



Ditchling (St Margaret's) Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114500
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 289939
Inspection date 10 January 2007
Reporting inspector Steffi Penny HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Lewes Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Ditchling
Age range of pupils	4-11		Hassocks BN6 8TU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01273 844130
Number on roll (school)	150	Fax number	01273 842673
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Jan Lear
		Headteacher	David Simon
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002		

Age group 4-11	Inspection date 10 January 2007	Inspection number 289939
--------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves an affluent catchment area with the majority of parents coming from professional backgrounds. Very few pupils are entitled to free school meals. The catchment area is large, including children from neighbouring villages and towns, and some children remain at the school despite moving away. The vast majority of pupils have a White British heritage. Compared with the national average the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties or disabilities is very low. The headteacher came to post in summer 2005 and at that time all permanent infant staff were on long-term sickness leave. There has been a relatively high turnover of staff.

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 where pupils achieve well. It has some significant strengths on the pastoral side which have resulted in the very successful promotion of pupils' self-esteem. Consequently the personal development and well-being of pupils is outstanding. Pupils trust the adults and are prepared to work hard and get involved in lessons. Pupils have a very clear understanding about healthy living, and how to remain safe. The systems to support and safeguard pupils are robust. Pupils participate very well in their own community as class or school council representatives. They are also effectively involved in the wider community, for example when they participate in the Ditchling Village Fair, take part in coffee mornings to raise funds for charity and help Ditchling museum develop educational resources. A particular reason for the success of this school is the close partnership that it develops with other schools, the university, different places of worship and the local community. The school's academic standards contribute significantly to the pupils' good preparation for later life.

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school varies from year to year but is generally at least average or better. The school has noticed a marked improvement in the skills and understanding with which children start school since it has worked in closer partnership with a local pre-school provider. Pupils learn well in the Foundation Stage and standards are well above both East Sussex and national averages. Despite some turbulence that has occurred in staffing, so that achievement at the end of Year 2 is satisfactory, achievement by the end of Year 6 for all pupils is good and overall standards are above those nationally. In writing, standards are average.

Self-evaluation has effectively ensured improvement to the education provided by the school. Since his appointment the headteacher has needed to make several changes to the structures, procedures and records that the school has. This he has done with the full support of the governors, staff and most parents. Where possible he has not rushed to provide quick fixes and instant results. Instead he and the staff have looked at ways of driving improvement through an evidence-informed approach with discussion and a shared understanding. A good example of this is the development and planning of a new curriculum. Currently the curriculum, although satisfactory, is very subject based. The school has recognised that whilst this has ensured statutory coverage, it has had a very negative impact on teaching and learning. Thus the curriculum is currently under review to allow for better class organisation with a skill based approach and greater cross-curricular links. The school has also accurately identified that, through better and consistent self-assessment procedures, pupils would better understand what they need to do to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing for the potentially higher attaining pupils.
- Improve the systems for academic guidance so that pupils are able to understand what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that pupils' progress is consistently good throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards by the end of Year 2 are broadly average. Although socio-economic factors would suggest that the results of national tests should be higher, this represents satisfactory achievement for pupils. This is because these pupils have had disrupted infant experiences, with high rates of staff illness and multiple staff changes.

Achievement and standards at the end of Year 6 are good and represent a consistent and improving trend. In the national tests for 2006 most of the children met their challenging targets. Standards are generally significantly above national and East Sussex averages although writing is broadly in line with the national average. The school has rightly identified spelling and early phonics work as areas for improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils, including their spiritual, moral and social education, are outstanding, and reflect the extremely effective strategies the school employs to develop pupils' self-esteem and independence. The school is aware that cultural understanding is not as well developed and the planned curriculum changes have been designed to improve this area.

Pupils demonstrate in their excellent behaviour and attitudes that they enjoy school. As a result, they achieve well. They and their parents feel they are safely looked after. Overall attendance is above the national average and is generally exceptional in two out of the three terms. Some parents persistently take leave of absence for their children to go on holidays, mainly skiing, in term-time.

The elected school council makes an excellent contribution to school life. It not only allows the pupils to share concerns and ideas, but is also used by the school to drive improvement through purposeful activities. This is demonstrated succinctly by one pupil who said, 'We are responsible to help the school make sure that it meets the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda.' Through their investigations the council have identified what the school does well and where improvements could be made. They have also looked at how children can take responsibility for action themselves and have shared this with the rest of the school through the class councils. The views of the council are acted upon by the school and they are given funds so that they can make sure that initiatives are followed through. For example they chose colouring pencils, colouring books and blankets for the chatterbox (a gazebo in the playground where pupils can sit and talk at playtime). Pupils talk lucidly about why they have chosen things in order to demonstrate their understanding and application of what they have learned from their ECM audit, for example one member said, 'We chose blankets so that the reception children would not get cold' and 'We have shown them how to fold them up so that they do not get dirty too quickly.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Achievement is good as a result of good teaching and the use of good school-home links that reinforce the pupils' learning. The school has adopted a more consistent approach in the classrooms, which is being monitored well by governors. Teachers are also more accountable for recording the progress of pupils in their class. Marking is supportive but would benefit from more consistent advice to pupils on how to improve their work. The increased opportunities for continued professional development have had a major impact on improving the quality of teaching throughout the school.

For those pupils needing extra support there are good intervention procedures which are introduced at an early stage to help. As a result, all pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Work is well matched to pupils' age and needs so they are suitably challenged. The school has recognised that strict adherence to published materials has made the work that pupils are asked to do less exciting and challenging than it could be. A good range of visits, visitors and clubs enriches the curriculum and helps reinforce responsible citizenship. Education is further supported by residential experiences for Years 3 to 6 that create opportunities for problem solving and outdoor pursuits. There is also an arranged trip to France in for Years 5 and 6. Whilst these trips are generally funded by parents the school uses its external partnerships to ensure that no child is excluded through financial hardship, if parents ask for help.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

All relevant procedures are in place to support and safeguard the pupils. The close-knit team, which includes not only teachers but also all the support staff, knows pupils and their families well. This enables any problems to be dealt with swiftly. Pupils say that very few incidents of bullying occur and when they do children stand up for one another and adults help to ensure that issues are resolved quickly. School records confirm this view.

Assessment procedures have improved. However, the school has rightly realised that this is not consistent and the guidance available has not made all pupils aware of how they can improve things for themselves.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Overall the leadership and management of the school are good. The innovative headteacher has a very clear vision for the school. Ably supported by senior managers, governors and parents the school has struck a very effective balance between good academic achievement and very positive personal development. More effective monitoring and development of teaching have improved teaching and learning so that they are consistently good across the school.

Developments in assessment and tracking procedures will mean that the school will have a more accurate record of how well each individual is progressing. The school has developed very effective links with outside organisations that are improving the education provided. These links include local schools, one of which provides specialist French teaching.

Governors fully support, encourage and challenge the school to be even better than it is. They are well informed about the school's performance, and records show that their interactions with the school are now more purposeful and targeted to the school improvement plan. The use of the plan is enabling the school to focus on the key priorities that will raise achievement. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and there is good capacity for further growth.

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.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-----------------------

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?	1
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?	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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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?	2
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?	3

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	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	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	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

Thank you for your warm welcome when I came to inspect your school. I very much enjoyed seeing you in lessons, looking at your work and talking with you. A big thank you to those of you who met with me and told me what makes your school good. No doubt you would like to know what I thought of your school, so I have included the main points below.

- ?
- You told me how much you enjoy being at St Margaret's and that you felt you were doing well. I agree. When I looked at your work and talked to you about your lessons it is clear that you are making good progress in class. ?
- I think that you behave extremely well both in lessons and around the school. I was very impressed at how the older children were looking after the younger ones. ?
- I think that all the staff really work well together and as a result, your school is very friendly. As you told me, this has also helped make sure that you feel safe and secure. ?
- Your school and class councils help the adults in your school know what you think. They also make a big difference in sharing ideas that the adults have with you. You know what makes 'every child matter'. ?
- Your teachers have focused well on making improvements in the right places. I think that their next ideas about improving writing, especially for those of you who should be really good at it, and helping all of you understand what you need to do to improve will make a big difference. Perhaps you could think of ways of helping them?

Thank you for being so polite and helpful during the visit. I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning and do your best. Please thank your parents for the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

With my very best wishes for your future.