

Bearbrook Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110318
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310258
Inspection dates	29–30 January 2008
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	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	369
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Bates
Headteacher	Mr Marcus Faulkner
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2003
School address	Fowler Road Aylesbury HP19 7QP
Telephone number	01296 488331
Fax number	01296 337432

Age group	4-11
Inspection dates	29–30 January 2008
Inspection number	310258

© Crown copyright 2008

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 three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school admits pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds. Although most pupils have White British heritage an above average proportion have minority ethnic backgrounds. A small proportion are at an early stage of speaking English. An average percentage have learning difficulties mainly regarding basic English. The school has experienced significant staff changes in recent years including the appointment of a new headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school has faced many challenges in recent years resulting in some underachievement in the past. Under the dynamic leadership of the headteacher and his enthusiastic team, standards have improved, teaching and learning are more focused, and there is a clear sense of purpose and vision. The headteacher has restored the confidence of parents, pupils, staff and governors, and embarked on a robust programme of improvement. As one parent wrote, 'I feel that there is commitment and strong leadership. The atmosphere is upbeat and happy for staff and children.'

Children in the Foundation Stage make good gains in their personal, social and emotional development. These qualities then blossom throughout the school. Consequently, pupils are well-behaved and keen learners. The staff's constructive use of praise enhances learning. Pupils achieve satisfactorily and there has been a steady improvement in standards in English and mathematics which are now broadly average. Progress accelerates in Years 5 and 6 because teaching challenges pupils well. Pupils respond to these demands enthusiastically and leave school equipped for the next stage of education. Leaders and managers rigorously analyse pupils' progress and use the information to compensate for previous weaknesses. One success has been in supporting those at an early stage of learning English with the result that these pupils now achieve as well as their peers.

Good monitoring and support have brought greater consistency to lessons. All of the lessons seen were satisfactory or better. Planning is thorough and there is a strong emphasis on developing basic skills. Extra support is given to those with learning difficulties, especially those who struggle with some aspects of reading and writing, and this enables them to improve satisfactorily. Teachers relate well to the pupils. In some classes, the teaching assistants provide well-focused support for individuals or small groups. Nonetheless, some aspects of teaching require further improvement. Assessment and marking are not used well enough to pitch learning at a sufficiently demanding level and to guide the pupils on how to improve. As a result, some lessons lack pace and, in some classes, pupils do not produce as much work as they should.

Pupils say how much they enjoy school and competently discuss safe and healthy lifestyles. They enjoy making decisions and participate enthusiastically in the school and eco councils. The school has introduced good links between English and other subjects and this has contributed to improved standards in writing. Although the school has improved its resources for information and communication technology (ICT) pupils do not use computers in other subjects consistently.

Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are ambitious for the pupils. Success in the last year shows that the school is well placed to improve. As one pupil said, 'I have always liked school but it's getting better and better. It's a place where I feel safe and cared for.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children start school with a wide range of skills which are at a lower level than that expected for their age. They make steady progress and achieve satisfactorily. Children enjoy the activities and learn to work well together. Staff provide an appropriate range of experiences but there

are insufficient opportunities for the children to make choices and use their initiative. Recent changes to the organisation are beginning to work although outdoor learning needs further improvement. Staff observe the children at work but do not draw sufficiently on the information to guide them on planning the next range of activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of assessment to ensure that work is pitched at a sufficiently demanding level, brings greater pace to teaching and results in higher productivity for pupils.
- Provide more balance between direct teaching and opportunities for children in the Foundation Stage to make decisions about their learning, especially in outdoor play.
- Improve pupils' skills and knowledge in ICT and provide more opportunities for them to use computers to support their learning in other subjects.

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

Standards at the end of Year 2 have improved slightly in recent years and are average in reading, writing and mathematics. Following a steep decline in standards at the end of Year 6, following the previous inspection, the school has reversed the trend, and standards in English and mathematics are broadly average. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve satisfactorily. The school identified weaknesses in the work of different groups and provided extra help so that the progress of those with English as an additional language has improved. Progress in Years 5 and 6 is good because of challenging teaching. The focus on writing and the good teaching of phonics are contributing to improvements in English. In some classes, strong links between English and other subjects also make a positive difference to pupils' performance. Pupils enjoy art and produce well-crafted and imaginative work in this subject.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

'I like coming to school because everyone is friendly,' said a Year 4 boy. Pupils are happy and develop positive attitudes about learning and relationships. Their behaviour is good and they are polite and thoughtful. Older pupils enjoy supporting the younger ones at play. Council members take their responsibilities seriously and keenly contribute to school improvement and to improving the environment. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In part, this is demonstrated by their commitment to looking after the school's pets and woodland and by their exciting artwork. They know how to stay fit and healthy and talk excitedly about the opportunities to join in the school's sporting events. They also contribute much to making the school's ethos positive through their hard work, willingness to do homework and participation in extra activities. Improving academic skills and the ability to work collaboratively help to prepare them for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

One of the strengths in teaching is the way that adults relate to the pupils. Lessons are planned thoroughly and the often good teaching of phonics and writing is helping to improve standards. Pupils who receive extra support for basic English benefit from well-focused tasks. In Years 5 and 6, where pupils are set challenging work, lessons have brisk pace and the teachers' expectations mean that pupils improve quickly. In most classes, pupils show pride in how they present their work. They are attentive listeners and keen to please. However, pupils' books show that productivity levels are not as high as they should be, due to the slow pace of lessons. Teachers mark pupils' work but guidance about how to improve and the setting of sharply focused targets are inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The good provision for personal, social and health education contributes much to pupils' positive attitudes to school and enables them to gain a good grasp of how to live in harmony with others. Pupils enjoy school visits, which contribute much to their learning. They eagerly participate in a good range of extra activities including sport, French and art. The school is working on ways to develop writing across the curriculum and there are appropriate plans to create more links between subjects. There have been improvements in the resources for ICT but pupils are at an early stage of using computers to support their work in other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Commenting on the friendly and approachable staff and that their children feel safe in school, many parents expressed delight that recent improvements have resulted in their children feeling valued and supported. One wrote, 'I feel I can leave my child in a safe and happy environment. My daughter's work and behaviour have improved so much.' The staff focus intensively on the pupils' well-being and there are robust child protection procedures, good quality risk assessment and detailed attention to matters of health and safety. All requirements regarding safeguarding children are met. The school provides adequate support for those with learning difficulties. Increased support for those new to speaking English is making a good impact. Assessment is not always used to identify the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance and this means that some teachers do not pitch the work at a sufficiently challenging level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy have done much to build confidence among staff, pupils and parents. They have well focused plans for improvement based on a rigorous analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Staff and governors share a commitment to pupils' success. Their actions have led to improvement in standards and the quality of teaching, although more remains to be done to tighten up on assessment, improve the Foundation Stage and increase the pace of lessons. Regular monitoring and evaluation have guided senior staff in setting

targets and have also resulted in all staff being clear about what is expected. The school's strategic plans are ambitious and achievable, and include the views of pupils and parents. Governors are supportive but their role in checking on the school's performance is underdeveloped.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	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	2

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 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	3
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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	2
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

12 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bearbrook Combined School, Aylesbury, HP19 7QP

please see attached pupils' letter

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.



12 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bearbrook Combined School, Aylesbury, HP19 7QP

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and seeing how much you have helped the school to improve. We were impressed by your good behaviour and the thoughtful way in which you shared your ideas about the school. The school and eco councils are doing really well and it was good to see how much you have learned about caring for the environment. One boy said, 'Eco council has made me think about things I waste. I now turn off my stand-by on the television.' Your mums and dads are pleased to see how much the school has improved. It was lovely to hear you talk about the environmental area, new computers and how you enjoy taking responsibility.

Your school has improved much and is now satisfactory. You now are achieving satisfactorily and the standard of your work has improved. These are some of the good things about your school:

- ☺ the staff care about you and help you
- ☺ you work hard and like helping each other
- ☺ you are kind and thoughtful and show lots of respect for others
- ☺ you are good at art and your work makes the school look attractive
- ☺ your headteacher, the staff and the governors have worked hard to improve many things about the school.

You can help the teachers to make the school even better by always trying your best. We have asked the teachers to give you better guidance when they mark your books and to encourage you to work quicker. We know that you like the new computers but you need more time to use them for your work in other subjects. We would also like to see better equipment for outdoor play for the Foundation Stage and for the teachers to help the children to make more choices about what they are learning.

We hope that you continue to enjoy school and continue to work hard.

Sean O'Toole
Lead Inspector