



Groombridge St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114559
LEA East Sussex
Inspection number 279413
Inspection dates 24 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Rev Hartland HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Corseley Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Groombridge
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 9SF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01892 864305
Number on roll	202	Fax number	01892 864305
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Dr P C Steel
Date of previous inspection	30 October 2000	Headteacher	Miss Angela Nicholls

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 24 May 2006 - 25 May 2006	Inspection number 279413
-----------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Groombridge St Thomas is a voluntary aided Church of England village primary school. It is smaller than most primary schools. Standards on entry are broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The percentage with learning difficulties is average. The number of pupils from minority ethnic communities is well below average, as is the number of those who have a first language other than English. The school has increased in size since the last inspection.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Although the school judges itself to be good, inspectors believe that this is too modest and that it is an outstanding school which justly merits the high esteem in which it is held by parents. The school displays a very strong Christian ethos. It has many strengths and provides an excellent education for its pupils.

All pupils make progress in their learning. Progress is best in mathematics in Years 3 to 6 where it is outstanding. This is as a result of the high expectations in the teaching and the high quality of the tracking of each pupil's achievements which enable the right next steps in learning to take place. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good and children make a good start in the Reception Year.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils very much enjoy being at school and their behaviour is excellent. They have very positive attitudes and feel safe and valued as individuals. All staff take very good care of them and know them well. Teaching is excellent. Teachers make every effort to ensure that all pupils can learn and achieve their academic potential. The curriculum is good, although the extra-curricular provision is limited in scope. The leadership and management are excellent with highly effective teamwork. The headteacher provides exemplary and inspirational leadership. Some school policies are reviewed less frequently than is desirable. The school has been rigorous and highly successful in making improvements since the last inspection. Value for money is excellent. The school has a proven capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- extend the range of extra-curricular provision to include a wider range of activities
- ensure that the cycle of governors' meetings includes regular opportunities for the review of school policies.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement and standards are excellent. Children in the Reception Year make good progress towards the early learning goals, with many making better progress than might be expected. The school has exemplary procedures for tracking the progress of each child.

The standards reached in the national tests, including the 2005 tests, at the end of Year 2 have been consistently above the national average in recent years. The results in reading last year were exceptionally high, with the number of pupils gaining the higher grades also above the national average. This is because of the school's relentless focus on the importance of reading. At the end of Year 6, results in the national tests have been consistently above the national average in recent years. The 2005 national tests results were significantly above the national average, with results in mathematics being exceptionally high. The proportion of pupils who gained the higher levels of

attainment was above average. The school exceeded its challenging statutory targets in 2005.

All pupils are making excellent progress, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. There are no groups of pupils who are underachieving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development is outstanding. Excellent personal relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and teachers ensure that pupils are confident learners. Their behaviour is outstanding; they enjoy school and attend regularly. The importance of fostering positive relationships is engendered in pupils from a very early age through the 'buddy system'. The effectiveness of this is very clearly demonstrated by a Year 1 pupil's description of her Year 6 buddy as 'warm and cuddly, who plays with me a lot'. This results in the extremely positive attitude which pupils have towards school.

The great importance attached to providing pupils with opportunities, through assemblies and lessons, to reflect on topics such as bullying, friendship and peer pressure enables them to make exemplary progress in their spiritual, moral and social development. In addition, the very good opportunities to learn about their own and others' cultures ensures that the pupils recognise and value diversity.

The wide range of sporting activities, so expertly delivered, coupled with the importance attached to the need for a balanced diet, ensure that pupils develop very well a healthy lifestyle. The curriculum and assembly topics reinforce very effectively what pupils need to do to keep themselves and others safe. The emphasis placed on teamwork and collaborative working is demonstrated to excellent effect through the school council and in the Year 6 mini-enterprise work. These opportunities ensure that pupils develop in an exemplary manner the citizenship skills required for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is outstanding. As a consequence, pupils are highly motivated to achieve their maximum potential. They respond in an exemplary way to the teachers' high expectations in terms of work and behaviour, showing genuine enjoyment in their learning. The teachers' questioning is of the highest quality. It is precise and challenging and identifies very well pupils' understanding. Answers, even when incorrect, are carefully considered and used to extend pupils' ability. Teachers are exceptionally skilful at organising activities that enthuse pupils so that they become totally immersed in their work.

Learning support assistants (LSA) contribute greatly to the quality of teaching and their unobtrusive but crucial support ensures that all pupils, including those with

learning difficulties, are fully included. A reassuring glance from one LSA was enough to ensure that a Year 5 pupil had the confidence to contribute successfully in a science lesson about night and day. The look of satisfaction on the child's face showed very clearly the considerable benefits of having an LSA in each classroom. The consistent way in which the school's tracking procedures are followed ensures that teachers have an excellent understanding of where pupils are in their learning. Marking is good because it provides suitable encouragement and, where necessary, relevant comments aimed at improving pupils' work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and improving. The last inspection judged that insufficient time was spent on the teaching of particular subjects. This is no longer the case because staff are now skilled in using teaching time effectively to develop the core skills of literacy and numeracy through other subjects. In addition, the range and depth of experiences available to pupils is reflected in the very good displays throughout the school that help to provide them with such a stimulating learning environment. The arts and physical education are particularly strong.

The recent decision to implement required workforce reform by employing specialist part-time teachers has had a very positive effect on the quality of the curriculum in physical education, music and French. The school recognises where improvement is needed. For example, recent investment in information and communication technology has been effective and is beginning to achieve very good results. The formal curriculum is well supported by visitors to the school and by visits off-site and pupils benefit from the good range of after-

school clubs available to them, although the extra-curricular provision is limited in scope.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, support and guidance is outstanding. This is because the work of the school is based on a very strong Christian ethos that attaches great importance to the welfare and care of the individual pupil. The huge success of this approach is summed up by a parent's description of 'a lovely nurturing school that is based on a caring, sharing and learning environment'. Pupils thrive in such an atmosphere and show a great awareness of the need for members of the school community to show care for each other and for those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils spoke with great pride about their efforts to support Anna, a child in Brazil.

The very effective personal, social and health education curriculum and the excellent use that is made of outside professionals ensure that pupils are fully aware of the importance of seeking support, keeping safe and leading a healthy lifestyle. The school provides a safe environment for pupils. However, it is less robust in ensuring that all statutory policies are regularly updated to reflect current guidance and good practice.

Procedures for monitoring academic progress are excellent. They include the use of highly effective systems of precise tracking and profiles of pupils' achievements. It is impressive that pupils know their personal targets and appreciate the fact that they have the opportunity to influence what these should be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school judges its leadership and management to be good. Inspectors believe it is outstanding. The headteacher provides highly effective and inspirational leadership to ensure the school provides for the needs of every pupil. She is justifiably held in very high regard by governors, staff and parents. The headteacher is very ably supported by the senior leadership team and other staff with responsibilities who share the headteacher's enthusiasm for and commitment to achieving the very highest standards in all areas. The school is very much a 'learning community' where the leaders willingly learn from others to be innovative and self-critical.

The school has highly effective procedures for monitoring teaching and evaluates its work very well, taking into account the views of parents and pupils and acting well upon them. Parents are very happy with what the school offers and with the genuine care shown for their children. Governors play an active and effective role in improving the work of the school and holding it to account. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths and of those areas that need to be improved. The school believes, and the inspection findings confirm, that, under the resolute leadership of the headteacher, it has a very good capacity improve even further.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am writing to you following the recent visit of two inspectors to your school to let you know what we think about the school. Thank you for your help in talking to us about the work you do and what you think about the school.

We think your school is an excellent school which provides you with an extremely good education. We saw, and your parents told us, that everyone in your school takes very good care of you and you get on very well with each other. You told us how much you enjoy coming to school and explained that the teachers make the lessons interesting so that you can learn more easily. You told us that you feel safe and that there is always someone to talk to if you have a problem. Teachers listen carefully to what you say and the school council makes things happen. The school is excellent in helping you to grow into thoughtful young people.

We saw that you are enthusiastic in lessons and, as a result, you all do very well, especially in the tests you take in Year 2 and Year 6. Your behaviour is excellent in lessons and around the school. Your parents are very happy with the school and all that it provides for you. Your headteacher is an excellent leader. She and all the teachers work very hard to make the school even better for you.

The school could do some things a little better. It could provide you with a wider range of activities outside lessons. Also, it could check rather more regularly on some of the policies it must have to help the school run smoothly.

May I, on behalf of both inspectors, wish you all the very best for the future.