

Ferndown First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113667
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311330
Inspection dates	5–6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Colin Lee

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	312
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Fitzpatrick
Headteacher	Jo Pringle
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Church Road Ferndown BH22 9ET
Telephone number	01202 873747
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is larger than the average-size primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Most of those from minority ethnic groups speak English fluently but a small number are at an early stage of English language acquisition, their first languages being either Bengali or Polish. Children's attainment on entry has been in line with national expectations since 2007 but was below expectations before that. Falling birth rates have been a significant factor in the drop in the number of pupils on roll since the last inspection. The headteacher has been in post since April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education with some good features. It is an improving school and this is due to the new headteacher's good leadership and determination to raise standards and improve pupils' progress. To do this she is working closely with key members of staff and the good governing body to introduce changes to teaching, learning, the curriculum and leadership and management. These aspects of the school are all satisfactory at the moment. The changes are recent but their positive effect is already starting to be seen. By setting challenging targets for teachers and pupils and by significantly improving the way that pupils' progress is tracked, the headteacher and senior staff are laying a secure foundation for improvement. The school knows itself well and its self-evaluation judgements are largely accurate.

The good provision for the Foundation Stage is one of the school's major strengths, which means children get off to a flying start and make good progress. Achievement is satisfactory throughout the rest of the school, although there are some variations between different groups of pupils. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of the good support they receive. The same is true of pupils with English as an additional language. More-able pupils, on the other hand, do not always achieve as well as they should. This is usually because teachers' expectations of them are not high enough and so the work is too easy. This is sometimes the case in literacy and numeracy but more often in other subjects.

Standards at the end of Year 2 have been below national averages for several years and dropped quite significantly in 2007. This was due to a high incidence of pupils with learning difficulties, a significant number joining the school during the year and an above-average proportion learning English as an additional language. There is improvement this year and present Year 2 pupils are attaining at least the levels expected for their age, with a particular strength in their writing. In the past, standards by the end of Year 4 have usually been below expected levels. The pupils currently in Year 4, however, are on track to do significantly better and reach expected levels. Pupils are being more successful and this is improving their attitudes to learning. Their overall personal development and well-being is satisfactory. There are some good features, such as their good behaviour, but their social development is held back because they are not given enough responsibility and cannot contribute to the school community as much as they would like.

The quality of teaching and learning is variable. Information from assessment is sometimes used well in planning pupils' next learning but this is inconsistent. The detailed assessment of children's learning in the Foundation Stage is not maintained when they are in Year 1 and so the transition is not smooth enough to ensure their good progress continues. A common strength in teaching is the good quality of guidance given through marking and target setting to show pupils how they can improve. This good academic guidance, along with high levels of care for pupils' well-being, makes the overall care, guidance and support a strong feature of the school's provision.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The good, well-led provision in the Foundation Stage gives children a wealth of lively and imaginative learning experiences. Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding.

All staff plan and work closely together and make good use of the generous indoor accommodation. The children make good and sometimes very good progress by the end of the year, and are well placed for the next stage in their education. They enjoy their lessons and behave very well. Relationships between pupils and the adults who work with them are very good and a positive encouragement to learning. They are well cared for and given good academic support based on thorough ongoing assessment. The Foundation Stage leader has a clear vision of the future and sets challenging targets. She is well aware that the restrictive access and current design of the outdoor area place limitations on its use, and this is a recognised priority for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of information from assessment to ensure a smooth transition from the Foundation Stage into Year 1 and so maintain children's good progress.
- Ensure that the more able pupils are given work that is sufficiently challenging.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils of all ages to have responsibilities that enable them to contribute to the school community.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children make good gains in learning in the Foundation Stage and by the end of the year most attain the expected levels for their age in all areas of learning. Provision in Year 1 is not planned carefully enough to take account of the pupils' differing needs and abilities, and this leads to variable progress. Most pupils in Year 2 are achieving well, and are working at above expected levels for their age in writing and at expected levels in speaking and listening, reading and mathematics.

In Years 3 and 4, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Those in Year 3 whose standards in the past were below national averages are quickly catching up. Standards are rising with improved tracking of the pupils' progress and provision of additional support for any who do not progress as well as they should. The school sets challenging targets for each year group. The pupils now in Year 4 are on track to achieve their targets and their standards in English, mathematics and science are in line with those expected of pupils at this age. The progress of more-able pupils varies between classes but, in general, teachers' expectations of these pupils are not high enough and they could achieve more than they do at present.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living and how to keep themselves safe. They are proud of their school and are friendly and welcoming to visitors. They behave well around the school and in the playground. When lessons inspire and stimulate them, they produce high standards of concentration and behaviour. However, in lessons which lack pace and challenge, they become bored and fidgety, and lose interest. Pupils know right from wrong, they have a clear understanding of the need to help others and they enjoy raising money for local and national charities. Attendance is satisfactory, an improvement from the last inspection. The school does all it can to ensure regular attendance and punctuality. Pupils usually cooperate well with each other, whether working in pairs or teams. Apart from the Year 4 pupils who form the School Council, other pupils have too few opportunities to take on responsibilities around the school and during playtime. Recent improvement in achievement means that pupils acquire

levels of literacy and numeracy skills that prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage in their education and their future economic well-being. The school recognises that pupils have limited understanding of arts and cultures in other parts of the world and has made cultural development a priority in next year's school development plan.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are variations in the quality of teaching and learning across the school, with lessons ranging from outstanding to satisfactory. Weaknesses are generally specific to individual teachers and effective monitoring and guidance by senior staff is gradually increasing teachers' effectiveness. Teachers make good use of resources such as interactive whiteboards to explain ideas clearly and imaginatively. A new system for assessing pupils' learning has been introduced and many teachers are starting to use this constructively for planning next stages in learning. This also helps the progression from one year to the next, although there is insufficient use of the information from assessment in the transition from the Foundation Stage into Year 1. Teachers match work satisfactorily to most pupils' abilities, but expectations of what the more able pupils can achieve are not high enough. Teachers set class, group and individual targets for pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy and they check pupils' work and progress regularly. They also encourage pupils to evaluate their own work and identify successes as well as weaknesses. These strategies have a good impact on the quality of pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage experience a range of stimulating learning opportunities, albeit with some restrictions to outdoor learning activities, and this fosters a love of coming to school. In Years 1 to 4 the school is making changes to the curriculum by linking some subjects together and by trying to improve the way that pupils' learning builds on the skills and knowledge they have acquired

previously. Pupils say they find some of their work interesting but teachers' planning shows that, apart from in literacy and numeracy, the learning activities are not being matched closely enough to pupils' different abilities. This is slowing down progress in these other subjects, most especially by those who are more able, including those who are particularly gifted or talented. The curriculum is enriched by regular educational visits and there is a satisfactory range of clubs providing learning opportunities outside the school day. These activities are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All statutory requirements for child protection are now met, which is an improvement since the last inspection. The school site is secure and health and safety issues are well managed by staff and governors. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good and pupils feel able to approach staff for help with any problems. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are swiftly identified and given carefully planned individualised support. The school makes good use of outside agencies, such as speech therapy, to provide additional support when necessary. Teachers provide good academic guidance to pupils through target setting and detailed marking of work that helps them understand what they need to do to improve their

work. Pupils use a simple system to mark their own work, showing what they think they have done well and what can improve. They are delighted when their teacher writes, 'I agree with your marking.' Such comment is very motivational.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has quickly gained a clear vision of where and how the school can improve and has made the improvement of pupils' achievement and standards an absolute priority. She and a senior management team which has a good breadth of expertise are already having a positive impact on school effectiveness through the changes they have introduced. The new methods of tracking progress, of assessing pupils' work and putting additional support where it is most needed are quickly having impact. Teaching is becoming more effective, standards are rising, and these are indications that the school has a good capacity to improve in the future.

The management structure has changed very recently through the re-instatement of the role of subject leader. The staff having these roles are enthusiastic and are in the process of setting priorities for developing their subjects. However, apart from in literacy, senior management has not made it clear enough that subject leaders should be linking such developments to improvement in pupils' achievement.

Governors have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are supportive and involved, contribute well to strategic planning and have a strong commitment to the ethos of the school. They fully endorse the extremely challenging targets that senior management has set to raise the standards of some year groups.

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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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	3
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	2
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	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

Dear Children

Inspection of Ferndown First School, Ferndown BH22 9ET

Thank you for making us welcome in your school and for talking with us so willingly. We thoroughly enjoyed joining you in lessons and seeing you at work. We think your school gives you a satisfactory education overall and some things are good. This is what we particularly appreciated.

- Children in Reception make good progress because the teachers and teaching assistants provide many interesting activities.
- Nearly all of you are making at least satisfactory progress and some of your work, like writing in Year 2, is of a particularly good standard.
- Your behaviour is good and this makes your school a friendly, pleasant place.
- You understand well about the importance of healthy eating and exercise and about what are safe things to do at school and at home.
- Teachers mark your work well and give good advice on how you can improve. We also like the way you use pink and green to mark your own work.
- All the adults do a good job in looking after you and making sure that you are safe and get help whenever you need it.
- The school is led well by the headteacher, and all the adults, including the governors, are working well together effectively to improve it.
- We have three recommendations to help your school to get even better:
 - We want there to be a closer link between what is taught and learned in Reception and Year 1.
 - Those of you who find the work easy need to have work that is a bit harder.
 - More of you should be given special responsibilities so that you can help one another and the adults around the school and at playtimes.

We hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make Ferndown First School to be an even better school.

Yours sincerely

Colin Lee Lead Inspector