

Culmstock Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113071
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	289500
Inspection date	26 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Shirley Billington

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Collier
Headteacher	Cathy Noble
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001
School address	Culmstock Cullompton EX15 3JP
Telephone number	01884 840598
Fax number	01884 841811

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and none speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is smaller than in most schools. Children's skills on entry to the Reception Year are broadly average, although their speaking and listening skills are often limited. There have been significant staffing difficulties over the past two years and there are still some temporary arrangements in place. An acting headteacher has been in post since November 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school has been through a troubled period as a result of disruptions to staffing, particularly at senior management level. Though some issues are yet to be resolved, good improvement has been made recently in strengthening the quality of provision to address underachievement. The success of the measures taken is due to a large extent to the good leadership of the acting headteacher. She has tackled weaknesses, utilising support from the local authority, to put in place a secure strategy to take the school forward. The school is now providing a satisfactory education for its pupils.

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. Many pupils in Years 5 and 6 have made up lost ground at a rapid rate during this year. There are some differences, however, in how well pupils are doing in different areas. Over the past year, they have made good gains in reading. Standards in science have also improved significantly as a result of the work done to improve pupils' skills in investigation. Writing is not as strong as reading and there are weaknesses in pupils' abilities to organise their work and in presentation. Standards in mathematics declined sharply in 2006. While there has been improvement this year, more needs to be done to improve pupils' understanding of the most effective strategies to use in calculation.

The improvements in pupils' achievement have resulted from the introduction of rigorous assessment systems to establish the next steps in their learning. This has improved the quality of teaching and learning, which is now satisfactory. The curriculum is sound and has been adapted to introduce links across subjects to make learning more meaningful. Planning takes account of the range of abilities in each class, but potentially higher-attaining pupils are not always challenged and sometimes mark time in lessons.

Pupils' personal development is good and the vast majority has positive attitudes to learning. They work well together and generally show consideration for others, with older pupils eager to take on responsibility for younger ones. Pupils develop a range of personal and academic skills that prepare them well for the next stage in their learning and for later life. The key reason for this is the good care, guidance and support that are provided. Many parents are appreciative of this, saying, for example, that their child is 'well cared for in an encouraging environment where he feels safe, makes good academic progress and has fun'. Reception children make a satisfactory start. Their personal and social skills develop well so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.

Parents are appreciative of the improvements they have seen recently. Although several have some understandable concerns about the frequent changes of staff and the impact on their children, they are overwhelmingly positive about the school's work. They are right to be confident. Leadership and management are now satisfactory. Good strategies have been put in place to check on the school's effectiveness and to address weaknesses. These have had a positive impact and the school is securely based to make further improvement when a permanent headteacher takes up post.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by improving pupils' skills in calculation and application of their knowledge of numbers in problem solving.
- Improve pupils' abilities to organise and present their written work.

- Ensure that potentially higher-attaining pupils are challenged to extend their thinking in lessons and to reach the standards of which they are capable.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception Year and most are working within expected levels at the start of Year 1. Their personal and social skills and their communication skills develop well. Steady progress continues in Years 1 and 2 and standards at the end of Year 2 are broadly average. In Years 3 to 6, pupils have not been doing as well as they should and there has been a significant element of underachievement in the past. This has been successfully tackled and achievement is now satisfactory throughout the school. A significant proportion of pupils in Years 5 and 6 have made up lost ground at a rapid rate over the past year and overall standards are now average. Pupils have done particularly well in reading and in science. Gains in writing and mathematics are satisfactory, but there is more to do in these areas to raise standards. Throughout the school, there is scope to extend the skills of potentially higher-attaining pupils and to increase the proportion working at higher levels at the end of Year 6. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from well-targeted support and make satisfactory progress in relation to their targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils generally enjoy school and several commented that lessons have become more interesting recently. They are usually attentive in lessons, but a few struggle to maintain concentration and to conform to expectations of behaviour. The vast majority behave well, say there is very little bullying and are confident that an adult would help them if they were concerned about anything. Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, knowing, for example, why they can only eat fruit at break times. Older pupils make a good contribution to the school community in a number of ways, including their involvement in fund raising and organising the library. The school council enables pupils to have a voice in various developments. They have been involved, for instance, in agreeing rules for playground games and formulating the school's travel plan. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils develop a keen sense of responsibility and enjoy opportunities to work together in pairs in lessons and in teams in competitive activities. They learn to appreciate the wider world through studies of artists and learning about a range of religions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

A focused programme of support and training has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers have secure knowledge of what they are going to teach. The purpose of lessons is made clear to pupils so that they know what they should achieve and what targets they are working towards. Most pupils are eager to succeed in lessons and appreciate, as one said, that 'teachers encourage you to keep trying'. Information from assessment is beginning

to be used well to plan different activities to meet the range of pupil needs, but at times there is a lack of challenge for higher-attaining pupils. Lessons are well organised and time is generally used well. Marking has improved and is often helpful and evaluative, but there is still some variation in the quality across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Adaptations have been made to the curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils and this is leading to improvements in achievement. In mathematics, for example, teaching arrangements have been revised and a range of strategies introduced to promote a more consistent rate of progress. This has had a positive impact, but there is still work to be done to extend provision for teaching effective ways of calculating and using knowledge of number to solve problems. Pupils engage in a range of written work in subjects across the curriculum, but do not always have a thorough understanding of how to present and organise their work for different purposes. The curriculum is enriched well through a range of clubs, links with other local schools and visits and visitors. Pupils have good opportunities to participate in sporting activities and compete in events such as athletics and tag rugby competitions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well known to staff and parents appreciate the level of care provided for them. As one parent explained, 'All the staff are very approachable and friendly and always have time to talk to you if required'. There are good arrangements for ensuring the safety of pupils in school. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good support, with advice sought from outside agencies and adaptations made to provision to meet their needs. A good assessment system has been introduced this year and this is ensuring there is good information on pupils' achievement. This is being well used to identify those pupils who are not doing as well as they should and to set targets to accelerate their progress. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled in analysing this information to focus teaching on the next step in pupils' learning. There is scope to ensure that it is now used to raise expectations of potentially higher-attaining pupils and to plan activities that extend their thinking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher has been instrumental in leading the drive for improvement that has resulted in accelerated progress for pupils over the past year. Rigorous systems have been put in place to check on the quality of provision and to address any weaknesses. This has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning, the way that pupils' progress is tracked and the analysis of information to identify the next step to further boost standards. Staff deployment has been reviewed and teaching arrangements adjusted to make the best use of available skills.

Several teachers have taken on new responsibilities and there are still some temporary arrangements in place because of uncertainties about staffing. Nevertheless, training has strengthened the roles of subject leaders in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the areas that they oversee. This has supported developments in provision for English, mathematics and science. Much of this work is in the early stages and there is still some way to go before

subject leaders take on the full range of monitoring activities. Governors are supportive and well informed. Many governors are new, but they have received training and are beginning to play a key role in the strategic management of the school.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	2
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	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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

27 June 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Culmstock Primary School, Cullompton, Devon EX15 3JP

Some of you may remember that I visited recently to see how you are getting on. Thanks to all of you who talked to me about the activities you get involved in and explained how things like the school council work. I thought you might be interested in what I am saying in my report. Your school is providing you with a sound education. Your acting headteacher is working hard with the staff and governors to make sure that it is getting better all the time.

Here are some of the 'highlights'.

- You are making the progress that you should in your learning and those of you in Years 5 and 6 have made very good progress over the last year.
- You know how important it is to stay fit, healthy and safe and the school takes good care of you.
- Good work has been done to make sure that the way you are taught and the things you learn are improved. Several of you told me you have seen a difference this year.
- Those of you in Year 6 are mature and responsible and well prepared for the move to secondary schools. I was very impressed with the way you are raising money for your trip to Cardiff – have a great time!

I have suggested that the school does three things now:

- makes sure that you learn the best ways to calculate your answers and work out problems in mathematics;
- helps you to do as well in writing as you do in reading by making sure you know how to organise your written work and present it properly;
- makes sure that those of you who are quick to learn are really made to think in every lesson.

You can help by continuing to work hard to reach your targets.

Thank you again for your help.

Best wishes

Shirley Billington Lead inspector