

Rushcombe First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113684
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311336
Inspection date	20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Burghart

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	309
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Downey
Headteacher	Leonie Fawcett
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003
School address	Hanham Road Corfe Mullen Wimborne BH21 3PX
Telephone number	01202 695722
Fax number	01202 657890

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the quality of teaching and the impact of the school's leadership and management. Evidence was gathered about current standards. Discussions took place with the acting and substantive headteachers, senior teachers, governors and pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a large first school with a lower than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. Children's attainment when they join Foundation is broadly average. This is confirmed by the school's own assessments and those of the local authority (LA) over a period of years. Currently, the school is led by an acting headteacher whilst the substantive headteacher is seconded to work with the LA. The school has been recognised by the LA as having Leading Learning Status and serves as an example of excellent practice to other primary schools, particularly for the innovative nature of its curriculum.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It is clear that pupils, parents, governors, staff and the local authority all agree and are proud of what is being achieved here. 'We are more than satisfied – an excellent school!' was a parent's comment that sums up the view of the vast majority. It is no surprise that Rushcombe is oversubscribed. The school very successfully balances pupils' personal as well as academic development. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are significantly above average and have remained so over a period of years. Two aspects are particularly noteworthy. Boys' writing is markedly better than in most other schools and pupils' abilities to investigate and solve problems in mathematics are particularly strong. Standards reached by Year 4 pupils in 2007, although well above average, were not quite as high as in previous years but this was a year group with a greater proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and achievement was as good as ever. The school's predictions for 2008 are for outstanding achievement and high standards. Inspection evidence confirms that this is likely to be the case and this reflects the school's success at supporting pupils of all abilities. A parent wrote, 'Our two children are quite different, yet they both thrive.'

Pupils of all ages make outstanding progress, building on the excellent start children get as a result of the high quality of teaching and support in Foundation. Throughout the school, this represents outstanding achievement. It is the result of high quality teaching and excellent use of assessment to set aspirational, but realistic, targets. Staff use questioning very effectively to encourage pupils to think before answering. They make learning objectives very clear and systematically refer back to these to help pupils appreciate the progress they have made. Work is very effectively planned to meet the needs of all pupils. This is especially successful in helping those with learning difficulties and pupils who are potentially higher attainers. This was the first school in the LA to gain the NACE challenge award for its provision for able, gifted and talented pupils. High proportions of Year 4 pupils regularly reach the National Curriculum levels expected in Year 6 and some do even better than this. The school's Leading Learning Status is directly related to its outstanding curriculum. In particular, this is a recognition of the exemplary use of outside agencies, such as sports coaches and peripatetic music teachers, and the wide range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors. Parents are positive about the impact of these opportunities. 'My child is enthused about learning,' noted a Year 4 parent. To their credit, teachers are not resting on their laurels and are constantly devising yet more ways to give pupils opportunities to be creative and develop their skills of working independently. There is a collegiate approach in the school which encourages teamwork and professionalism.

The school's philosophy based on the '5 Rs', resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness, reciprocity and responsibility, was extended at the suggestion of the pupils to include 'respect'. It transcends all that happens at the school, underpins excellent personal development and ensures pupils are well prepared for future study and life in general. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are considerate and polite and obviously care about the school as a community. Peer mediators and school councillors are very good examples of pupils taking responsibility. Excellent relationships amongst pupils and staff very effectively support learning. Teachers are prepared to listen to pupils who, in turn, are confident that staff work in their best interests. In response to the school's outstanding level of physical care and high quality academic guidance, pupils feel safe and show extremely positive attitudes. Their behaviour is excellent. That attendance is average, rather than better than this, is the result of holidays taken in term-time – a trend the school does all it can to overcome.

Outstanding leadership and management, sustained despite staff changes, are at the heart of the school's success. Comments from parents include 'high standards of leadership and management' and 'excellent vision'. Governors make an outstanding contribution to the way the school is run. Improvements to their involvement in, and impact on, strategic management and developments to the curriculum are fine examples of the school's successful track record. Although a very small minority of parents feel there is still room for improvement, parents are much better informed and involved than at the time of the last inspection. They support the school well in a strong partnership to the benefit of pupils' learning. The school has well established systems to monitor and evaluate the success of decisions taken in terms of pupils' learning. It is particularly adept at using targets to raise and maintain standards to challenge not only pupils but also staff. There are excellent tracking procedures and careful attention is paid to analysis of assessment data. As a result, expectations are high and senior managers have an accurate view of the school's performance. This all adds up to an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children do very well in Foundation, making excellent progress from average starting points. The vast majority achieve the expectations in all areas of learning before they join Year 1 and a significant proportion do better than this. Children settle into school routines extremely well because they are supported very effectively. Teaching is outstanding, with activities skilfully planned against the background of the Foundation Stage curriculum. The school is committed to encouraging learning through play. This is achieved with excellent record keeping and a balance of activities which children choose for themselves or are directed to by the staff.

Progress in personal, social and emotional development is excellent. 'My child has only just started but enjoys everything in this happy and welcoming school!' confirmed a parent. Children quickly learn to share and take turns (even when waiting for Snow White's costume!). They are prepared to listen to each other and their teachers and readily join in with all activities. Communication skills are fostered very effectively. By the end of Foundation, children are emerging as readers and writers. Mathematical development makes the most of children's good counting skills. Plenty of opportunities to join in sorting and counting games and rhymes give a very good basis for an early understanding of addition and subtraction. The topic work approach nurtures children's knowledge and understanding of the world as well as encouraging creative skills. Physical development is fostered very well in the good outdoor activity area and indoors, for example, in the use of construction kits and toys. These are so well used that some show signs of tiredness. Replacement is part of the excellent Foundation Stage action plan and is a discerning example of the continued outstanding leadership and management of the Foundation Year.

What the school should do to improve further

In this outstanding school there are no major aspects requiring improvement. Senior leaders and governors have a very clear understanding of what will make things even better. Developments, such as replacing well used Foundation equipment and providing even more opportunities for pupils to work independently, already feature in high quality school development planning.

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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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for your warm welcome when I visited your school. It was easy to see that you enjoy being there and are keen to make the most of all you have to do. I was extremely impressed by the way you try to keep to what you call the '5 Rs' (or is it 6?). I am sure that you and your parents will be pleased, but not at all surprised, to hear that Rushcombe First is an outstanding school. You are right to be so proud to go there.

Here are some of the highlights of your school:

- Your behaviour is excellent and you work hard.
- The staff work particularly well as a team and are very good at helping you to do your very best. The way you are taught is outstanding.
- You reach high standards and do especially well in reading and writing.
- Children get off to an excellent start in Foundation.
- The school takes excellent care of all its pupils and makes sure everyone is safe and knows how to stay healthy.
- You are being helped to grow up as responsible young people.
- What you have to learn is really well planned. Teachers make sure learning is interesting and enjoyable.
- The school is very good at setting you targets to challenge you to do even better. This works especially well for those of you who are quick to learn and those who sometimes find learning difficult.

The acting headteacher, staff and governors have a very clear picture of what the school is good at. They already know how to make it even better, for example replacing some of the toys that are wearing out in Foundation. The school is on the right track because the way it is run is outstanding.

The future looks bright. Keep up the good work!



25 September 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Rushcombe First School, Corfe Mullen, Wimborne BH21 3PX

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Yours sincerely

Mike Burghart
Lead inspector