

Ashbeach Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110685
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	310389
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Susan Normington
Headteacher	Ms Hazel S Lambert
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Ashbeach Drove Ramsey St Mary's Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE26 2TG
Telephone number	01733 844262
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average Fenland primary school serves a number of small rural communities. The pupils are almost exclusively of White British heritage and the percentage eligible for free school meals is well below average. A broadly average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties, mostly relating to dyslexia, speech, language and communication difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. There have been changes in the school's intake in recent years as a result of housing development in the area. Although attainment on entry was below that expected nationally when older pupils joined the school, attainment on entry to the younger years is now in line with national expectations. The school has an Artsmark Gold and Eco School Silver Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Parents and pupils alike are overwhelmingly positive about its work. Parents describe it as 'fantastic', 'terrific', 'wonderful', 'unusual and unique'. Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about everything the school has to offer and older pupils especially realise that the school is giving them an experience that is quite different from that provided in most primary schools. They say, 'In most schools, pupils don't get to do the things we do here, it's a real privilege'.

The most striking features of the school are its outstanding curriculum and impressive outdoor facilities. Much learning takes place on the 'common', which is situated within the school grounds. This extended area includes vegetable patches, a wildlife area, a hide for watching birds and, in keeping with the school's Eco status, an outdoor classroom built from bales of straw and lime-wash. Every year group spends part of the week learning in this area and, furthermore, most work in class is organised through a series of topics that emphasise the links between subjects. Teaching is outstanding and assessment is very thorough.

Achievement is outstanding and standards are above average, exceptionally so in speaking and listening. Children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage, where achievement is outstanding. National test results in 2007 were above average at Key Stages 1 and 2 in English, mathematics and science. Improvements in the learning opportunities provided have led to a further increase in pupils' achievement and they are now making outstanding progress in many lessons. Moreover, as a result of the school's outstanding curriculum, pupils gain a wealth of skills that are not measured directly through National Curriculum tests.

The way that the school cares for its pupils and the progress they make in their personal development are both outstanding. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and their enjoyment of school is exceptional. Their understanding of healthy living is excellent and they respond extremely well to the many opportunities to take responsibility. The school prepares them exceptionally well for the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher is passionate about making learning as relevant and exciting as possible so that it makes a deep impression on the pupils and motivates them to become lifelong learners. She has successfully fired up everyone involved in the life of the school with this enthusiasm, so that they all share the same clarity of vision and sense of purpose. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection and is well placed to improve further. Self-evaluation is good but the findings from monitoring and the analysis of performance data are not used as well as they could be in judging the school's effectiveness. Most importantly, the school tends to underplay some of its important strengths. School development planning is detailed and shows that much action is taking place all the time to bring about school improvement. However, despite a great deal of tracking to check the progress of individual pupils, priorities in the school development plan relate mostly to improving the curriculum further rather than being linked directly to raising standards.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Parents express delight at the amount of progress their children are making and at the exciting activities provided. At the end of the Foundation Stage last year, children's attainment exceeded national expectations and girls

reached exceptionally high standards. Expectations are very high and teaching is inspirational, engaging the children as interested and motivated learners. Very thorough procedures are in place for assessing children's attainment on entry, for observing what they can do and tracking their progress. Regular use of the outdoor facilities on the 'common', with a particular emphasis on learning through exploration and imaginative development, contributes a great deal to children's achievement in all areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine the way information from monitoring and performance data is used to evaluate the school's effectiveness, and ensure that development priorities are linked where relevant to raising standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school's small numbers mean that results vary from year to year. Standards in 2007 were above average in reading and writing in Year 2 tests and average in mathematics. Teacher assessments show that more pupils are now working at the higher levels in mathematics and that there has been an improvement in reading. Standards in Year 6 tests in 2007 were above average in English and mathematics and the school exceeded its targets in both subjects. Since many of these pupils joined the school with below average attainment, these results show that a number made outstanding progress during their time at the school. Standards are currently above average and older pupils in particular display a wealth of skills that exceed those normally found amongst children of their age. Being an Eco-school with exceptionally rich outdoor provision means that pupils learn a great deal about the environment and gain many practical skills. Most importantly, they develop advanced thinking skills so that they are able to forge sophisticated links between different ideas and grasp new concepts quickly. This is particularly evident in the high quality discussion in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Being involved in planting and growing vegetables, then eating them, contributes significantly to pupils' outstanding knowledge of healthy living. Their sense of enterprise is developed through selling produce at the local farmers' market and through learning about the world of work from the many visitors to the school. Pupils readily engage in physical activities and nearly all take part in adventurous residential activities. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils say that they feel very safe and relationships are excellent throughout the school. Attendance is above average and behaviour is good; older pupils in particular display an unusual level of maturity for their age. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school and undertake many jobs, for example looking after the hens and helping to maintain the school grounds. Through the school council and Eco committee, pupils organise a range of events and activities and raise funds for a number of causes. They are involved in decision-making and help to select new teachers, devising probing questions to find out what a prospective member of staff might have to offer the school. They are prepared exceptionally well for the future, through the outstanding range of skills and qualities they develop.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Lessons are planned exceptionally well to provide a variety of activities that engage pupils' interest. As a result, pupils concentrate extremely well, are prepared to think deeply and are eager to express their ideas. Pupils say that teachers make learning fun so that, 'You don't realise you're learning a lot'. Teachers are confident in the subjects they teach and innovative in the methods they use. Teachers keep very thorough records of pupils' attainment and the school regularly uses a wide range of tests to check their progress. Teaching assistants are used well and pupils with learning difficulties are supported very well, including those with dyslexia, speech and language difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school identifies clear strategies to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, although individual education plan targets are not specific enough. Good and improving opportunities are provided for parents to become involved in their children's learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding with many exemplary features. Most significant is the way first hand experience is promoted through the school's outdoor facilities. Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about learning outside and say, 'Doing it and seeing it, you remember what you did - you get pictures in your head', and 'When I get home, I can't stop thinking about it'. Very strong emphasis is placed on creativity, with regular support from an artist in residence, and the school has devised an exceptional programme that uses artistic skills to extend pupils' thinking, concentration and coordination skills. All pupils start the day with this programme and it is being taken up by a number of other schools. The curriculum provides pupils with very coherent learning opportunities through a concentration on topics that span many subjects. Work in literacy, for example, is brought to life by pupils writing about a range of different contexts. Topics are enriched by numerous educational visits and visitors to the school. Links with the community are very good and the school works closely with the on-site pre-school and with the secondary school to which most pupils transfer. The school is twinned with a school in Nicaragua, and this supports the development of pupils' cultural and social awareness, and regular workshops are provided for gifted and talented pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and parents say that they find the staff very helpful and approachable. The school instils in pupils a sense of self worth and a belief that they can succeed. They are known as individuals, who are valued and trusted to take responsibility. Pupils who need additional help are quickly identified and join flexible groupings for extra support. Procedures for safeguarding and protecting pupils are thorough. Arrangements are exceptionally good for settling younger pupils in and preparing older ones for moving on to secondary school.

Marking is generally informative, often exceptionally so, and most pupils are clear about their targets and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership of the curriculum is inspirational: leaders are innovative and dynamic, readily embracing national and international initiatives. This has given rise to a primary school with some highly original features. Teamwork throughout the school is strong and opportunities for professional development are very good. Teachers are engaged in research and training, and share effective practice within and beyond the school. Links with other educational establishments are very good. Senior leaders and subject leaders undertake a significant amount of effective monitoring, including lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work and of teachers' planning. The views of parents and pupils are regularly gathered and taken into account. Governance is good: each governor is linked to a year group and curriculum area, and governors conduct half-termly visits and report their findings.

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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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	2
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	2
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	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

20 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashbeach Primary School, Huntingdon, PE26 2TG

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed my visit, seeing all the interesting things you do, and talking to you about your school. I am writing now to tell you what I found out about it.

Ashbeach is an outstanding school. I can understand why so many of your parents wrote to say that they are delighted that you are able to go to such a good school. They know, as I discovered, that the staff look after you extremely well and make sure you have many interesting things to do every day. That is why you enjoy school so much. I was particularly impressed with the 'common' and all the exciting activities that take place outside. I was also very impressed with ARTSTART and could see how much it helps to put you in the mood for work and builds up your concentration so that your brain works better. When I visited your lessons, I noticed how good you are at linking different ideas together and talking about them. This is partly because so much of your learning is based on topics that link subjects together, but also because a lot of the teaching is outstandingly good.

The school is led and managed exceptionally well and it is improving all the time. I have asked the headteacher and other staff to think really carefully about everything they know about the school, and to use that to make decisions about what is working really well and what might be improved. I have also asked them to make sure that new developments are linked to helping you to reach even higher standards.

Keep enjoying your time at the school, learning new skills and having fun.

Yours sincerely

Ms M J Goodchild

Lead inspector