



Tower Hill Community Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123019
Local Authority Oxfordshire
Inspection number 292559
Inspection dates 20–21 September 2006
Reporting inspector Christopher Parker

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Moor Avenue
School category	Community		Witney
Age range of pupils	4–11		OX28 6NB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01993 702599
Number on roll (school)	142	Fax number	01993 772899
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs L Berry
		Headteacher	Mr P McNamara
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 20–21 September 2006	Inspection number 292559
--------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

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 two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school serving a diverse socio-economic community. About a quarter of pupils have free schools meals, which is above the national average. They are taught in five mixed-age classes. The number on roll has fallen since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties has grown over the last three years and is now above average. In some classes of younger pupils almost half are identified as having learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The senior leadership team is eager to make improvements, and has been successful in raising standards in English. It knows what the school is doing well and where its weaknesses lie. The school's self evaluation, and their tracking of the pupils' progress, provides a good range of useful information. Some is used effectively to identify groups of pupils who need support but it is not being used well enough to make sharply focused plans to bring rapid improvement.

The senior leadership team and the governors have wrestled with the need for an effective method of improvement planning. Although better approaches have been made long term plans are not robust or precise enough to move the school forward at pace. Leadership and management are satisfactory but the absence of a rigorous improvement strategy results in satisfactory rather than good provision for the pupils.

Nevertheless, the school has proved very clearly it does have the capacity to make a marked improvement. Over the last two years changes to the teaching of writing have had a significant impact on the progress pupils make and standards in English have risen quite dramatically by the end of Year 6. Good teaching of writing and well planned opportunities to write in other subjects result in pupils making good progress in English between Year 3 and Year 6. This success is yet to be replicated in mathematics. Consequently teaching and achievement are satisfactory and there is clearly scope for them to be good. Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6.

The introduction of better assessment and marking has played an important role in improving standards in English. However, there remains considerable variation in the approaches used by the teachers. Well planned group support for pupils with learning difficulties is helping them to make satisfactory progress.

The children make a good start in the reception class. From low starting points the children achieve well but many do not reach the goals set for the end of the reception year. The impact of activities to improve writing is not as marked in Years 1 and 2 but efforts to improve speaking and listening are proving beneficial. Most pupils make satisfactory progress but a few do not do as well as they should.

The pupils' personal development and well being is satisfactory. Most pupils behave well but some boisterous behaviour at lunchtimes, amongst a few, goes unchecked. Others take on responsibilities and are far more productively engaged. They organise games for younger pupils, supervise play equipment and help to improve the school environment. Pupils make a good contribution to the community. Many participated in the school's winning entry into 'Witney in Bloom'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the school improvement plan sets out a precise schedule that is sharply focused on raising standards

- Raise standards in mathematics by improving the teaching and the curriculum so that pupils achieve as well they do in English.
- Establish a coherent and agreed approach to marking, assessment and target setting.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school collects a good deal of information about the pupils' progress. It confirms that most pupils achieve satisfactorily.

The growing proportion of pupils with learning difficulties has resulted in a decline in test results at the end of Year 2. In 2005 they were low and teacher assessments indicate they will be very similar in 2006. Analysis of the school's information shows that those who reach or exceed the goals for the end of the Reception Year make satisfactory progress and go on to reach the higher levels in the Year 2 tests. However, a few of the children who are not quite reaching the goals for the end of the Reception Year do not do as well as might be expected.

By the end of Year 6 standards are broadly average. The significant improvements in standards in English in 2005 have been maintained this year and more pupils reached the higher level. Progress in mathematics, although satisfactory, is somewhat short of what is being achieved in English.

Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress because they are supported through an appropriate range of individual and small group activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well being are satisfactory. Many children start with fewer personal and social skills than usual but make good progress in the Reception class.

Behaviour is satisfactory. A few parents expressed concerns about bullying. No incidents were observed but discussions with pupils reveal that when it does happen it is dealt with effectively. There is some unnecessarily boisterous play which causes concern to some pupils that is not always dealt with quickly enough by adults.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils know right from wrong. They enjoy taking part in musical performances and appreciate the cultural diversity within society. Strong cultural links with schools in Finland and Spain raise awareness of the lives of people in other parts of the world.

Pupils grow in confidence and show care and respect for others and are able to take on responsibilities within the school community. The school council ensures that pupils' views are heard and acted upon. As one of its members said, 'We take on a whole world of responsibilities'.

Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the need for safe and healthy living but this is not always reflected in what they eat. Pupils acquire sound basic skills and learn to work in teams preparing them satisfactorily for next stage in education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is generally satisfactory, but it is good in English. Work to raise standards in writing means that teachers now successfully use a range of approaches to interest and motivate pupils. The teachers demonstrate good writing and help the pupils to use interesting words to set the scene or develop a character for a story. Teaching assistants are carefully deployed to support pupils with learning difficulties to develop their knowledge of letter sounds and to improve their reading and writing.

Teaching in other subjects has not benefited from the same focus consequently it is not as successful in ensuring the pupils achieve as well as they do in English.

Improved marking has played a significant part in raising standards in writing. Some of the marking sets out very clearly what pupils need to do to improve but the teachers do not always ensure that pupils take note of their comments to improve the next piece of work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It provides the pupils with a range of activities that ensure most achieve satisfactorily. The school makes good use of group work to give the pupils a 'boost' in their reading and writing.

Discussions with pupils reveal a broad curriculum, including French, supported by interesting activities, visitors and visits. The older pupils say they are, 'doing history in English,' indicating that good links are being made between these two subjects and that interesting opportunities are contributing to the improvement in writing. There are a good range of extra curricular activities.

The Foundation Stage curriculum is lively and engaging giving the youngest children an opportunity to develop their skills in the classroom and in the very well resourced outdoor area.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Adults know the pupils well and have a high level of concern for their well-being, as a result pupils feel safe. Procedures for safeguarding them and ensuring their health and safety are robust and well understood

by staff. Outside agencies are used whenever possible to support vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties.

Secure child protection procedures are in place. Pupils feel confident that there is someone to turn to for help if necessary. Academic guidance is developing through better assessment, marking and tracking of the pupils' progress. Although some of this information is used effectively there are inconsistencies of approach. This valuable information is not yet being used to the full.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior leadership team have demonstrated their ability to make changes, improve teaching and raise standards in English. However, the absence of a precise long term development plan means that its capacity to improve is satisfactory rather than good. Successful strategies that ensure pupils do well in English have not been transferred to other subjects. Last year a detailed plan, containing some very good features such as milestones against which progress could be evaluated, was used. This year a much simpler model is being tried but it is not sufficiently focused on pupils' achievement and it does not have clear enough targets for governors to evaluate success.

The English and mathematics subject leaders are both actively engaged in extending provision. They check the standards of the pupils' work, monitor the quality of teaching and analyse all of the available data. However, the information they collect is not driving the school's improvement strategy.

The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection in 2003. Besides the marked improvement in achievement in English by the end of Year 6, overall achievement has improved between Year 2 and 6. Attendance has also increased and is now average. Further work is required to ensure the leadership is ever more sharply focused on improvement.

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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
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

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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.

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

This letter is to tell you about the findings of the recent inspection and to thank you for taking the time to talk to Mr Davis and me. At the moment the school is providing a satisfactory education for you. I chatted to some of you who told me about where you think you are doing well and where you could do better. Some of you said that you felt you were doing better in English than in mathematics. So, we looked at how much progress you have been making and found that you are right and you are not doing as well in mathematics as you are in English. When I talked to the teachers they told me about all the things they have done to make improvements to English lessons and how your writing has benefited. The school does not have a good plan for making sure it continually gets better or that you do as well in mathematics as you do in English. I have asked the teachers to make sure that they make very clear plans and include ways of helping you to do well in mathematics.

Some of your teachers make very useful comments on your work, to help you to improve. Some set you targets. I have asked the teachers to have another look at how they are marking your work and setting targets so that much the same approach is used in all classes.

Most of you behave well but there is some unnecessarily boisterous play that some children are unhappy about. Many of you are very considerate of others and I am sure you will help your teachers and supervisors to make sure that everyone is happy on the playground. You enjoy exercise and know it is important to be safe and eat healthily but this is not always reflected in what you choose to eat.

I enjoyed being in your school. I hope that in the future it is successful in helping you to do as well as you possibly can.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Parker

Lead Inspector