

# Balcombe CofE Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	126006
<b>Local Authority</b>	West Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	295502
<b>Inspection date</b>	4 July 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Patricia Davies

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	133
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Chris Malkinson
<b>Headteacher</b>	T M Harris
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 July 2001
<b>School address</b>	London Road Balcombe Haywards Heath RH17 6HS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01444 811403
<b>Fax number</b>	01444 811403

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

Balcombe is a small village school. Most pupils live in the village, and about a third comes to the school from the surrounding area. Almost all the pupils are from White British backgrounds. Year groups are small and differ much in size. Attainment on entry to Reception varies a good deal from year to year, but is broadly as expected and, in some years, a little higher. The overall proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average, but the distribution of these pupils varies across the school, and the proportion is above average in some year groups. There have been some recent changes to staff and leadership responsibilities.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Balcombe is a good school. It is a small and friendly community where pupils grow in confidence and achieve well. Pupils' well-being is carefully nurtured. This pastoral element is a strong feature of the school's good care, guidance and support, and its impact is illustrated in pupils' exceptionally good behaviour and positive relationships at work and play.

Some key initiatives have been selected to lift the quality of teaching and learning, and to ensure that activities provide the necessary challenge, particularly for the more able. The first signs of success appeared in the improvements to last year's national test results, which rose above the national average. Standards this year are also above average, and with greater proportions at Year 6 reaching the higher levels in English, mathematics and science. Teaching and learning are good, although the school is well aware that there are still some inconsistencies in both that it must continue to tackle. Nevertheless, pupils are considerably motivated by the greater opportunities they now have to take an active role in their learning. High levels of engagement and enjoyment during lessons are other outstanding features of pupils' good personal development and well-being. Pupils also write enthusiastically about visits and dramatic performances. These experiences are valuable extensions to the school's good curriculum. Good provision in Reception ensures that areas of relative weakness in language, literacy and mathematical skills are successfully rectified by the time pupils start Year 1.

Good leadership and management are characterised by honest and accurate appraisal of the school's effectiveness and a strong commitment to improvement. The increases in academic performance show that the school is well placed to make further improvements. Key members of staff are enthusiastic about their new leadership roles and are already laying foundations in preparation for the new academic year. Monitoring activities have been much extended and staff and governors look keenly at how they can sharpen them further. Teaching and learning have been carefully checked, but lessons are not yet monitored as frequently as they should be in order to fully resolve the remaining variations in the quality of both.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching and learning are monitored with sufficient frequency to tackle and resolve remaining inconsistencies and so improve the quality of both.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

The school has done much to get to grips with inconsistencies in pupils' progress, especially in writing and mathematics. Although the school is aware that some variation still remains, pupils' progress and achievement are now good and standards are above average. Those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make similarly good progress. They are well supported, often by very specific tailor-made activities, in class and during additional activities away from the classroom. Good progress in Reception is most evident in those areas where children start school with relatively lower attainment. As a result, the current Reception group will move through in to Year 1 with above expected standards in all areas of learning, including the initially weaker areas of writing and mathematical calculation.

Last year's national test results rose from average to above average levels. The present Years 2 and 6 have higher proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than the

groups taking the tests last year. Therefore, standards this year – just above average at Year 2 and above average in Year 6 – illustrate continuing academic improvement. The impact of the school's hard work is particularly evident at the higher levels, with gains at Level 3 in writing in Year 2, and at Level 5 in Year 6 in English, mathematics and science.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal skills and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good as a whole, and with some outstanding aspects. Exceptional qualities include pupils' behaviour and high levels of interest and participation during lessons. Despite the limitations of space in the playground, pupils play small ball games and other activities with considerable awareness of the safety of others. During assemblies, pupils are quick to applaud the performance of other pupils. Their confidence, motivation and friendliness prepare them well for future life at secondary school and beyond, as does their good academic progress. Attendance is above average.

In addition to the everyday responsibilities pupils undertake, they are gaining a greater 'voice' in school affairs. They have been influential, for example, in promoting awareness of issues surrounding bullying. Pupils also make valuable contributions to the local community through their participation in Harvest Festival and the Parish Plan. Many take part in the school's wide range of sporting activities. Pupils have a good knowledge of what they should eat to be healthy, although some own up to not always choosing to do so!

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Some important initiatives have been introduced to improve teaching and learning. The most successful so far is the adept use of discussion, which enables pupils to explore ideas independently and make suggestions of their own, either with a partner or the whole class. Pupils' familiarity with subject-related terminology also allows them to explain with growing clarity and precision. They are greatly motivated by these activities and all take a full part. Where this approach is used with a high level of skill, and combined with careful questioning and well-deserved praise, pupils quickly begin to understand new and complex mathematical concepts and identify a wide range of methods to solve a problem. Increasingly, discussion is also used for pupils to evaluate their work and that of others, or to identify what they might find if a task has been successfully accomplished. This is a refinement that the school is keen to develop further.

Much of the school's teaching and learning are good and, sometimes, outstanding, but they are still variable in quality. Progress is satisfactory, rather than good, when tasks and questioning are sometimes too 'safe' and should demand more of pupils. Sometimes, too, levels of concentration are disturbed when children are noisy because they become over-excited by their activities.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum gives a good foundation for teaching, particularly in the light of recent improvements. These modifications have successfully focused attention on independent learning and the application of knowledge and skills, for example in mathematics. While these approaches benefit all pupils, they have given a boost to achievement at the higher end. Links between literacy and other subjects also help to give pupils a wide range of writing opportunities. Basic literacy skills are well attended to in Reception and Key Stage 1 through a close focus on building letter sounds. At the same time, stories that capture children's imagination and sense of fun promote the pleasure of reading and writing early on. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities benefit from much individualised support. A program for teaching computer keyboard skills, for instance, helps those with writing difficulties to produce a similar volume of written work to others in their class.

Drama productions, visiting artists, trips and residential visits all enrich pupils' experiences. Extremely close links with the secondary school help to support the extensive range of sporting opportunities and provide specialist teaching of Spanish. These activities do much to promote pupils' cultural development, but the school is aware that there is greater scope for extending their awareness of cultures other than their own.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Parents particularly appreciate the school's sense of community and nurturing climate – as one parent wrote, 'it's wonderful atmosphere... makes the children confident to "have a go" at all areas of learning'. Pupils clearly feel happy and secure. Pupil 'buddies' are available at playtimes and there is an 'action box' for 'posting' concerns. Parents write highly of the support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Vulnerable pupils are particularly well looked after. Extremely close links are forged with parents, carers and outside agencies. There are also opportunities within school to chat things through, and find subjects where pupils are successful in order to increase their motivation. Early and relaxed introductory activities ensure an untroubled start in the Reception class, while arrangements with the secondary school allow for a similarly smooth transfer for pupils in Year 6. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are secure.

Pupils report themselves to be happy with the school's academic guidance and support. They find the learning targets on display in classrooms very useful for checking their level of attainment and what they should do next to move on. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored. Marking is another of the school's priorities for further development and to make sure that pupils will consistently receive feedback on how to improve their work.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's focus on developing some key areas of improvement has proved successful in raising achievement and standards. At the same time, the school clearly understands where it is now and that improvement needs to be maintained. Much thought has been given to the

school's current needs in restructuring leadership arrangements for September. Preparation is already well ahead to settle in new teachers and strengthen liaison between key stages.

The headteacher has a sharp eye for what makes teaching effective and is using this expertise to good effect in promoting the monitoring skills of subject leaders. There is already a wide range of monitoring activities that give leaders a thorough grasp of strengths and weaknesses within their subject and what to do next. Nevertheless, teaching and learning are not yet monitored and followed up often enough to test out the ongoing impact of new initiatives and fully tackle remaining variations in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Governors in key positions are highly motivated and well informed. They see that financial decisions are closely matched to the school's priorities and follow up through, for example, discussion with subject leaders and visits to school. Consultation with parents has been extended. Governors are aware also of the need to formalise their monitoring activities further.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
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	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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

4 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Balcombe CofE Primary School, Balcombe, RH17 6HS

Thank you very much for your friendly welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed being with you and this letter is to tell you something about what I found out during my visit.

Perhaps the most important things you should know are that your school is a good school and you achieve well. Your confidence and your great interest and participation during lessons help you all to do well. It was good to hear that you thought that your teachers were kind and helpful – all the staff are working very hard to make things even better for you.

Here are some other important things about you and your school

- Your school is a warm and friendly community, which your parents and carers feel to be really important.
- You are all extremely well behaved and are caring and thoughtful with each other, especially in the playground where the space is fairly small and safety is important.
- Teaching is good, although it still sometimes could be better.
- You are very good at talking about your ideas in lessons and this helps you to find new ways of working things out, for example in mathematics.
- All the adults look after you well and you feel that you get plenty of help to do even better.
- I can tell from the website that you thoroughly enjoy your trips and visits (and the school pantomime!) and some of you told me what fun they had on the residential trip.

This is what your school has been asked to do to make things even better

- Make sure that lessons are checked more often so that staff can make sure that the quality of teaching and the progress you make are always good or better.

With very best wishes for the future,

Patricia Davies Lead inspector