



Benson Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123125
Local Authority Oxfordshire
Inspection number 292587
Inspection dates 26–27 February 2007
Reporting inspector Rob Crompton

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Oxford Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Benson
Age range of pupils	4–11		Wallingford OX10 6LX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01491 202502
Number on roll (school)	207	Fax number	01491 201546
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Timothy Howarth
		Headteacher	Mrs Linda Neely
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 26–27 February 2007	Inspection number 292587
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school opened in November 2005 and serves a socially mixed area. The new school was the result of the amalgamation of two neighbouring schools, Benson Community Infants and Benson CE Junior. Both schools were temporarily led and managed by an acting headteacher who is now the head of the new school. Almost all pupils have White British heritage. The school has achieved the National Healthy Schools Award, the Active Mark and the Sports Mark.

The inspection of the junior school in November 2004, before amalgamation, found that it was underachieving. A follow-up visit in June 2005 indicated that reasonable progress had been made in addressing the weaknesses.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This new school provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education. It has already developed several good features. Pupils in the Foundation Stage and the infants are progressing well and reaching above average standards. Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory. By the end of Year 6, pupils do well in reading, mathematics and science but pupils are not progressing well enough in writing because their skills in constructing sentences are weak. Under the highly effective leadership of the headteacher, senior managers and staff have achieved much since the school opened. Subject leaders have played their part in the drive to raise standards but there are insufficient opportunities to monitor teaching in order to identify successful methods and share them with colleagues. Good teaching and learning, underpinned by an effective curriculum, are leading to improved progress. In the past, pupils in Years 3 to 6 have underachieved and the good teaching is beginning to compensate for this so that these pupils now achieve satisfactorily and standards are rising. However, some lessons in the lower juniors do not cater well enough for more able pupils.

The school is a happy and purposeful place which parents and pupils hold in high regard. Pupils enjoy school, behave well and work hard. They are well cared for and they feel valued and safe. One pupil summarised the views of her classmates by saying, 'We feel relaxed in an atmosphere of learning'. Older pupils willingly take on extra responsibilities and good efforts on the school's part mean that pupils are well aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and exercise. Pupils' basic skills, levels of self-confidence and strong team-working skills, together with their openness to new ideas, provide a good basis their future economic well-being. Rigorous assessment procedures enable staff to keep a careful eye on progress and, because information is increasingly shared with pupils, they are aware of what to do to improve.

The common sense of purpose among staff and governors, informed by good self-evaluation, together with the good progress made since the school opened, indicate a good capacity to improve. Several aspects of the school's provision are now good and their positive impact on pupils' achievement is emerging clearly. This augers well for the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more challenging work for more able pupils in the lower junior classes.
- Raise standards in writing in Years 3 to 6 by improving pupils' sentence construction.
- Provide more opportunities for subject leaders to monitor lessons and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, and share successful methods.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

From a broadly average start, children make good progress through the Foundation Stage. By the end of Reception, standards are about the level expected for children of this age. The current group of children are on course to reach above average levels, particularly in early reading skills, such as the recognition of letter sounds, because of the well-focused teaching.

Achievement overall is satisfactory. The legacy of underachievement among older pupils is being overcome but still has an impact on overall performance. Pupils achieve well in the infants and reach above average standards in reading and writing, and do especially well in mathematics. The picture in the juniors is one of rising standards, particularly in Years 5 and 6. In 2005, although pupils reached average standards, they had not built well enough on the skills and knowledge they had acquired previously. In 2006, national tests were average overall and good in English. As a result of improvements in teaching, assessment and the curriculum, current pupils are on course to do even better. Inspection evidence shows that over half are expected to attain above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' skills in writing, however, are not as secure as in other aspects of English. They have a good sense of audience and write imaginatively but their sentence construction is sometimes immature. Teachers are well aware of this and are making every effort to help pupils improve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Pupils leave the school with a respect for others and a set of personal values which guide their day-to-day behaviour. Pupils enjoy their time in school. One girl said, 'It's a good and fun school in which you learn a lot'. One pupil thought behaviour was good 'because we are taught to respect each other'. Pupils soon develop good attitudes to learning and attendance is above average. They take on responsibilities from an early age, such as acting as 'buddies' at playtimes. All pupils have an influence in the school either directly through the school council or in class, when discussing school council business.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning are much improved since the school opened when, as monitoring records show, there were too many run-of-the-mill lessons. Assessment records indicate that many pupils were marking time, particularly in the lower juniors. Pupils now find lessons more interesting and enjoyable, not least through teachers'

skilful use of computer technology. Following an outstanding literacy lesson in Year 5, for example, pupils were fully absorbed as the teacher used the interactive white board to show them how to import sound files into their multimedia versions of alternative fairy tales.

Pupils have a clear idea of what they are supposed to achieve during each lesson because this is flagged up at the beginning. Marking is good. Teachers set individual targets and pupils are increasingly involved in evaluating their own progress. Teaching is now much more geared to meeting the needs of different groups of pupils. Teachers, very ably supported by teaching assistants, regularly provide work at different levels. This benefits most pupils, including those with learning difficulties. In the lower junior classes, however, more able pupils often have to complete routine tasks before tackling harder work and this leads to a loss of pace in learning. Recent improvements in teaching and learning are having a clear impact on progress in lessons although more needs to be done to ensure consistent progress in all junior classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Children enjoy a good range of activities in the Foundation Stage. Work is well planned and staff take full advantage of the spacious and well resourced indoor and outdoor areas. The curriculum for older pupils is planned thoroughly. Opportunities are used to make the most of cross-curricular links, such as when pupils practise their weighing and measuring skills in the context of preparing healthy foods. Planning is monitored effectively. A good check is kept on pupils' progress in personal and social education to ensure full coverage and avoid duplication. Test results are used well to identify strengths and gaps in pupils' learning, such as a current need to improve sentence level work in English. The curriculum is inclusive and meets the needs and capabilities of most pupils, either through setting different tasks in lessons or a programme of support for pupils with learning difficulties. Extension activities often provide harder work for more able pupils but the level of challenge is not always high enough. Good use is made of local expertise to enrich creative and sporting activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good levels of care, guidance and support because members of staff are committed to the best interests of pupils and share information about pupils well. One parent said, 'The school always addresses any concern speedily, professionally and with great care'. The site is kept safe, as confirmed by a recent independent audit. The tracking of pupils' progress is used well to set suitably challenging targets and provide guidance for individuals. Pupils find these targets helpful and value the support they get from teachers, such as in the marking of their work. In the older classes, there is often a written dialogue between teachers and pupils. Marking is a little inconsistent in the younger classes and individual targets are sometimes not challenging enough. Reviews of the progress made by pupils with learning difficulties lead to purposeful targets and focused support so that their rate of progress is similar to that of other

pupils. Personal development is monitored well and leads to effective support, including peer support such as 'a circle of friends'. This means pupils feel comfortable in school and confident enough to disclose any worries they may have to a member of staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school is effectively led by a determined headteacher, who has established a strong management team. She has successfully led a drive for improvement during her short time leading the school. Teamwork is buoyant and there is a positive ethos that extends throughout the whole school community. The school is very accurate in its self-evaluation, especially in its view of the quality of teaching. The use of thorough evaluation has greatly supported the pace of change. Subject leaders played an important role in the drive to raise standards and are well focused on improving standards further. They have a clear overview of the school's performance but have too few opportunities to observe lessons so that they can help colleagues to continue to improve.

Governors have made a good start and are working closely with the headteacher and teachers so they know how well pupils are performing. They are becoming increasingly involved in school improvement planning and supporting professional development.

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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?	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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

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	2

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	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 the warm welcome we received during our visit. You were very helpful in showing us around and telling us what you think about your school. We agree with you that everyone is friendly and we saw that you enjoy lessons and the many other activities. We were impressed by your behaviour and delightful attitudes. The school ensures that you are well cared for and safe, and it was good to see that you have gained the Healthy Schools, Active Mark and the Sports Mark. These show that you take health and fitness seriously.

As far as your work goes, we found that all of you are making at least satisfactory progress and some of you are learning quickly. This is because the teachers are good at helping you improve. We have suggested that, to raise standards, some children could be given harder work, particularly in Years 3 and 4. Older children are trying very hard to improve their writing and are getting better at it. We agree with their teachers, that they should concentrate on writing better sentences to make their work more interesting.

The headteacher and all staff have worked hard to get the school off to a good start and we have suggested ways in which they might move the school forward. Most things are in place to enable the school go from strength to strength. You can do your bit by following your teachers' guidance and continuing to contribute your ideas.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Crompton

Lead inspector