

Rackenford Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113495
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311295
Inspection date	5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Hyland
Headteacher	Caroline Buckley
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2004
School address	Rackenford Tiverton EX16 8DU
Telephone number	01884 881354
Fax number	01884 881354

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Introduction

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

- progress being made by pupils of all abilities
- the way the school provides for pupils of different ages and needs in the same class
- the effectiveness of leadership within a small team of mainly part-time teachers

Evidence was gathered from observations around the school, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, and analyses of the school's working documents and the questionnaires completed by parents. Other aspects of the school were not inspected in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This school is much smaller than average. Pupils are registered in two classes, one for children in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, the other for pupils in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6. For large sections of the day, they are taught in three or four smaller groups with children in the Foundation Stage and the Year 6 pupils frequently taught as single year groups. Most pupils come from the small village of Rackenford and the surrounding very rural area. Almost all are White British and all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is close to average, but they are unevenly distributed with many more in some year groups than in others. The staff team has been expanded this year to include a new full-time teacher as well as the three part-time teachers who have been in post for some time. The relatively limited accommodation is being extended with the acquisition of an additional classroom ready for occupation at the beginning of the new school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school serves its community well. It has many strengths and few areas in need of improvement. Pupils achieve well and attain above average standards. Within their good personal development and well-being there are some outstanding elements, including pupils' exemplary behaviour in lessons and around the school. Parents are unanimous in their approval of the school's work. One summed up the views of many by writing, 'My child loves the school and has benefited from all the additional activities, rare in such a small school.' Others commented on the 'commitment and enthusiasm of all the staff', one saying that this 'more than makes up for any lack in facilities'. The headteacher ensures there is a constant focus on improving the school and, together with other staff and governors, carries out frequent checks on pupils' progress and the school's performance. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and those areas needing improvement. This has led to significant progress since the last inspection and the school is well placed to improve further.

The attainment of children on entry is broadly as expected nationally. However, it is exceptionally varied, and, with so few in each year group, tends to fluctuate from one year to the next. Children make good progress in their first year in school in the Foundation Stage. This good progress is maintained by pupils of all abilities and standards are above average in national tests in Years 2 and 6. The school quickly identifies those who find learning difficult. It is effective at enlisting external expertise and carefully deploys the well qualified teaching assistants to provide extra help for these pupils, enabling them to progress well. One parent of such a pupil referred to 'the fantastic help' received. Standards in reading, mathematics and science are higher than those in writing. Some pupils previously made slower progress in writing, particularly when taught in a class of three or more year groups. For a few, this is still the case, because their speaking and listening skills and vocabulary are somewhat limited and this restricts their ability to convey ideas and use complex sentences in their writing. The school carefully tracks the progress of all pupils and sets realistic but challenging year-end targets. Almost all pupils are on track to reach their targets, particularly in reading and mathematics, and the work of pupils currently in Years 2 and 6 shows above average standards are being maintained.

The pupils are particularly well known by the staff. This contributes to the good care, guidance and support they receive. The school rigorously implements procedures designed to safeguard them. Pupils report feeling completely safe in school and are confident, if they have a problem, about approaching a member of staff or one of the trained Year 5 mediators, who carry out their duties very conscientiously. This peer mediation is just one element of the outstanding range of opportunities for pupils to take responsibility around the school as well as contributing to the wider community through participating in festivals and events to sponsor charities. All pupils from Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 are involved in the extensive weekly rota of school duties, which they fulfil independently and efficiently. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and are very committed to the extensive range of physical activities provided. A group of older pupils were visibly excited at playtime as they anticipated going kayaking later in the day. The school has received Healthy Schools and Activemark awards in recognition of its good work in these aspects. Pupils enjoy school a great deal and talk about it very enthusiastically. Attendance rates are above average. Pupils' moral and social development is strong and they collaborate well, for example when working in pairs to describe and build three dimensional shapes in mathematics. These qualities contribute to the good level of skills acquired ready for their next stage of education and adult life.

Teachers plan lessons carefully to provide work which reflects the variation of age and need in each class. This is particularly strong in mathematics and usually good in English. They make sure pupils are clear about what it is they are learning, and encourage them to reflect on their own progress. Most work is marked in detail, often with careful suggestions about how to improve. Pupils receive good academic guidance. They find the regular one-to-one discussion with teachers helpful in thinking about their short-term targets and what they need to do to improve. There is good liaison between teachers and teaching assistants to ensure a coherent programme of work, even though at least three different teachers teach most pupils during the week. Pupils are exceptionally positive about their learning and have a lot of fun in some lessons, for example in art when sketching a 'mummified' figure adopting various poses. The children in the Foundation Stage are benefiting from the recently developed designated room and outdoor area, but are not given enough opportunities to make independent choices when learning through play.

The curriculum meets the needs of the current mixed-age classes and ensures that pupils do not repeat topics. The school recognises there is insufficient guidance at present about promoting the progression of key skills. As a result, staff have begun revising the current long-term plans in the light of new national guidance and the changing class structures from September. The outstanding quality and range of additional activities beyond the classroom strengthens the curriculum. They include musical productions, drama, sporting events, weekly swimming for all, annual residential experiences in Years 3,4,5 and 6 to destinations including France and London, and visits to such places as a mosque and Exeter Cathedral. These widen the pupils' horizons and give them a good awareness of cultural diversity beyond their immediate environment.

The headteacher works effectively and provides good leadership in addition to her significant teaching commitment. There is a distinct sense of a united staff team and the headteacher is supported well by her colleagues, who are taking on increased responsibilities for their subjects. However, the headteacher is the only member of staff with formal leadership responsibilities and this imposes a heavy schedule. She is supported very well by the chair and other governors, for example in the preparatory work for the new classroom. Governors fulfil their roles exceptionally well. They are kept very well informed by the headteacher and through their own regular visits, and have a particularly clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher has established a well structured annual cycle for monitoring the school's performance and makes good use of the information gained, for example when analysing the pupils' progress, in order to identify priorities in the school improvement plan.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle into school quickly following a supportive induction programme including close links with the pre-school setting in the village. They share a class with Year 1 and 2 pupils but for much of the day are with a teaching assistant in a newly designated area with direct access to a secure outdoor space. They make good progress in all areas of learning and by the end of the year, most have met the learning goals for their age, and a few have exceeded them. Their room is relatively small, restricting the range of activities that can be set up, but the children respond well to the teaching assistant and show a vivid imagination in some of their play. The school recognises that at present too much of the day is spent being directed by an adult with insufficient time for children to choose and move freely in and out of doors. New equipment has been purchased recently, including tricycles and a mini-greenhouse, to extend the range

of learning experiences and the children thoroughly enjoy enriching activities such as when they join the older pupils for French.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress in writing, particularly in Years 3 to 6.
- Ensure there is a better balance between activities set by adults and those chosen by children in the Foundation Stage, with more opportunities to move independently in and out of doors.
- Include detailed guidance on how to secure the progression of key skills when revising the long-term curriculum plans.

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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	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	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	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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

9 June 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Rackenford Church of England Primary School, Tiverton EX16 8DU

Thank you for welcoming me to your school recently. I enjoyed talking to groups of you, seeing some of your work and walking round your school. You were very helpful in answering my questions. I am pleased you like your school so much and you are right to say it is a good school. Here are some of the highlights I noticed:

- You behave exceptionally well in class and around the school. Nearly all of you have special jobs to help around the school and I could see how well you carry out these responsibilities.
- You work hard in lessons and make good progress. Those of you who find learning more difficult are helped very well by the additional teaching assistants.
- Your teachers plan interesting lessons and make sure that your work is not too hard or too easy.
- The range of extra activities, clubs and trips provided by the school is brilliant. You are extremely lucky to have so many special events such as the residential visits to France and London, kayaking sessions, visits to a mosque and Exeter Cathedral and taking part in events such as the Exmoor Challenge.
- Everyone who works at the school takes good care of you and makes sure you are safe.
- Your headteacher has lots of ideas of how to improve the school. She is helped very well by her colleagues and the governors.

I have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on three things to make the school even better:

- Help you make even more progress with your writing.
- Provide more time for the children in the Reception class to choose what they would like to do and decide when they would like to play outside.
- Produce clear guidance for teachers about when to teach you new skills in each of the topics that you study.

I am sure you will have your own ideas about further ways to improve the school and will want to talk to your teachers about these.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kerly Lead Inspector

9 June 2008



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Martin Kerly
Lead Inspector