

Firle Church of England Primary School

The Street, Firle, Lewes, BN8 6LF

Inspection dates

8–9 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Current pupils are on track to reach above average levels at the end of Key Stage 2.
- A strong focus by senior leaders on improving the quality of teaching has paid dividends. First-hand observations of teaching, work in pupils' books and their current rates of progress show that teaching is good.
- Higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and the better quality of teaching mean that current pupils are making quicker progress than those in the past, particularly in mathematics. The proportion of pupils in each year group already reaching higher levels than those expected for their age is increasing.
- Teachers make sure lessons are brisk and lively and deploy teaching assistants well to meet pupils' differing needs. Regular marking shows pupils what they have done well and often how to improve and pupils eagerly look for this advice.
- Pupils say they enjoy school and are happy, and parents unanimously agree. Pupils feel safe and behave well.
- The effective governing body has played a crucial leading role in a time of significant change to the structure of leadership and management of the school. Committed and passionate, the governors share the headteacher's determination to make the school outstanding.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is rarely outstanding. Tasks are not pitched at precisely the right level for pupils of different abilities to secure rapid progress.
- Teachers sometimes miss opportunities in lessons and in their marking to use pupils' individual 'next-step' targets to move them on more quickly.
- Whilst improving, attendance is below national averages. The school does not work often enough with families of pupils that have high levels of absence.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed parts of 14 lessons across all four classes, including three jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector talked with pupils about their learning and experiences of school, examined their work and listened to them read.
- He spoke with pupils, parents, staff, four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of 23 responses to the on-line survey (Parent View). He also analysed 11 questionnaires returned by staff.
- The inspector observed the school's work and reviewed a range of the school's documentation including information about the progress of pupils currently in school, the school's own monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching, records of behaviour and incidents, and safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Reception-aged children are taught in a class with others of a similar age. In the rest of the school, pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families) is lower than the national average. None of the pupils in these groups reached the end of Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2 in 2012, and there are none in the current Year 6. Currently, no looked after children or children of service families attend the school.
- A much-larger-than-average proportion of pupils arrives or leaves the school at times other than the usual points of transfer.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations of pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the previous inspection, following the resignation of the previous headteacher, the school was without a substantive headteacher for nearly a year while the governing body took advice and explored alternative leadership structures for small schools. Since June 2012, the school has employed an executive headteacher who is also executive headteacher of another school. From September 2013, the current arrangement will end and the current executive headteacher will remain just as headteacher of Firle Church of England Primary School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that much is outstanding by:
 - making sure that tasks are always sufficiently challenging for more able pupils in all subjects and meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs more precisely, particularly in mathematics
 - maximising opportunities for pupils to work on the individual next steps they need to take to accelerate their progress and regularly referring to these in marking.
- Raise attendance to at least average levels by working more frequently with families where pupils are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress across the school in reading, writing and mathematics and achieve well in relation to their starting points whenever they join the school.
- In the past, pupils have not made enough progress to reach the higher levels of which they are capable. However, pupils that left in 2012 made good progress over time in English to reach levels that were significantly above the national average. Current Year 6 pupils are on track to attain above average levels in both English and mathematics. Across the school, the proportions of pupils working at levels above those expected for their age are rising.
- A significant minority of children start school working at levels below those expected for their age, and not always at the start of Reception Year. Children do well in the nurturing and purposeful Early Years Foundation Stage to start to close any gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Pupils quickly develop a secure grasp of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) and use this confidently in their reading and writing. Almost all of the pupils that did not meet the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check last year have caught up, and current Year 1 pupils are doing well.
- Pupils of all ages have positive attitudes to reading. Teachers make sure that reading sessions have a clear learning focus, as seen in Years 3 and 4 where pupils knew what skills they were developing when working independently. Pupils understand the more advanced reading skills they are learning, such as understanding how a character is feeling or what effect the author is trying to create.
- In writing, pupils develop well both the technical accuracy of their writing and its effectiveness at engaging the reader. In the Years 1 and 2 class, when the pupils were writing a story following a discussion about what might hatch from the 'mystery egg' in the incubator in the classroom, one pupil wrote, 'Just at that moment, silence fell.'
- Teaching number calculations in orderly ways that help pupils' understanding of why we do things, as well as regularly using these skills to solve problems, is supporting the acceleration of their progress in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs also achieve well and make similar progress to other pupils, reflecting the school's successful promotion of equal opportunities. They make slightly quicker progress in reading and writing than they do in mathematics because extra help tends to focus more regularly on developing pupils' literacy skills.
- Historically wide gaps in English and mathematics between pupils eligible for pupil premium and their peers are narrowing. For example, eligible pupils that left in 2011 were nearly two years behind others. For the current Year 5 pupils, in the majority of cases in both subjects, they are in line with their peers or above, with pupil premium funding contributing to individual and small group support targeted at further reducing remaining gaps.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching over time is securing the good progress that current pupils are making. Pupils and parents share positive views about the quality of teaching.
- Teachers conduct lessons at a brisk, lively and purposeful pace that engages pupils. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen. However, tasks do not always stretch more-able pupils sufficiently to promote the rapid progress that would make their achievement outstanding.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is consistently strong. Using the interests of the children to capture their imagination, from hatching quails eggs to spending a day in woodland adjacent to the school, the skilful teaching promotes children's understanding, independence and problem-solving skills well in addition to their literacy, mathematics and social skills.

- In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils know their own 'next-step' targets. However, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to remind pupils of these individual next steps in their marking, or when setting tasks. That said, teachers make sure that pupils are mindful of the things they need to remember to be successful in particular tasks and to complete their work to a good standard. Marking regularly shows pupils where they have done these things well.
- Effective use of teaching assistants ensures they have a positive impact on pupils' learning, particularly supporting the successful inclusion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. They often check pupils' understanding and reinforce the key learning points, without limiting their independence.
- Both teachers and teaching assistants listen and observe pupils carefully during lessons to identify and address misconceptions, or give encouragement where necessary. In an imaginative mathematics lesson in Years 5 and 6, pupils followed instructions to move around a giant coordinates grid on the playground, enabling the adults to assess pupils' understanding immediately.
- Teachers use technology well to illustrate key learning points and celebrate success, including interactive whiteboards and 'visualisers', which enable the whole class to look at each other's work projected onto a screen.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils and parents express mostly positive views about behaviour, confirming that the good behaviour observed during the inspection across the day was typical. Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and work well independently or together. They are confident, welcoming and mix well.
- Pupils feel safe in school and develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves so in a range of situations, from riding their bikes to using the internet.
- Pupils report that incidents of bullying are rare and many are not aware of any. They have a good understanding of the different forms bullying can take and are confident that adults in school resolve any problems.
- A small number of parents using Parent View disagreed that the school deals effectively with bullying, although most believe the school responds well to concerns they raise. Recently, the school has rightly tightened its procedures. Taking into account the full range of views and evidence, the inspection found that there are few cases of bullying and the school responds to such issues well. It does not tolerate discrimination of any kind and there have been no recorded racist incidents for a number of years.
- Rigorous procedures for promoting good attendance mean that current attendance figures are significantly higher than in previous years, although they remain below the national average. These figures do not reflect the enjoyment in school conveyed by both pupils and parents. Leaders have introduced robust systems, including meeting with families where attendance remains too low, although they do not do this often enough where attendance is not improving as rapidly as it could.

The leadership and management are good

- A strong focus by senior leaders on improving the quality of teaching has secured a good quality of education for pupils.
- Teachers are held to account increasingly rigorously for the progress made by pupils. They receive clear feedback following regular monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, including points for improvement. The impact of regular professional development, including for teaching assistants, has included areas such as raising aspirations, mathematics and behaviour management, and is evident in the improved quality of teaching.
- The school has been through a turbulent time since the previous inspection, with significant changes to the structure of school leadership. Some parents and staff express concerns linked to

the reduced headteacher time the current arrangement allows for the school. Nonetheless, the school has made significant improvements and parents and staff view the planned arrangements for September positively. The headteacher rightly has plans to involve staff and leaders at all levels more fully in the drive to make the school outstanding.

- Although performance dipped following the previous inspection, current pupils are sustaining the significant improvement in English results in 2012 and are now achieving well in mathematics. This demonstrates the school's capacity to improve. Leaders at different levels have an accurate view of the school's performance and correctly identify and prioritise areas for further improvement.
- School leaders and the governing body value the effective and wide-ranging support given by the local authority in key areas, including teaching and strategic leadership, which has helped secure necessary improvements.
- Pupils like the improvements that the school has made. As one put it simply, 'We do more learning now.' Good extra-curricular opportunities and enrichment activities, such as art, sports, cooking, the allotment and the residential visit, all contribute to pupils' good achievement. Leaders have rightly identified the need to make more links between subjects to strengthen the promotion of pupils' academic and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is knowledgeable about the school's performance and highly committed to, and passionate about, improving it. It has an accurate view of the quality of teaching, and clear performance management procedures closely link pay with performance. With training and support from the local authority, the governing body has significantly increased the rigour of its systems. Governors both support and robustly challenge school leaders in their shared drive to make the school outstanding, combining their own analysis of data against national benchmarks, with information gathered during regular formal visits to the school. The governing body played a key role in determining the strategic direction of the school. Acutely aware of the need for careful financial management, particularly in the context of a small school, the governing body remains focused on the needs of pupils and the quality of education when making decisions, including about the use of pupil premium funding. Safeguarding procedures are monitored and meet statutory requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114525
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	401447

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	83
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mahey Abey
Headteacher	Gianni Bianchi
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 December 2009
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