

Marsh Baldon Church of England Controlled School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123131
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	292590
Inspection dates	17–18 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Sean O'Toole

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Benton
Headteacher	Mrs Jo Capel-Davies
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2002
School address	The Green Marsh Baldon Oxford OX44 9LJ
Telephone number	01865 343249
Fax number	01865 341496

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small rural school admits pupils from a wide area. An average percentage have learning difficulties. Most come from White British backgrounds. None are at an early stage of learning English. There are wide variations in the abilities of the pupils when they start school. The school holds the Active Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Pupils' positive attitudes, good behaviour and thoughtfulness towards others reflect well the school's motto, 'Small School, Big Deal'. This goal is enshrined in the strong focus on supporting vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties. Pupils' good personal qualities are underpinned by the caring and supportive work of the staff which contributes to growing levels of confidence amongst the pupils. One of the school's successes is the way that pupils of different ages, abilities and backgrounds work and play together. One parent summed up the views of many by saying how well the headteacher and staff value and include all pupils.

Throughout the school, most pupils, including those in the Foundation Stage, make satisfactory progress. Children starting in the Reception class bring a range of skills which are mostly appropriate for their age. By the time they leave, at the end of Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are average. Pupils read well but their writing could be better. Pupils use writing checklists to measure their own success and teachers' marking offers guidance on improvement but there are too few challenging opportunities for pupils to write extensively in a range of subjects. Those with learning difficulties make good progress because staff focus very well on providing specific support for individuals and small groups which helps the pupils to feel valued and to participate fully in class. Nonetheless, there is scope to improve especially in raising the standards attained by the more able.

Staff use national guidelines to plan lessons and pupils say how much they enjoy practical subjects like science and design and technology. Lessons take account of the different ages in the classes and there are some variations in the tasks set for different ability groups. However, the choice of tasks does not provide sufficiently open-ended opportunities that challenge pupils and require them to delve into learning at a deeper level. Pupils relish the exciting opportunities to learn through extra curricular activities and extended visits and these opportunities enhance their personal skills very well. They are less happy with the approaches to teaching English, which several older pupils say are not interesting enough.

The vast majority of parents value the school's work especially its involvement in the community, the family atmosphere and the willingness of staff to support individuals. Almost all indicated that staff listen to their views and respond where appropriate. The headteacher and governors draw on the valuable parental interest and have followed up on several of their suggestions. There has been much debate in the school through the process of evaluating its work and this has led to clear plans for improvement which match the inspection findings. Having identified the issues, the headteacher, staff, and governors need to ensure that these priorities are tackled robustly.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Reception children are taught alongside Year 1. The children quickly settle into the school's routines and play happily together. From their starting points the children make satisfactory progress. Relationships between staff and children are good and contribute to good progress in personal, social and emotional development. Staff make satisfactory use of the national guidelines for children of this age and include a variety of opportunities for them to learn on their own or to be supported by an adult. Planning does not take sufficient account of the wide range of abilities in the class and this leads to some missed opportunities to stretch the more

able. Staff make observations of the children at work but do not make sufficient use of this information to pinpoint what the children need to do next. Staff are vigilant in ensuring children's safety and encourage parental involvement. By the end of the Foundation Stage, the children are working at levels which are appropriate for their age.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by providing more opportunities for pupils to use their English skills when writing in other subjects.
- Sharpen up some aspects of teaching, especially in setting demanding tasks which stretch the pupils and which encourage the more able to investigate more thoroughly.
- Improve the provision in the Foundation Stage ensuring that teaching takes more account of the differing abilities in the class.

A small proportion of the 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

The small number of pupils in each cohort means that standards vary from year to year. Overall standards are average at the end of Year 6 but more able pupils are not as successful as they should be. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because they receive well-focused support and much individual attention. The programme to support those lacking confidence in reading has met with much success. Pupils are successful in reading and enjoy books. An initiative by the headteacher to focus on problem solving in mathematics has improved pupils' confidence. More remains to be done to extend the more able through challenging teaching. Girls are more successful in assessments and tests than boys but there is little difference in their performance in class. Writing remains an area for development, particularly in providing opportunities for pupils to practise and extend their skills in subjects other than English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils of all ages and abilities are clearly happy and develop secure and purposeful relationships with their peers and adults. They have good spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities. Their behaviour is good and pupils have a good understanding of fairness and justice. Older pupils are especially thoughtful. They value friendship, work together well and set a good example through their positive attitudes. Pupils have a sense of fun and enjoy sharing ideas but some said that they do not always feel that their views are taken into account. They appreciate different cultures and traditions and take pleasure in celebrating each other's success. Pupils are proud of their contribution to the school's Active Mark and relish opportunities for sport and games. They know how to stay fit and healthy and talk excitedly about the opportunities to join in adventurous pursuits on their residential visit. Pupils show much concern for others and keenly raise funds to support charities. They enjoy being part of village life and participate enthusiastically in local events. They also contribute much to school life through their hard work, willingness to do homework and participation in extra activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are some strengths in the teaching which include the staff's good relationships with the pupils, effective behaviour management and the recent focus on target setting. Lessons are well planned and tasks are matched appropriately but sometimes the work set is not demanding enough for the more able. Teachers keep a check on the pupils' progress through regular marking which includes encouraging comments and, in the best examples, is linked to targets so that pupils know what to do next to improve. However, this information is not always used well enough to identify strengths in the pupils' learning and so some of the tasks set offer insufficient challenge. Teachers cope well with the mixed age classes and there is some good practice in teaming some younger with older pupils. Teaching assistants work effectively with those with learning difficulties. As a result, these pupils participate fully in lessons and, when receiving specific support, make good gains in basic reading. The pupils work hard and are keen to answer questions and share ideas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Most aspects of the curriculum are good. Strengths in the provision include the emphasis on personal and social education which has heightened pupils' awareness of healthy and safe living. The residential visit and other trips and visitors also enrich the curriculum and contribute much to the pupils' growth in confidence and social awareness. Initiatives to cover some work through topic themes also take good account of the needs of boys. The curriculum is enriched well through a good range of extra activities which include aspects of sport, including swimming, cookery, the melodious choir and opportunities to learn musical instruments. The school draws on outside expertise to support learning and specialist teaching of science also has a good impact on standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good pastoral care and support for its pupils. Several parents praised the school's support for those with learning difficulties. One wrote, 'We have been very impressed with the way that the school has assessed our daughter and set targets. They have picked up on some gaps in her learning and have provided extra help'. Staff have a good knowledge of safeguarding children and meet all requirements. Academic guidance has been strengthened by recent improvements to target setting and marking which are contributing to some improvements in pupils' understanding of what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has effectively managed recent staff changes, the disruption caused by the fire at the school and subsequent rebuilding. She takes a good lead in introducing initiatives and through a good development plan has clearly identified the next steps for improvement. Several parents speak highly of the ways in which the headteacher keeps them informed and

involves them in decision-making. The very good annual meeting with staff, governors and parents ensures that ideas are aired and considered. Accurate analysis of data has been used to set performance management targets and regular monitoring of teaching has pinpointed areas for development. Some success has been achieved in raising standards in reading and improving aspects of problem solving in mathematics. Nonetheless, more remains to be done to sharpen up the quality of teaching especially in challenging more able pupils and in improving the quality in the Foundation Stage.

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Annex A

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	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.

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

2 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Marsh Baldon Church of England Controlled School, Oxford, OX44 9LJ

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I enjoyed talking to you and especially liked the presentation you gave to parents and governors about your visit to Yenworthy. You certainly make the most of opportunities to join in a good range of activities. You contribute much to the work of the school and it was good to see how well you get on together. I was pleased that you listen well and work hard.

The teachers try hard to support you and to make sure that you feel cared for. They are good at helping those of you who find some work difficult. I have asked them to find ways of making some of the work harder as several of you said it was sometimes too easy. You can help with this by always concentrating and by doing your very best. I have also asked the teachers to make sure that they expect more of you when you are writing your topic work. The youngest children quickly settle into school and that is due to the kindness and support that you and the teachers show them. I have asked the headteacher and staff to find some different ways to help these children to do even better in their work.

Everyone at the school wants you to do well and I know that your parents and teachers are really proud of you. I hope that you continue to make a success of your time at Marsh Baldon and have happy memories of your time there.

Best wishes

Sean O'Toole Lead inspector