

Ashdon Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114964
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311772
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Anna Coyle

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	100
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
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Elizabeth Noakes
Headteacher	Mrs Lynda Walsh
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ashdon Saffron Walden Essex CB10 2HB
Telephone number	01799 584219
Fax number	01799 584107

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small rural primary school that serves the local village and its surrounding area. All children are from White British families. The proportion of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that of other schools. Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is slightly above that typically seen for children's age when they begin in the Reception class. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools award and an Active Mark award.

Provision is made for a breakfast and after-school club, which is privately run by a separate committee.

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 that enables its children to achieve well and leave as confident, articulate learners. It evaluates its provision effectively and is well led and managed. The school is very much a part of the community it serves and it contributes effectively to harmonious relationships between the two. It is held in high regard by parents, who are rightly proud of its good reputation. One parent summed up the views of many: 'The school is well led with a happy productive staff who have the ability to get the best out of the children.'

From starting points that are higher than in most other schools, children make satisfactory progress in the EYFS and build successfully on learning in Years 1 and 2. They make the best progress in Years 3 to 6, and the most able do particularly well at Key Stage 2 because the quality of teaching is so good in Classes 3 and 4. It is sometimes outstanding. Consequently, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave at the end of Year 6, with many children attaining the higher Level 5 in the national tests. However, standards have fluctuated at Key Stage 1 over the last three years and, although they were above average overall in 2008, no children achieved the higher Level 3 in writing. The school knows that writing is an area upon which to focus if it is to meet its challenging targets for the coming year, and that greater challenge is required for children in the Reception year to help prepare them for the transition to Year 1.

Personal development and well-being are good, and attendance is above average. Children enjoy learning and build up their confidence and self-esteem effectively. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Children show an astute awareness of right and wrong, and respect the views of others. They know how to stay fit and healthy, and they make important contributions to the school community by willingly taking on responsibilities such as school councillors, playground leaders and class monitors. Good achievement in reading, numeracy and computer skills helps to prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Classrooms are clean and colourful places in which to learn and the quality of teaching is good overall. The good curriculum is planned well and enhanced by a wide range of clubs and visits, as well as music tuition. The school has good procedures for safeguarding and protecting the children. They are cared for well and staff maintain good partnerships with parents and external agencies. The good arrangements to track progress are used effectively so that children know how well they are doing and have clear targets to guide their work.

Good leadership and management lie at the heart of the school. The headteacher plays a pivotal role in leading the staff and securing improvements. She provides clear direction and is well supported by the deputy and senior management team, although the procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are not yet sufficiently robust. All staff share a commitment to making the school even better, whilst recognising that there is still more to do to develop the EYFS provision and drive up standards in writing across the school, especially at Key Stage 1. Governors keep a close check on how well the school is doing and are closely involved in evaluating the provision. The weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection have been tackled successfully and the school has good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Staff take good care of the children and ensure that their welfare, health and safety have high priority. Parents are very supportive of their children's education at home and their close links with the school help children settle happily and enjoy learning. From good starting points, children generally make sound progress and achieve satisfactorily by the time they move up into Year 1. By the time they leave the Reception Year they reach the expected goals for their age, and many exceed them, although achievement is not as high as it could be because the most able children are capable of even higher standards. Teaching is satisfactory and focuses well on increasing children's communication, language, literacy and numeracy skills through formal adult-led activities, whilst teaching assistants provide sound support to individuals who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Learning and development is soundly based on practical tasks to promote children's knowledge and understanding of the world, and the curriculum includes a reasonable mix of organised tasks and free-choice indoor and outdoor activities. However, planning does not take sufficient account of children's prior attainment to provide enough challenge through independent learning and there are not enough structured play opportunities for them to explore and develop new skills in creative and physical activities. Adults promote children's personal skills well and encourage them to share and take turns when playing with the resources. They check children's progress to measure how well they are doing and identify where additional support is needed for those who find learning hard but there is insufficient challenge for the most able. The provision is led and managed satisfactorily. It is being developed further to incorporate the new EYFS curriculum for problem solving, reasoning and numeracy.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the provision for children in the EYFS by making better use of assessment to inform planning and provide more challenge for the most able.
- Extend the current arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and use the information gathered to help drive up standards in writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children achieve well to reach above average standards by the time they leave the school, with the most able doing particularly well at Key Stage 2. Standards are sometimes well above the national figures by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science, especially at the higher levels. For example, the test results for 2007 were particularly high and showed that the proportion of children who attained Level 5 was almost twice as high as nationally in all three core subjects. The results of the 2008 tests show that standards were not quite as high as the previous year but were, nevertheless, still above the national expectations overall, except in writing. The inspection findings confirm this picture and show that children build successfully on their previous attainment and make good progress in Years 3 to 6. However, the picture has been a very different one at Key Stage 1, exacerbated by staffing difficulties, with standards fluctuating significantly over the last three years: they fell in 2006 and took another tumble in 2007 but rose again in 2008 to above average overall, although no children reached Level 3 in writing. Children do best in reading but they do least well in writing. To boost standards, staff

have rightly identified the need to increase children's writing skills throughout the school, and spur on the achievement of the most able at Key Stage 1.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Children work and play well together and are keen to take part in the range of activities offered. Attendance is above average. Children enjoy their education and are punctual for their lessons, arriving in good time each day. Their spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is good. Children behave well and have good relationships with adults and each other, although they say that the bigger boys are too boisterous at times. Nevertheless, the oldest ones look after the youngest ones during breaktimes by acting as playground leaders, and they know how to help anyone standing at the 'Friendship Stop'. Children have a good understanding of how to stay safe. They adopt healthy lifestyles and enjoy plenty of physical activities in lessons and in after-school sports clubs, such as cross-country running. They take on responsibilities willingly in the classroom and around the school and participate in a wide range of events in the local community. They are well prepared for their future well-being through the development of skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology. The school council makes an excellent contribution to the community and learn about teamwork and financial decision-making through various activities involving environmental, ecological and energy-saving issues.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching prevails in the mixed-age classes from Years 1 to 6. It is sometimes outstanding at Key Stage 2 when challenging activities capture children's interest and inspire them to work hard. For example, they thoroughly enjoy practical activities such as exploring mathematical measurements in Years 5 and 6 and taking part in scientific investigations in Years 3 and 4. Warm relationships between adults and children motivate learning, and teachers make good use of a wide range of resources, including computers and electronic whiteboards, to make learning fun. The work of the teaching assistants has been improved successfully since the previous inspection to ensure that all adults are deployed closely to support children who find learning difficult. This ensures that children of differing capabilities receive the right levels of support, although the most able children are not always sufficiently challenged in writing. Teachers assess progress regularly, and children are encouraged to do well through the positive written feedback and helpful comments they receive in their books. A recent focus on teachers' marking has led to improved systems for checking children's work and for giving them challenging targets. Marking is exemplary in Years 3 and 4.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum provides children with a well-rounded education. It has a strong focus on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects, and staff are currently focusing rightly on driving up standards in writing, especially in Years 1 and 2 where they are inconsistent. As well as providing a good focus on promoting thinking skills and creative aspects such as art and music, children have good opportunities to learn a modern foreign

language during French lessons. They also take part in interesting activities to extend their knowledge of personal, social and health education and citizenship to help them prepare for their future lives. In addition, the school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities including gardening, choir, sporting and musical events, as well as instrumental brass and woodwind tuition. Colourful displays of children's work contribute to the stimulating and vibrant learning environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has robust arrangements for safeguarding children. It makes careful checks on all adults who work in the school and has good systems for ensuring health and safety. Staff provide good day-to-day care of the children, and parents are very appreciative of the levels of personal support their children receive. Children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good support to help them and there are good partnerships with external agencies to further aid learning. Academic guidance is satisfactory. The school is developing its assessment procedures to include a more formal computerised system for tracking progress. This is being used increasingly well to provide staff with a clear analysis of data so that they can introduce intervention strategies quickly when necessary. All children at Key Stages 1 and 2 know their targets and understand what they need to do to get to the next level. They successfully assess their own work and the work of others when they are asked to do so. This helps them to grow into strong independent learners.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's good leadership and management are key to the welcoming, friendly nature of the school and the good achievement of the children. She has an accurate grasp of the school's strengths and a clear vision for the way it will develop. She is well supported by the new deputy headteacher, who has quickly established good assessment procedures and keeps a careful check on children's progress. He is a very good role model for his teaching colleagues and works well with the headteacher and senior management team. The school evaluates its performance effectively and uses the information to devise a good school development plan. However, the arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching are not rigorous enough and, although the subject leaders oversee the provision, they do not formally check teaching and learning in their areas. Governors play an important and influential role in evaluating and challenging the school for the benefit of the children. They are regular visitors to the school and fulfil their responsibilities diligently.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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 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

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 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	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 November 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Ashdon Primary School, Saffron Walden, CB10 2HB

Thank you for being so helpful and making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I am writing to let you know what I found out.

I think that you go to a good school. You achieve well and reach above average standards by the time you leave at the end of Year 6. It was good to hear how much you like coming to school and enjoy learning. You say that you are happy in school and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried. You behave well and you know a lot about keeping healthy and safe. The teaching is good and staff take good care of you and keep you safe. The school provides a good curriculum for you and there are plenty of things to do in the after-school clubs and other activities. Those of you involved in the school council take your responsibilities very seriously and try hard to look after the school environment and save energy. You make an excellent contribution to the work of the school. Well done!

I have asked your teachers to improve the provision for the youngest children in the school by making better use of assessment information to help them plan activities and stretch the most able. I have also asked the headteacher to make sure that the leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching in the school to help improve standards in writing. Mrs Walsh, the staff and governors want the school to become even better and I hope you will play your part by continuing to work hard and doing your best, especially in writing.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Dr Anna Coyle

Lead inspector