

# Benenden Church of England Primary School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 118597           |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Kent             |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 313007           |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 19–20 March 2008 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Jacque Buttriss  |

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

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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                                    | 161  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body                             |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | Paddy Mahon                                    |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Jenny Reich                                    |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 10 March 2003                                  |
| <b>School address</b>                     | The Green<br>Benenden<br>Cranbrook<br>TN17 4DN |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01580 240565                                   |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01580 243112                                   |

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a small rural primary school, set within very old and cramped buildings. Learning takes place on five different sites, in various locations around the village. Pupils walk to and fro on a daily basis. A new building on a single site has been planned for the near future. Most pupils are taught in mixed age classes. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There is unusually high mobility amongst pupils, a small proportion of whom are from a variety of ethnic groups.

## 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. It has some outstanding features. A great strength of the school is the high degree of care all adults and pupils show for each other, 'the wonderful caring atmosphere', as one parent put it, whilst a Year 6 pupil said 'It's like a family'. Pupils say they feel safe and secure, and their development of healthy lifestyles is outstanding. Pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to their learning, 'I love the lessons', said a Year 3 pupil. Their behaviour is good both in lessons and in the playground. Pupils are very polite and courteous to each other and to adults. Attendance has declined in recent years, but has stabilised and is now satisfactory.

Pupils' contribution to their community is outstanding. The active school council is successfully involved in improving the school environment and revising school rules. Pupils are highly involved in the local community through fundraising, putting on plays and helping to lead some Sunday church services. Learners develop good skills to prepare them for their future lives.

Achievement is good. It is enhanced by excellent provision for the more able pupils as well as good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, so that both groups achieve well. However, a small minority of middle-ability pupils underachieve in mathematics. Standards reached by learners are broadly average, with significantly above average standards in science throughout the school. Children make satisfactory progress in their Reception Year.

The good teaching has many strengths, including the often inspirational teaching for more able pupils. However, in a few lessons, the drop in pace and lower expectations of what pupils can do result in some learners making slower progress. Assessment is developing well, but some pupils do not currently have sufficient opportunity to evaluate their own work to see how well they are doing. An outstanding variety of activities and clubs enriches the curriculum very well, especially the impressive range of sports. Curriculum provision is good and is enhanced by excellent links with other schools, providing specialist teaching in some subjects. However, the mathematics curriculum is not sufficiently stimulating, with the result that it does not fully engage all pupils' interest.

Care, guidance and support are good. However, academic guidance is less strong than the excellent pastoral care. Some pupils know that they have individual learning targets, but many cannot recall them. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is inconsistent as some teachers do not make enough suggestions in pupils' books to help them know how to improve.

Leadership and management are good, with a strong leadership team giving clear direction to support school improvement. Governors give good, active support to the school and carry out their monitoring roles well.

Parents are strongly supportive of the school, 'My son couldn't be happier, and neither could we'. Their only common concern, voiced by many parents, is the 'drawbacks of the accommodation'.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 3

Reception pupils settle in well. The shortcomings of this building, and its daily use as the canteen and dining hall, constrain teaching time and limit the organisation of the classroom into areas for learning. However, Reception children experience the full range of the curriculum

and enjoy a stimulating range of outdoor activities. The teacher has a very good rapport with the children, which encourages them to feel secure and to gain confidence. 'You have to write a J', said a Reception class boy, proudly. 'I can actually read, so I know what letters'. Children make satisfactory progress. However, greater supervision of groups using craft equipment is a priority area to be addressed.

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

- Introduce greater variety into the mathematics curriculum and ensure that all teachers have sufficiently high expectations to engage all pupils and help them to achieve as well as they can.
- Ensure consistency in teachers' marking and the setting of individual learning targets to help pupils know how to improve their work.
- Establish clear safety guidelines for the use of equipment in the Reception classroom.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Children come into the Reception class with standards in line with expectations and make satisfactory progress. By the end of Year 6, pupils attain standards broadly in line with national averages in English and mathematics and well above average in science. Small year groups and the high mobility of pupils lead to variations year on year. The current Year 6 also has a higher than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. From their below average attainment at the end of Year 2, these Year 6 pupils have made good progress. This represents good achievement. More able pupils are challenged well so that they attain appropriately high standards in each subject. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported to make good progress. Following a period of low achievement, assessment records show that progress is now good across the school and this is leading to improved standards. Most pupils achieve well. However, there is a small minority in Years 3 to 6, in the middle ability range, who do not achieve as well as they could in mathematics.

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

### **Grade: 2**

'It's safe, jolly and easy to learn', said a Year 6 boy. Pupils and parents alike comment on the lack of bullying in the school. Pupils say they feel safe and they know who to go to if they have any concerns. Frequent walks between buildings around the village are outstandingly well supervised. These walks give pupils plenty of exercise and, together with the good take-up of sports opportunities, free fruit and the good quality meals provided by the nearby independent school, lead to outstandingly healthy outcomes for all. Attendance is average. 'My daughter adores coming to school', wrote the parent of a younger pupil. Behaviour is good and relationships across the school are excellent. However, there is some low-level distraction in a small minority of lessons.

'There is a real sense of community in the school', commented a parent. School Council members are proud to have a positive input to school improvement, such as the recently installed traversing wall. Active participation in community events and a global link with Malawi result in pupils' contribution to the community being outstanding. Pupils' good achievement and well-developed social skills means they are well prepared for their next stage of education. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as demonstrated in assemblies and in their general conduct.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

'We have fun lessons', said a Year 2 boy. Teachers work hard to provide exciting lessons that engage the interest of most pupils and help them to make good progress. The planning of lessons provides a good framework for teaching and learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do, except in mathematics, where a few teachers have lower expectations and tasks are less motivating. As a result, pupils lose interest and the pace of progress slows. Provision for groups of more able pupils in mathematics is outstanding and these pupils achieve particularly well. As one Year 6 boy commented enthusiastically, 'I am in the able group and that work is challenging!' Teaching assistants support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well so that they make good progress. Assessment has improved, but there is insufficient opportunity for some pupils to assess their own progress in their work.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The outstanding variety of very well attended clubs and activities provides excellent curriculum enrichment. The very wide range of sports opportunities is remarkable for a school of this size, 'From rugby to lacrosse, golf to gymnastics', commented a parent. There is good provision of arts, music and other activities. Excellent enhancement of the academic curriculum is provided through teachers from local secondary schools leading weekly lessons for older pupils. There are good curriculum links with the church and with local charities which enrich learning opportunities. French is taught across the school. The mathematics curriculum has been adapted in recent months and is improving, but still lacks stimulus for a few middle ability pupils, with the result that they are not always fully engaged.

The limited space and the necessity of moving between sites curtails teaching time and constrains delivery of some aspects of the curriculum, but the school is successful in making inventive arrangements to surmount these difficulties as well as possible.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Outstanding pastoral care is a distinctive feature of this school. Good partnerships with outside agencies help the school to support vulnerable pupils and their families well. There are good arrangements for safeguarding pupils and all staff are trained in child protection. Parents commend the 'excellent communications' between school and home. Very good links with other schools and pre-school providers ensure smooth transition between stages of education. There is good provision for personal, social and health education. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. However, inconsistencies in pupils' knowledge of their learning targets and in teachers' marking of pupils' books result in some learners not knowing how to improve their work.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

The hard-working headteacher and her enthusiastic leadership team have brought about good improvements since the previous inspection, especially in the way they have successfully raised attainment and skills in information and communication technology (ICT). There has been a great improvement in the attainment of younger pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Relatively high absence rates have been a cause for concern, but leaders have successfully worked hard to arrest this decline and attendance is now in line with the national average. Assessment and the development of writing skills across the school are other areas of recent improvement. The school's capacity to make further improvements is good.

There are good self-evaluation processes which enable the school to identify its priorities for development. The school improvement plan, together with the subject action plans, provides a good framework for improvement. However, the tracking of pupils' progress is in the process of being refined to improve the quality of information it provides. Leaders set suitably challenging attainment targets to raise standards. Subject leaders regularly monitor provision in their subjects, but this is identified as an area for further development this year. There is good inclusion for all groups of learners, but a minority of older learners are underachieving in mathematics and the school is considering ways to address this situation.

The outstanding way in which the very limited and awkward school accommodation is used minimises its drawbacks and ensures the best use of space in the current circumstances. Governors support and challenge the school well and undertake their monitoring roles with appropriate rigour. They have successfully gained agreement to the building of a long-awaited new school.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**



**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b> | <b>School Overall</b> |
|--|-----------------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 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  | 3   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | 2   |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 2 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 3 |
| 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

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How good is 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   | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 |
| How well 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                                    | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

### The quality of provision

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 2 |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 2 |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>   | 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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 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 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

Dear Children Inspection of Benenden Church of England Primary School, Benenden, TN17 4DN

Thank you for being so friendly, polite and helpful when we came to inspect your school. You made us feel very welcome and we enjoyed talking with you. Yours is a good school which helps you to make good progress and cares for you very well.

These are the things we especially like about your school:

- Everybody gets on well together and you all care for each other very well.
- You have an excellent understanding of what you need to do to keep healthy.
- You behave well and enjoy school.
- Your teachers work hard to make most of your lessons interesting and fun.
- Most of you work hard and achieve well.
- Your school council is very successful in improving your school environment and you have excellent involvement in your wider community. Well done!
- The headteacher and staff make excellent arrangements to make the best use of your awkward buildings on so many sites around the village.
- There are excellent opportunities for those of you who can manage it to have additional challenges.

These are the things we think your school could do even better:

- Introduce more variety into your maths lessons to help you all enjoy your work in this subject and achieve as well as you can.
- Your teachers could all make sure you know your own learning targets and they could suggest ways to help you improve your work.
- There should be clearer safety rules and reminders for children using craft equipment in the Reception classroom.

You can all help, too, by keeping up your good work. I would like to wish you lots of success in your future education.

Yours sincerely

Jacquie Buttriss Lead Inspector

21 March 2008

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TN17 4DN**

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Yours sincerely

Jacquie Buttriss  
Lead Inspector