

Pennycross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113297
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	311194
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Clive Lewis

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	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roy Hammond
Headteacher	Kevin Storey
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Arden Grove Pennycross Plymouth PL2 3RL
Telephone number	01752 705137
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized school. Many families associated with the school face challenging social and economic difficulties. Children's attainment on entry to the Reception classes is well below the levels expected for their age. The number of pupils receiving free school meals is almost double the national average and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities overall is high and exceptionally high in some year groups. There are currently four pupils with statements of special educational need. Movement of pupils in and out of the school is also very high in some year groups. There are few pupils with English as an additional language and the percentage of pupils from ethnic minorities is very low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Pennycross Primary is a satisfactory school that is improving rapidly. The school has an accurate view of its current strengths and weaknesses and is working hard to improve the satisfactory education it currently offers. The headteacher's strong and determined leadership, combined with good support from the local authority, has secured improvements in the quality of teaching, subject leadership and the school's assessment and tracking systems. It is still too early to evaluate the full impact of all of the changes that have been made although standards are beginning to show signs of improvement, with the improvement in science standards in Year 6 particularly noteworthy. The great majority of parents are very supportive of the school, one writing: 'My child has made fantastic progress at Pennycross and he really enjoys going to school.'

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching is often good in the small target-group sets, but there is still too much variation across the school, which the school is working hard to tackle. As a result, pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception class, but enter Year 1 with standards that are significantly below those expected nationally. Standards remain well below average by the end of Year 2. Pupils are beginning to make better progress in Years 3 to 6, especially in Year 6 and, as a result, standards in Year 6 in the most recent national tests were an improvement on previous years, despite the very high level of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the class. Standards in science improved significantly and were average. English and mathematics standards were well below average, particularly in the percentage of pupils achieving the higher levels. Significant improvements have been made to the school's systems for tracking individual pupils' progress in English and mathematics, and teachers are now making much better use of the tracking information available to them to plan work for different groups of pupils. Although all pupils now have targets for English and mathematics, pupils' knowledge of their own targets is not yet consistent across the school.

Staff care for pupils' social and emotional needs very well and there is a strong ethos of helping all pupils to succeed. Consequently, pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils know how to stay safe and healthy and take responsibility for themselves and others. Pupils enjoy coming to school, as evidenced by their good behaviour and the good contribution they make to the local community. The curriculum is good with a good range of additional activities. However, the curriculum for the youngest pupils is currently restricted by the lack of developed outdoor facilities. Under the determined leadership of the headteacher, with continued support from the local authority, the school has at least satisfactory capacity to make the necessary improvements.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Most children start school with less well-developed skills than is typical for their age. This is particularly evident in their communication, language and literacy skills although children's physical, number and personal skills are similarly poorly developed. They make satisfactory progress during the year because of the satisfactory teaching and provision. They are taught in a safe, spacious and attractive environment split into different learning areas. However, the outdoor area adjacent to the classroom lacks all-weather protection to allow year-round use. This, combined with the pronounced gradient, restricts planning and opportunities for

appropriately stimulating independent learning activities. As a result, children's independent learning skills are not developed to their best advantage. Although children are given reasonable opportunities to develop their speaking skills, the opportunities for pupils to develop their listening skills are not planned systematically.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school.
- Improve all teaching to the level of the best and iron out inconsistencies in relation to challenging the more able pupils and making sure all pupils know what they need to do to improve.
- Improve provision for the outdoor curriculum in the Foundation Stage.

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

Children start school in Reception with skills well below the levels expected for their age. Although they make satisfactory progress in their first year, standards remain well below expectations by the time pupils enter Year 1. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 but, because of the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, standards are significantly below average by the end of Year 2. This has been the trend over a number of years. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 make satisfactory progress overall and currently do better than this in small group sets and in Year 6 because of the good teaching. Standards are rising slowly in Year 6 national tests and although standards remain significantly below average, the gap between the school's results and the national average is closing. In 2007, standards were broadly in line with the national average in science, which reflects very good progress. Standards in English and mathematics were low, particularly in terms of the number of pupils achieving the higher levels. Two reasons for the low standards are the very high number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the high level of pupil mobility. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall although pupils taught in the small target groups, with a high level of skilled teaching assistant support, frequently make good progress towards their targets. Pupils' satisfactory achievement will help to equip them for later life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and say their teachers make many of their lessons fun. Attendance is below average and pulled down by the low attendance of a few pupils. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good because the school places a particularly strong emphasis on social and moral education. Pupils share spiritual experiences during reflective moments in assemblies and within art and music lessons. Behaviour during lessons is good although some pupils say they do not like their lessons interrupted by the few pupils who 'mess about'. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They know which foods are 'good' and enjoy the healthy salad bar available at lunchtimes. They understand the importance of regular exercise and enjoy their physical education and sports lessons. As one pupil said, 'You need to be active and fit.' Pupils make a good contribution to the school community and are given opportunities

to take part in the running of the school. The school council feels it is listened to and has made a difference to playtimes and the school's environment. Some older pupils are prefects and some are trained as peer mediators and undertake their roles enthusiastically.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Classroom management skills are a strength of teaching across the school. Of particular note, and a confirmation of teachers' high expectations in this area, is the high level of presentation of work throughout the school. Teaching is only satisfactory because there is too much inconsistency from class to class. The best lessons are carefully and thoughtfully planned, move at a good pace and are challenging. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic about learning. In the small group target lessons taught by a teacher with two or more teaching assistants supporting, pupils frequently make good progress. In some whole-class lessons, however, teaching does not sufficiently challenge all pupils, particularly the more able, as the work is not matched closely enough to individual pupils' needs. There is some inconsistency across the school in pupils' understanding of their own targets for improvement. Marking of work is up to date and supportive, but it does not routinely identify areas for development or make clear reference to pupils' targets for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned and offers pupils a broad range of learning experiences. It is a key factor in helping pupils to enjoy school and develop positive attitudes to learning. In the Reception class, the curriculum enables children to learn from first-hand experiences, although opportunities for independent learning outside the classroom are limited. There is a strong focus on developing basic skills across the school and all aspects of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda are central to the curriculum. Intervention strategies to help pupils catch up or extend their learning are good and contribute significantly to pupils' achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in lessons. Good use is made of visitors and visits out of school and there is a wide range of extra-curricular activities and regular educational visits which support pupils' learning and personal development well. The provision for personal, social and health education is making a significant contribution to pupils' personal development, although opportunities to learn about the cultural diversity of Britain are currently limited.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's pastoral care in its support for the personal needs of each individual is strong and arrangements to ensure children are safe and healthy are a strength of the school. Procedures for safeguarding and child protection are all in place and systems designed to ensure pupils are safe on visits out of school are thorough. Rigorous systems to promote better attendance are beginning to have a positive impact. Very good links are made with other professionals and services to promote the care and welfare of pupils. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Skilled teaching assistants are used effectively to keep pupils engaged and interested and ensure they make appropriate progress. Systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress have improved significantly and regular and rigorous analysis of the

data is leading to rapid intervention if a pupil is in danger of falling behind. These good systems are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. Although all pupils are given targets for improvement in English and mathematics, not all are sufficiently aware of them and they are not consistently or regularly referred to by all teachers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

With the help of the local authority the school has carefully evaluated its strengths and weaknesses in order to bring about improvements. Over the last eighteen months, the headteacher, with the effective support of the local authority, has introduced a series of initiatives designed specifically to improve the achievement and progress of pupils. As a result, the quality of middle management in the school has improved significantly and subject coordinators are taking a much more active approach to their role. Weaker and unsatisfactory teaching has been eradicated and teaching is now at least satisfactory throughout the school. Standards are beginning to show signs of improvement, particularly in science where standards by Year 6 are now in line with national averages. However, other changes have been made so recently that their success has yet to be confirmed by measurable improvements. The headteacher has introduced a regular programme of rigorous, six-weekly, progress meetings where each pupil's progress is reviewed by the senior management team together with each class teacher. These allow the school to monitor and assess the progress of each pupil carefully and to plan intervention strategies to support individual pupils more rapidly and effectively. The school is using its resources very effectively to provide additional teaching support for year groups where there is a very high percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The governing body is developing its role in holding the school to account and governors are regular visitors to the school and classrooms. The changes introduced by the headteacher, with the support of the local authority, are having a very positive impact on the school and are helping the school to move forward at a rapid rate. These improvements are beginning to make a difference to pupils' achievement.

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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?	2
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	4
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?	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?	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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pennycross Primary School, Pennycross, Plymouth, PL2 3RL

I would like to thank you for your help during the recent inspection of your school. My colleague and I very much enjoyed our visit.

Pennycross is a satisfactory school. Your headteacher and staff care for you very well and give you good support to enable you to learn and enjoy your lessons. Teaching is satisfactory and as a result you make satisfactory progress. Standards by the end of the Juniors are lower than in most other schools but are beginning to improve. Staff make sure that you understand how to look after yourselves and keep safe and you do this well. They keep a constant check on how well you are all doing so as to ensure that you are all making sound progress. You told us that you like school and there are lots of things to do and enjoy. I agree with you. Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school and you work hard and try to succeed in all that you do.

I have asked your school to do three things that will make it even better:

- Help you to do better in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that all teaching in the school is as good as the best teaching.
- Make sure the youngest children have more opportunities to explore and play outside the classroom.

I am confident that, with your help, the school will improve still further.

I wish you well in your future education.

Yours sincerely

Clive Lewis Lead inspector