

Little Common School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114429
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311598
Inspection date	5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	David Collard

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	650
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tom Graham
Headteacher	David Pratt
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
School address	Shepherds Close Bexhill-on-Sea TN39 4SQ
Telephone number	01424 842297
Fax number	01424 846697

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Little Common is a large primary school on the outskirts of Bexhill. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low, as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special education need. There are a few pupils with significant physical disabilities, requiring wheelchair access. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is low. Over the last few years, there have been difficulties with staffing, particularly at a more senior level, due to a high number of staff taking maternity leave.

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, providing a good quality of education. The commitment, drive and enthusiasm of the headteacher and the school's self-evaluation are real strengths. This is a school where there is a passion to get things right. This has resulted in some innovative improvements, ensuring that pupils make a good start to their education. The school enjoys very strong support from parents, one of whom mentioned that she travels an hour each way so that her children can attend the school.

The pupils are delightful. They are keen to share their experiences both with visitors and with each other and thoroughly enjoy the many and varied activities on offer. It is not surprising, therefore, that behaviour is exemplary and attendance is good. The effective school council feels a real sense of responsibility about making changes. Two Year 6 pupils said that they particularly enjoyed explaining to the youngest children what had happened at their meeting. They very sensibly explained that when taking these children's suggestions on board, they had to be careful to think which ones were realistic.

The school has its own school meals provision and pupils are very aware about what constitutes a healthy diet. Through their sports activities, they are being prepared well to lead an active lifestyle. Some pupils have been recognised at both local and regional levels for these sporting achievements. The 'challenge area' of one classroom, where pupils can share their successes outside school, gave a girl the opportunity to show how proud she is of her horse riding. Pupils are also very aware of how to stay safe. Activities such as this are preparing pupils well for their economic well-being. Access to the buildings is administered stringently, and older pupils and adults on duty make sure that everybody plays safely. This is all due to the high levels of pastoral care and support that are evident throughout this large school.

Children start school with standards broadly as would be expected for their ages. By the end of the Foundation Stage, the good provision is ensuring that they are reaching slightly above the expected levels. Achievement through the school is good because of the consistently good teaching in each year group. As a result, standards by the end of Year 6 are above average. Both inspection evidence and the school's data show that, in each year, virtually all pupils make at least the expected progress with significant proportions doing better than this.

Whilst results in Year 2 national tests are consistent year on year, in Year 6 there is some variability. The high mobility in Years 3 to 6 is partly the reason for this variability as pupils' progress often falters somewhat as they settle into their new classes. This is addressed quickly through the good identification of particular needs and there is evidence to show how pupils' progress soon returns to normal. One new pupil explained that she had been made to feel welcome and was really pleased to have come to the school. She also felt she was doing much better in her learning and this was borne out by her recent assessment information. Achievement in science, whilst satisfactory, has shown more variability. The school has recognised this as an ongoing issue. This year, pupils are given specific work both on practical science and in theory to help plug any gaps from the past and this is proving successful. Nevertheless, some pupils in Year 6 who were trying out test questions still found difficulty when trying to apply their previously acquired knowledge in an unfamiliar situation.

Good teaching and an extensive curriculum have been at the heart of pupils' progress. This produces a calm, orderly school where lessons are interesting, stimulating and move at a good pace. Inspection evidence, along with recent monitoring by the school, shows that most teaching

is at least good. The strong year group structure makes sure that there is support for teachers in their planning and organisation of lessons. This ensures pupils receive similar experiences in each class. Teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils with specific difficulties as well as small groups. As a result, all pupils make similar levels of progress. On just a few occasions, teaching assistants are not deployed as well as they could be when whole-group sessions are taking place.

Day-to-day assessment, including marking, is thorough. Pupils know what their targets are and how they need to get there, although some could be written in a more child-friendly way. The innovative 'tickled pink' and 'green for growth' marking structure gives pupils instant coloured recognition about the strengths and weaknesses of their work and they say this really helps them to improve. A lot of work has been done to analyse assessment data and to support those pupils who appear not to be making the progress they should. Evidence of this can be seen in the extensive extra groups taking place, including voluntary Saturday morning classes. One parent said that she was amazed her child was so excited to be going to school at the weekend! In addition, the analysis defines any whole-school issues about gaps in learning. Whilst this work is very thorough, it is not as rigorously completed for the Year 6 national tests. This makes it difficult for the school to determine the outcomes from any trends in weaker performance, such as in science.

The highly experienced headteacher has built an effective senior team even though difficulties with staff changes have meant some restructuring. Day-to-day management is extremely strong, producing a school that runs 'like a well-oiled machine'. With the recent restructuring of the senior team, the highly evolved management plan has come about through an excellent self-evaluation of the school's provision. All leaders have a very clear understanding of the priorities and are being given real responsibility to make the changes needed. The experienced governing body also have the right information to help them provide good support and challenge to the many developments that are taking place. The school has continued to improve significantly and innovate from a strong position at the time of the last inspection. All this provides ample proof of its excellent capability to improve further in the future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and pupils achieve well. Activities are balanced well between teacher-directed lessons and good opportunities for children to play. They get on with each other and the adults very well. In one class, the frog project very successfully included children working with an assistant counting lily pads, some other pupils recording what they had found while others were colouring, cutting and pasting the lifecycle of a frog. In a valuable allied task in another class, the children's physical education lesson involved them replicating a frog's movement by hopping. Pupils' assessments show that they make particularly good progress in aspects of language and mathematical development as well as in their knowledge and understanding of the world. The leader, who is also in charge of Key Stage 1, brings a vast amount of experience and, by having management of both key stages, is able to help organise good transition into Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the analysis of individual aspects of the national tests to determine and remedy the reasons for any fluctuations in pupils' standards, particularly in science.

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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	1

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	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	2
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	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

6 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Little Common School, Bexhill TN39 4SQ

Thank you for making me so welcome during my recent visit. I very much enjoyed joining you in your lessons and seeing what you were all getting up to. I am sure you will not be surprised to hear that I think you are at a good school. As I promised some of you, I enclose below some of the main points from my report.

- You told me how proud you were of your school. I can see why. You clearly enjoy all your lessons and behave extremely well. When I was walking about, I could often hear a pin drop because many of you were concentrating so hard.
- You make a good start in the younger classes and this continues through the school. By the time you leave in Year 6, you are reaching above average standards in your SATs. I have said that you make good progress right the way through the school.
- You are looked after very well. The children on duty are very conscientious about their jobs. I saw some helping the younger children and making sure they were kept safe.
- I enjoyed seeing how well you behaved in the dining room during lunchtime. I think the number system for calling you in works really well. I have not seen that before so I will be able to suggest it to other schools.
- Your teachers work hard to make sure you have interesting lessons. I know some of you said that you find the work very challenging. That is because the teachers keep a close eye on how well you are doing and change work if they think it is too easy.
- You have so many exciting things to do both in lessons and outside school. It is a wonder you can fit it all in.
- Your headteacher, along with all the other teachers, is doing a good job at making sure that the right changes are being made so that your school gets even better. I have asked them to make sure that they check the previous SATs papers to see if there are any ways in which you can improve, particularly in science.

Finally, I want to wish you all the very best for the future. You can help things improve by suggesting any ideas you may have and continuing to work hard.

Best wishes

David Collard Lead Inspector

6 March 2008



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