

Pilton Infants' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113128
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311118
Inspection date	12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-6
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	A Bellamy
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 0001
School address	Abbey Road Barnstaple EX31 1JU
Telephone number	01271 342579
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Age group	4-6
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a little smaller than the average infant school. Pupils come from a mixed residential area close to the school. Almost all are White British. They are admitted twice a year to the Foundation Stage where they are taught in one class in the autumn term and two classes for the remainder of the school year. In Years 1 and 2 pupils are taught in parallel classes. Their attainment on entry is broadly similar to that usually found. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is smaller than usual, but there are more pupils with statements of special educational need than expected in a school of this size.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that serves its community well. It has many strengths and few areas in need of improvement. Children are carefully and sensitively introduced to the school and get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage. A particular feature of the school is the level of thought given to the needs of all individuals and the way they are all valued. This is appreciated by parents, one of whom commented, 'The needs of the children are the school's top priority.' Another wrote, 'Since moving to Pilton Infants my child has enjoyed every day and his attitude to learning has got ten times better.' The high quality care and support and the sound academic guidance pupils receive successfully promote good personal development and well-being. The very experienced headteacher leads the school well and, together with other leaders, has an accurate view of the school's performance. The school has worked effectively to maintain previous strengths whilst addressing the few areas for development identified in the previous inspection report, demonstrating that there is a good capacity to improve further.

Pupils achieve well. Standards are consistently above average by the end of Year 2 because pupils make good progress in lessons during their time in school. Teaching is good and teachers plan activities that are carefully matched to pupils' different abilities. Although teachers set pupils short term targets to practise, many pupils are unclear about these. Teachers often talk to pupils about their work, but when marking work they do not consistently provide them with enough information about what they have learnt or how to improve. Pupils enjoy school and talk about it enthusiastically. They behave well and are exceptionally thoughtful and caring of one another. Many take on responsibilities around the school and are keen to help younger or less confident members of the school community. They respond very positively to the broad curriculum and especially to the many excellent activities and special events such as the arts week. There are outstanding links with external professionals to support the most vulnerable pupils, ensuring they are fully included, and with neighbouring schools, for example in the joint sculpture making following a visit to the beach. The attendance by most pupils is good, but overall attendance is only satisfactory. This is because a small number of pupils do not attend regularly enough and others take holidays during term time. The school does not have a clear strategy for raising levels of attendance.

Leadership and management are good. There is an effective annual programme for checking the performance of the school and the information gained is used well to plan for improvement. Governance is improving and the new chair of governors is helping ensure governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The school has detailed assessment information about individual pupils and is trialling new ways of tracking their progress. At times, it does not bring this information together well enough to identify trends and the bigger picture of progress by whole classes or year groups. This reduces the leadership team's ability to respond quickly to changes in pupils' performance.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision is good in the Foundation Stage. Very sensitive induction procedures help children to settle quickly and begin to make progress from their first day in school. Good progress is maintained in all areas of learning and, by the end of the year, most children attain standards expected nationally, and a considerable number exceed these levels. Children who join in the autumn term benefit from particularly spacious indoor accommodation that is used well to

provide a stimulating range of learning experiences. The children are well taught and there are good systems for teachers and teaching assistants to monitor and record their progress. The curriculum is good rather than outstanding because of the lack of a designated outdoor area for these children. This restricts the opportunities for them to move freely in and out of doors without direct supervision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers provide clearer guidance to pupils when marking their work and talking to them about the next steps in their learning.
- Make better use of assessment information to identify trends in progress and possible causes of variations in the progress made between one group of pupils and another.
- Improve attendance by reviewing the ways attendance is monitored and the actions taken to encourage fewer absences.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are consistently above average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and in writing, they are high with two thirds of pupils exceeding national expectations for their age. The good progress begun in the Foundation Stage is maintained and pupils of all abilities achieve well. The needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and lots of carefully targeted extra support enables these pupils to make good progress with almost all attaining the nationally expected levels before they leave the school. In 2007, a substantial proportion of pupils of all abilities made such good progress they exceeded their targets set for the end of the year. Those pupils currently in Year 2 are on track to meet their challenging targets next summer, maintaining above average standards, and ensuring they are well prepared with the skills needed for their next stage of education and adult life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by their exceptional moral and social awareness. Pupils of all ages move around the school very confidently, even when under some pressure such as gathering for the Christmas production, 'Sparkle'. One parent commented, 'My daughter was very shy on starting school, but was encouraged and has come out of her shell.' Pupils collaborate exceptionally well in lessons and around the school and are quick to offer help or comfort when one of them is worried or has a problem. One told an inspector, 'We help them and stop them from feeling sad.' Pupils take on significant responsibilities for helping to run the school and become involved in supporting local and national charities, such as the children's hospice and the shoebox appeal. Attendance remains a relative weakness. Although most children attend regularly, absence rates remain too high for a small number of pupils. The school does not have recognised strategies for encouraging attendance and, in some instances, it does not follow up absences robustly enough. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to avoid dangers both in and out of school. They feel safe in school and are confident that any adult would help to sort out a problem. They have a good awareness about the importance of a healthy diet and physical exercise and many keenly take part in the varied additional physical activities provided by the school. This is reflected in the school's recent Healthy School award.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers plan effectively in small teams, helping to ensure that pupils in parallel classes work on similar activities. They introduce interesting and often practical activities and these help to motivate the pupils. In many lessons teachers set up situations where pupils have to work together and this successfully promotes their collaborative skills. Teachers ensure work set is carefully matched to pupils' different abilities, but not all the school's computers are networked and so teachers do not have easy access to all the assessment information stored centrally when considering longer term targets for pupils. Teaching is good rather than outstanding because although teachers assess progress accurately they do not consistently follow the school's policy for marking work. The older pupils, in particular, do not get enough written feedback about what they have learned or how they can improve. Teachers use teaching assistants well, often to work with pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This enables these pupils to be fully included in all activities, whilst minimising any disruptions within the class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school is effectively reviewing the approach to mathematics and English in line with recent national guidance. It adapts the curriculum well to meet the needs of specific pupils, such as those with learning difficulties. Clear plans are underway to extend the use of computers so that pupils get more opportunities to practise computing skills in different subjects. Many additional experiences of a high quality enrich the overall good curriculum. The joint project with the partner junior school and neighbouring special school enabled pupils to learn to work alongside and support others whilst visiting a local beach and then producing sculptures using drift material. Imaginative ways to promote pupils' social and emotional development are skilfully linked to other work, such as when designing posters in pairs in readiness for the arrival of the next intake of children to the Foundation Stage.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is particularly effective at providing high quality support and care for individual pupils, including those who are most vulnerable, and this directly contributes to the pupils' good personal development and well-being. All staff are committed to ensuring that they are trained, often in their own time, to meet these sometimes complex needs and parents appreciate this. One wrote, 'The staff are very understanding of my child's needs and deal with each situation in a very caring and professional way.' The school implements all the statutory procedures designed to safeguard pupils. Academic guidance is satisfactory, but pupils' targets are not prominent in all classrooms or referred to systematically enough and, consequently, a significant proportion of pupils are not completely clear about their targets or next steps of learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher knows all the pupils exceptionally well and her determination that all are equally valued successfully underpins the commitment to full inclusion across the school. Other leadership roles are effectively fulfilled, including coordinating assessment practices and the provision for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has effective systems for planning improvements based on the findings from its systematic programme of checks. It helps to ensure the rigour of these checks by sometimes involving outside professionals, for example when moderating standards in writing. Governors' involvement in this process has been limited until recently, but the new chair is successfully raising the profile and governors are responding well to their recent and on going training programme, enabling them to begin to hold the school to account. The school has introduced new systems for collecting and collating the comprehensive individual assessment information. However, at present, leaders are unable to draw together easily the information for a whole class or group of pupils and this makes it more difficult to identify any emerging trends in progress and respond accordingly.

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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?	2
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

17 December 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Pilton Infant School, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 1JU

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. My colleague and I enjoyed talking to you, watching part of your school play 'Sparkle', and seeing some of your work. We are glad you like your school and we are pleased to say that you are right to tell us that it is a good school. Here are some of the highlights we found:

- ?
- you all work hard in your lessons and make good progress because you quickly learn new skills, such as with your writing, and get to know about lots of new things ?
- you behave well and are very thoughtful towards one another, especially when you think someone is worried or has a problem ?
- the teachers plan lots of interesting things for you to do and they, together with the teaching assistants, make sure your work is not too hard or too easy ?
- you enjoy the wide range of activities, especially such things as the arts week or performing to your parents in the play ?
- everyone who works at the school takes very good care of you all and the headteacher gets help from other people beyond the school to help those of you who have problems from time to time ?
- the headteacher and the other leaders are always thinking of ways of improving the school and know just what needs to be done.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on just three things to make the school even better. They are:

- ?
- help teachers give you clear guidance when marking your work and deciding with you what you need to practise in order to help you do even better ?
- find ways of helping the school leaders to use all the information they have about the progress each of you is making when they want to find out about how well the whole class or year group are doing ?
- think about better ways of checking how often you all come to school and what could be done to encourage some of you to take less time off school than you do at the moment.

We know you are proud of your school and will want to help the staff in whatever way you can.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kerly Lead Inspector