

Diss Church Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121032
Local Authority	NORFOLK
Inspection number	291965
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Ann Taylor

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr K Tilcock
Headteacher	Mr K Ridgway
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002
School address	The Entry Diss Norfolk IP22 4NT
Telephone number	01379 642675
Fax number	01379 640515

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Nearly all children in this average-sized school are of White British background and speak English as their first language. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is average, reflecting the social circumstances of the area. The proportion with recognised learning difficulties is above average. Children's attainment is usually above average when they join the school.

There has been a lack of stability in staffing in recent years, including changes of headteacher and the long-term absence of the deputy headteacher. The school has been part of the local authority's intensive support programme for the last three years and school improvement has been overseen by a local authority 'project board' during this time. It recently achieved the SportsMark and Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Diss Church Junior is a satisfactory school. Standards had fallen in recent years because children were not making the progress that they should. Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, while the school has coped adequately with staffing difficulties, it had been slow to effect real change and raise standards. Consequently, the rate of improvement since the previous inspection has been inadequate. The headteacher and staff, together with the local authority's project board, have introduced appropriate initiatives over the last three years to raise children's attainment, but these have been slow to bear fruit. There has been a large amount of development by local authority advisers, which has been key in improving practice. Together with the arrival of new, permanent staff, this is accelerating children's progress.

Children enter school with standards above those expected but in recent years they have been leaving Year 6 below average. This trend has been reversed and children are making at least satisfactory progress in all year groups. Standards at the end of Year 6 remain lower than they should be in writing, mathematics and science because of the amount of catching up needed. Children perform at the levels expected in reading, and increasing numbers of higher ability children are now reaching the levels of which they are capable.

The teaching quality is improving and is satisfactory. With a secure team of teachers, real progress is being made in overcoming gaps in children's knowledge. Assessment systems are firmly in place in English and mathematics and are being used satisfactorily to identify and eliminate underachievement. It is early days for similar assessments to be implemented in science, where standards remain too low. The satisfactory curriculum is in a state of change. It is being adapted to help remedy the weaknesses which have contributed in part to the lack of children's progress. There is a good amount of sport on offer, which is helping to improve their fitness levels.

Children's personal development and well-being are good; behaviour has improved and children enjoy school. They are well cared for and relationships are warm and friendly. They know their targets confidently enough, but this knowledge is yet to make a real difference and help them to improve their work. Parents are generally positive about the school, although a significant minority has concerns, focused around behaviour, being listened to and how well the school is led and managed.

The headteacher, supported and challenged by the project board and governors, has an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and what needs to be done to continue the improvement. The senior leadership team remains depleted because of the long-term absence of the deputy headteacher, which continues to hamper school improvement. Subject leaders have a fair understanding of their areas and are growing in their roles. However, the evaluation of teaching quality by senior leaders is not yet sharp enough to secure further improvement. The basic educational practices have been brought up to date, staffing stabilised and with teaching developing well. Consequently, the school provides satisfactory value for money and has a satisfactory capacity to continue with this improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, mathematics and science by ensuring children make consistently good progress as they move through the school.
- Evaluate teaching more rigorously and identify clearly, areas for improvement.

- Develop the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by ensuring staff are given clear direction and support with regard to their roles in raising standards.

A small proportion of 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

All children, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language, are now achieving satisfactorily. This follows a considerable period in the school's history when achievement was inadequate. Performance in national tests in Year 6 in 2006 was low in English and mathematics and exceptionally low in science. The school did not reach its own targets and very few children reached the higher levels. The current Year 6 entered the school with broadly average levels of attainment in Year 3. They are on course to reach around average standards in mathematics and English. Children read proficiently but their writing, mathematics and, particularly, science are weaker. Years 5 and 6 still have considerable amounts of catching up to do because of the school's chequered history.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and this results in good behaviour, positive attitudes and supportive, friendly relationships. A few older children find it difficult to respond to the school's expectations of good behaviour. Attendance is good. Children have good opportunities to develop their social skills and many make good friends. Their cultural awareness, especially understanding of life in a diverse modern Britain, although satisfactory, is relatively weaker.

Children have a good understanding of how to stay safe, recognise that bullying is wrong and know what to do if they see unacceptable behaviour. They are happy to talk to adults about this and ask for help. A small but significant number of children and parents are concerned about the prevalence of bullying, especially on the playground at lunchtimes. The school is working effectively to improve this. Children know about road hazards when walking or cycling. A number are taking part in an initiative to encourage them to walk to school and enjoy being rewarded for doing so. Children have a good understanding of how to stay healthy; many join school sports clubs and some are eating different fruits because of the school's successful fruit tasting sessions. They make a good contribution to the wider community both at school and in the town. Pupils have a satisfactory range of skills to prepare them for secondary education and their future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching has improved over the last year, and is now frequently good and occasionally outstanding. Teachers' subject knowledge has improved, particularly in mathematics, which is helping them plan lessons well. Typically, teachers have a clear understanding of what they want children to learn, which is shared with them in clear, easily understood language. Activities

are interesting and usually well matched to the range of abilities within the classes. In some years, teachers teach their specialist subjects so that strengths are fully utilised. Recent improvements in the way teachers check children's work and record how well they are doing in English and mathematics are beginning to bring about better progress. This is because they more readily recognise when children need additional support or challenge. This is not the case in science where standards are, as a consequence, lower. The quality of marking is variable. Some teachers provide clear guidance about how to improve while other comments are largely encouraging. Children's good attitudes and behaviour provide a strong platform on which to further improve their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The science content has recently been updated to make it more detailed and relevant in response to the urgent need to raise standards. There are more opportunities for children to practise their writing in other subjects, such as history, although there is scope for more of this kind of approach. Languages and thinking skills lessons add variety and breadth to children's experiences, which they enjoy. There is a good number of clubs available and, impressively, three residential visits on offer. For example, Year 4 were at Holt Hall during the inspection. Holding themed days, such as the history day finding out all about Roald Dahl, is the start of a move to make what is on offer more interesting and appealing. There is a good amount of sports taking place, signified by the recent awarding of the Active Sports mark.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support given is satisfactory. Staff know children and their families well and children feel safe and well looked after. They say 'Staff are friendly ...' '...teachers help us as much as they can...' '... it helps to build your confidence'. Provision is currently being reviewed to ensure that the few pupils who find it difficult to behave appropriately do so, and remain in school. Measures to help keep children safe and secure, including child protection and health and safety procedures, are firmly in place. In the past, children have not been set sufficiently challenging targets in English and mathematics which has restricted their progress. This has changed; they understand better where they need to improve and this has started to raise their understanding of their own capabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership is securing tangible improvement, demonstrated by the satisfactory progress that children are now making. Although there have been considerable staffing difficulties, improvement has taken longer than it should have done. With the continuing guidance from the project board and strong support from the governors, the headteacher has overseen recent improvements to the quality of teaching, curriculum, children's behaviour and attendance. Middle managers are developing well, but are new to their roles and only just starting to contribute fully to monitoring and raising standards. The school is now setting challenging and accurate targets based on an increasingly secure view of what should be expected.

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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?	3
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	No

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	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?	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.

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	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

May 29th 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Diss Church Junior School, Diss, Norfolk, IP22 4NT

I am writing to thank you for making Ms Frith and I so welcome when we visited your school just before half term, and to explain what we found.

Your teachers are getting much better at teaching you and helping you to work harder to reach higher levels than you have been doing in the past. We were pleased to see this. Everyone says you are behaving much better, although we know some of you younger ones feel lunchtimes are still too boisterous. Some of your parents agree. Mr Ridgway has plans to help make playtimes happier for you. We know adults in school look after you well and we think you are very lucky to have the chance to go on so many residential trips. We were sorry to have missed those Year 4's who were at Holt Hall during the inspection. You impressed us with the way you knew your English and mathematics targets, so well done and keep up the good work.

We have asked Mr Ridgeway and all the staff and governors to help you all to do as well as you can in writing, mathematics and science. You can help by continuing to try hard. Your teachers need really clear advice about how they can make their teaching even better and we have asked Mr Ridgeway to provide this. We also think all teachers who have responsibility for running different parts of the school need more support and direction.

Have a lovely summer and thank you once again.

Mrs A. Taylor Lead Inspector