

INSPECTION REPORT

COMBS INFANT SCHOOL

Combs, Chapel-en-le-Frith

LEA area: Derbyshire

Unique reference number: 112525

Headteacher: Mrs A. Curry

Reporting inspector: Mrs J. Tracey
20270

Dates of inspection: 19th-20th June, 2001

Inspection number: 196441

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 7
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Lesser Lane Combs Chapel-en-le-Frith High Peak Derbyshire
Postcode:	SK23 9UZ
Telephone number:	01298 813120
Fax number:	01298 813120
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C. Ryan
Date of previous inspection:	April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
20270	June Tracey	Registered inspector
13762	Norman Shelley	Lay inspector

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Combs infant school is a small, rural school with 23 pupils on roll in the age range four to seven years. It does not have a nursery. A maximum of eight children is admitted each year. Currently, no pupils are eligible for free school meals and there are no children from ethnic minority groups or for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is average. None of these has a formal statement of need. Attainment on entry is average in comparison with children of similar age.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with some outstanding features. It provides a full range of learning experiences that meet the needs of all pupils. Teaching is very good and is the main factor contributing to very good achievement by the time pupils are seven. Standards in English and mathematics are consistently high. The school is very well led and managed. The headteacher, staff and governors work closely together as a team and effectively contribute to the good ethos and learning environment. The expenditure per pupil is above average, as in many small schools, but, nevertheless, the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils of all abilities achieve well and attain high standards.
- Teaching is very good.
- The headteacher has excellent leadership and management skills that promote high quality team work.
- Partnership with parents and the local community is exceptionally good.

What could be improved

- Provision of playing space around the school and storage facilities inside.
- Training opportunities for governors to become more familiar with current developments in education.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good improvement since its previous inspection in 1997.

- High standards have been sustained, and raised further, through the successful implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.
- Assessment procedures have been refined and are well used to inform pupils how to improve their work.
- Pupils' handwriting and presentation of work have improved.
- There is better provision for art and information and communication technology (ICT). Standards have improved in both subjects and the use of ICT is now a strength of the school.
- The governors work more effectively through a committee structure.
- Accommodation has been extended so fewer activities take place simultaneously in the same space.

STANDARDS

Attainment on entry to the reception class is average. Children's language, mathematical and social skills vary depending on their previous experience. They achieve well. By the time they start Year 1 standards are above average for their age and they are well into the early stages of the National Curriculum.

Each year since the previous inspection, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have reached the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they are seven. A high proportion of pupils regularly exceeds this level. Standards are consistently well above average compared to national standards. Teacher assessment of attainment in science indicates similar standards and this is borne out by evidence from the inspection. It is not appropriate to make year-on-year comparisons with the relatively small year groups (usually eight pupils) but it is significant to note that, overall, the upward trend in results since 1997 is higher than the national trend. All pupils, whatever their ability, achieve very well and constantly strive to do even better. Standards of work are well above average in all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. These are underpinned by the strong focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very positive attitudes towards school. They work with enthusiasm and endeavour to do their best in response to the teachers' encouragement.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour is very good. It contributes to the good learning environment within lessons and in other activities.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils interact well with other pupils. Relationships between pupils and adults are respectful and contribute well to overall achievement. Pupils show initiative and successfully learn to take responsibility for themselves and others.
Attendance	Attendance is excellent. There is no unauthorised absence. The importance attached to regular attendance is a key factor in the consistency of pupils' development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	Aged 5-7 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school, particularly in English and mathematics. Pupils make rapid gains in knowledge and learn to apply it purposefully to advance their understanding. The teaching observed was never less than good. More often than not it was very good, and on one occasion was outstanding.

Most of the lessons are based on 'team teaching' that is very effective. It enables all pupils to learn from each other, the younger ones benefiting from an awareness of what can be achieved in later years and the older ones from the confidence that comes from explaining themselves to others. The core part of each lesson is usually devoted to activities relevant to pupils' age. It is during these sessions that direct teaching and a focus on individual work successfully enables teachers to challenge every pupil to work at optimum capacity and make very good progress. High priority is given to the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. Characteristics of

the very good teaching include good lesson planning, based on clear objectives, high expectations and sound interpretation of what pupils need to do to improve their work. In encouraging pupils to be self-critical teachers inculcate good habits which provide a sound foundation for future stages of education.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum meets statutory requirements. It is well balanced with appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills. Particular attention is paid to the development of information technology skills. Their inclusion in lesson plans for all subjects is benefiting pupils of all abilities. The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of additional activities in which parents frequently participate.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school's policy of providing equally for all pupils is reflected in the very good provision made for pupils with special educational needs. They benefit from additional support and from starting their school life in a close 'family' environment.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are no pupils at an early stage of learning English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall, provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. It is particularly good for moral and social development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a high standard of care for its pupils. It creates a secure environment in which pupils flourish and gain in confidence and self-esteem. Assessment procedures are well defined and are effective in assisting pupils to reach their full potential.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The number of staff is small but adults work well together and generate a good team spirit that is instrumental in ensuring the school lives up to its published aims.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are equally committed to the school and fulfil their responsibilities well. Involvement in a wider training programme would extend their awareness of the latest developments in education.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school analyses its performance against national standards and continually refines its teaching programme to highlight areas identified for improvement.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes good use of all its resources, particularly personnel. It successfully overcomes limitations imposed by its small size, for example in accommodation and the delivery of subjects such as physical education, by working in co-operation with other local schools. Financial planning and control are very good. The school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children enjoy school and are encouraged to do their best• Teaching is good and children make good progress• Behaviour is good• The school is well led and works closely with parents• There is a high level of involvement with the local community	Parents are very satisfied with the school. They expressed no significant concerns about its work.

Inspectors endorse the parents' views in every respect.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils of all abilities achieve well and attain high standards.

1. Since the previous inspection, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have reached the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. A high proportion of pupils regularly exceeds this level. Standards are consistently well above national averages. Teacher assessment of attainment in science indicates similar standards and this is borne out by evidence from the inspection. It is not appropriate to make year-on-year comparisons with the relatively small year groups (usually eight pupils) but it is significant to note that, overall, the upward trend in results since 1997 is higher than the national trend. In parents' own words they are 'thrilled with standards'. They feel the school gives all pupils, whatever their ability, a good start to their education because it focuses on the individual. Inspectors found all pupils to be achieving very well from their starting point on entry and striving to do even better. This reflects the high expectations inculcated in pupils' attitudes to learning.

2. Overall, attainment on entry to the reception class is average. Children have varying degrees of language, mathematical and social skills depending on their previous experience. Not all children have attended nursery prior to starting school. The school's focus on the individual identifies specific needs and the teaching is such that children quickly gain in confidence and adapt to the learning environment. They gain knowledge of letters and sounds and make a good start to reading. Mathematical and physical skills are well promoted through a wealth of practical activities that underpin learning in numerical work, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical and creative development. Good quality resources enhance learning and children are taught to handle them with respect. Children achieve well in the reception class. By the time they start Year 1 they are well into the early stages of the National Curriculum, especially in relation to literacy and numeracy.

3. Pupils achieve very well in Years 1 and 2. This is because teachers use the highly refined assessment system to target significant aspects of pupils' work. Pupils are constantly encouraged to discuss how good work can be made even better. This teaches pupils to be self-critical. The sharing of step-by-step targets with pupils and parents encourages a triangular partnership with the school that is an added strength to the provision. Parents' daily use of the reading diary as a vehicle for exchanging information with the school is a prime example. The high standard of reading equips pupils with the necessary skills to undertake a wide variety of tasks independently. It also enables them to use information technology skills to reinforce work in other aspects of the curriculum. Added to this, pupils learn to explain themselves well, drawing on their own experiences. Standards of handwriting and presentation are good. By the time pupils reach the age of seven, they write in simple well-punctuated sentences. The highest-attaining pupils incorporate speech marks and write with the interest of the reader in mind. Descriptive language is well used to add sensitivity to prose and poetry.

4. In mathematics, numerical skills are developed at a challenging pace relevant to pupils' capacity to assimilate and utilise mathematical knowledge and understanding. There is a good focus on mental agility and pupils are encouraged to explore different ways of solving problems. The use of computers to consolidate learning is exemplary and provides good opportunities for pupils to use their initiative. For example, in the Year 2 activity in which pupils looked for patterns when adding or subtracting multiples of 9 and 11 from a given number. By the time pupils leave the school some are working comfortably with addition and subtraction involving three digit numbers.

5. The development of investigative skills is built into work in all subjects, particularly science. Pupils are encouraged to base their conclusions on observations and they respond well when answers are used to develop the lesson further. Practical activities often embrace work across the whole curriculum. For instance, pupils gained a significant amount of knowledge about geography, the locality, history and conservation of the environment when they were taken on a 'stream dipping' exercise to look at natural habitats. Education 'beyond the classroom' is an inherent feature of the school's work and is a contributory factor to pupils' good achievement.

6. The school has recently gained the Quality Award from the Basic Skills Agency. This marks the high quality of provision for the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. Provision in other subjects is equally good. In ICT and art there has been a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Topic work is based on themes that are carried through the different subject areas. This helps to break down boundaries and promotes the transfer of skills and knowledge. For example, some very good art work on display demonstrated pupils' understanding of how creatures' skin colouring lends itself to camouflage. In ICT, pupils competently use computers to search out information and for word processing. The older pupils know how to save and print their work and appreciate the contribution ICT can make to all their studies.

7. Pupils enjoy a well-balanced curriculum that appropriately serves the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. They are justly proud of their work that is celebrated in many attractive displays about the school. There is no evidence of complacency - teachers ensure that expectations and aspirations are constantly raised to keep pupils working at optimum potential.

Teaching is very good.

8. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. The organisation of this small school lends itself to team teaching that is very effective. Almost all the lessons begin with an introductory session involving all pupils. This is often followed by separate activities for the three different age groups. These culminate in productive 'rounding off' sessions in which pupils share their work with others and prepare for subsequent lessons. The advantages of the timetable arrangements are manifold. Younger pupils benefit from an awareness of what can be achieved as they move up the school and this raises their expectations. Older pupils gain in confidence because their answers have to be sufficiently explicit for everyone to understand. Oral sessions at the beginning and end of lessons make a strong contribution to the development of pupils' language and communication skills. The central part of most lessons is devoted to highly focused group activities relevant to the appropriate stage of the National Curriculum. Activities are well planned with very clear objectives which are constantly revised to take account of what pupils have already learned.

9. The 'team' consists of the headteacher, another teacher and a learning support assistant. All are well experienced and complement each other. Each is fully aware of where their teaching fits into the whole scheme for pupils' academic and personal development. The teaching observed was never less than good; more often than not it was very good and on one occasion was outstanding. For example, in a literacy lesson in Year 2, pupils succeeded in generating words with varying numbers of syllables and used this knowledge to predict unusual spellings. Working as a group with the teacher they came very close to the correct spelling for the creature 'tuatara', previously having only heard it pronounced orally. In the same lesson, pupils in Year 1 learned to select words to give directions on signposts at the zoo, simultaneous with practising the writing of capital letters. Teachers are consistent in their demand for accurate formation of letters and good presentation. This begins in the reception class where teachers provide a wide range of activities, initially oral and practical, to stimulate a thirst for learning as a means of access to the rich curriculum on offer. Teachers make very good use of computers to develop pupils' technical skills and to encourage independence. As a result, pupils' success in reinforcing their own learning, and extracting and printing information is self-fulfilling.

10. The curriculum is organised on a three year cycle so that the cross-curricular themes on which topic work is based are not repetitive in a pupil's time in the school. This works well and enables teachers to capture pupils' interest whatever their age or level of ability. An excellent example was the outdoor lesson, jointly led by the teachers and the Peak Park Rangers. Pupils acquired and applied scientific knowledge within the local environment. Good preparation, including an introduction prior to setting off on the expedition, resulted in a fascinating afternoon that brought the learning experience alive. Teachers capitalised on pupils' findings by responding to the barrage of questions and observations thrown up by individual pupil's specific interest. For example, that of the boy who searched through a classification of birds to identify a feather he had found. The willingness with which teachers engage in dialogue with pupils in and outside lessons is a key factor relevant to pupils' persistence in seeing a task through to its conclusion.

11. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, a notable example being an art lesson in which pupils experimented with computer graphics to design work in the style of William Morris. Skilful questioning by the teacher made high demands on pupils' observational skills. Good sharing of expertise was demonstrated when both teachers were drawn into discussion about the technicalities of making minute changes to the computer images.

12. Relationships between adults and pupils are of high quality and promote pupils' self-esteem well. As a consequence, behaviour is very good and pupils respect their teachers. Inspectors agree with parents that the school provides very good pastoral care for its pupils.

13. The school keeps detailed records of pupils' progress and teachers use this information well to inform lesson plans. These are overtly directed towards each pupil's needs and the school rightly prides itself on challenging all pupils to reach ever rising goals. Teachers positively encourage pupils to consider for themselves how to improve their work. Equal emphasis is placed on all aspects of pupils' development. With respect to health and social education for instance, pupils are successfully made to consider the impact of a balanced diet whilst lunching in a family atmosphere which promotes good social habits.

14. Teachers ensure that the school day moves at a fast pace and that every pupil is challenged. Pupils' interest is sustained and they are well motivated. Homework tasks complement classwork and are well designed to encourage the active involvement of parents. In mathematics, pupils are provided with well-designed numerical games to reinforce number work. Instructions are personalised for every child so that parents can easily identify the target for that week's homework. Outcomes of the homework are discussed in class at regular intervals so that pupils can reflect on what they learned from working with their parents.

15. The school recognises the importance of a co-ordinated approach to teaching. It makes optimum use of the experience of well - qualified staff to provide a stimulating climate for learning in which all pupils prosper.

The headteacher has excellent leadership and management skills that promote high quality team work.

16. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school which is successfully transmitted to all who work in it. Her leadership and management skills are inspirational and concur with the high regard in which parents and the local community hold the school. The efficient manner in which the school is organised contributes to pupils' well being and feeling of security. The headteacher balances her teaching commitment and the time devoted to management very well. The governors recognise that she carries a heavy workload and that pupils benefit from all the staff's generosity with their time.

17. The headteacher and governors have a good overview of the school and action since the previous inspection has brought about significant improvements, especially in accommodation and resources. Added to this, assessment procedures for monitoring pupils' progress and evaluating results against national statistics have led to highly focused target-setting for individual pupils and groups. This is influential in lesson planning, and, consequently, in raising standards. Work is well planned to meet pupils' specific needs and innovative ideas serve to make pupils 'blossom' and grow in confidence.

18. Teaching and learning are closely monitored by the headteacher simultaneous with observation and sharing of practices by the staff team. Everyone benefits from this, and, ultimately, the pupils. The school is associated with a 'cluster group' of schools enabling teachers to share in discussion of matters at the interface of educational provision. Meetings usually take place after school so that the daily timetable is not disrupted. They provide good opportunities for staff development and the upgrade of expertise. A prime example is the initiative taken by the school to ensure that pupils' work in information and communication technology is integral to the whole curriculum. Pupils' good results in national tests are an indication of the energetic approach with which the school has embraced the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

19. The school development plan reflects careful consideration of priorities. It evolves through genuine consultation and self-critical analysis of performance. Prudent financial management is indicative of decisions based firmly on providing the best education possible in the initial stages of children's school life. The headteacher is pro-active and successful in bidding for funds from external resources whenever they become available.

20. The school generates a very good climate for learning in which pupils prosper and enjoy their first experiences of the educational system.

Partnership with parents and the local community is exceptionally good.

21. The partnership between parents and the school is exceptionally good and is a key feature of the school's philosophy. It is backed up by serious commitment from the local community, especially in relation to financial support. Parents and friends value the opportunity of being part of the school's extended family, with ample opportunities for them to become involved in school life.

22. Parents' support for the school is borne out by the outstanding response (100 per cent) to the parents' questionnaires and comments at the meeting for parents. Over 95 per cent of parents think that good leadership leads to high expectations and a climate in which pupils want to give of their best. All children were said to enjoy school.

23. The quality of information provided for parents is very good. They are kept informed of children's progress through organised consultation sessions and reports. These reinforce the informal contact with teachers on an almost daily basis. Of particular value is each pupil's record of achievement folder. This contains ongoing samples of work, annotated to indicate progress towards the criteria and standards of the National Curriculum. By sharing this information with parents they become directly involved in every stage of their children's development. Parents recognise that teachers work hard to ensure that each child accomplishes as much as is possible during their time in the school.

24. When interviewed during the inspection, parents spoke highly of the good relationships with the school and expressed appreciation of the openness and approachability of staff. The school also works very closely with members of the local community, primarily through the Village Hall Trust. The school is at the hub of the community. An indication of the importance attached to this was the raising of a substantial sum of money to extend the building when the school was under threat of closure because of inadequate accommodation. The school and the community, to the benefit of both, effectively use the extended facilities.

25. The school lives up to its description as a 'community' school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Provision of playing space around the school and of storage facilities inside.

26. The playing areas around the school are well maintained and provide sufficiently for activities at breaks and lunchtimes. An area is currently under development to extend provision for environmental work and the study of natural habitats. Access to larger outdoor space for physical activity is limited. However, this is overcome to some extent by use of facilities at the local high school.

27. Accommodation has been extended since the previous inspection and the provision of resources to support the curriculum is good. As a result, the classrooms brim with stimulating displays. The lack of storage space and the use of the building outside school hours often necessitate the moving of furniture and equipment. This is time consuming and sometimes prevents pupils' ongoing work being left out ready for use in the next lesson. Plans are in hand to provide extra accommodation in a 'gallery'. This will alleviate the storage problem.

Training opportunities for governors to become more familiar with current developments in education.

28. The governors have become more effective since the previous inspection through the use of a committee structure. Preparatory work carried out in committee facilitates purposeful discussion at governor's meetings before decisions are taken.

29. Governors are very dependent on the headteacher for dissemination of information about the latest guidelines and developments in education. They are concerned that they often cannot gain this information first-hand because access to governors' training courses is proving to be difficult. The governors and school have already started to make arrangements with other schools to share training at local venues.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

30. In order to maintain and further improve the school's provision it should:

- (1) continue to develop ICT to support the whole curriculum,
- (2) as soon as is practicable:
 - improve the provision of playing space around the school to provide more scope for games and physical activities,
 - extend storage facilities so that there is less need for movement of furniture and equipment;
- (3) seek more training opportunities for governors to familiarise themselves with the latest developments in education.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	7
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
14	57	29	0	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		23
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals		0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		4

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	4.5
National comparative data	5.2

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	16
Any other minority ethnic group	

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/00
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	£
Total income	106116
Total expenditure	101507
Expenditure per pupil	4614
Balance brought forward from previous year	10913
Balance carried forward to next year	15522

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	23
Number of questionnaires returned	23

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	100	0	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	82.6	17.4	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	95.6	4.4	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	69.6	26	4.4	0	0
The teaching is good.	91.2	4.4	0	0	4.4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	78.3	21.7	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	91.3	8.7	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	95.6	4.4	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	82.6	17.4	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	95.6	4.4	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	82.6	17.4	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	65.2	30.4	4.4	0	0