



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

**Inspection report**  
**RAF Benson Community Primary School**

**Oxfordshire Education Authority**

Dates of inspection: 7 and 8 December 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

© Crown copyright 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

## **Contents**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Basic information about the school</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key issues</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Inspection findings</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Standards achieved by the pupils</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The quality of education</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Implementation of the action plan</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix – Information about the inspection</b>	<b>10</b>

## **Basic information about the school**

Name of school:	RAF Benson Community Primary School
Type of school:	Primary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mr A White
Address of school:	RAF Benson Wallingford Oxfordshire OX10 6EP
Telephone:	01491 836460
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mr M Spence
Local education authority area:	Oxfordshire
Unique reference number:	123028
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr C J Redman HMI
Dates of inspection:	7 and 8 December 2004

## Introduction

1. RAF Benson Community Primary School is situated in Oxfordshire and provides education for pupils who are primarily children of Royal Air Force (RAF) personnel. The turnover of pupils is very high and the school roll fluctuates markedly from time to time as a result of the staffing needs of the RAF; currently the school has 172 pupils including 13 who attend the Foundation Stage part-time. There are considerably more boys than girls, 100 compared with 72; this difference appears unevenly across the school with two classes having twice as many boys as girls, but three classes having a good balance. Few of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and none currently takes them. The proportion of the pupils who have been identified as having special educational needs, at 20 per cent, is typical of figures nationally and only one pupil has a Statement of Special Educational Need. Nearly all of the pupils come from white British heritages and none speaks English as an additional language.
2. The school was inspected in June 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.
3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of June 2003. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on three occasions to monitor the progress being made.
4. In December 2004, one HMI and one Additional Inspector inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of June 2003.

## Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:
    - standards had declined markedly before the June 2003 inspection; they are now improving but are not yet good enough;
    - standards in the Foundation Stage are good and the pupils make good progress towards achieving the nationally set Early Learning Goals;
    - in the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 1 national tests, standards of writing were average, but standards of reading and mathematics were below average. The boys' results were close to those of boys nationally, but the girls' attainment was markedly below their national average;
    - in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2, the proportion of the pupils attaining the nationally expected levels or higher in English and mathematics was average; it was above average in science;
-

- 
- the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are at least satisfactory and often good. In the Foundation Stage and Year 6 they are very good. Most of the pupils are enthusiastic about learning and show pride in their achievements. They are eager to talk about their work and they respond well to encouragement;
  - attendance is above the national average and there is no unauthorised absence;
  - the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is satisfactory. The school council provides good opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility and understand citizenship. Most classrooms include displays which remind the pupils about the importance of caring for others and behaving well. Displays around the school encourage pupils to respect the cultural diversity found in Britain today, as well as celebrating the pupils' achievements;
  - the quality of learning, including the progress made by the pupils, was at least sound; it was good or very good in half the lessons. Learning has improved greatly in response to better teaching: it is good in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 6, and satisfactory in the other classes. Nevertheless, learning is not yet good enough because it does not match the quality typical of schools nationally;
  - all of the teaching was satisfactory and half was good or very good. This shows a marked improvement since the June 2003 inspection, when just over a quarter was good and a third was unsatisfactory, but it does not yet match the quality of teaching typically found in schools nationally. Teaching was very good in the Foundation Stage, and consistently good in Years 1 and 6; it was mixed in quality elsewhere but there was insufficient good teaching in Years 2, 3 and 5;
  - information and communication technology (ICT) was underused in too many lessons, primarily because the school's facilities are not good enough;
  - the quality of assessment was sound and provided a good record of the pupils' attainment. However, marking varied too widely from outstanding in Year 6, where it helped the pupils to understand what they needed to do to improve, to broadly satisfactory in several classes;
  - the provision for special educational needs is mostly effective. Individual education plans are well focused and are reviewed regularly by staff, parents and pupils; clear targets enable the pupils' progress to be tracked so that provision can be amended when necessary. Teaching assistants understand the individual needs of the pupils and they provide effective support in lessons, making a significant contribution to the quality of teaching. However, teachers' planning has not been monitored to ensure that it matches the pupils' individual needs and little assessment has been made of how the quality of support in lessons affects the pupils' progress, particularly when there is no teaching assistant;
  - the quality of leadership and management has improved considerably. Monitoring of the school's work is good and has contributed to significant
-

improvements in teaching, learning and behaviour. Strategic planning has improved and is now good. A new staffing structure is more appropriate for the school's needs. Middle managers are developing greater confidence and starting to appreciate the techniques required to secure improvements in teaching and learning;

- the curriculum is broad and balanced, but cross-curricular links are not adequately developed, particularly in literacy and ICT. The school's plans for improving the resources for ICT are good, but currently, the provision is unsatisfactory;
- financial management has improved significantly. The school has had a deficit budget for several years; this has been substantially reduced by grants from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the RAF. Projections indicate that the school will bring the budget into balance by April 2007;
- the quality of governance has improved substantially. There is a full complement of governors with good representation from the RAF. The governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are determined to ensure the quality of education continues to rise. They suitably hold the school to account for its actions and support new developments energetically;
- the staff have asked challenging questions of their own provision. The level of debate about professional issues has improved greatly and the staff are more aware of the good practice found elsewhere that could be usefully integrated into their teaching. The hard work and dedication of the staff have led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour since the June 2003 inspection so that they are now satisfactory;
- the local education authority (LEA) has supported the school well; this has included providing staff in key positions for a short time until the school's work improved and giving a wide range of valuable advice and financial support.

## **Key issues**

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to improve standards;
  - improve teaching and learning so that it matches the national profile or better;
  - improve the provision and use of ICT across the curriculum.
-

---

## Inspection findings

### Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards had declined markedly before the June 2003 inspection; they are now improving but are not yet good enough.
8. In the Foundation Stage, standards are good and the pupils make good progress towards achieving the nationally set Early Learning Goals.
9. In the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 1 national tests, standards of reading and mathematics were similar to the previous year and below national averages. Although standards of writing fell slightly, the proportion of the pupils achieving the expected level was similar to the national average. However, year-on-year comparisons are not reliable because the high turnover of pupils means that a significant proportion had attended the school for only a short time before taking the tests. There was a marked difference between the results for boys and girls; the boys' results were close to the average for boys nationally, but the girls' attainment was markedly below their national average.
10. The school's results in the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 2 national tests improved in English and mathematics, but fell slightly in science. The proportion of the Year 6 pupils attaining the nationally expected levels or higher in English and mathematics was similar to the national average and was above average in science. The pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 was similar to schools nationally. Compared with schools where the pupils' prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 was similar, the proportion of the pupils at RAF Benson School attaining at least the nationally expected standards was above average in English, average in mathematics and high in science.
11. Standards in English have improved since 2003, but are not yet good enough. Throughout the school the standards in speaking and listening have improved. Most pupils listen carefully to their teacher or other pupils and, as a result, they answer questions sensibly and accurately. They use opportunities to discuss work with their peers well, rehearsing their ideas and gaining confidence in expressing their opinions. Their vocabulary has developed well and is now typical of their age.
12. By Year 2 standards in reading are below national expectations; nevertheless, some of the more able pupils read fluently. The pupils are not inspired by the poor quality of books in class libraries, which consequently do not promote the pupils' interest in reading. However, by the end of Key Stage 2, standards of reading are better and are mostly good for the pupils' age. The pupils enjoy reading and can explain why they like a particular book or author; they read a range of material, including non-fiction for information and research.
13. The standard of writing in Year 2 is below national expectations, but is improving. Handwriting is too often affected by letters that are not consistently well formed. Spelling is not sufficiently accurate. Most pupils use capital letters and full stops in the correct place, but the style and vocabulary used in the writing are below typical levels. By Year 6, standards in writing are close to age-related expectations. The pupils use more imaginative vocabulary and complex sentences. However, there are too few opportunities for the pupils to develop their literacy skills across a range of subjects, except in Year 1 and in the early years.



14. Standards in mathematics are improving but they vary widely. At Key Stage 1, they are below typical levels overall. At the end of the key stage, the higher attaining pupils calculate with appropriate facility and accuracy for their age, including simple multiplication; they are starting to solve money problems, but not with sufficient accuracy; they can identify patterns in numbers, such as whether a number is odd or even, and use these facts effectively to solve simple problems; their understanding of shape, space and measures is above average. The pupils attaining lower standards make too many errors in calculations and do not have sufficiently quick recall of basic number facts; they identify patterns in numbers well, but do not use these effectively to solve problems. A few of the least able pupils are still learning to write digits correctly, have a weak understanding of place value and make errors in calculations too often; their knowledge of shape, space and measures is well below typical levels.

15. At Key Stage 2, the accuracy of calculations is not good enough, even for the more able pupils; too few of the pupils recall basic number facts quickly. However, the range of knowledge of the higher attainers is above average; for example, they use fractions and percentages correctly in a variety of contexts and solve simple linear equations; their knowledge of shape and space is good, including how to transform shapes on a graph; they handle data well, including calculating probabilities. The pupils not yet achieving the higher standards have attempted a wide range of work but their understanding is weaker so that they cannot use their knowledge effectively to solve problems. A few of the least able pupils work at much lower levels; for example, some have confused ideas of decimal place value or which are the appropriate units to use for measurement.

16. In science, the standards are average. In Key Stage 1, the pupils' understanding of common features in their environment is sound, including the benefits and dangers of electricity, and how materials change through heating and cooling. They respond sensibly to suggestions on how to find things out and show a keen sense of enquiry during investigational work. They record their work appropriately, including using tables. They are developing satisfactory skills of predicting, testing and evaluating outcomes. In Key Stage 2, standards vary more widely but are satisfactory overall. The higher attaining pupils have a good understanding of life processes, such as ways of preserving food and healthy living; they recognise the issues associated with fair-testing and represent data well in graphs and tables. The knowledge of the lower attaining pupils is too superficial across the science curriculum; at times this weakness restricts their ability to contribute sensibly to discussions because their ideas are formed from a mixture of fact and inaccurate supposition; their weak literacy skills impinge adversely upon their ability to express scientific ideas clearly and record their knowledge accurately.

### **The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

17. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are at least satisfactory and often good: in 14 of the 17 lessons they were good or better; in the Foundation Stage and Year 6 they were very good. Most of the pupils are enthusiastic about learning and show pride in their achievements. They are eager to talk about their work and appreciate encouragement. The school has set out clear expectations of the pupils' behaviour; positive strategies are used to promote good behaviour and the pupils respond well. Careful records are kept of any behavioural incidents; there have been no exclusions during the past year. The school staff provide good role models for the pupils, establishing positive relationships with them and

---

encouraging an atmosphere of mutual trust. The pupils have a clear understanding of right from wrong.

18. The attendance rate has risen to 96 per cent, which is above the national average. There has been no unauthorised absence. The attendance is effectively monitored and absences are checked thoroughly. The school suitably promotes the importance of regular attendance, for example, in communications with parents.

19. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is satisfactory. Assemblies promote the aims of the school and contribute towards its positive ethos. The assembly during the inspection, for example, reminded the pupils about thinking of others and how their words and actions can affect others. The school council provides good opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility and understand citizenship. The Year 6 pupils undertake a wide range of tasks to help the school run smoothly, including acting as buddies to pupils at playtime when necessary. Most classrooms include displays which remind the pupils about the importance of caring for others and behaving well. Displays around the school encourage pupils to respect the cultural diversity found in Britain today, as well as celebrating the pupils' achievements. A Christmas performance rehearsal by pupils in Years 1 and 2 was warmly received by the other pupils, who showed their respect and encouragement for the efforts of their younger schoolmates.

### **The quality of education**

20. The quality of learning, including the progress made by the pupils, was at least sound, it was good or very good in half the lessons. Learning has improved greatly in response to better teaching: it is now good in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 6, and satisfactory in the other classes. Nevertheless, learning is not yet good enough because it does not match the quality typical of schools nationally. Throughout the school, most of the pupils used their time well by tackling the tasks set by the teacher and persevering when they met difficulties; only a few were dependent on adults to make adequate progress. The pace of learning varied, however, and a minority of the pupils were content to work slowly so that, too often, they did not complete tasks. Most of the pupils took pride in their achievements and presented their work tidily. Where they were given the opportunity to discuss problems or issues with partners they did so productively; however, the quality of problem solving was below the levels typical of their age, except in the Foundation Stage and Year 1. Many pupils were keen to answer questions, but too few asked questions to clarify their understanding or extend their knowledge.

21. All of the teaching was satisfactory and half was good or very good. This shows a marked improvement since the June 2003 inspection, when just over a quarter was good and a third was unsatisfactory, but it does not yet match the quality of teaching typically found in schools nationally. Teaching was very good in the Foundation Stage, and consistently good in Years 1 and 6; it was mixed in quality elsewhere but there was insufficient good teaching in Years 2, 3 and 5.

22. In the Foundation Stage, a wide range of stimulating, well-planned activities was used. There was an effective balance of activities chosen by the pupils and those taught directly by an adult. The outdoor area was used well to enhance the learning in the classroom. Effective management ensured that the pupils learnt in a calm but stimulating environment. Good planning and regular assessment supported the learning well.

---

23. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the teaching had many strengths. All of the lessons were planned conscientiously but the quality of delivery varied too widely. The best teaching included: a variety of learning activities that challenged the pupils appropriately; good exposition and questioning by the teacher; good pace; well-organised resources; the opportunity for the pupils to develop independent learning skills such as research and problem solving; and good attention to developing literacy and numeracy skills.

24. Where the teaching was less successful, activities were not always organised adequately so that the pupils understood how their knowledge and skills were intended to develop; exposition was too long, did not hold the pupils' attention fully and slowed the pace of the lesson. ICT was underused in too many lessons, primarily because the school's facilities are not good enough; however, it was used well in a Year 6 mathematics lesson. In all lessons, the management of behaviour was at least satisfactory and often very good.

25. The quality of assessment was sound and provided a good record of the pupils' attainment. However, marking varied too widely from outstanding in Year 6, where it helped the pupils to understand what they needed to do to improve, to broadly satisfactory in several classes.

26. The provision for special educational needs is mostly effective, but has some weaknesses, primarily because the co-ordinator has insufficient time to manage this important area. Individual education plans are well focused and are reviewed regularly by staff, parents and pupils; clear targets enable the pupils' progress to be tracked so that provision can be amended when necessary. Teaching assistants understand the individual needs of the pupils and they provide effective support in lessons, making a significant contribution to the quality of teaching. Good links with support agencies help to ensure any new pupils receive the necessary support as soon as possible. However, teachers' planning has not been monitored to ensure that it matches the pupils' individual needs and little assessment has been made of how the quality of support in lessons affects the pupils' progress, particularly when there is no teaching assistant.

### **Leadership and management**

27. The headteacher at the time of the June 2003 inspection, took early retirement after a long period of sick leave. The school was led by an acting headteacher for the academic year to August 2004. Under her guidance, the quality of leadership and management improved considerably. She led significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and helped the staff to work together more productively. Through effective monitoring and evaluation, she identified the strengths and weaknesses in the school's educational provision and addressed the shortcomings rigorously. She clarified the responsibilities of the teachers with management roles and supported their professional development to help them undertake their duties more effectively.

28. A new substantive headteacher took up post in September 2004. He has made sensible changes to the management structure so that it is more suitable for the school's requirements. He has a clear understanding of what constitutes a good quality of education and sensible ideas of how to develop further the school's provision. Good monitoring has helped him achieve a sound understanding of the school's work. He has delegated responsibilities appropriately and supported the effective contribution of those staff with management duties. Middle managers are developing more confidence in leadership and are

---

starting to appreciate the techniques required to secure improvements in teaching and learning. The systems for monitoring the school's work are sound and the quality of self-evaluation is good. There are well-designed procedures for tracking the pupils' progress, analysing assessments and identifying areas of the curriculum that require further development.

29. Strategic planning has improved and is now good. As well as a governors' action plan, the school has well-considered subject and whole-school development plans, suitable to guide the school over the current academic year. However, longer-term planning is underdeveloped.

30. The curriculum is broad and balanced, but cross-curricular links are not adequately developed, particularly in literacy and ICT. The school's plans for improving their resources for ICT are good, but the current provision is unsatisfactory.

31. Financial management has improved significantly. The school has had a deficit budget for several years; this has been substantially reduced by grants from the DfES and the RAF. Projections suggest that the school will bring the budget into balance by April 2007.

32. The quality of governance has improved substantially. There is a full complement of governors with good representation from the RAF. They are organised into two appropriate committees, an arrangement that supports their prime focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Governors are suitably linked to areas of the curriculum; they monitor the school's work well and write informative reports about their impressions; as a result, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a determination to ensure the quality of education continues to rise. They suitably hold the school to account for its actions and support new developments energetically.

33. The school has adopted many practices to evaluate whether it is offering best value. For example, it has used test results to compare standards with those of other schools locally and nationally; there is a clear determination to improve the school's standing by these measures. The staff have asked challenging questions of their own provision. The level of debate about professional issues has improved greatly and the staff are more aware of the good practice found elsewhere that could be usefully integrated into their teaching. Due attention has been paid to the professional development of the teachers and their assistants. The hard work and dedication of the staff have led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour since the June 2003 inspection so that they are now satisfactory.

34. The LEA has supported the school well; this has included providing staff in key positions for a short time until the school's work improved and giving a wide range of valuable advice and financial support.

### **Implementation of the action plan**

35. The inspection report of June 2003 required the school to address six key issues. These related to: raising standards; improving teaching and learning; strengthening leadership and management at all levels; improving the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; improving the quality and range of learning opportunities; and rectifying issues of health and safety. The quality of teaching and learning has improved markedly, but has yet to make sufficient impact

---

on standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2; it has led to higher standards in the Foundation Stage. A broad range of improvements has strengthened the school's leadership and management. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are now good. The range of opportunities for teaching and learning has improved, but ICT does not play a large enough role in the pupils' learning. The school has rectified all of the matters related to health and safety identified in the June 2003 inspection report.

## **Appendix – Information about the inspection**

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in June 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in November 2003, and in March and May 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of June 2003.

In December 2004, one HMI and one additional inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Seventeen lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly, a rehearsal for a Christmas play and three registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff and the chair of governors; informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of June 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.