



Shobdon Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116734
Local Authority Herefordshire
Inspection number 290616
Inspection date 23 January 2007
Reporting inspector Ian Hodgkinson

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Shobdon
School category	Community		Leominster
Age range of pupils	4-11		HR6 9LX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01568 708386
Number on roll (school)	46	Fax number	01568 708386
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Steve Macdonald
		Headteacher	Victoria Hancock
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small school serves a rural community in and around the village of Shobdon, close to the Welsh border in the north west of Herefordshire. Numbers on roll have fallen sharply in recent years as a result of local population changes. The school is in many ways at the heart of this community. Its building encompasses the village hall, in which a separately-run playgroup operates during the mornings. All the school's pupils are of White British heritage. The social and economic circumstances of pupils' families are broad-ranging but generally favourable. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties varies from year to year; it has generally been above average but is currently a little below average. None has a statement of special educational need. The skills of the very small cohorts who join the school in the Reception class also vary widely from year to year but are generally at levels expected for their age.

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, which thrives on its strong community spirit. Like the staff, governors and wider community, pupils really pull together to get things done. Pupils' social development is excellent and they make an exceptionally good contribution to school and the wider community. In class, they work with great maturity in groups, sharing ideas and showing real leadership in completing tasks and meeting deadlines. The school's strong ethos, developed through its 'Values Education' programme, ensures that relationships between pupils are very good, and that they have a powerful understanding of right and wrong. They adopt very active, healthy lifestyles, act very safely, and behave particularly well. As a result of all these factors, pupils' personal development and well-being is outstanding. Pupils enjoy school enormously, and a number of their parents commented that 'they can't wait to get in through the gate'. This is because teaching is good, lively and exciting, and pupils learn well. Teachers help pupils to improve the quality of their work by providing very good opportunities to apply their literacy, numeracy and computer skills, as well as skills of working with others, across a range of activities. This helps give pupils an excellent preparation for later life. However, the breadth of age and ability across pupils in each class presents a considerable challenge to staff in making sure that work is always well matched to pupils' capabilities. While the needs of those with learning difficulties are well met, opportunities are sometimes missed to extend the challenge for the more able. This is reflected in results in writing for pupils in tests at the end of Year 2, where attainment at the higher levels has generally been below average. Teachers check the progress of their pupils and set them some targets for improvement, but they do not systematically record and display how pupils are making their way through these targets. Pupils and staff therefore lack some important information on how well pupils are doing and how they can best improve. Consequently, academic guidance is not as effective as the other elements of care, guidance and support for pupils, which is good overall, and has very strong attention to pupils' safety and welfare.

Pupils achieve well. They get off to a good start in the Reception class, where they are given well-structured and challenging tasks and make good progress. Standards are above average by Year 6 as a result of good progress through the school. A considerable broadening of the range of enrichment activities has helped improve writing standards across Years 3–6 by allowing pupils to set their writing in more meaningful contexts. The school's curriculum has improved since the last inspection and is now good, with a better balance in quality of work across subjects. Parents and teachers give much of the credit for these improvements to the vision and energy of the headteacher. A heavy teaching load limits the amount of formal monitoring of teaching and learning that the headteacher can do. Nonetheless, a good, open, collaborative style of leadership and management allows the school to develop a clear view of its strengths and weakness and plan effectively for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of pupils attaining the highest levels in writing in tests at the end of Year 2.
- Record pupils' progress against their targets clearly so that teachers and pupils have a clear view of how well pupils have done and what needs to be improved.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children join the Reception year with generally well-developed personal and social skills and settle happily to work in a class they share with pupils in Years 1 and 2. They make good progress because activities are well structured to engage and challenge them across all areas of learning. By the end of their Reception year, most pupils either attain levels expected for their age or work beyond them. Across Years 1 and 2, pupils make satisfactory progress overall. Standards vary from year to year in national tests at the end of Year 2, but are generally average. This is because while most pupils reach levels expected for their age, too few reach higher levels, especially in writing. Expectations about what is required for higher-level writing are not always established clearly enough. All pupils, including higher attainers, make good progress from Years 3–6, to reach standards which are above average and which have been rising faster than average since the last inspection. Standards in mathematics and science have been high for some years and remain strengths. Standards in English have risen considerably over the last three years and are above average by Year 6. Overall, pupils, including those with learning difficulties, make good progress and achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils' cultural development is good and has been significantly boosted by many opportunities to participate in theatre and the arts. However, pupils' awareness of the diversity of faiths and cultures in modern Britain is less well developed. Social and moral aspects of development are particular strengths. The inspector agrees with the parent who commented that her son acquired 'excellent life skills' through the school. Pupils are enthusiastically involved in decision-making and in a wide range of activities that bring benefit to the school and community. The school council, for example, has been much involved in making decisions about how pupils can play more safely in the playground. Pupils rightly take enormous pride in their work in constructing and maintaining the school's delightful quiet garden. Pupils' participation in a range of physical activities led by teachers and coaches from partner clubs and schools has, along with changes to snacks and lunches, made an excellent contribution to the development of healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use a variety of exciting approaches to engage and interest pupils. The quality of pupils' learning is supported by sometimes excellent application of key skills of literacy, numeracy, computer skills or working with others. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils set up a science experiment in groups to test the physical properties of an elastic band and skilfully used a variety of mathematical techniques, supported by laptop computers, to process and record some very useful results. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported in class by their teachers, who carefully choose resources and approaches to suit their needs. Sometimes opportunities are missed, especially in Years 1 and 2, to challenge more-able pupils to work to a higher level, and move them on more quickly. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is generally clear, constructive and informative, and has improved since the last inspection.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum offers a good range of experiences which support learning well. Teachers take many opportunities to make links between subjects so that pupils can apply their knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved considerably since the last inspection, and computers are well used for teaching and learning. The curriculum has been enriched by frequent opportunities for pupils to participate in arts, drama and literary events and performances, and these have supported improvements in pupils' standards of writing in Years 3–6. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to experience a wide range of activities through after-school clubs. The school has sought to strengthen the teaching of pupils about cultural diversity and racial equality through a well-structured religious education programme, through citizenship and through visits. This has not yet had an impact on pupils' awareness of such issues, which is still underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has a high regard for pupils' welfare and safety. Child protection procedures are securely in place and staff properly trained. The development of a Travel Plan to help pupils avoid the dangers of a busy main road when arriving at school has drawn together the whole community in securing land and resources for car parking and footpaths. Reception year staff work very effectively with parents and the attached nursery to ensure that children settle well when they first arrive at school.

Teachers know their pupils well and, by tracking their attainment with regular testing of their standards, they can identify when a pupil may need additional help and support. There is, however, no system in place to identify all the targets pupils will need to meet to reach higher levels of performance or to record pupils' progress in meeting

these targets. As a result, expectations about what is required to reach the higher levels, including in writing in Years 1 and 2, are not as clear as they might be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is highly regarded by staff and parents and has been very effective in developing a real sense of teamwork across the whole school. She 'leads from the front', with a heavy teaching commitment and responsibility for a significant number of items on the school development plan. The school generally knows its strengths and weaknesses well because its leadership is highly receptive to the views of its pupils, parents, staff, governors and community. Governors are highly experienced and effective in supporting the school's developments. They have managed the school's resources carefully in the light of falling pupil numbers. However, resources are not being used well enough at present to allow the headteacher enough time to carry out detailed monitoring of teaching and learning. This monitoring is too informal and not sharply focused enough to give staff and governors a clear picture of the most and least successful aspects of the school's work. Nonetheless, the school has a good track record of improvement since the last inspection, with significant improvements in the quality of the school's curriculum and rising standards. It is well placed 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	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	1
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?	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	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

Many thanks for the welcome you gave me when I came to your school for its recent inspection. I really enjoyed talking with you and looking at your work. Your work, of course, includes the beautiful quiet garden and other displays, of which you are rightly proud.

One of your parents wrote that 'there is a great atmosphere and enthusiasm at Shobdon School'. You and your parents made it clear to me that you think Shobdon is a good school, which is well led by the headteacher and her colleagues, and I agree with you. The school really encourages you to get involved in working with others to make decisions and make a difference. It encourages you to respect and look after one another. Your personal development is excellent, and you are very well prepared for later life.

I can see why you enjoy going to school so much, because the teaching is good and lessons are lively and exciting. Teachers help you to use all your skills when completing work, and encourage you to work together to solve problems. As a result, you achieve well and make good progress. When pupils leave Shobdon, their test results are better than average.

You study a good range of subjects, and told me about all the clubs and activities you get involved in. The school looks after you well, and you feel safe and secure.

I have made two main recommendations about how the school can get even better. Firstly, it needs to help more of you get to higher levels in your writing by the end of Year 2, to give you a good start for later work. Secondly, I've asked teachers to keep a clear record of how you are making progress through your targets, so that you can see how well you are doing and what needs to be improved. You can help in this by working hard to make sure that you meet your targets in the work you are set.

I wish you and the school every success for the future.