

Waterside Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110337
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310262
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	John Earish

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	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Robert Anderson
Headteacher	Mr Gareth Drawmer
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Black Horse Avenue Chesham HP5 1QU
Telephone number	01494 786608
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small primary school serves an area of Chesham where many families live in disadvantaged social circumstances. About a fifth of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups and four are at the very earliest stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well above that found nationally. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. There have been many recent staff changes including the appointment of a new headteacher from the beginning of the autumn term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Waterside Combined School provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. It has a number of strengths, mostly relating to pupils' personal development and well-being, which is of good quality. Parents agree and say 'the staff are caring and approachable'. Pupils treat each other with respect, behave well and want to learn. Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6 and achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress towards their individual learning targets.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and evidence from the school's accurate evaluations show that the amount of good teaching is increasing. In the better lessons, teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of all groups of pupils and progress is good. A weakness in otherwise competent teaching is that teachers sometimes spend too much time introducing activities. Consequently, some pupils, especially those of higher ability, do not always have enough opportunities to learn independently and to develop their own critical skills that extends their learning further.

A good range of out of class activities enriches the satisfactory curriculum. It provides well for pupils' social and health education and makes a positive contribution to their good personal development. Adjustments have been made to provide more opportunities for pupils to recognise and spell words phonetically and includes a good support programmes to boost the progress of pupils who need extra help. This is having a positive impact on reading standards. The school is successfully increasing the opportunities for pupils to practice and develop their writing skills across a range of subjects such as geography and history. However, opportunities for pupils to apply their skills at problem solving and investigative work in science are less well developed.

This is a school in which each child matters. All pupils are warmly welcomed and equally valued. The quality of care, guidance and support provided for pupils is satisfactory overall and their pastoral care is good. Although pupils have targets to achieve, they do not always have sufficient opportunities to assess for themselves or with others what they need to do to improve their work.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The new headteacher and management team have identified a number of priorities for development through self-evaluation. Although this is accurate there is still more to be done to ensure that closer monitoring is more vigilant in order to eliminate underachievement. Some subject coordinators are not yet influential enough in raising the quality of teaching and learning to ensure greater consistency in pupils' progress. The use of assessment information to track the performance of the pupils, and to accelerate their achievement, is developing well and this has been most successful in English. However, weaknesses remain in science. The school has responded by increasing the opportunities for pupils to design and carry out their own experiments. Well-informed governors are determined to sustain the recent improvements by holding the school to account for its performance through systematic monitoring. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

A small, but significant number of the pupils interviewed during the course of the inspection provided further confirmation that the school has made important changes in order to improve. They were particularly pleased with the opportunities they now have to write creatively in lots of different styles and subjects. They also liked solving mathematical problems and it was now one of their favourite subjects but wished they had could do more experiments in science.

Several remarked that when teachers just give you facts 'it goes in one ear and out of the other' but when you do an experiment 'you really enjoy it and it stays in your brain and means something'. They agreed that teachers want to help you improve your grades and that learning is usually fun.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children typically start school with skills and abilities that are very much lower than those normally expected of four year olds. They make good progress in developing their skills in the early stages of reading and in learning to work cooperatively and to share with one another. Although, fewer reach the goals expected of them by the end of Reception than is typically the case. Induction procedures are good and help the children settle quickly into routines and to play with others. However, the lack of a covered outdoor area restricts the range of activities offered for outdoor learning. The school is aware of this and has plans to develop the accommodation for the children in the Foundation Stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in science by building on the start made in increasing the opportunities for pupils to design and carry out their own experiments.
- Develop the role of all subject coordinators at improving the consistency in teaching and learning and raising attainment.
- Extend the opportunities for pupils to assess their own work so they have an even better understanding of what they need to do to improve

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

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Standards are below average at age 7 years and broadly average by the time the pupils leave at the age of 11 years. Last year, standards were above average in English by the end of Year 6 and have been improving steadily over the past three years. The weakest subject is science, with significantly fewer pupils attaining the higher level 5 in national tests compared with the previous year. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils make the best progress in English and last year's tests results show that the rate of progress made by the pupils was the highest over the last five years. The school recognises that progress in science is not as strong as in other subjects with significant variations from year to year. Actions taken to address this weakness means that pupils are now making at least satisfactory progress during lessons. Lesson observations confirm that pupils are making good progress at developing their phonic skills to attain higher standards in reading by the age of 7 years. Pupils with learning difficulties make similar progress to their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school, and are enthusiastic learners particularly when lessons are practical and interesting. The rate of attendance, previously unsatisfactory, is similar to the national average and is further evidence that pupils are happy and now enjoy coming to school.

Pupils have good relationships with their teachers and other adults. Behaviour is good throughout the school and pupils feel safe. They say that any bullying is effectively dealt with by the adults. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously and pupils are confident that their views are listened to.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respect the feelings of others and have a good awareness of their beliefs. Older pupils delight in acting as playground friends and raise money for a number of local and national charities. Pupils have a good awareness of the benefits of choosing healthy food and enjoy the good range of opportunities for physical activities. The school has gained a county award for the range of extra sporting activities it offers. The very active gardening club keeps the environment looking attractive by planting tubs of plants around the school and was the regional winner of 'Best School' in the 'Britain in Bloom' competition. Pupils improving skills in English and mathematics prepare them appropriately for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Good and imaginative teaching was observed in all year groups, but this is not yet sufficiently consistent to support rapid progress in all subjects. When teaching is good, activities are pitched at the right level to match pupils' abilities, including those of higher ability, which inspires them to work hard. For example, during a science lesson in Years 3 and 4, pupils connected batteries, buzzers and bulbs in different configurations to produce the brightest bulb and the loudest buzzer, which was a challenging activity for this age group. Everyone was excited and determined to 'have a go' and 'do their best' and made good progress. On other occasions the activities are not as well matched to the needs of particular groups, introductions are overlong and there are fewer opportunities to work independently and explore ideas. Pupils enjoy these lessons less. Questioning is usually thorough and opportunities to discuss in pairs are used well to develop and consolidate pupils' understanding of new ideas; although on some occasions there are missed opportunities to extend their thinking sufficiently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced with an appropriate emphasis on English and mathematics. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to practise their early reading skills by 'sounding out' letters and words phonetically. The school has started to adapt the curriculum to make it challenging, relevant and exciting by making links between the different areas of learning. For example, a good start has been made at increasing the opportunities to write in a range of styles in different subjects. The use of information and communication technology has improved since the last inspection and is satisfactorily supporting learning across the curriculum. However, opportunities for pupils to apply their skills at problem solving and investigative work in science

are less well developed. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities including an annual residential trip, and numerous sporting and cultural activities which support pupils' personal development well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school looks after its pupils well. Child protection procedures are thorough and risk assessments are of a good quality. Support for pupils' welfare is strong and the guidance they are given contributes to their good personal development. Improved procedures for monitoring academic progress, although relatively new, are already helping staff to identify quickly those who are underachieving and take action to deal with it. Target setting is helping pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work in English and mathematics. However, the judgement for care, guidance and support is only satisfactory overall because pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to assess for themselves or with others what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher and leadership team are building on the improvements of recent years and are determined to increase pupils' achievement. School self-assessment has identified key priorities for development. These are manageable and appropriate. The school is right to focus on improving the role of subject leaders. This is intended to ensure that they have a greater influence on the quality of teaching and learning across the school, as well as establishing greater consistency in pupils' progress in all subjects. Governors share the leaders' determination to raise standards, but need to be vigilant at holding the school to account for its performance in order to consolidate recent successes. Given the recent improvements to pupils' achievement in English and improvements to the tracking of their performance, there is satisfactory capacity to secure further improvement.

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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	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?	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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3
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

10 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Waterside Combined School, Chesham, HP5 1QU

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you and your views and opinions have given me a lot of helpful information. I thought you might like to know more about what I found out.

Your school is giving you a satisfactory education, but I could see that it is getting better. Here are a few of the things I liked most of all.

- You behave well and get on very well with each other.
- You listen carefully to what your teachers say and enjoy practical activities.
- The school council represents your views well and you all help the school to run smoothly.
- You enjoy the extra curricular activities that are organised for you. I was particularly impressed to hear about the success of the gardening club.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are well looked after.

All of the adults in your school want it to be even better. Here are some of the things I have suggested they should do so that you can improve your work.

- I have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to design and carry out your own experiments in science. You told me that you really enjoy this and that it helps you to learn.
- I have also asked them to give you more opportunities to assess your own progress so that you have an even better understanding of what you need to do to improve your work.
- Your headteacher and teachers are going to find ways of checking on how well the school is doing and of making sure that everyone is as successful as possible.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and by listening carefully to your teachers' advice. I am sure that you are ready for this challenge!

Yours truly,

John Earish

Lead Inspector