



Blackthorns Community Primary School, Lindfield

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 125946
LEA West Sussex
Inspection number 282028
Inspection dates 4 July 2006 to 5 July 2006
Reporting inspector Eileen Chadwick AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	3 Blackthorns Close Lindfield
School category	Community		
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 2UA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01444 454866
Number on roll	208	Fax number	01444 414670
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Mike Nichols
Date of previous inspection	29 November 1999	Headteacher	Mrs Ruth Schofield

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average-sized primary school is situated in a residential area of Lindfield and also draws pupils from a wider area. Its social and economic context is favourable and very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is close to the national average. The school has a small specialist unit (SSC) for pupils with severe dyslexia, all of whom have statements of educational need. A significant minority of pupils join the school other than at the usual time. Pupils' overall attainment on entry is above average. There has been substantial building work this year as a result of which the accommodation has been improved.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Blackthorns School provides a satisfactory education with good features. This is similar to the school's own judgement of its effectiveness. Inspection finds that pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils develop excellent interpersonal and social skills as a result of the school's high quality provision.

Good provision in Reception enables children to make good progress and reach or exceed the standards expected of this age. Pupils' progress is generally satisfactory in Years 1 and 2 but slows for younger pupils because there is not enough direct teaching of reading and writing skills.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 3 to 6 and, as a result, by Year 6 pupils' attainment is above average in English and mathematics and average in science. Standards have improved significantly this year in mathematics. However, the school is fully aware that more work is needed to make sure more pupils reach higher levels in mathematics and science and that spelling standards improve. In Years 1 to 6, the lack of a consistent approach to teaching spelling causes pupils to make spelling mistakes, which impairs the quality of their writing. Pupils in the special class for those with special educational needs (SSC) make good progress because of good quality provision. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but varies. Although there is good practice, teaching is not consistently good enough in all parts of the school to ensure that all pupils, including the more capable, do as well as they should. The curriculum is innovative, with some excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity. Care, support and guidance for pupils are good.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and her deputy understand what needs to be done next to raise standards. Recent improvements to the systems for checking teachers' assessments of pupils' progress have led to the identification of underachievement. However, there have not been such rigorous checks on the standards of teaching and learning and subject leaders are not sufficiently involved in monitoring the quality of education in their subjects. Issues from the last inspection have been successfully tackled. The school has the capacity to improve and gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure there is more direct teaching of reading and writing skills in Years 1 and 2, as part of raising pupils' standards in these aspects.
- Raise standards in mathematics and science in Years 3 to 6 by providing more-capable pupils with consistently challenging work.
- Raise standards in spelling by implementing a consistent approach to teaching this throughout the school.
- Implement a more rigorous approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, making full use of the expertise of subject leaders.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they generally reach above-average standards by the time they leave. Pupils' overall attainment on entry is above average. Children in Reception make good progress and, by the end of the year, many have achieved or exceeded the national standards expected for their age. Progress in reading has improved in Year 1 this year and is now generally satisfactory. However, pupils do not make enough progress in learning to spell and punctuate their work. Pupils' progress is satisfactory in mathematics. At the end of Year 2, standards are above average in mathematics. Although standards are average in reading and writing, they are not high enough given pupils' capabilities. However, pupils are making good progress this year and are beginning to catch up from their earlier underachievement. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average in English and mathematics and average in science. This represents satisfactory progress for pupils. Pupils do very well in reading and speaking and listening. Standards are rising significantly in mathematics, although in both mathematics and science, the numbers of pupils reaching the highest achievement levels are still too low. Standards in writing are improving in Years 4 and 5, where there are outstanding examples of imaginative writing, including poetry. However, spelling is a weakness for a substantial minority in Years 3 to 6. Pupils make good progress in information and communication technology (ICT) and, by Year 6, reach high standards. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 and good progress in Years 3 to 6. Pupils in the SSC make good progress.

The school's targets for pupils' achievements are modest and were not met in mathematics in 2006.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils greatly enjoy school and are enthusiastic learners. They particularly appreciate the many creative opportunities they are given through their written work, art and design and music. There are excellent relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults. There are many opportunities for older pupils to take on responsibilities such as acting as peer mediators, being buddies and supporting younger pupils at lunchtimes. They provide excellent role models for the younger ones. Pupils have a good awareness of how to keep safe and of healthy living. They enjoy participating in a wide variety of sports activities, for example.

Behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and around the school. Pupils demonstrate exceptional social and interpersonal skills. Attendance is good and pupils are rarely late. The school council enables pupils to have a genuine influence on the running of the school and development of its learning environment and recreational facilities. Pupils develop their problem-solving, decision-making and teamwork skills very well and successfully gain economic awareness through business and enterprise projects.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There is an excellent spiritual atmosphere in the school. The 'thematic' curriculum, which covers a wide range of stimulating topics, enables pupils to gain an excellent understanding of historic traditions and other cultures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Many teachers have strong subject knowledge and often make sure there is a balance between the direct teaching of subject skills and opportunities for the pupils to suggest ideas and develop their creativity. All teachers provide exciting contexts for learning and have the ability to manage their classes effectively. However, less effective teaching is apparent when there is too little teaching of direct skills or tasks are not so well matched to pupils' different learning needs. This can cause more-capable pupils to mark time when they repeat too much of their earlier learning. Not enough time is spent teaching spelling and punctuation skills. The lack of the same method for tracking pupils' phonic skills, from Reception through to Year 1, restricts the systematic teaching of these skills in Year 1.

Assessment of pupils' progress is thorough but its use for planning work matched to pupils' different abilities is not always as effective. Teaching is good in the SSC, where the smaller steps in literacy are successfully taught and learned.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. In Reception, it is practically based, with a good balance between learning through direct teaching of small and large groups and learning through play. The systematic teaching of literacy and numeracy helps children to make good progress in their first year in the school.

In the rest of the school, the curriculum is broad and very effective links between subjects enable pupils to solve problems which cross subject barriers. There are some excellent in-depth learning opportunities, particularly in art and design, ICT and writing in the upper part of the school. Throughout the school, the curriculum encourages high levels of creativity from pupils. They find projects such as the Romans and mythical dragons stimulating and inspirational. The curriculum is well adapted for meeting the needs of those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The provision for music is of an extremely high quality, with first-class opportunities for pupils to create musical compositions, including songs. The good programme of outside visits and visitors, as well as extra-curricular activities, enriches learning. However, not enough attention is paid to the development of basic literacy skills for some younger pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

These aspects of the school's work are good and some aspects of pastoral care are outstanding. Staff look after pupils very well and foster high quality, caring relationships. Staff and governors are vigilant in ensuring the school is a safe place where pupils feel secure. There are well-established procedures for dealing with child protection issues and for supporting vulnerable pupils. The measures taken against rare cases of bullying are effective. There are comprehensive induction programmes for new entrants to Reception and pupils who join the school at other times.

The school has made good strides in improving the process of assessing pupils' progress. Systems for identifying and tracking pupils' learning are good, including for those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school's focus now is to use its assessment systems for further raising achievement. Pupils know their targets and the use of targets is having a particularly good impact on raising standards in writing for older pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides satisfactory leadership and management and, together with the senior team, has created a strong sense of teamwork. The headteacher knows the pupils and parents very well and many parents are very pleased with the standards of education and care provided. The headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school and provides strong pastoral leadership. This ensures that pupils receive a well-rounded education and an exciting curriculum which inspires them to learn.

The headteacher, together with her recently appointed deputy, has introduced better systems for checking the progress pupils make. The school's thorough analysis of assessments has led to the school accurately identifying priorities for improvement. However, the arrangements for checking the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, whilst satisfactory, are not yet sufficiently rigorous. This is impeding pupils' progress, especially in Year 1. There has been substantial building work this year and accommodation is now greatly improved. The headteacher has led the school well during this period of significant and potentially disruptive change. Subject leaders in English and mathematics have been appointed recently and have not yet undertaken sufficient monitoring of teaching in these subjects.

School improvement planning is satisfactory. It identifies the right priorities and takes account of the views of parents. Governors' leadership is satisfactory. They are active in the life of the school and keep a watchful eye on how well pupils are doing. The school has the capacity to improve and provides satisfactory value for money.

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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
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	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	2	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	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	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?	2	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?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	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

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. We think your school is a happy and friendly place. It was easy to see how much you enjoy coming to school. This letter is to tell you what we particularly liked about your school and to mention some things that could be improved.

These are some of the things we thought were good:

We think your attitudes to school are very good and your behaviour is excellent.

You are very friendly to each other and help each other out.

You are very good at solving problems and work well together in teams.

The school helps you to have very good ideas and create some really good songs, poetry and pictures.

You make really good progress in ICT.

Outside visits and visitors make your work exciting.

We know your headteacher and the staff are working hard to make the school even better. To help in this we have asked them to do a number of things:

Make sure those of you in younger classes always make good progress in reading and writing.

Make sure those of you in older classes are given work that is not too easy in mathematics and science.

Help all of you to become better at spelling.

Make better checks on how well you are all learning.

With very best wishes,

Eileen Chadwick Lead inspector