



Ashurst CofE Aided Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126020
Local Authority West Sussex
Inspection number 293436
Inspection date 13 March 2007
Reporting inspector David Collard

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	School Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Ashurst
Age range of pupils	4–11		Steyning BN44 3AY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01403 710426
Number on roll (school)	63	Fax number	01403 710765
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Helen Rowe
		Headteacher	Janet Williams
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
4–11	13 March 2007	293436

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Ashurst primary is a small rural school serving the local area. The numbers on roll have increased since the last inspection. There are no pupils from ethnic minority groups. Pupils are taught in mixed age classes or groups, depending on the activities. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is low although two pupils have statements of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an exceptionally high achieving school that provides an excellent quality of education within a strong Christian ethos. Pupils start school with above average standards and leave in Year 6 with very high standards. In the 2006 national tests for eleven-year-olds, all pupils gained the higher Level 5 in mathematics and science and all but two achieved this in English. In addition, standards in information and communication technology (ICT) and art are equally high. The very strong leadership of the headteacher, combined with excellent teaching, has been the major factor that has led to this success. Following two good inspection reports and improved levels of achievement, it is clear that the school has an excellent capacity for further improvement. Although the school is small and has some building restrictions, it works hard to ensure that all areas of the excellent curriculum are covered in depth and the potential of each child fully realised. Innovative links have been made with partner institutions, including master classes in science, ICT, food technology and cookery as well as close connections with the local church and a school in The Gambia. The outstanding provision in the Reception Year ensures that pupils make very strong progress and start Year 1 very well prepared for more formal work. Through Years 1 to 6, this excellent achievement is maintained, ensuring a sustainable and steady improvement in standards. Pupils' personal development is equally outstanding. Pupils develop an understanding about how to be responsible for their own learning through the many opportunities they are given to work independently and so it is no surprise that attendance is well above the national average. There are many opportunities for collaborative work. For instance, during the inspection, the themed art and technology week saw pupils of all ages working together. Teachers planned similar tasks but cleverly adapted them to the ability and maturity levels within the combined year groups. The care, support and guidance of pupils are exemplary. The environment is safe and secure but not oppressive, ensuring an open and welcoming approach. Academic guidance is thorough in all subjects and helps staff to ensure that pupils are fully challenged in all that they do. Discussions with pupils in Year 6, and some former pupils, demonstrated how much they felt they had gained. As was written by the pupils in their annual report to the governing body, 'We may be small but we are deadly... you won't regret coming to this school, I didn't'. The outstanding leadership and management will accept no complacency about developing the school to the highest level. The headteacher's vision is based on a strong work ethic so that pupils can make the most of their life chances. She makes realistic demands on her staff based on an extremely thorough understanding of the school's current position. They have responded equally well to her undoubted enthusiasm. Improvement plans focus on the correct priorities, such as to continue to improve ICT. They are rigorously ensuring that provision becomes even better. Parents are rightly pleased with their children's education. As one wrote in the questionnaire, 'I have been very lucky to get my children into Ashurst'.

What the school should do to improve further

Whilst there are no significantly weaker areas to address, the right priorities that will continue to make a difference are identified in the school improvement plan. These include improving the provision for ICT and sustaining the highest levels of pupil achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The continuous progress that is made each year maintains and improves on the good standards with which pupils start school. It is a key reason why pupils achieve so well academically. Whilst the numbers of pupils in each year are small, standards are exceptionally high not only in English, mathematics and science but also across a range of other subjects. As a result, achievement is excellent. Children start school with good communication and numeracy skills as well as being socially adept and having a good understanding of the world around them. They make excellent progress during the Reception Year, with many achieving standards of those expected in Year 1. Through the mixed age classes, pupils in Years 1 and 2 make substantial gains. By the end of Year 2, all are able to read and write and are numerate, reaching standards well within the levels expected for their age. Many pupils are working above this. This continues through Years 3 to 6 where even those who were not doing quite as well in Year 2 manage to achieve good levels. The data from national tests shows that those in Year 6 in 2006 made high levels of progress from when they were in Year 2, being within the top 1% of the country. In addition, pupils are increasingly computer literate, and many are beginning to show artistic, creative or sporting talent.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is excellent. Pupils have highly positive attitudes to school and are extremely well prepared for later life. They are confident in their own ability and, when working, even the youngest pupils have very high levels of concentration. They work and play hard and are always striving to do better. They can talk about how to develop a healthy lifestyle, know how to stay safe and are making the right choices about their diet and exercise. The local community has benefited greatly from the work of pupils. The persistent lobbying by pupils has been instrumental in obtaining 20 miles per hour speed limit on the road outside. They have also raised funds to provide resources for a nursery school abroad. Parents say pupils' support of church activities is central to village life, showing the very high level of contribution that pupils make to life in the local community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The high standards achieved are a result of the excellent teaching. There is evidence of this through lessons seen during the inspection and both internal and external monitoring. Classroom management is excellent. Across all classes, the planning is focused very well both on individual need and ensuring that previous learning is taken into account. For instance, year groups are split on occasion to ensure that age- and subject-specific knowledge is taught. For example, Reception children have the opportunity to work with each other, enabling them to experience structured play activities and interact with others of similar ages whilst Year 6 pupils have regular sessions as a group with the headteacher. Teachers are acutely aware of the shortcomings of the accommodation so plan themes and topics accordingly. For instance, wireless laptop computers are sited in each area, enabling them to be used more regularly. A former pupil said that he had had much better access to computers when he was at Ashurst than he now has at his new school. Nevertheless, the school is planning to enhance the technology provision over the coming years.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The excellent curriculum is as a result of highly innovative staff planning. This is linked very carefully to ensure that pupils of all ages and abilities have consistent levels of challenge. For instance, the recent design of seed packets had the youngest children learning how to fold paper carefully, drawing and copying instructions. At the same time, older pupils researched information about growing seeds and carefully measured and designed their packets on computers to take account of their intended use. Basic skills such as writing are incorporated very well between subjects. Pupils have a wide range of other opportunities. There are residential field trips, French is taught from Year 2 and a local college and high school are used to provide extended activities across a broad range of subjects. The key aim of the planned curriculum very successfully endorses the school's ideal of 'promoting pupils' creative and reflective thinking, on developing pupils' ability to solve and resolve problems and ensuring pupils are reflective and excited learners'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are cared and supported for extremely well, enhancing both their pastoral and academic development. The school is very vigilant and successful in its safeguarding procedures but manages to do this without creating an oppressive atmosphere. Academic guidance is equally secure and very thorough across all subjects. Each individual is carefully tracked and any possible underachievement is carefully monitored. When the need arises, tailored plans are then put into place to remedy any weakness

and pupils are sensitively shown how to make improvements. In their assessments, teachers show how they take account of previous testing and make sure future work links to this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The consistently strong provision over a number of years has come about because the leadership and management of the school are outstanding. An unequivocal and clear direction is being set by the very highly effective headteacher who aims to produce pupils with the best possible standards in whatever talent they have. A knowledgeable governing body is able to both support and challenge the leadership team through the good understanding they have built up. This includes evaluative monitoring and well-informed meetings. The close-knit staff work well as a team, enabling individual strengths to be capitalised on. For instance, one of the school's priorities is to develop physical education and so other facilities are being explored to enhance the provision. Through the use of specialists and visits and connections with other institutions, the school works hard to build an objective judgement about its work. This is ensuring that the self-evaluation is very realistic, a fact also endorsed by the local authority.

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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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 looking after me so well during my recent visit. I really enjoyed meeting you all and hearing about the exciting things you do. As I promised some of you, I have included the main points of the report below.
- You told me what a great school you were at and I agree. I have said in the report that it is outstanding because you all reach such high standards and make exceptionally good progress from the Reception Year to Year 6.
- Your teachers know how to plan lessons that will make you think hard. It is not an easy job to plan for all the different ages and abilities but the teachers do this extremely well. They are helping you to become independent and making sure that you make the most of your talents. This is why the teaching is excellent.
- I was impressed with your behaviour. I also noticed in the lessons that when you were working on your own, you were concentrating so hard that nothing seemed to disturb you.
- Those I spoke to in Year 6 said that they thought they did exciting work and again, I agree. I think that the curriculum you are offered is outstanding. It is quite difficult to make sure this happens in schools like yours because you do not have things such as a gym or computer suite. Nevertheless, with all the other places you go to, it makes sure that you do not miss out on the things that happen in bigger schools.
- You all rightly said that you were looked after well and felt safe and secure. This is because all the staff take the trouble to make sure that the right systems are in place.
- Your headteacher has worked extremely hard, along with all the other adults, to ensure you can do your very best. I am sure you know that she will continue to do so because she has some interesting plans for the future. If this happens, I am confident that the school will continue to improve even more. I am sorry I did not get to have a chat with more of you and know that some of you were disappointed about this. Unfortunately, I had to see so much before I left. It is now over to you. Continue working hard, listening carefully and making sure you do as well as you have been.