

Benhall St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124721
Local Authority	SUFFOLK
Inspection number	293089
Inspection date	24 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Cheryl Thompson

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Barrie Slatter
Headteacher	Mr Chris Gallagher
Date of previous school inspection	16 September 2002
School address	School Lane Benhall Saxmundham Suffolk IP17 1HE
Telephone number	01728 602407
Fax number	01728 602407

Age group	4–9
Inspection date	24 May 2007
Inspection number	293089

© Crown copyright 2007

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 an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a much smaller than average primary school serving the local community and beyond. There are two classes. Almost all pupils are White British with a much lower than average proportion eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is around that typically found. Since the last inspection in 2002, the number of pupils attending the school has fallen due to demographic changes. Attainment on entry is average overall but in some years it is below average in the areas of language, literacy and mathematics.

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 and a happy community. Pupils love coming to school and work and play together extremely well. They achieve well academically and their personal development is outstanding. Parents are extremely pleased with all that the school has to offer, especially recent improvements. One wrote, 'The school atmosphere is now buzzing, vibrant and energetic with endless enthusiasm from the children'. Parents also contribute a great deal to pupils' obvious enjoyment of school by helping in classes and with the exceptional range of clubs.

Leadership and management are good. The school demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement. Since his appointment as acting headteacher and subsequently, headteacher, many changes have had a good impact on pupils' achievement and enjoyment of their education. Good processes for monitoring the work of the school are used profitably so that the headteacher and two teachers have a good understanding of what is working successfully and what needs to be improved further. The school's self evaluation is accurate and precise. Under strong leadership from the headteacher, the teachers have contributed a great deal to the recent good improvements. Governance is satisfactory. The school provides good value for money.

Teaching is good and underpinned by excellent relationships. Grouping pupils according to what they need to learn next in numeracy and literacy ensures a good level of challenge. Lessons are interesting because teachers have made a good start on linking subjects to make learning relevant. The good curriculum is enriched with 'theme weeks' and a good range of visits and visitors. Consequently, pupils are very keen to learn and demonstrate this with their very good attendance, excellent behaviour and good work rate.

Standards are above average and pupils make good progress. Provision for children in Reception is satisfactory. The school's new system for teaching letter sounds is beginning to have an impact on improving reading skills but Reception children are not having enough short sessions to help them make the best possible progress. In the Year 2 national tests, standards are generally above average with standards in writing usually being better than in reading. The headteacher has put in place a comprehensive system for tracking pupils' progress which has ensured that the good progress made in Years 1 and 2 is sustained through to Year 4. The information from this tracking system is not yet used as effectively as it might be in setting pupils individual targets for improvement and sharing these with parents. This reduces the impact of target setting on helping to improve the rate of progress.

Pupils have a particularly good understanding of how to lead a healthy life-style and keep themselves safe. They take responsibility seriously and contribute a good deal to the school and wider community through the school council and class councils. These qualities, together with their good literacy and numeracy skills prepare them well for their future. Overall, pupils receive good care, guidance and support with the strength in the excellent pastoral support. Each pupil is valued as an individual and any signs of unhappiness are quickly noted and acted upon. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying in school and that, should they have any worries, any adult will listen and help them. The school's safeguarding procedures meet government requirements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading further by more regular teaching of letter sounds for the Reception children.

- Increase the rate of progress for all pupils by setting individual targets for improvement and sharing these with parents.
- Develop governors' roles so that they can challenge the school to do even better in pupils' standards and achievements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Very small numbers of pupils take the Year 2 national teacher assessments and this makes the data for any single year statistically unreliable. For the past five years, though, results have usually been above average. Standards dropped in 2006 but, from their starting points, this small group of pupils had made at least satisfactory progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills. Reception children make sound progress overall but could make better progress in learning letter sounds. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties, now make good progress as they move from Reception through the school. The headteacher's new system for tracking pupils' progress, based on regular formal assessments, has ensured that good progress is maintained through to Year 4. Indeed, the more able pupils, particularly, have made excellent progress this year to attain standards in Year 4 that are well above those expected for their age.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The considered opinion of the school council is that the children are, 'nice and generous'. They are right! Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are excellent. They are generous in their kindness and patience with each other when they work and play together. Through philosophy lessons, pupils have a good understanding of the need to respect the opinions of others and can also express considered opinions of their own. Older pupils are genuinely considerate and very responsible with the younger ones. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Through the strong links via the 'Comenius' project, pupils know a good deal about the culture of other European and of African children.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is based securely on thorough assessment which ensures that pupils have the right level of challenge in their work. Learning is good because teachers encourage pupils to gauge their own success by identifying what they already know and what they need to learn. Pupils' excellent behaviour and attitudes also have a significant impact on learning. For example, discussions are well focussed and pupils' work rates are good. Furthermore, grouping pupils according to what they need to learn next in literacy and numeracy makes the most efficient use of teachers' expertise and teaching assistants' time. Where this arrangement is less successful is in the teaching of phonics (letter sounds) for the small group of Reception children. The literacy session for these children is too long and they lose concentration.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and enriched with an exceptional range of clubs and sports activities such as gardening, engineering and multi-sports. Teachers are beginning to exploit links between subjects which make lessons interesting but the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is limited due to the number and location of computers within the school. The range of clubs and theme weeks promotes pupils' enjoyment of learning and their personal development exceptionally well. For example, in the gardening club, pupils learn that vegetables are part of a healthy diet and they work together alongside knowledgeable adults to grow a wide range of their own vegetables in their school gardens.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. Pastoral care is excellent. In this small school, each pupil and their family are known very well. Any signs of unhappiness are quickly noted and dealt with. The arrangements to protect and safeguard pupils are effective. The school makes good use of outside agencies to make sure that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have their needs identified and suitable individual education plans and support are put in place. The headteacher has worked successfully to involve parents in their children's learning. Standards in reading in Years 3 and 4 have improved considerably as a result of this initiative. The current method of setting 'layered targets', whereby pupils have a series of goals to aim for, has served its purpose in helping pupils to know that they can take responsibility for their learning but the targets are too broad. Good links with the nearby pre-school provision ensures a smooth start in Reception.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a very clear sense of direction for a school where pupils enjoy learning from a lively curriculum. The school's new motto, 'Feeling great about learning' is evident even in brief visits to classrooms. In their response to the questionnaire, many parents commented positively on improvements in the past year. As one wrote, 'The school has improved so much since they appointed the new headteacher'. The processes for monitoring the work of the school are now firmly established and having a good impact on pupils' progress, as well as helping the school to identify where staff training or new resources are required. For example, a new reading scheme has been purchased and parents report 'stunning progress'. New ICT resources are planned for the next term. The full-time teacher and the part-time teacher take responsibilities for specific subject areas. Through their involvement with new monitoring processes and tracking system, they have a good idea of the strengths and areas to improve. Governance is satisfactory. A high proportion of governors are relatively new and have yet to undertake training for their roles.

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
--	-----------------------

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	3
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	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.

Annex A

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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

25 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Benhall St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School,
Saxmundham, Suffolk, IP17 1HE

Thank you for welcoming me to your school and being so friendly and helpful. I really enjoyed spending the day with you and am writing to tell you what I found out about your school.

You and your parents are quite right when you say that you go to a good school and everyone looks after you well. When I visited your classrooms and looked at your work, it was easy to see that you make good progress and enjoy learning. Weeks like the 'Monster Week' make learning fun for you.

You told me that you like school and two of the best things about it are the clubs and that everyone is 'nice and generous'. You are right! I was very impressed with your excellent behaviour in lessons and in the playground, especially at dinner time when you were looking after your gardens. You know a lot about the right sorts of food to eat to keep you healthy.

Mr Gallagher is doing a good job running your school and is improving things for you at a fast rate. I have asked him to do some things to make it even better. The Reception children could make even better progress learning letter sounds so I have asked that they have more short practice sessions to help them learn these. Now that you are good at knowing about targets, I have asked that you have your own special targets to help you improve and that your parents know about them too. Your governors are quite new so I have asked that they continue to go to training courses to help them know more about what they need to do to help Mr Gallagher and make sure that you do as well as possible.

Thank you all again for being so helpful. I hope you enjoy eating the peas and all the other vegetables you have grown.

Cheryl Thompson

Lead inspector