

# Meeching Valley Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114440
<b>Local Authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	311603
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 December 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Selwyn Ward

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	180
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Anthony Bradbury
<b>Headteacher</b>	Chris Gascoyne
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	31 January 2005
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Valley Road Newhaven BN9 9UT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01273 514300
<b>Fax number</b>	01273 514300

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<b>Age group</b>	4–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

In this small school, an above average number of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mostly for behavioural and emotional difficulties or speech and language delay. The great majority of pupils are White British. In addition to those children who start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), an above average number join the school partway through their primary education. There is a breakfast club and a pre-school, which are separately managed.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Meeching Valley Primary provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has been through some turbulence as a result of the disruptive effects of changes both of staff and of class organisation, as the school has moved between mixed- and single-age classes. This has affected standards, particularly in 2007, when results in the national tests were very low and pupils did not make the progress they should. A revitalised leadership team and more settled staffing have helped to turn the school around so that pupils are now making satisfactory progress, with children getting off to a good start in EYFS. Standards in English and mathematics are now much closer to the national average, with results in the 2008 national tests up sharply on the previous year. They remain very low, however, in science. The school has this year revised its curriculum planning for this subject to improve pupils' progress, but school leaders recognise that gaps remain in pupils' prior knowledge and understanding.

Where the school has had greatest success is in its creation of what parents describe as 'a very caring and supportive environment'. The good arrangements for pupils' welfare enable them to feel safe and to grow in confidence and self-esteem. The way the school achieves this good personal development is, again, greatly appreciated by parents. One, typically, wrote, 'I have always been impressed at how each child is treated as the individual they are'. In a school where all the classes are named after precious and semi-precious stones, it is not surprising that the staff think of the children as their 'little gems'. Pupils get on well with each other and behaviour is good. This represents a remarkable turnaround, particularly for those pupils who need extra help in controlling their behaviour. Good quality marking that sets out the next steps in pupils' learning is making a key contribution to the pupils' improved progress.

Stronger links between different subjects are helping to make learning more interesting and exciting for the pupils because they give a more practical application for literacy and numeracy tasks. Teachers generally manage their classes well and teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support those pupils who need extra help with their learning or in staying focused. This good support enables many of the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress in their learning. Although they make better progress in reading, more able pupils do not always do as well as they could because they are not always challenged enough to extend their thinking. Pupils who join the school partway through their primary education make similar progress to the others in the classes they join.

The headteacher, school leaders and governors have a broadly accurate picture of Meeching Valley's strengths and areas for development, although they have an overly rosy view of some aspects of the school. They have had success in arresting the underachievement in 2007. Their monitoring has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Individual pupils' progress is carefully tracked, but the school's policy of setting targets based mainly on the previous year's assessments means that pupils are not always pushed to make the faster progress needed where they have had a year when they have slipped behind. Nevertheless, the improvement in the school, particularly over the past year, shows its satisfactory capacity to improve further.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

Children make good progress, so that by the end of the Reception Year, they have made good gains from their low starting points to reach standards that are just below average. Children are helped to quickly settle in the EYFS. A parent explained that their child had been 'made very welcome and has made friends quickly'. The children are happy and work together with much enjoyment. They behave well and show positive attitudes because staff value and listen to them. Consequently, progress in their personal, social and emotional development is especially good. Parents are closely involved and regularly send in 'wow' slips when they have been impressed by what their children have said or learnt. Welfare arrangements are thorough and there is good supervision. Children freely choose activities in the sheltered outdoor area, although they do not have enough opportunities to climb and play on toys that promote their physical development. Leadership of the EYFS is good. Children readily select activities for themselves and tackle them with good levels of concentration, whether it is making a Christmas present from scrap materials or digging for buried stars with letters of the alphabet on them. EYFS staff work well as a team, keep good records and make accurate assessments of what children can do and the progress they make. They use this information well to plan activities geared at moving children's learning on.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in science by identifying and filling the gaps in pupils' prior knowledge and understanding.
- Set work in all lessons that challenges and extends the thinking of more able pupils.
- Ensure that the individual targets set for pupils' progress push them to catch up when they have fallen behind.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Standards have improved since 2007, when pupils did not achieve as well as they should. Though still below average overall, and low in science, standards are now much closer to those expected nationally. Achievement is satisfactory, and pupils' progress in basic literacy and numeracy skills prepares them adequately for their future. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities often make good progress because they benefit from good support, with a high number of teaching assistants in each class. More able pupils, however, do not do as well as they should because they are not routinely set work or questions that challenge them enough to extend their thinking. This means that relatively few pupils attain higher levels in the national tests and the school's targets are for only a very small number to attain the higher level in 2009 and 2010. Pupils who join the school partway through their primary education are helped to make similar progress to the others. Again, those who come in with lower attainment generally make better progress than those with higher prior attainment.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils enjoy school and they feel safe from bullying. They are very confident that the adults at school will give them the help and guidance they need. They are very positive about the way the comments teachers make in their marking are helping them to think more about their work. Pupils do not all, however, take as much pride as they should in the presentation of their work. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are very clear about right and wrong and say that behaviour is much better and that it is now calm. Parents echo this view. One wrote to describe the 'huge improvement in my son's behaviour'. The big fall in the number of detentions also shows how much behaviour has improved. Pupils play a positive role in school life, for example as school councillors, playtime buddies and monitors, and are involved in the local community. They especially enjoy joining in the Brighton Festival parade. They take an interest in learning about cultures and beliefs other than their own. Year 6 pupils, for example, are raising money for a village in Malawi where a former pupil now lives. Pupils are well aware of the importance of healthy living and of staying safe. Sporting activities are especially popular.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

As a parent pointed out, 'My daughter's progress has not been helped by numerous changes of teacher in previous years.' The now more settled staffing is resulting in improved teaching and learning. Teachers relate well to their pupils and they generally manage behaviour effectively so that even those pupils who have difficulty in containing their emotions are helped to settle and get on with their work. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to help keep pupils interested and engaged. The most effective lessons are punctuated with varied practical activities that help to maintain a brisk pace of learning. In some lessons, however, pupils' attention drifts when they have to listen passively for too long. Just occasionally, pupils are unsure about what they should be doing when they are set individual or group work. Teaching assistants are mostly used well to support those pupils who need extra help with their learning. More able pupils, however, are not always challenged enough to develop their thinking and raise their attainment.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

A number of recent initiatives are beginning to have an impact in raising standards. These include, for example, more regular opportunities for extended writing. Imaginative links between different subjects are helping to enthuse pupils and are motivating them to achieve. Work in Year 5, for example, linking mathematics and history, prompted pupils to think more about the need for standard measures as they discovered the limitations in measuring objects in cubits that varied with the size of the individual. School leaders have identified that past weaknesses in the science curriculum have led to underachievement in this subject. The revised science curriculum is still in its first year. It is giving pupils more opportunities to learn through investigation and to make constructive links with other subjects. However, school leaders acknowledge that there remain gaps from previous years in pupils' knowledge and understanding in science and these have not been precisely catalogued with action taken to fill them. Pupils and their parents are pleased with the many extra-curricular activities on offer, although several

of these are only available to older pupils. The very well attended cookery clubs are a particular favourite.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

There is rigorous attention to health and safety and child protection checks. Working in close partnership with outside agencies, good support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps these pupils to make good progress. A parent of a child receiving help with language development described how 'support has always been readily available, but without making him seem different to his peers.' Pupils who join the school partway through their primary education are assessed when they start and support is put in place to enable them to make similar progress to others. There is some variation in the quality of marking, and not all is as good, but most marking gives pupils clear feedback on how they can improve their work. In the very best marking, this involves teachers entering into a written dialogue with each pupil that helps them to assess for themselves the progress that they are making.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Meeching Valley describes as its aim to provide 'a safe and caring school working together to achieve our best'. The headteacher and school leaders have had particular success with the first part of this aim. They have created a school where pupils are happy, feel safe and increasingly want to learn. More consistent systems for managing behaviour have had a dramatic impact on pupils' attitudes. There has been less consistent success, however, in ensuring all pupils achieve their best. Following a period of staff and organisational changes, senior leaders are now tackling the need to raise standards. With help from the local authority, they have rightly focused on improving pupils' writing and basic mathematical skills. Initiatives to improve these are beginning to have an effect, but leaders acknowledge that there is further to go before all pupils have caught up on previous years when they fell behind. Changes in science are too recent to show through in raised standards.

Governors are supportive, ensure the school meets all its legal responsibilities and play an active role in monitoring its work. Parental responses are mostly full of praise for the good care shown to their children and the recent improvements. One of the strengths of the school is its success in promoting community cohesion between pupils and families and creating 'a family feel' recognised by pupils and parents. As one parent wrote, 'Communication with us has been good at all times and they have listened to us.'





## 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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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/or disabilities make progress	2

<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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
The extent to which 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	3

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

8 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meeching Valley Primary School, Newhaven BN9 9UT

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. I especially enjoyed joining so many of you for the Christmas breakfast where we all met Santa!

We were pleased to see what a happy school it is and how well you all get on with each other. You are looked after well, and we were delighted to see how much behaviour has improved. That is certainly helping to make the school a happier place. The school is giving you a satisfactory education. The children in Rubies class get off to good start. Through the rest of the school, teachers are helping you to make sound progress and standards are rising. You are still not doing as well as you should in science, however, so we have asked school leaders to look carefully to see where there are aspects of science from previous years that you are still unsure about. They can then help you to catch up so you achieve better in this subject.

You like the way teachers are linking subjects together to make learning more interesting. Your writing is coming on, thanks to all the 'Big Writing' you are doing, but some of you could take more care with your presentation. It is a pity to spoil good work through untidiness. Teachers are helping you to improve your work through the comments they write when they mark your books. Do always make sure you read what they say as that will help you to move your work on to the next level.

Those of you who have joined Meeching Valley from other schools have been helped to settle in and to make similar progress to those of you who have been at the school from the start. Those of you who need extra help with your learning do well because of the good support you get. It is those of you who find some of the work a little too easy who are not doing as well as you should be. We have asked the school to make sure that teachers always set you work and pose you questions that challenge you more. We have also asked that, for anyone who falls behind in their work, the targets set for them by school leaders push them to catch up.

Good luck for the future, and best wishes for the Christmas holiday.

Yours faithfully Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector