



Firle Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114525
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 289951
Inspection date 5 December 2006
Reporting inspector Sheila Browning

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

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|---|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | The Street |
| School category | Voluntary controlled | | Firle |
| Age range of pupils | 4-11 | | Lewes BN8 6LF |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01273 858260 |
| Number on roll (school) | 81 | Fax number | 01273 858260 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Muriel Rees |
| | | Headteacher | Douglas Kidd |
| Date of previous school inspection | 23 April 2002 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Firle is a small village school. The majority of pupils are of White British origin and a very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most speak English as their first language. Attainment on entry to the Reception class is broadly as expected. Following a period of stability there have been many changes of staff recently, including senior staff members. There is also a large proportion of new governors. Many pupils also move in and out of the school, particularly during Key Stage 2; in some cases, mobility is as high as 50%.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Firle is a satisfactory school and provides a sound standard of education. It faces significant challenges in the high mobility of its pupils, staff and governors. The school's strong family ethos and pastoral care ensure good relationships throughout the school community. Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils say they feel safe. They enjoy school, particularly its many clubs and additional activities, and behave well. New pupils settle in quickly. The school works well with parents and other agencies. Parents' appreciation of the school is summed up in the comment of one parent who wrote, 'Firle School has a lot to offer.'

The school has successfully tackled several of its issues since it was last inspected. Provision in the Foundation Stage is now good. These children achieve well and standards are broadly as expected. Results in the Year 2 national tests have risen rapidly.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Under the good leadership of the headteacher, new members of staff are gradually settling in. New subject leaders are developing their role, but are not yet fully involved in monitoring the school's performance. New governors, too, are developing their responsibilities and are beginning to check the school's provision.

Achievement is satisfactory, as are teaching and learning. The attainment of each small cohort is considerably affected by the movement of pupils in and out of the school and has the greatest impact at Key Stage 2. Standards therefore vary each year, but are broadly average at Year 6. The school has recognised that writing is an area of relative weakness in all year groups. Improvements are being made through new initiatives to extend pupils' speaking and listening skills, but basic writing skills, such as sentence structure, comprehension, and spelling, are not taught rigorously enough. Curriculum and care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Improvements to assessment have been influential in improving achievement because pupils' progress is now carefully monitored. Nevertheless, information is not used as precisely as it should be to give more-able pupils sufficiently demanding work, particularly in writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that basic writing skills are taught with enough rigour in order to raise achievement in writing.
- Use assessment information to plan work that will challenge pupils to do their very best, particularly the more able pupils in writing.
- Develop the role of subject leaders and governors so that they monitor pupils' achievement more rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

In the Foundation Stage, children's achievement is good. Standards are above expectations in personal, social and emotional development and in aspects of communication, language and mathematical development, but weaknesses in writing mean that attainment is broadly as expected by the start of Year 1. Since the last inspection, results have risen rapidly in Key Stage 1. In the 2005 national tests for Year 2 pupils, standards were significantly above average. Results were lower in 2006, but reflect good achievement for this particular group of pupils. Writing remains a relative weakness throughout the school and the school is working hard to tackle this. Achievement in this subject is satisfactory, but more-able pupils do not make as much progress as they should.

Achievement across Key Stage 2 is variable but satisfactory. It is satisfactory overall because more-able pupils do not achieve as well as they could in writing, and achievement is more varied. School test results in 2006 improved in Key Stage 2, but writing remains a relative weakness, with few pupils achieving the higher levels. The school is working hard to tackle this. Over half of these pupils joined the school in Key Stage 2 and the majority met or exceeded the challenging targets set for them. In Key Stage 2, standards have been maintained overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Behaviour is good and pupils get on well with each another. In the Foundation Stage, for example, children quickly learn to share and help others. Older pupils, too, enjoy being play leaders for younger ones. The school is welcoming and friendly to new pupils. Pupils new to the school settle quickly and happily. Attendance is above average. Pupils say they enjoy school and can turn to an adult if they have any concerns.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school encourages pupils' spiritual development well through their involvement in assemblies and church services. Pupils have a growing awareness of the needs of others and contribute to fund-raising and community events. They understand that their actions have an impact on others. Pupils contribute well to the local community through research about the history of the village and their work at the local nature reserve. Pupils know how to lead healthy and safe lifestyles and play together sensibly. They respond well to encouragement to adopt a healthy lifestyle by drinking water and eating healthy snacks. Pupils enjoy responsibilities and are proud to be members of the School Council. They develop a satisfactory understanding of how to manage their own money on school trips, and through fund-raising activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching is good in the Foundation Stage and in Years 5 and 6 because teachers' expectations are higher and work is more closely matched to pupils' abilities in these classes than they are in others. As a result, these pupils make good progress. Pupils say they enjoy teaching most when work is linked across several subjects. They like exploring science and mathematics in the nature reserve.

Assessment is becoming more systematic and provides an increasingly accurate profile of pupils' attainment. This information is beginning to improve teachers' understanding of what pupils are capable of and is leading to more rigorous and detailed planning. Nevertheless, activities are not always challenging enough for more-able pupils. Relationships are good and this helps to motivate pupils. Teaching assistants generally support pupils well, particularly in small- group work. They are particularly effective when helping pupils with learning difficulties through closely focused support programmes.

Accommodation is used creatively to make the best use of all available space. For example, small learning and resource areas have been established in the hall. Resources, particularly interactive whiteboards, are used well. Marking is often good and helps pupils to understand what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is enhanced through a good personal, social and health programme, visits, visitors and exciting activities, such as a residential trip in France. These activities and numerous extra-curricular clubs contribute much to pupils' enjoyment. Gardening and cookery clubs and a shared restaurant experience with parents also help promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils develop wider interests through the strong provision in sports, arts, music and French. Pupils say they enjoy learning about different cultures, such as studying the way of life in Malawi and The Gambia.

Children in the Foundation Stage have a rich learning experience, which enables them to become confident learners. Good links between subjects, such as history and English, lead to good reinforcement of research skills. While lessons focus appropriately on developing pupils' basic skills, including the use of information and communication technology, basic writing skills are not as well developed to raise pupils' achievement in writing, particularly more-able pupils.

Partnerships with local schools and parents strengthen the curriculum. These links include outdoor pursuits, developing mathematical resources for the more able children and input from parents with artistic talent.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Strengths in the school's pastoral care support pupils' personal development well. As a result, pupils readily involve themselves in all activities and are happy to be playground 'buddies' and school councillors. The school provides a safe and secure environment. Children settle quickly into school and parents comment positively on this. Arrangements for pupils joining the school at different times of the school year are good. Strong links with other schools, external agencies and parents are beneficial to pupils' welfare and personal development.

Pupils with learning difficulties are identified early and, when well supported by teaching assistants, they make good progress. Closer tracking of pupils' academic progress and support through intervention programmes are helping most pupils to make better progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is the driving force behind successfully identifying areas for development and putting in place procedures and practices to secure improvement. He is well focused on raising pupils' achievement and the school's effectiveness is seen in the rising test results in Year 2 and improvements in the Foundation Stage. The many improvements are appreciated by parents. The new staff team is already established and new members of the governing body are settling in. New initiatives, though, have not yet had time to bed in with new staff. The school's leadership demonstrates satisfactory capacity to continue moving forward. Increasing analysis of data and regular monitoring of teaching and learning are contributing to the improving picture of pupil achievement.

The new leadership team makes realistic judgements of the school's performance and determines the direction needed to take the school forward. In almost all respects, the leadership team has accurately evaluated the school's effectiveness. New subject leaders are beginning to take on more responsibilities, although they are not yet fully involved in monitoring the school's performance.

Governors are increasingly involved and proactive. They have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors are fully committed to improve the quality of education and are undergoing the training they need to increase their expertise. Although the accommodation is still cramped, the school makes the best of it so that pupils' learning is not affected adversely.

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Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 3 |

The quality of provision

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|---|---|
| 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? | 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

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| 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 | 3 |
| 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

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed talking and listening to you and seeing your work. At the moment the school is giving you a satisfactory education and the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall.

These are some important things we found out about your school:

- Firle is a happy and safe school and we were impressed with your good behaviour and by the way everyone gets on well together.
- Those of you in the Foundation Stage get off to a good start.
- Most of you are making satisfactory progress and those of you in Reception and Years 5 and 6 are making good progress.
- You know how to lead healthy lifestyles, which is important for your future life.
- You work hard and enjoy school and you told us how much you enjoyed all the many clubs and activities.
- You contribute well to school life, particularly those of you who are 'buddies' and members of the school council.
- You are well cared for at school.
- All the staff are working hard to make Firle even better than it is now.

This is what we have asked the school to do to make it even better:

- To help you to understand and learn basic writing skills, such as how to write sentences properly and spelling, in order to do even better in writing.
- Ensure that those of you who find your work easy are given work to do that is more challenging.
- Make sure that staff who look after different subjects and governors check you are doing the best you can.