

Polegate Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114435
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	289909
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	398
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Rogers
Headteacher	Clive Hale
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2001
School address	Oakleaf Drive Polegate BN26 6PT
Telephone number	01323 482404
Fax number	01323 482404

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In this larger than average primary school, an average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities. The school has a small number of pupils of Traveller background in most year groups.

Building works are currently under way to open a Children's Centre on site in September 2007. The school has had many changes of teaching staff over recent years due to circumstances beyond its control.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Though satisfactory overall, this is a school with many good features. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to make learning fun and there is an impressive range of clubs and other activities. Pupils are looked after well so that they feel safe at school and they have, know and use personal targets in English and mathematics that are helping to improve their work. As a result of the good curriculum and the good, care, guidance and support that they receive, pupils' personal development is good. Behaviour is exemplary and pupils are keen to learn. Parents described how their children's 'ability, confidence and enthusiasm for school has improved 100%' as a result of the 'friendly and caring atmosphere'.

The headteacher and leadership team have been very effective in creating this climate for learning where pupils want to do well. The many changes of teaching staff have, however, been a barrier to the school's success. Some parents voice worries over the number of changes of teacher which have followed from, for example, several staff taking maternity leave. There is no doubt that this staffing turbulence has reduced the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning. Though there is much good and some outstanding teaching, teaching and learning are satisfactory because there has been interruption to pupils' routines and there is inconsistent practice between classes. Teachers do not always match work as closely as they could to pupils' different abilities. There is some excellent marking in some classes but this is not universal across the school. The changes of teacher mean that pupils do not all steadily build on what they have learnt before and so their achievement over time is satisfactory rather than good.

It is to the credit of school leaders that they have been successful in minimising the disruptive impact of the staffing difficulties. Leadership and management are good. School leaders' monitoring of teaching, learning and progress is thorough and, though it has not eliminated inconsistent practice among changing staff, it has substantially reduced it. Despite the problems, average standards have been maintained over the last five years in the Year 6 national tests and in the assessments made at the end of Year 2. This represents good, sustained improvement since the last inspection, when standards were much lower, and shows the school's good capacity to move forward. In the Reception Year, where the impact of staff changes has been less, children make good progress, attaining standards that are a little above average from a starting point that is a little below that expected for children of this age.

What the school should do to improve further

- More closely match work to pupils' abilities so that there is consistent challenge for more able pupils but work is not too difficult for others.
- Ensure that all marking gives pupils clear guidance on the next steps they need to take to improve their work.

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 good progress in the Reception Year and attain standards that are a little above average. Standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 have been broadly average in every year since

the last inspection. This represents good, sustained improvement since that inspection and shows that pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities generally make similar progress to their classmates because they benefit from good support. In recent years, pupils from Traveller backgrounds have done exceptionally well. Some more able pupils do not do as well as they should.

The school has worked hard to further raise achievement, especially in writing, where standards have lagged behind other subjects. These initiatives have been impeded by the continuing staffing instability and it is too soon to see their impact. School leaders have set exceptionally challenging whole-school targets because they want staff and pupils to 'reach for the sky', but they acknowledge that these highly aspirational targets are unlikely to be achieved.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The emphasis given to ensuring pupils' good personal development is reflected in their excellent behaviour and their enthusiasm for school. Pupils also appreciate the importance of schooling. As one pupil explained, 'I enjoy school and want a good education so that I can get a good job.' Attendance is a little above average.

Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Pupils get on well with each other. On the rare occasions that bullying incidents occur, pupils say they are dealt with effectively by staff. Pupils show a good knowledge of cultural diversity. This is developed in assemblies and by the Globe Trotters Club that gives pupils an understanding of the traditions and customs of other countries.

Pupils take responsibility by being school councillors, prefects and playground 'buddies' and make a positive contribution to the school community. It was the school council, for example, that suggested extending the 'Star of the Week' award to teachers as well as pupils. Pupils also take responsibility for their learning and have a good understanding of their individual targets for improving their work. Their key literacy and numeracy skills prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage of their education. Pupils have a good understanding of the need for regular exercise and a healthy diet, and they have a good understanding of how to stay safe; for example, they all wear protective sun hats when playing outside.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are many lessons where pupils are given work that challenges and motivates them well. This is not, however, a consistent feature of teaching. In some lessons, the tasks that pupils are given are not matched closely enough to pupils' different abilities so that sometimes work is too difficult for some and too easy for others. Teachers know and get on well with their pupils and so pupils behave very well and are, as a parent put it, 'motivated to find out more'. Teachers make skilful use of interactive whiteboards. These add to pupils' enjoyment and motivation. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils who need additional help, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. As a result, these pupils focus well on what they are doing, find their tasks fun, and learn as well as others in the class.

In some classes, pupils benefit from excellent marking that engages them in genuine dialogue about their progress and gives them very clear guidance on what they need to do next to move

their learning on. This is not consistent throughout the school. In some classes, marking does little more than acknowledge that work has been completed. Some teachers give pupils mixed messages by not picking up literacy points when marking writing in subjects other than English.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

From the start of the Reception Year, the curriculum is creative and enlivened through themed days, such as Victorian and Roman days. A strong feature is the way ICT is used as a tool to boost learning across all subjects. Media projects, such as animation film-making, run in conjunction with a local secondary school, also help to make learning interesting and fun. Further added interest comes through visiting artists and archaeologists, for example, which resulted in a wonderful Iron Age house being erected in the grounds. Wide-ranging visits include foreign and residential stays which do much to enhance pupils' personal development. However, some parents express concerns about the amount of money they are invited to contribute to such activities. An excellent range of after-school and lunchtime clubs gives pupils opportunities to extend their interests and artistic and physical skills. Pupils can choose, for example, to attend Globe Trotters, drama, birdwatchers or cookery, to name but a few. A homework club provides help for those pupils who have difficulty completing work at home.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents are appreciative of the attention their children receive and understand that the school takes very good care of them. One described how their son had been given the opportunity to 'help' younger children with their swimming as a way of giving him extra time in the pool, explaining that 'he was very nervous of the water and this attention really helped him to grow in confidence'.

The school's support systems ensure pupils' well-being and safety. The procedures to ensure that children are protected are up-to-date and secure. Vulnerable pupils benefit from good support and many are identified early on in Reception, which enables support to be tailored for them at an early stage in their schooling.

The school has developed good systems to track pupils' progress. Those identified as at risk of falling behind are quickly identified and given extra help. Pupils are set personal targets to improve their standards in literacy and numeracy. These give them good guidance on what they need to do to do better, although in some classes opportunities are missed to reinforce this guidance through marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and leadership team have had to deal with difficult periods of staff turnover and change which have impeded school improvement and have taken their toll on the overall quality of teaching and pupils' rate of achievement. Nonetheless, these difficulties have been handled well. Standards have been maintained through rigorous monitoring of teaching, with a particular focus on pupils' learning. Self-evaluation is accurate and areas identified as needing improvement, such as writing, have rightly been made priorities in the school improvement plan. However, strategies put in place to boost standards in writing have not had time to show

significant impact throughout the school, particularly with several classes affected by the staffing instability. School leaders have had particular success in creating a school environment where pupils are happy and want to do well. It is this that is most appreciated by parents. As one put it, 'Polegate Primary is a very uplifting, challenging and exciting place to learn and grow up in.' Parents are especially pleased with the way school leaders have succeeded in making learning fun across a wide range of subjects. One described how 'I have seen this school grow over the last six years and I continue to be astounded at the achievements across so many areas of the curriculum'. The school is very well resourced with ICT equipment that is used well by staff to enhance learning and enthuse pupils. A consistent approach to discipline, modelled by senior staff, results in excellent behaviour throughout the school.

Governors are well aware of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They are well informed through training and regular visits to school and via presentations made to them. This enables them to be appropriately challenging as well as supportive of staff.

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.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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?	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	1
The attendance of learners	3
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	3

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?	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.

Annex A

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	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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

22 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Polegate Primary School, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6PT

Thank you all for making us so welcome and helping us when we visited your school. We were pleased to see how happy you are in school. We enjoyed talking to many of you and seeing you hard at work in lessons. I especially enjoyed, as you all did, the 1S class assembly and was proud to be awarded my very first 'Star of the Week' award!

Your school is giving you a sound education. We were pleased to see how very well behaved you are and how well you get on with each other. You are keen to do well, and we think that is due to the way in which the school looks after you well and provides you with such an interesting range of things to do in and out of lessons. Many of you told us how all the ICT in the school helps make learning interesting and fun.

There have been a lot of staff changes at the school. These have been managed well so they have not disrupted things as much as they might have done. Nonetheless, they have had some effect. There is quite a lot of good teaching in the school, but teaching and the progress you make is satisfactory rather than good because there is some inconsistency due to the staff changes. It is this that we have asked the school to try to iron out. Sometimes, for example, work in lessons is too easy for some of you and too hard for others. There is some really good marking that helps you to improve your work, but not all the marking is as good as this, and that too we would like to see improved.

You can all help as well by continuing to work hard and do your best and by asking how you can make your work even better.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when we came to see you.

Yours faithfully

Selwyn Ward Lead Inspector