

Rush Common School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123070
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314478
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Hill

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	411
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Hogben
Headteacher	Mrs Maxine Evans
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Hendred Way Abingdon OX14 2AW
Telephone number	01235 533583
Fax number	01235 535863

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school in a relatively advantaged suburban area. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average, although the percentage with statements of special educational need is average. The large majority of pupils are of White British origin, with about 13% from a wide variety of different minority ethnic groups. Few pupils have a mother tongue other than English. The current headteacher was appointed in February 2006, having been acting head since September 2005. The school has won a number of awards including Sports Active Mark Gold and Investors in People.

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 where pupils achieve well because of good teaching. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time at Rush Common and take a pride in their accomplishments and in their school. The many exciting activities that enhance the good curriculum contribute well to their enthusiasm and their learning. Provision for their care, support and guidance is good. Staff work hard to ensure that all learners feel that they are valued members of this thriving community. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to this sense of community, particularly through the 'Eco-School Council'. They get on well together and with staff, and behave well. One girl in Year 4 said 'There's no bullying because we are all friends'. Pupils have an excellent understanding of keeping safe and of healthy lifestyles.

Standards have gone up in the last year and are above average throughout the school. Good provision and improved achievement in the Foundation Stage mean that children, who start with attainment broadly in line with that usually found, exceed average standards by the end of Reception. Achievement has also improved at Key Stage 1 so that pupils' standards are now above average by the end of Year 2. Overall standards at the end of Year 6 have been above average for several years. A blip in the 2006 results, when standards in writing were just average, has been addressed well by the school, and pupils in Year 6 have done particularly well in writing this year.

The improved achievement of pupils is due, in large part, to much better procedures to track their progress. Teachers are making good use of this information to plan work that is matched more closely to pupils' needs, although there are inconsistencies in how well this is done. Teaching is good overall and includes an increasing number of outstanding lessons, but also features other inconsistencies. In some lessons, good use is made of discussion to help pupils learn, but in other lessons opportunities for this are missed. Better lessons feature a good pace and lots of opportunities for pupils to be involved in collaborative or practical work. These generate both enthusiasm and good progress. In other lessons, teachers sometimes spend too long talking to the class without giving pupils enough opportunities for active involvement.

Significant improvements have been made because the school is well led and managed. It is well placed to improve further. Good systems are in place to check on the quality of provision and on pupils' achievement. Good use is made of the improved data on achievement to make sure pupils get any extra help they need. Frequent monitoring of lessons by school leaders supports continuing improvements in teaching. However, the records of the monitoring are inconsistent in the extent to which they indicate strengths and weaknesses, and how clearly they show teachers how to improve their practice.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on existing good practice to reduce inconsistencies in teaching.
- Improve the monitoring of teaching so that teachers are given clearer advice about how they are doing and how to improve their practice.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average throughout the school. Children make good progress from broadly average starting points and go into Year 1 with standards better than those normally found. For several years, results of national assessments at the end of Year 2 were average overall. In 2006, standards rose significantly following a concentration by the school on the progress of younger pupils. This year, provisional results show standards have risen again.

Results at the end of Year 6 have been significantly above average for several years, although results in English have varied somewhat from year to year. English standards in 2006, for example, were just average because of weaknesses in how brighter pupils did in writing. Successful work by the school this year has resulted in major improvements, and provisional results suggest that writing is now a strength.

Standards are generally high in information and communications technology (ICT) and physical education. Pupils also make a good start in learning French. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress because they get help that is closely matched to their needs. The few pupils who are new to speaking English make rapid progress in learning the language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils welcome newcomers and support them to settle in quickly and to make friends. The youngest children settle happily into school and show good independence in choosing activities. The behaviour of pupils is good, especially in lessons, although sometimes they are over-boisterous in the playground or when moving around the school. Pupils are polite to each other and to adults. They say that instances of bullying or racism are almost unheard of. Pupils very much enjoy coming to school and attendance is good. They feel very happy and 'completely safe' in school and know where and how to find help with their work or if they feel upset about things. Pupils try hard and concentrate very well. They are clear that '...we all want good scores...we all want a good education'. The importance of making healthy eating choices and taking regular exercise is very well understood. The Eco-School Council takes its responsibilities very seriously and is confident that it has an important and valued role in improving the school and the environment. The Year 6 pupils are particularly proud of their recent 'Youthful Greens' mini-enterprise project, when they grew and sold plants.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and improving. Outstanding teaching is often a feature of physical education and music lessons, particularly if they are taught by teachers with specific expertise in the subjects. Teachers use ICT well in subjects across the curriculum. All lessons benefit from good classroom management based on positive relationships and well-established expectations. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to clarify their explanations and to make lessons more interesting. There are many good features in most lessons but there are often elements of inconsistency. For example, teachers make good use of assessment data

to plan different work for pupils who have different needs, particularly in English and mathematics. Occasionally, however, teachers misjudge this and some pupils get work that is too easy for them or too hard. Teaching assistants make a major contribution to learning, particularly of pupils who struggle with their work, by providing extra help, so they cope well and are fully included in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum builds on the exciting start children make in the Foundation Stage. ICT is a strength and supports learning across the curriculum. Imaginative projects promote strong links between subjects and make learning relevant. A creative approach to learning, with an emphasis on doing and making, enthuses pupils. However, in Year 6, pupils have too few opportunities to design and perform their own scientific investigations. Good links with schools in Europe and Uganda promote a better understanding of other countries. There is a very good range of popular extra-curricular activities. In recognition of its effective work on the environment, the school has been awarded 'Eco-School' status. Visits, including residential trips, extend learning well outside the classroom. Good personal, social and health education permeates the curriculum. There are good links with other local schools which benefit continuity in learning, for example when pupils transfer to secondary school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The caring ethos of the school has a very positive impact on the good personal development and well-being of the pupils. All adults work consistently to reinforce the clear guidelines for expected standards of behaviour in the school. Provision for pupils with learning disabilities and difficulties is good. Robust and successful systems are in place to assist pupils in the early stages of learning to speak English. The school makes good use of positive partnerships with parents and a wide range of external agencies to help learners with practical or emotional difficulties.

The school has recently put in place a good tracking system to identify where support can be most efficiently targeted for all pupils. This is having a positive impact on raising achievement. Day-to-day marking of work shows pupils how they can improve or what they need to learn next. Child protection systems are firmly in place. However, some parents expressed concern over health and safety issues, which the inspection team agrees with. The school is working swiftly to address these and, meanwhile, is taking steps to minimise risks.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides effective leadership and there is a clear vision for improvement. A newly structured senior leadership team, good self-evaluation and good teamwork from all staff have raised standards.

Middle managers understand and fulfil their responsibilities well. Subject leaders ensure there is consistency and breadth to learning and take joint responsibility for raising standards. They have made good progress in devising a more creative and relevant curriculum. The school's monitoring and evaluation effectively identifies intervention strategies to improve teaching

and rates of progress and achievement. However, there are inconsistencies in how lesson observations are recorded. Support for pupils with learning disabilities and disadvantages is well managed so many meet the expectations for their age groups.

Governors contribute well to planning, decision making and evaluation. They fulfil their statutory duties, challenge effectively and have a good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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 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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

19 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rush Common School, Abingdon, OX14 2AW

Thank you for all your help when we inspected your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you hard at work in lessons. Mrs Goodsell and Mr Iles especially enjoyed the singing. You told us that you really enjoyed school and we could see why.

We agree with you that Rush Common is a good school, and that it is getting better. We found out that you work hard, behave well and get on well with each other. We were very impressed by how much you know about the environment and about healthy eating, and by the good work of the Eco-School Council.

You are reaching good standards in your work because your teachers are good at explaining things to you, and give you lots of interesting things to do. We thought that some of the lessons we saw were excellent, because some teachers are particularly good at certain things, such as using ICT, or getting you to share your ideas. We have agreed with the staff that they are going to share ideas so that they can all learn from each other and have even more excellent lessons. Teachers already visit each other's lessons from time to time to give each other tips on different things. We have suggested that they write down what they see there more carefully, so that everyone can learn from this.

Your headteacher and the other staff, with the help of the governors, organise the school well. They have helped you to make better progress recently by keeping a more careful eye on how each pupil is getting on, to make sure everyone gets the right work and all the help they need. They are determined to get even better, and I know they can rely on all of you to help them.

We hope you carry on working hard and enjoying school.

Best wishes,

Steven Hill Lead Inspector