightly concerned that the school does not adequately meet children's individual needs.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils speak of how new routines have made the school a much more settled place. They understand the reasons for the changes because they have been involved in shaping them and believe them to be fair. Teachers apply the whole-school procedures to manage behaviour consistently, and pupils are motivated by praise and rewards. A few parents and carers indicated some concern about behaviour, while others expressed their appreciation of the more rigorous challenge to unacceptable behaviour. Pupils know that some of their peers have difficulty managing their own behaviour and emotions. They are sympathetic and appreciate

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the steps taken to diffuse incidents, such as setting up a pastoral room to support those experiencing difficulty. Pupils relate their learning in personal, social and health education lessons well to everyday situations, which is helping them to resolve social and friendship issues for themselves. They say that physical bullying is now rare, but that it happened in the past. While there is still some name-calling, pupils recognise that this is rarely meant maliciously and that there are no overtones of racist behaviour or homophobia. Pupils say they feel safe in school and that adults are always there to help. They value that they are taught about dangers they may face now in the outside world and on the internet, and those that they may encounter later in adult life. Attendance is average, and shows an improvement this year over previous levels.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are inadequate overall. The recent appointment of a new headteacher and other staff, following a period of turbulence, is helping the school to settle. These changes in senior leadership are helping to establish initiatives and address the challenges ahead. While a start has been made within the school to develop middle leadership skills, and to set up more robust arrangements to monitor pupils' progress and intervene to address underachievement, there has been little effective professional development. Leadership across the school is inexperienced. The capacity beyond the headteacher to model, coach and change teaching for the better is limited and too little improvement has been made since the last inspection. Capacity to improve is judged inadequate.

A few parents or carers commented positively on how any problems are dealt with quickly. They enjoy the wider range of events, such as coffee mornings and workshops, which help them to feel involved. The headteacher has developed a sense of teamwork across the school and, as a result, staff are ambitious for the future. The effective way in which behaviour has been challenged this year is an example of how staff have worked closely together to decide what needs to be done and then to bring about improvement.

The school actively ensures that all groups of pupils are fully engaged in school activities, but its success in tackling discrimination and securing equality of opportunity is limited. Information to track pupils' progress has not been accurate enough to support targeted interventions and consequently underachievement remains. The curriculum interests pupils because it includes many school visits and special school events. It supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. The after-school club and extra-curricular activities address a range of needs and interests, and are enjoyed by those participating. However, the curriculum is not ensuring a sufficiently secure framework for the teaching of writing.

The governing body has rightly identified that it has been insufficiently involved with strategic planning to accelerate pupils' progress and academic achievement and it is reviewing its practices. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.

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.



19 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meeching Valley Primary School, Newhaven BN9 9UT

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. Thank you to those who talked to us or completed our questionnaire. You told us that you enjoy school and we saw that you listen carefully in lessons and are keen to learn. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves.

Many of you told us about the improvements this year, such as how better behaviour makes school life more enjoyable. However, your school is not providing you with a satisfactory education, so we have decided it needs 'special measures' and extra support to improve more quickly. This means that school leaders will be working to ensure that improvements to teaching and assessment will be introduced to help you to make more rapid progress. By the time Year 6 pupils move to secondary school, many have not made enough progress in their learning, and their attainment in English and mathematics is too low.

To help you to make faster progress, we have made some practical suggestions for changes to teaching, particularly of phonics (letters and their sounds), spelling, punctuation and handwriting. We have asked your headteacher and teachers to make sure that the work you are given is matched well to what you can do already so that your work is set at the right level, not too hard or too easy. We want you to write longer pieces of work and learn to work quickly and well when no adult is sitting with you. We have also asked the people who lead the school to make sure all the leaders are involved and keep closer checks on how well you are doing.

Other inspectors will visit your school soon to check how well these areas for improvement are being tackled. All of you can help, too. Please tell your teachers when there are things you do not understand or if the work is too easy. Make sure that you read and act on the advice teachers give you when they mark your work.

Thank you again for the welcome you gave us during the inspection, and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings
Lead inspector

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