

Tidcombe Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113339
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311219
Inspection date	19 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Doolan
Headteacher	Steve Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Marina Way Tiverton EX16 4BP
Telephone number	01884 252973
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- the standards of girls, middle-attaining pupils and summer-born children
- whether pupils achieve consistently well across the school and if not, whether the school is doing enough to improve weaker progress
- the effectiveness of teachers' marking and written guidance to inform pupils about how to improve their work.

The inspector gathered evidence on the day from discussions with staff, pupils, governors and others. A range of school documentation was examined and first-hand evidence was gathered from observing pupils in lessons and at play. Parents' views were gathered from questionnaires completed prior to the inspection and through talking to some at the start of the day. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found the school's own self-evaluation assessments to be somewhat modest and some judgements in this report are a little higher.

Description of the school

The school serves an area of mixed housing, with an increasing proportion of pupils entering different year groups from further afield. Many of these entrants have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils with additional needs has risen significantly of late, as has the number of looked-after children. Few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or speak languages other than English. There is an imbalance between numbers of boys and girls, with a large percentage of boys, particularly in Years 3 to 6. The school was recently without its headteacher because of a lengthy illness, when it was managed by the deputy headteacher and other staff. The deputy headteacher is now absent because of extended secondment to a senior post elsewhere. There are two assistant headteachers. One class was out of school on a residential visit during the week of the inspection. The school holds an Activemark award, the Healthy Schools award and the Bronze Travel award, which it is currently upgrading.

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. Pupils are happy and enjoy their education, with many parents commenting very favourably about its positive influences on their children's lives. Achievement is good across a wide range of subjects. Pupils are successfully 'encouraged to achieve' in the words of one parent, gaining significantly in independence and confidence during their time at the school. They chat with bubbly enthusiasm about their learning, showing curiosity and a lively interest in new experiences. Staff are good at bringing out the best in pupils, whatever their educational or social circumstances or difficulties. The community values this highly and many parents have moved children to the school, justifiably confident, as one put it, that pupils will 'come on in leaps and bounds' in academic and personal development.

The school judges itself modestly, acknowledging weaknesses frankly. Significant difficulties, such as the recent prolonged absence of the headteacher and now of the deputy headteacher, have been managed well, minimising the potentially adverse impact on pupils' learning. Other staff have relished new opportunities for their own professional development, maintaining a shared sense of purpose and committed to creating enjoyment and achievement for all their pupils. This characteristic is greatly appreciated by parents and carers. Teaching is good, with staff creating a 'warm and welcoming place', as one parent commented, where pupils settle quickly whenever they join the school. Monitoring and evaluation of school performance are good, particularly in identifying the small amount of weaker teaching which hinders pupils' progress and is the main reason why achievement slows down. This is being tackled firmly, offering good opportunities for support, but its resolution has been delayed by absences of key staff. Attendance is satisfactory with most pupils seldom absent because they enjoy school. However, figures are pulled down by unusually prolonged illness and by a minority of families who take holidays during term time despite the school's expectations.

Standards on entry are mixed, but below average overall. The increasing proportion of pupils entering during the upper years often has standards well below expectations. As the school settles after a period of turbulence, the pace of progress is increasing, which is leading to higher standards amongst younger pupils, especially in writing. Older pupils' writing, particularly their handwriting, still needs improvement and writing is accurately identified as a priority for development. A well tailored curriculum enables boys and girls, including middle attaining pupils on whom the school has placed recent focus, to achieve equally well. In areas such as art, instrumental music and singing, physical education, information and communication technology (ICT) and other subjects, standards are high. By the time pupils leave the school, standards in English and mathematics are broadly average, though Years 5 and 6 both include a higher proportion of pupils with complex educational needs. A rich variety of more unusual activities punctuates the school day interestingly. Short bursts of activity, such as 'brain gym', peer massage, 'Leap into Life' and so on, add very significantly to the pace of learning and to pupils' enjoyment. They also keep pupils fit and healthy, often taking place outside. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' achievements in these and other aspects of learning, successfully shouldering responsibility for many activities. Teachers' marking and academic guidance about how pupils can improve their work are satisfactory, but are acknowledged as areas for improvement. Pupils say they are 'not too sure' about their targets or how to improve their progress towards these, and most marking does not help them enough.

A few parents have concerns about behaviour, but most is good, with polite, friendly pupils welcoming visitors warmly. Many pupils and parents mention the benefits derived from annual

residential visits and the good personal education programme. Parents value the school's good pastoral care, as one said, from 'very friendly and approachable staff' which leads to pupils feeling safe and secure.' They agree with pupils themselves who say that the best thing about the school is the 'fun' they have in learning. Pupils report little bullying and know what to do if it happens, and the Children's Council would like to be more involved in preventing this. They recognise that some pupils have difficulty in conforming to the school's expectations and feel that they could help.

Leadership, management and governance are good. A key success stems from the school's inclusive philosophy. This has led to strengthened provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as these needs have grown, which in turn is leading to increasingly good achievement. The school works well with partners to support many complex needs, often including behavioural issues which have led to unhappiness elsewhere. Staff keep a sharp eye on pupils' progress across a range of subjects and the school uses challenging targets for its own performance. Targets at individual pupils' level are less clear. Pupils themselves are not sufficiently involved in judging how well they are achieving these. Governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They provide good challenge and support for management. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, for instance, in improving accommodation and in developing subject leaders' and governors' roles. There is good capacity to move the school forward further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for the Nursery and Reception classes has improved significantly. Recent relocation has brought the two classes into adjacent spaces next to Year 1, which has improved all aspects of transition. Younger children experience the next phase 'seamlessly' and are happy to move on to familiar areas and staff. Outdoor space and resources are good. All facilities are used well to provide a good balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed learning activities. Teachers and support staff work well together and this Early Years unit is managed well. Recently improved recording of children's development provides an increasingly clear picture of their progress in all areas of learning. Any weaknesses revealed are strengthened through curriculum revision. From a low baseline, progress is good and the levels the children reach at the end of Reception are broadly in line with expectations.. A large proportion of children currently in Reception are late spring or summer born, so a transition curriculum is being carefully planned to ease them into the expectations of the National Curriculum for Year 1. Although the impact of this has yet to emerge, indications are that this will improve progress for these younger pupils as they move into Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Clarify targets for individual pupils so that they understand them.
- Provide detailed feedback through marking which informs pupils what to do to improve their work in order to progress towards their targets.
- Improve writing, particularly that of older pupils.

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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?	2
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	3
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	3
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	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

03 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Tidcombe Primary School, Tiverton. EX16 4BP

I am writing to thank you for the very warm welcome into your school in March and to tell you what I found out.

Yours is a good school where you achieve well in lots of different subjects. I was impressed by how well you do at other things, such as 'Leap into Life' activities, brain gym or massaging other pupils. I was particularly pleased to hear from you and your parents how much you enjoy everything you do at school and to see this for myself. You do a good job of making new pupils welcome into your school, too, so everybody feels happy working and playing together most of the time. Your Children's Councillors were telling me that they would like to be involved in stopping the little bit of 'falling out' that there is and I think that would be a good idea. I hope you can all help them with that.

You learn well because teaching is good and because all the adults in school work hard to make sure you have lots of different, interesting things to do throughout the day. This is part of what keeps you active and healthy. I liked the way you work so well with other pupils in different groups and pairs. All this is well organised by your headteacher and other adults and everyone takes very good care of you.

Even in such a good school, there are things I have asked the school to do to make it even better. I have asked staff to make your targets clearer for you, especially those for English and mathematics, so that you know what you are aiming for, and then to give you very clear guidance about what to do next in order to reach your targets. You will need to read carefully what teachers say in marking your work so that you know how you can help yourself to improve. Younger pupils' writing is improving because teachers have been working hard to make it better. There are still things about older pupils' writing which need to improve so I have asked the school to do that, too. Again, you can help with that, especially if it is handwriting that needs to be better.

Thank you again for your welcome. Yours sincerely

Janet Simms Lead inspector

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