

Almondbury Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107727
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	287898
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Roger Gill

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Edwards
Headteacher	Miss Jane Sargent
Date of previous school inspection	19 November 2001
School address	Longcroft Almondbury Huddersfield West Yorkshire HD5 8XW
Telephone number	01484 223954
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Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school, with a falling roll, in which most children are from White British backgrounds. The proportion from minority ethnic heritages exceeds that typical for schools nationally. Many of these children are at an early stage in learning English as an additional language. There is also a small group of refugees and asylum seekers. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, but an above average proportion has a statement of special educational need. The school has been awarded Investors in People and ActiveMark awards. Links with schools in five European countries have been built up over a number of years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Almondbury is an outstanding school, which gives its children a whole host of life-enhancing experiences. The school's chosen path makes it what it is. Its European links, for example, have massive benefits for children's academic and personal development. Furthermore, the school's keenness for exploiting the educational use of its magnificent school grounds fires children's imaginations and brings learning to life.

The headteacher is adamant that it will never 'arrive' in terms of its aspirations. That is why it describes itself as a good school. Reticence and the recognition that standards are average this year instead of being above average, as is the case usually, lie behind the school's own assessment. Things never stand still. The school is applying for an International Schools award, for example, and preparing to pair up with children in Nigeria. The inspection judgement differs from the school's self-assessment because children's achievement is excellent, even when standards are average, and their personal development is remarkable. The headteacher, governors and staff have analysed every scrap of evidence in the school to make learning better for children. Monitoring and evaluation are powerful and accurate tools of management; the school is just disinclined to blow its own trumpet.

Parents know just how effective the school is. Typical comments relating to the exemplary curriculum and the immensely influential teaching include 'My child has progressed more than our family could ever have imagined' and 'My child wants to come in the holidays.' The school was described as being a very good one in 2001, when it was last inspected. Improvements since then have been huge. The European dimension, the interest in learning beyond the classroom and the successful inclusion of a much wider range of children are all new, and successful, enterprises.

Children achieve superbly in reading, writing and mathematics because play is so purposeful, particularly in the Foundation Stage, and children prosper in Years 1 and 2 because any problems in their learning are ironed out by a strong team of teachers, assistants and volunteers. This combination of captivating play and precision teaching of basic skills is carefully orchestrated by the headteacher behind the scenes. The school welcomes children from more diverse backgrounds than ever before, but their progress too is rapid. Furthermore, the school has a justified reputation for teaching children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities successfully.

The oldest children are ultra-enthusiastic about their school. They relate, without drawing breath sometimes, how meeting visitors from five countries, learning French, making dens in the school grounds and pond dipping have all made them 'love school'. Neither do they stint on talking about the basics. Boys, for example, relish 'maths and tests', which shows how well the school has realised its plans to raise their achievement. Children in Year 2 are proud and confident because their early experiences in Nursery and Reception equipped them so well for learning, staying safe, keeping healthy and joining in.

The influence of robust leadership and management from governors, headteacher, deputy headteacher and staff is evident in children's academic achievements. Moreover, the children's first-rate personal development is due, in part, to the dedicated care and support provided from all quarters. It is in academic guidance that there is scope to make good practice outstanding. Children know some targets to help their learning improve and they are aware that their teachers plot their progress, but an even closer appreciation of how well they are doing and of their next steps is necessary. The school's plans for development, including those

relating to children's self-assessment, are detailed and wide ranging, as it never rests on its laurels. Its capacity to improve is outstanding as demonstrated by the advances made since 2001.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that all children have a clear idea of their next academic targets and are involved in assessing their progress towards these targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are above average except when there are high numbers of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, progress is outstanding throughout the school. Attainment on entry was below that typical for Nursery age children in 2001 and it has decreased of late. However, children make speedy progress as soon as they arrive because activities are so carefully designed to get them socialising and learning, or improving, their English. Children can then make the best use of educational play to broaden their skills even further. The pattern is that children usually reach the expected levels by the end of Reception and then go on to exceed the national average at the end of Year 2. Standards are average in Year 2 currently, but children have achieved outstandingly to reach this level given the difficulties faced by many. Children progress well in other subjects owing to the rich curriculum they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children enjoy school greatly. The little things seem to give them most joy. Some children, for example, marvelled at the sunlight as it filtered through the trees in the school grounds. These thoughtful moments are combined with enthusiasm for a healthy lifestyle. They care about what they eat and keeping fit. It is easy to see why attendance is above average, for the majority of children, when school is so appealing. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, not least in the seamless way in which the understanding about different cultures is threaded through the curriculum. Children love helping others. For example, children speak of being a 'talking partner' or 'book buddy' in ways that denote the kudos they derive from these responsibilities. Beyond the school, liaison with the local newspaper, town councillors and their MP over the school's recycling project has taught them valuable lessons about social responsibility.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Children learn swiftly because teaching is so inspiring. The development of specific skills and a challenge for higher attainers are balanced very well. For example, in Reception some children chose to study tadpoles in the tank, while the teacher developed mental arithmetic skills using a frog glove puppet. Some higher attainers were so motivated that they wrote their own subtraction problems using tens and units. Occasionally, older children in the Foundation Stage lack the right level of challenge, but this does not diminish the effect of teaching overall. Assessment is used very productively to plan new lessons. That is why play is so beneficial in the Nursery, for example: it is carefully structured to meet children's identified needs. Teaching

in Years 1 and 2 develops understanding superbly through practical work and the judicious use of capable teaching assistants. However, thinking about how successful learning has been sometimes lacks the full participation of children.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The very impressive curriculum has far more to it than the European links and the use of the school grounds. Nursery and Reception children make special studies in depth such as the one in which they learned about hedgehogs. Provision for literacy and numeracy in Years 1 and 2 is very carefully geared to children's individual needs and presented in a fun way. For example, in a recent village study, these children practised their reading, writing and arithmetic in a Number Hunt. Children learned about the history of coal mining and this prompted older children to marvel at the experience of absolute darkness in a way that combined a sense of wonder and historical learning at the same time. There are opportunities to learn French and also many clubs in which children can develop new interests. Days devoted to special themes are popular and health-promoting such as the Busy Body Sports Day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care and support provided are first-class. Child protection arrangements and health and safety procedures are in place and working. Very positive relationships exist throughout. Children say that everyone is friendly and any bullying is nipped in the bud. The differing needs of children are met because the scrutiny of development is meticulous. Parents are frequently involved in their children's learning, which enables them to help at home. Attendance is monitored very carefully and the school works hard when, on occasions, individual lapses cause attendance to dip to the average. The way that children are guided by targets is good. Older ones delight in having personal and academic goals to aim for. Children know the purposes of a lesson well because these are explained thoroughly. In the best lessons, they know how their success will be quantified, but this is not consistently the case.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's skilful and knowledgeable leadership is significant in its effect. An ambition that children will receive the best possible education resonates among governors and the entire staff. This is the result of the headteacher's tireless and principled determination. The European links make this school particularly special.

School staff led an expedition with seven Year 2 children and their families to Finland in February 2006. Then staff from Finland and the four other countries visited Almondbury. Thus children's horizons were broadened greatly. The school is unassuming about its influence, because leaders at all levels are never satisfied. They are always planning for the future. Monitoring and evaluation describe how well the school is doing, and the budget is analysed extremely closely. This is necessary because high costs and a falling roll demand prudence, which governors provide admirably. The school has sustained its effectiveness in changed circumstances, providing excellent value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Almondbury CE (VC) Infant School, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD5 8XW

Thank you for your help when I inspected your school. I thoroughly enjoyed my two days with you all.

You go to a fantastic school. I was spellbound by all that you have to do such as digging for treasure in the Foundation Stage yard, studying tadpoles with huge magnifiers and sending your work off for children in Finland to enjoy. Everyone I spoke to was keen to show off their school. I will not forget my trip to see the school pond with six of you and the water snail that we discovered. The children I sat with at lunchtime told me about all the clubs for tennis and gardening, for example. What sticks in my memory the most are the stories they told of the Outdoor Week, when you did things like orienteering and making sculptures in the school grounds. It definitely was not like that when I went to school.

I learned how special the teaching was at helping you to learn. What really impressed me was the way that your teachers work so well with teaching assistants and volunteer parents to make everything so interesting. You are very lucky to have such wonderful school grounds in which to play and learn. It is easy for me to see how children make such good progress through the school. Teachers in the different classes work so closely together that your journey from one to the next is very smooth.

I know everyone wants to improve even in a great school such as yours. So, I have suggested one thing that will help. Your teachers need to help you become experts at talking about how well you have done and at what you need to do better. To do this you will need a few more helpful targets and a chance to point out how well you are getting on with them in lessons and over a few weeks. This will be mainly for the older children in Years 1 and 2, but I am sure that children in the Foundation Stage will enjoy doing something similar.