

Ashford Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115921
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312108
Inspection dates	25–26 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Paula Protherough

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)	121
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	20
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sandra Everitt
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Watson
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ashford Hill Thatcham RG19 8BB
Telephone number	01189 813822
Fax number	01189 817043

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average village primary school admits pupils from a wide area including the neighbouring town. The pupils are of predominantly white British origin and speak English as their first language. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is above the national average. There are three pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) including visual and physical impairment, autism and speech and language. The 20 pupils in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are taught in a mixed age class that includes some Year 1 pupils. The school achieved the Activemark in 2008 and Healthy Schools Award in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school offers a good quality of education for pupils so they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. As one parent commented, 'Every child, however able, is made to feel secure and valued giving them the confidence and support to reach their full potential'. Parents and pupils rightly appreciate the high quality of care and attention to their needs given by an enthusiastic and well-organised staff. The headteacher and deputy form a highly effective team. They have an accurate view of the school's performance and a clear vision for future improvement securely based upon pupils' achievements. Since the last inspection, they have successfully introduced a range of initiatives to improve teaching and learning and raise standards.

Pupils enter the school with a wide range of abilities and the profile of their knowledge, skills and understanding varies considerably from year-to-year. Taken overall, attainment on entry to Reception is generally in line with age related expectations. Pupils of all backgrounds and abilities make good progress and achieve well as they move through the school. By the age of eleven, standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils achieve very well in their reading, but not so well in their writing. This is partly because approaches to teaching handwriting and presentation are inconsistent across the school. Similarly, teachers do not systematically provide opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their writing skills across the curriculum.

Improved assessment and a new system for tracking pupils' progress are successfully helping teachers to ensure a good match of task to the range of abilities in each mixed-age class. Lessons are interesting, and relevant practical activities frequently enhance pupils' learning in science and design and technology. Teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly, writing comments that tell them how to improve. Individual talents are nurtured so that pupils flourish and grow in confidence and self-esteem. This has a positive effect on their attitudes and behaviour and they take very good care of each other. Older pupils are outstanding in the way they undertake responsibilities for many aspects of the school, such as organising activities on the playground and managing assemblies. Productive links with the local and wider community support the good achievement of pupils by offering them opportunities to develop and extend skills and talents such as sport and music.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

For some children, the Ashford EYFS is their first experience of being out of the home, whilst others come from different playgroup and Nursery settings. The school's effective induction arrangements, well-developed links with families and the safe and stimulating classroom environment mean that new arrivals are swift to settle in their new surroundings.

The adults focus successfully on the development of good personal and social skills so the atmosphere is harmonious, busy and happy. Well-established routines and adults' clear expectations mean that the children settle very quickly and become confident in 'self-registering' at the start of sessions and making sensible choices from the range of activities on offer. The environment provides exciting and stimulating activities to meet the needs of the children in all areas of learning, including opportunities for challenging physical activities on the large outdoor play equipment and large bikes and tractors.

Although children arrive with wide-ranging levels of knowledge and skills, the staff team's thorough assessments successfully identify next the steps in each child's learning and ensure experiences are well matched to individual needs. Letters and sounds are taught systematically and successfully through songs, games, group activities and play. However, opportunities for children to develop confidence and enthusiasm for writing within these contexts are not always fully exploited. The children's enjoyment and positive attitudes to developing problem solving, reasoning and numeracy are evident in the way they tackle this type of activity; a feature that is further enhanced by their recent work in the outdoor shop. Assessment results confirm that children make good progress in all areas of learning so that, by the time they move to Year 1, most have achieved a good level of overall achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure consistent approaches to the teaching of handwriting and presentation of work.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in all subjects of the National Curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils of all backgrounds and abilities make good progress and achieve well as they move through the school. By the end of Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics, with a significant proportion of pupils exceeding the expected levels in reading and mathematics.

By the time pupils leave the school at age eleven, standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science and have been for several years. A whole school focus on mathematics has been particularly successfully in raising standards still further but there has been a steady fall in the number of pupils achieving higher levels in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils appreciate the family atmosphere of the school and the many opportunities to promote their personal development. Behaviour is good because pupils show a high level of cooperation and sociability. They have an excellent understanding of how to be safe and have confidence in the adults in school to support them if they have a problem. Playtimes are peaceful and enjoyable. 'Playleaders' look after games equipment and organise activities to ensure that no one is left alone. Pupils know how to live healthy lifestyles and make sensible choices about food. They are extremely active and take full advantage of opportunities for physical activity in lessons and clubs. The school council is lively and well organised and helps pupils to learn to consult with each other and take on responsibilities. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall and pupils have a good understanding of world faiths and cultures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons provide a good mix of challenging activities that motivate pupils and encourage effective learning. For example, the teacher's use of a variation of bingo successfully supported Year 5 and 6 pupils' capacity to perform complex long multiplication of decimals. Teaching assistants

make a significant contribution to lessons; supporting positive relationships and encouraging pupils' confidence to answer questions and explore ideas in greater depth. This is particularly the case for those pupils with LDD who are well supported, fully involved in lessons and enabled to make good progress towards their targets. Teachers help pupils to be involved in their own learning by telling them what the objective of the lesson is before they start. They mark and assess work thoroughly and use the information to track the progress of their pupils and plan activities that meet the wide range of age and ability in each class. However, approaches to the teaching of handwriting are inconsistent, as are teachers' expectations of pupils for the presentation of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Teachers take good care to match the curriculum to the diverse needs and interests of their pupils, taking account of both personal and academic development. As a result, the curriculum provides a good range of interesting and enjoyable activities with many enrichment opportunities, such as visits to Southsea beach, that successfully engage and motivate pupils. There is a good programme to support pupils' personal development and social skills. A wide variety of extra-curricular activities is well supported and appreciated by the pupils, and includes a successful football team.

Teachers are beginning to establish plans that enable pupils to make links between the subjects of the National Curriculum. For instance, provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection. Pupils are more confident in developing and applying their ICT skills across the curriculum from Reception to Year 6. Some teachers are also seeking to achieve this by setting interesting research tasks in history; such as getting pupils to write about a Victorian street child in Year 6 or Mary Seacole in Year 2. However, there is not yet a coherent set of plans to ensure that teachers enable all pupils to develop their writing skills in these wider contexts, in all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school successfully promotes the health, safety and well-being of its pupils. Arrangements for safeguarding are secure. As a result, exceptionally good relationships between staff and pupils create a climate that raises confidence and self-esteem. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties, including those with statements of SEN, is good. Adults provide sensitive and well-focused support for vulnerable pupils, including those with autism, learning and emotional and behavioural difficulties. There is a well-judged combination of withdrawal and in-class support provided by the learning support assistants. Effective links with a wide range of support agencies, including neighbouring schools, enrich learning opportunities, for example for able mathematicians, and support the transfer of pupils from Year 6 to secondary school.

The school now has a thorough system of tracking pupils' academic progress, which is proving increasingly effective in enabling the school to identify pupils who may be at risk of underachieving. As a result, challenging targets are set and usually met or exceeded.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leadership team has made accurate evaluation of the school, the progress made since the last inspection and what needs to be done to improve further. A sharp focus on pupils' achievements and raising standards underpins the well-considered action plan, along with a comprehensive programme of monitoring to develop teaching and learning.

Leadership roles are successfully devolved to all those who work at the school. Staff value the opportunity to lead in their areas and take an active part in school improvement planning, using rigorous self-evaluation to monitor subjects and establish priorities for development, such as the improvement of writing. The school's curriculum successfully meets the needs of its pupils and, together with strong local community links, successfully develops their understanding of the diversity of British society.

The school's performance management arrangements are thorough and effective. Because of these processes, all staff recognise a shared responsibility for the progress of pupils. The governors know the school well and make an effective contribution to school improvement through their enthusiastic support allied to thoughtful challenge.

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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?	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?	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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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**

09 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashford Hill Primary School, Thatcham, RG19 8BB

Thank you for welcoming me into your school. I agree with you that your school is good for many reasons. The headteacher and all of the other adults work hard to plan how they can make the school a good place for you to learn. They look after you well and help every one of you feel safe, well cared for and happy. They provide you with many clubs after school and interesting activities in lessons to help you achieve well. As a result, you enjoy coming to school, behave well, are kind to each other and work hard in lessons.

By the time you are eleven, you are ready for the challenge of secondary school because you are polite, well-rounded people who read well and work confidently in, mathematics, science and many other subjects. However, two things would help you do even better. Some of you may remember me talking to you about your handwriting and the way you present your work. Sometimes you do not take enough care over this, so I have asked your teachers to help you improve your handwriting and the presentation of your work.

I know that some of you have enjoyed writing accounts in history about the seaside in Victorian times or about Mary Seacole. However, I think that your writing would be improved if you did this more often. Therefore, the second thing I've suggested is that the teachers plan more opportunities for you to write, using your knowledge and imagination, in the other subjects you study such as geography and design and technology.

I hope the rest of this year goes well and that when you look back on your work next July, you'll all be able to see the improvements I've suggested in your books and folders; (as well as many other achievements, I'm sure!)

Yours sincerely

Paula Protherough

Lead Inspector