

Whitchurch Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110333
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310261
Inspection date	27 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

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	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Anthony
Headteacher	Mr Simon Blore
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	North Marston Lane Whitchurch Aylesbury HP22 4JG
Telephone number	01296 641418
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the key features that lead to the school gaining such exceptionally high standards, how the school provides academic guidance for pupils and provision in the Foundation Stage. Evidence was gathered from the analysis of pupils' progress, scrutiny of samples of their work and observation of pupils in lessons. Discussions were held with staff, governors and pupils. In addition, 49 parents' questionnaires were analysed and their comments taken into account. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Whitchurch is an oversubscribed and average sized primary school that has one class for each age group. Children starting the school generally have skills that are similar to those typically found though their personal and social skills are above expectations for their age. There are a very small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and all are fluent English speakers. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about half the national average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Four pupils have statements of special educational needs. The school has been awarded 'Investors in People' status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'Our daughter couldn't enjoy school any more than she does and is so happy. We are thrilled with the school and the children put their heart and soul into their work.' These comments express the parents' great confidence in the school. It is a wonderful school that is outstandingly effective in almost every way and it prepares pupils exceptionally well for their move to secondary education. A strong ethos, encapsulated in the phrase the 'Whitchurch Way', underpins all the school does. It results in the pupils' exceptional personal and academic development, captures, and builds an enthusiasm for learning from an early age. Pupils attain standards that have been exceptionally high for many years. They thoroughly enjoy school and thrive because provision is consistently outstanding. There is an inviting and exciting learning environment. This is safe, stimulating and celebratory with elaborate and high quality displays of the pupils' excellent work throughout the whole school.

The school's close and accurate monitoring of pupils' progress and of teaching contributes well to the school's success. The quality of the process is such that any potential issues are quickly identified and dealt with before they become problematic. Any vulnerable pupils, including those that are at risk of slipping behind in their learning, are kept under close review to make sure that the additional provision that has been devised for them is having a positive impact. As a result, these pupils achieve as outstandingly well as their classmates do.

Children in the Foundation Stage settle quickly and achieve well. This good start is accelerated through the rest of the school. National assessments for pupils at the end of Year 2 are well above average. By the time that they reach Year 6, pupils attain standards that are in the top 5% in the country. Almost all pupils attain the standard expected of their age group and about three quarters attain the higher standard. Furthermore, standards in art, information and communication technology, history and geography are also exceptionally high because the school places a very strong emphasis on pupils' achievement in all curriculum areas.

Pupils receive excellent guidance and support to help them to continue to make such strong progress. Year 5 and 6 pupils prepare a weekly learning log for the headteacher and this diary enables pupils to identify strengths in their learning and points that they feel will help them to improve. However, this is not just a log of events. The points raised are acted upon and each pupil's needs carefully considered. They reflect on their learning thus fostering their independence and their skills of evaluation. In addition, meticulous details of pupils' progress are maintained and each pupils' progress is regularly reviewed. As a result, clear targets are set and pupils know precisely what they need to do to improve.

Teaching and learning are of very high quality. This enthuses the pupils and generates high levels of excitement and participation in the rich and challenging activities set. All the key attributes of highly effective teaching are present: excellent explanations, good pace, outstanding questioning skills used to check pupils' understanding and extend their thinking, challenging work that is well matched to pupils' abilities, excellent planning and classroom organisation. These characteristics were present in all lessons seen, but exemplified in an excellent Year 5 history lesson. Pupils were investigating and interrogating the school's Victorian logbooks, and learning was made real because the logbooks catalogued key features of learning for pupils who attended the school over 100 years ago. The pupils were fascinated to compare and contrast schooling then and now. They also built up an excellent picture of how to use primary historical sources and their learning was outstanding.

Even though the school evaluated its curriculum as good, it is much better and is outstanding. The school's evaluation was based on the need to make some improvements. However, the curriculum is rich and varied, considerably exceeds all requirements and is organised in such a way as to make learning real. A wide range of visits and visitors frequently takes learning out of the classroom and also strongly promotes pupils' personal development. This is supplemented well by residential visits, which provide the spine of work across all areas of the curriculum. There are many opportunities for pupils to excel in sports and the arts because the curriculum is supplemented well by the good range of clubs. In addition, pupils who find learning easy are supported very well both in the school by the high challenge provided in lessons and also by taking part in activities organised by local secondary schools. These include master classes in science and mathematics. In addition, the Buckinghamshire Young People's University provides Saturday morning activities.

Because they adhere to the 'Whitchurch Way' which means that pupils have very high expectations of themselves and others, pupils feel safe in school. Attendance levels are high, behaviour is excellent and pupils report that there is no misbehaviour. As one school council member said, 'We all make sure that everyone has fun every day and everyone's behaviour is really good.' Because staff are careful to celebrate successes, pupils are immensely proud of their school and of themselves when they receive awards. This ethos of celebration is a further important feature in the school's success.

Leadership and management are outstanding and secures excellence in provision and achievement. All staff fulfil their leadership roles very well, teamwork is very strong, morale high and the contribution of every member of staff and governors is valued and appreciated. Governance is good because there have been a number of new governors recently and governors recognise that more training is required in order for them to fulfil their role to the highest calibre. There has been excellent improvement since the previous inspection and there is an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle well and make good progress in the Foundation Stage. Teaching is very good. Children are provided with a wide range of interesting activities that include a good balance between those that are directed by the staff and those that children choose for themselves. Children enter the school with above average personal and social skills and these are nourished very well. Children are confident, secure and happy learners. However, there is a weakness because outdoor learning is severely hampered. There are some steep and difficult steps for children to manoeuvre between the classroom and the outdoor space and also there is no shade or cover provided for them. This means that the children do not have enough easy access to outdoor learning as is necessary. In consequence, even though staff make as best use of the space that they can, it is difficult for them to sustain outdoor learning in all the required areas.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consider ways to improve access to the outdoor learning space in the Foundation Stage, and provide more cover for the children.

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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
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	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

10 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitchurch Combined School, Aylesbury, HP22 4JG

Thank you so much for making me welcome and for talking with me when I visited your school. I enjoyed finding out about Whitchurch. Please would you also thank your parents for returning the questionnaires.

I agree with both your parents and yourselves that yours is an excellent school in all respects. Your work is of a high standard and your achievement throughout the school is outstanding. I was very impressed with the way that you use so many skills across all your subjects. I thought the many displays of work were beautifully created and displayed and they help to show all the many and wide variety of things that you are taught. I was particularly impressed with your artwork in all the classes, but particularly the group portraits in the hall. Your teachers have excellent skills and they help you to learn exceptionally well. They plan interesting and exciting activities for you and I can understand why you all love lessons and learning. I enjoyed hearing about the trips that you go on - particularly the Year 6 trip to Southampton and the Year 5 visit to the Isle of Wight.

Your behaviour is excellent, you have very positive attitudes to each other and I was very impressed how well all of you get on together, and how you make sure that others are happy too. Mr Blore and all the other adults involved in leading and managing your school do an excellent job. They make sure that you receive the best possible education.

I have asked your school to do one thing. This is to think about ways to improve the outdoor space for the Reception children. At present, you know how steep the steps are. In addition, they need to have some cover so the children can learn when the weather is bad or it is very hot and they need shade.

Once again, thank you for your help. Keep to the 'Whitchurch Way' and you can then make sure that your school gets even better.

Yours sincerely

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector