

# High Ash Church of England Combined School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110419
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	310294
<b>Inspection date</b>	13 December 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Thompson

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	231
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Tom Muldownie
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Louise Eaton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 September 2003
<b>School address</b>	Pound Hill Great Brickhill Milton Keynes MK17 9AS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01525 261620
<b>Fax number</b>	01525 261988

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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 quality and standards in the Foundation Stage, how well pupils make progress, and the quality of teaching and the curriculum. The inspector gathered evidence from an analysis of information and data about pupils' achievements provided by the school, observations of parts of lessons, parents' questionnaires, and discussions with the headteacher, the Foundation Stage coordinator, the vice-chair of governors and pupils. The inspector did not investigate other aspects of the school's work in detail, but found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These judgements have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

## Description of the school

High Ash Combined is an average-sized primary school serving three villages in north Buckinghamshire. It also draws about 40% of its pupils from nearby Milton Keynes. Most pupils are of White British heritage, and are generally from advantaged home circumstances. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. The school has a number of awards; these include The Active Mark and Arts Mark Silver awards in 2007, and the National Healthy Schools award in 2006.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

High Ash is an outstanding school. The parents and pupils hold their school in very high regard. Their extremely positive views are entirely justified. One parent summed up the views of many when writing, 'High Ash is a diamond of a school that shines brightly and promotes excellent standards for future generations.' Another commented on the 'wide and varied opportunities beyond traditional classroom learning, the caring and dedicated staff, good communications with parents, an impressive reporting system and the emphasis on achieving and developing.' It is a vibrant place where pupils achieve exceptionally well. This occurs because teaching, the curriculum, and the care and guidance provided for pupils are all excellent.

The key to the school's success is its relentless focus on developing its pupils as confident, caring, independent and thoughtful learners. From broadly average starting points, pupils make outstanding progress and by the time they leave at the end of Year 6, standards are high. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is excellent. Pupils are bright and articulate; they have highly developed social skills and play a full part in the day-to-day life of the school. Their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils' social awareness extends well beyond the school, and is evident, for example, in the wide range of charity fundraising activities selected and supported by the pupils and their links with local organisations.

The curriculum provided for pupils is one of the school's many exceptional features. It is enriched through a wide range of out-of-school activities and frequent events, such as a Challenge Week, and regular class visits. The Tudor banquet, enjoyed by pupils in Years 3 and 4 during the afternoon of the inspection, is a good example of the way in which the school brings learning to life for pupils. There is a strong musical tradition. Almost half of the pupils in Key Stage 2 learn to play an instrument, and the school helps celebrate their achievements by providing regular opportunities for public performance. The school's strong commitment to developing the potential of its gifted and talented pupils is a further excellent feature that is valued by parents. One wrote, 'I have two extremely able children, and it is a testament to the school that they are rarely bored.' The promotion of pupils' health, safety and general well-being is central to the school's work. The recent award as the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Sports Partnership school of the year justly recognises the high quality of its work in promoting all aspects of physical education. The richness of the curriculum is also greatly appreciated by the pupils. One commented, 'There's not a week without something going on.' Another added, 'I really like the amount we learn - something new every day.'

Built on the recipe for success provided by the curriculum are high quality teaching and learning. Teaching is consistently good and is regularly outstanding. In all of the classes visited during the inspection, pupils were very keen to learn, concentrated well on the tasks in hand and gave thoughtful responses to teachers' probing questions. This occurs because teachers are very good at making their lessons interesting, sustain a crisp pace to learning, and provide achievable challenges for pupils of all levels of attainment. Teachers are very good at developing their pupils' skills as thinkers and learners. For instance, pupils in a Year 4 lesson selected worksheets that best reflected their individual learning styles, from a range provided by the teacher, when planning a piece of explanatory writing. Pupils are skilled in evaluating their own work, and NINT (Next I Need To) is a regular feature as pupils set their own targets for improvement. The school's work in focusing on pupils' learning styles is one of the facets of its provision that earned a recent award from the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE).

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for pupils is another of the school's many excellent features appreciated by the pupils. 'I really like it here, everyone is friendly and I feel safe,' typifies the sort of remarks made by pupils when asked to give examples of what they value most about the school. The procedures to ensure pupils' safety and well-being are rigorous. The school keeps thorough records of the checks made on the background of all adults who have contact with the pupils. The academic guidance provided for pupils is exemplary. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is extremely thorough, and provides useful pointers for future improvement. Pupils invariably act on these comments, and the quality of their response is another reason for the excellent progress they make.

Leadership and management at all levels are excellent. The driving force behind the school's effectiveness is the headteacher. Under her inspirational leadership the school enjoys a deservedly high profile within the local community. The highly professional staff team and the committed and knowledgeable governors ensure that there is no room for complacency, and constantly look for ways to improve even more. The way in which the school has maintained high standards, both academically and in pupils' personal development, is a clear indication of its outstanding capacity for future improvement.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

Children are given an excellent start to their education in the Reception classes. On entry, children's attainment is broadly average overall and generally above what is normally expected in their personal development and mathematical development. However, new entrants display too few of the skills expected as emerging writers. Despite the excellent progress made because of the high quality provision, children's attainment in writing is the one area of attainment that is below the national average when children transfer to Year 1. The school is fully aware of this and work is underway to improve the situation as part of an initiative to develop writing skills in all year groups. The staff are good at building children's confidence as learners, and working with them to help improve learning. The children enjoy a great deal of individual attention as they busily go about exploring the range of activities provided for them, both indoors and out. Systems for checking on children's progress and recording the outcomes are thorough. The outcomes of daily meetings to evaluate each day's teaching and learning are used well to plan what is to be done next.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Develop the work already in progress to improve pupils' skills as writers by placing a particular emphasis on the Foundation Stage.

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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?	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Achievement and standards

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

<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>	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	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



**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of High Ash Church of England Combined School, Milton Keynes, MK17 9AS

Thank you for being so welcoming and helping me so much when I came to inspect your school to find out how well you are getting on. I particularly enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to some of you at break time. I would also like to say an extra 'thank you' to the school councillors I met. You showed me just how special High Ash pupils are. I agree with your parents that you go to an excellent school.

There is so much I like about your school that I can't mention everything, so here is a list of what I think are the most important things.

- You do really well in your work, and when you leave school at the end of Year 6, your results are often among the best in the country. You should be very proud of this.
- Your behaviour is excellent, and you get on really well with each other.
- You told me how much you appreciate your teachers. They are exceptionally good at helping you to learn well in lessons.
- Your teachers organise lots of exciting things for you to do. I really enjoyed visiting the Tudor banquet for Years 3 and 4, and I thought that your costumes were wonderful. I know that you enjoyed it too - although some of you did not seem to be too keen on eating the rabbit!
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are really well looked after, and your teachers give you excellent ideas about how to make your work even better than it already is.
- Your headteacher and the other people who help run your school do an outstanding job and make sure that you get the very best education.

All of the adults in your school want it to be even better, and they constantly work hard to make this happen. I have suggested that in future terms they should put even more effort into helping the children in Reception to become better at writing. This will help them to do even better when they move through the school in later years.

I am sure that you will continue to have great success in the future.

With best wishes

Mike Thompson

Lead Inspector