

Countess Gytha Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123659
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314661
Inspection date	30 September 2008
Reporting inspector	John Laver

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)	128
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	15
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Peck
Headteacher	Janet Mills
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Queen Camel Yeovil BA22 7NH
Telephone number	01935 850345
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and of pupils speaking English as an additional language, are all below average. The proportion of pupils with a range of learning difficulties is above average. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in its Reception Class. The school has undergone a radical transformation in recent years, with a fall in numbers on roll, a reduction in teaching staff and, as a consequence, adjustments in organisation resulting in mixed-age classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Countess Gytha Primary provides a satisfactory standard of education. It is improving: as the school adapts to falling numbers of pupils and subsequent reorganisation of staffing and classes, it is implementing strategies to raise achievement. It does this in a learning environment which has promoted positive features, including the good personal development of its pupils. However, the same environment also suffers from old buildings that have been ravaged by floods in recent years. Nevertheless, the great majority of parents speak warmly of the school, particularly commending its family atmosphere. Typical parental comments are: 'My daughter loves it at school. She would come every day if she could, even in the holidays', and 'The teaching staff are super-supportive and nurturing to the children.'

Pupils get off to a good start in the Reception year and generally reach average standards by the time they start in Year 1, although they were above average in 2008. In this small school, the numbers of pupils in year groups, and the range of ability, vary considerably from year to year. Nevertheless, the standards, as confirmed by the 2007 national tests and the more recent unvalidated 2008 results, are broadly average, although higher for girls than boys. Pupils of varying levels of ability achieve satisfactorily overall, although boys make slower progress than girls, particularly in writing and mathematics at the higher levels. The school leadership recognises the underachievement, particularly of a small minority of more able pupils. It has put strategies in place to raise expectations and performance. These strategies include smaller pupil groupings and more targeted support from staff. There is already evidence of some pupils showing more motivation and vibrant learning, particularly in mathematics. Pupils themselves comment on this improvement. However, these strategies are only recently in place and therefore only beginning to take effect.

Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. Most enjoy attending lessons and the good range of other activities, particularly sport and drama, which are amongst the strengths of the curriculum. Attendance is now above average. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility on the school council. They also confirm that they feel safe in school. Parents greatly appreciate the high level of care of their children. Provision for academic guidance is less developed. The school has good assessment and tracking systems in place, but teachers do not use the resulting targets consistently in lessons to raise achievement. Marking is also variable in quality, so that pupils do not always understand clearly how they can improve their work. Teaching is good when lessons are lively and well paced, and teachers encourage pupils to think for themselves and produce challenging work. The results are impressive, seen for example in the work of older pupils on 'green projects', which make a good contribution to understanding of the environment. Overall, the teaching is satisfactory. Some takes too little account of the individual learning needs of pupils in mixed-age classes with a range of ability. Teachers do not always challenge a minority of more able pupils to produce the work of which they are capable.

The leadership has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection, with a sharper focus on areas for improvement, and there is now better monitoring. There is accurate self-evaluation and commitment by staff, all of whom have leadership or management responsibilities, and there is appropriate planning for improvement. The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. As yet, there is limited evidence of improvements in pupils' achievement resulting from recent changes. Currently the school has a satisfactory capacity for improvement, with the prospect of better progress if the recent strategies to improve achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy, are continued rigorously.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Early Years provision is a strength of the school. The EYFS leader ensures that she gets to know the children well and gives them a strong sense of security, contributing to the excellent care and welfare the children receive. As a result, they socialise well and make outstanding gains in personal development. Benefiting from the school's close partnership with parents, the children also achieve well in developing a range of knowledge and skills, although progress in writing skills is more variable. The staff use very effective assessment procedures and know the appropriate level of challenge for each child, hence both teacher-led and child-initiated activities result in good progress. As a result, most children join Year 1 with confidence and an eagerness to learn.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and improve the level of challenge, especially for more able pupils, by ensuring a better match of work to the needs of each pupil.
- Improve the quality of learning through the more consistent use of targets and more constructive marking, so that all pupils know how they can improve their standard of work.

A small proportion of the schools where overall performance 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 are average overall, and pupils achieve satisfactorily. Although many girls achieve a good standard in mathematics and English, not enough boys achieve the highest grades. Standards of speaking are above average, and teachers develop speaking through encouraging extended discussion. There is a significant minority of pupils with a range of mainly moderate learning difficulties. They make progress at the same rate as other pupils, although some individuals achieve well, particularly as teaching assistants are becoming more adept at providing an appropriate level of support. The leadership has reorganised the timetable for older pupils, allowing for more focused teaching of groups of pupils. This is beginning to improve the progress of many pupils, including some of the more able.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils behave well and attendance has risen. Pupils have a mature attitude towards dealing with issues such as bullying, and have a good understanding of how to stay safe and of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They take particular enjoyment in a wide range of clubs and sports activities, and make an outstanding contribution to the community. Apart from the many opportunities to serve others, through the school council and as monitors, they take part in a wide range of activities outside school, such as the children's parliament, drama and music. The school also has a long-standing link with Zambia, used to develop pupils' awareness of cultural differences. A minority of pupils are less well prepared than they should be for the next stage of education because of underachievement in core skills such as literacy and numeracy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers' success in building on pupils' desire to learn and ensuring their progress is inconsistent. In the best lessons, teachers plan activities well and actively involve pupils through means such as paired discussions and research projects, whilst extending understanding through good questioning. However, in lessons which are satisfactory, too many of the activities are teacher-dominated, without involving enough pupils or ensuring the right level of challenge to ensure good learning. Teachers' marking is sometimes conscientious and informative, but too often it gives little indication to pupils of their real progress, and bears little relation to their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Although a minority of lessons do not sufficiently challenge all pupils, for most of them the curriculum is a strength. There is a strong programme of personal, social and health education and a popular emphasis on physical education. The school uses its links with another school well to provide specialist teaching of French. Other particular strengths are the range of enrichment activities, which have a very high take-up, and the links with other schools, for example through the local sports partnership. The school is also improving the curriculum by developing more links between subjects and allowing for different pupil groupings to meet learning needs more effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils believe that they are very safe in school. The school has robust child protection procedures in place. There is a strong level of personal support for vulnerable pupils, for example through mentoring by governors, and parents are very appreciative of how well the school looks after their children. Academic guidance is less well developed: assessment and tracking systems are thorough, but teachers do not use the resulting targets consistently enough to improve the quality of learning and progress in the classroom. Some children do not know their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Governors are knowledgeable about the school and support the headteacher well in trying to lead the school towards better achievement. Subject leaders now share in monitoring and analysis, and planning for improvement is sound. However, the strategies used to drive up achievement are at a relatively early stage. The leadership makes good use of its links with other schools in sharing expertise. There is a good contribution to community cohesion: the school has a strong profile in the local community, whilst also forging links with more distant places, for example through the exchange project with Zambia. The school has also prudently managed the difficult downsizing exercise necessitated by falling rolls.

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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?	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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ 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	3

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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
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**

October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Countess Gytha Primary School, High Street, Queen Camel, Somerset BA22 7NH

Thank you for welcoming us into your school recently. During our short visit we enjoyed seeing you in lessons and around the school, and you talked readily to us.

Your school gives you a satisfactory education. There are some very good things in the school. The youngest children do very well, learning a lot of new things. You behave well, and many of you told us how much you enjoy school. You are now coming to school more regularly. We agree with you that you are safe and well looked after, and your parents believe this also. You are particularly good at showing responsibility and helping others in the community. For example, we know that the school council works well, and you represent the school very well during activities in the town. You also show a good understanding of how people elsewhere live, and the school has an interesting link with Zambia. The school provides you with a good range of activities outside lessons, for example the sports clubs. You rightly value these, and a greater proportion of you take part in these activities than children do in many other schools.

Your teachers look after you well, but sometimes they could give you work that is even more challenging. Although most of you work well in lessons, some of you should be doing even better, especially in English and mathematics. Your headteacher knows this, and she and the other teachers are trying some new ways of teaching you so that standards of work can be higher. So far there has been only a short time to make these things work.

We have asked Mrs Mills and the teachers to do two things in particular to help you make more progress. One is for them to give you more challenging work, especially those of you who find learning easier, so that you can do even better. The other thing is for your teachers to use your targets more and give you more information when they mark your work, so that you can all see how to improve it.

Once again, thank you for your welcome and good luck for the future.

John Laver Lead Inspector