



Combe Down CofE VC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109230
Local Authority Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number 288320
Inspection date 13 February 2007
Reporting inspector Anthony Shield

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Church Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Combe Down
Age range of pupils	4-11		Bath BA2 5JQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01225 840324
Number on roll (school)	402	Fax number	01225 835459
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Paul Langham
		Headteacher	Richard Bullard
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Combe Down is larger than most primary schools, situated on the outskirts of Bath and serving a mixed community of largely private housing. Pupils come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and on entry most children's attainment is a little above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is below average. The school has recently gone through an unsettled period, with frequent and significant changes of leadership during the last 12 months. The headteacher has been in post since January 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some considerable strengths, ambitious for itself and its pupils. It is poised to do even better. The school has been sustained through a difficult period by its cohesive sense of community, the hard work and determination of all its staff, and strong parental support. Pupils achieve well in an atmosphere of trust and good relationships, reflecting the school's core belief that children learn best in a secure and happy environment. Parents commented on the 'professionalism, commitment and friendliness' of staff.

Achievement and standards are good overall. Children get off to a very good start in the Reception Year. Teaching here encourages an excitement about learning, and many children exceed the expected levels by the time they start in Year 1. Good and lively teaching in Years 1 and 2 ensures pupils continue to make good progress, so that standards by the end of Year 2 are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress through Years 3 to 6 in recent years has been satisfactory. As a result of recent improvements, progress is now good, and Year 6 pupils are on track to reach challenging targets. Standards in science are exceptionally high and progress is excellent. Although pupils reach standards that are significantly above average in English and mathematics, pupils' progress is weaker in these subjects. However, progress has begun to improve in these areas, and pupils gain a good grounding in basic literacy and numeracy skills, which prepares them well for their future.

As a result of strong procedures for care, guidance and support, pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils show considerable enjoyment in all tasks and take pride in their work. Their enthusiastic approach is an important factor in their success. Behaviour is good, and pupils are kind and sensitive to others. They take their responsibilities seriously and their contribution to the school and the wider community is particularly impressive.

Teaching is good and has improved as teachers have worked to provide work more closely geared to the needs of individual pupils. Imaginative planning helps ensure that pupils have exciting and interesting tasks. As a result, pupils work hard to do their best. Interesting and attractive classrooms help build on pupils' motivation and excitement. In lessons, feedback and assessment on how well pupils are doing is not consistently well used to ensure pupils know how to improve and how to work things out for themselves. An excitingly planned curriculum has some very good features. For example, the occasional use of whole weeks devoted to one area of learning gives a strong boost to pupils' learning. There is an excellent range of enrichment activities and clubs. At the heart of the school's work is its care and concern for the individual child, and as one parent commented 'helps to make Combe Down the school it is'. The use of performance data to support academic guidance is less well embedded in everyday practice, but newly established procedures are already making a difference.

Leadership and management are good, and the school has a strong sense of shared values. The recently appointed headteacher has a clear vision and has begun to put in place management systems to enable more effective monitoring and self-evaluation.

Management roles are still developing, and as yet subject leaders and other staff, while keen to get involved, are not all making a consistently strong contribution. An effective senior team offer good support for the headteacher and their colleagues.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve progress in English and mathematics through Years 3 to 6 so that it matches that of science.
- Make more rigorous use of assessment information to set precise targets so that pupils know how to improve and give them the confidence to be more independent.
- Develop leadership and management roles at all levels to ensure a consistent contribution to monitoring and self-evaluation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils do well and by the end of Year 6 standards overall are well above average and exceptionally high in science, where standards have risen significantly since the last inspection. In recent years, standards have been consistently above average in English and mathematics, but pupils do not make the same level of progress in these subjects as they do in science. In recent years, progress overall in Years 3 to 6 has been satisfactory, but is now improving and pupils are currently achieving well. Most pupils meet or exceed their targets. Standards by the end of Year 2 are also above average in reading, writing and mathematics and pupils achieve well through Years 1 and 2. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress throughout the school. Children in the Reception class get a good start because of the well planned curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are polite and courteous. They are enthusiastic about school and keen to do well. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, but do not always have the confidence to solve problems on their own. Attendance is above average. Behaviour is good and a number of acts of kindness were observed. Pupils report that bullying is very rare, and is dealt with quickly and not allowed 'to linger in the air' as one pupil put it. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Pupils work collaboratively in groups, listening and responding to each other with maturity. The way in which two girls invited other pupils to audition for their rock band in assembly was typical of the self-assurance of many pupils.

The school is working towards Healthy School status and has done much to encourage the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and physical activity, through special activities such as the annual sports week. Many pupils take part in after school clubs to play sport. Pupils feel safe and know there are trusted adults at hand. They willingly take responsibility, and older pupils act as monitors, play leaders and lunchtime companions for the younger ones. Strong support is given to help raise funds for a range of charities.

Pupils know that their views will be valued, and the school council is an effective forum for discussion.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching throughout the school is improving rapidly. Lessons are characterised by good relationships and a quiet, purposeful buzz of activity. Classrooms are attractive and colourful environments, and pupils respond well to the thoughtfully planned activities which challenge and interest them. In a Year 5 lesson, for example, pupils' imagination and attention were captured through making hexagonal prisms to mirror the Giant's Causeway. Feedback and marking is improving and the use of individual learning targets in English and mathematics is beginning to focus pupils' learning. However, feedback on how well pupils are doing is not consistently effective. Although pupils know that teachers and teaching assistants will help them if they get stuck, pupils are sometimes not given enough opportunities to work things out for themselves.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

'A diverse and exciting curriculum, with ambitious events such as book week and arts week, which the children love', was the way one parent expressed his admiration for the school's vibrant and well planned curriculum. Although key literacy and numeracy skills are not neglected, the curriculum is much better balanced than at the time of the last inspection. Special weeks provide added interest and opportunities for cross-curricular approaches. For example, the inspection took place during arts week and pupils were enthusiastically engaged in a range of art, dance and music work. Pupils commented on how much they enjoy the 'fun and creative' approaches to their learning. They also speak excitedly about their involvement in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, which include philosophy and knitting as well as the more common music and sports clubs. The curriculum is well planned to cater for the range of abilities, including pupils with learning difficulties. The Foundation Stage curriculum is carefully and imaginatively planned.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Teachers know pupils very well and their care and welfare is central to the school's values. A family ethos of care for one another is apparent throughout the school. The school is vigilant in ensuring the safety and welfare of all pupils, and is responding urgently to parental concerns regarding the security of the site. Child protection procedures are fully in place. Systems for tracking academic performance are in place, but are not used confidently by all teachers to track progress, set targets and intervene to prevent possible underachievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Recent disruption to the leadership of the school has not affected the school's strong sense of shared values or the confidence of the community it serves. The new headteacher has a clear view of what must be done not only to maintain the school's strengths but also to move it forward. He has begun the process of putting into place more robust management systems designed to improve accountability and to provide a stronger framework for self-evaluation. Although this process had already begun before the headteacher's arrival, the process has accelerated. Its impact on improving teaching and pupils' progress is already being felt. An impressive group of senior teachers are relishing the opportunities to contribute. However, management roles are still developing, and as yet subject leaders and other staff are not as involved in school self-evaluation processes as they could be. The quality of school self-evaluation is satisfactory.

A committed team of governors under the thoughtful leadership of the newly appointed chair provide satisfactory support and challenge. Governors are now better informed, enabling them to intervene with more confidence. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I enjoyed meeting you and your teachers and watching you learn. I especially enjoyed talking to some of you and watching you take part so enthusiastically in arts week. You spoke clearly and sensibly about your school. Combe Down is a good school and you can be proud to attend it.

What I liked most about your school

- The enthusiastic way in which you join in lessons and out of school activities.
- Your good behaviour and the care you take of each other.
- Everyone gets on well together.
- Your teachers take very good care of you and help you to become mature and responsible.
- Good teaching is giving you a chance to learn lots of exciting things and make good progress.

What I have asked your school to do now

- Ensure that you do as well in English and mathematics as you do in science.
- Make sure you know how well you are doing and how you might improve; ensure you know how to sort things out on your own when you get stuck.
- Make sure that all staff know what they have to do to make your school even better.

Thank you once again for your help during the inspection. Good luck in the future!