

Mendham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124598
Local Authority	SUFFOLK LA
Inspection number	314978
Inspection date	25 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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	37
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr M Ayett
Headteacher	Mr C Digby
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Mendham Harleston Norfolk IP20 0NJ
Telephone number	01379 852520
Fax number	01379 854562

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 very small school serving the village of Mendham and surrounding area. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and the proportion entitled to free school meals is below average. Children entering the school do so with very different pre-school experiences. Their attainment on entry to the Reception Year is often broadly in line with that expected but it varies widely from year to year because of the small number of pupils in each year group. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and none with English as an additional language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and, as a result, the school provides for a range of learning and medical needs. Recent awards include an Activemark for sports provision and an ECO award for the school's environmental work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school provides an exceptional level of care and personal development for pupils. It has many important outstanding features and is continually looking to improve. The staff work very hard and very successfully to provide a fully rounded education for the small number of pupils. The parents are very appreciative of the school's work and one wrote, 'Very happy with all aspects of the school - my daughter looks forward to going in every day.'

A major strength of the school is its supportive but challenging ethos. This is particularly evident in the outstanding progress made by pupils with a range of learning or medical needs. Those with behavioural or emotional difficulties, and those with specific learning needs, make excellent progress and often achieve better than such pupils achieve nationally. They do well because the staff identify their needs early and work tirelessly to ensure they receive the right sort of support while challenging them to do the best they can.

Other pupils achieve well and standards by the end of Year 6 are usually above average. However, the very small size of the year groups means results can vary widely from year to year. For example, in some years, results are below average and in other years they are above average. Nevertheless, inspection findings indicate that pupils make good progress in relation to their own starting points and learning needs. In 2007, standards in the Year 2 national assessments were above average in reading and writing, but below average in mathematics. In the Year 6 tests in 2007, standards were above average in English and mathematics and exceptionally high in science. The school is developing a system for tracking the pupils' progress that is appropriate for the small numbers involved, and this is already helping them recognise and address any underachievement more efficiently. Standards throughout the school are very high in art and design and in pupils' use of information and communication technology (ICT).

Pupils make good progress because they have outstanding attitudes towards school and they are well taught. There are excellent relationships between teachers and pupils. This is evident in outstanding behaviour and a willingness among pupils to take responsibility for their learning. Attendance is above average and this reflects their enjoyment of school. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and safe, and through such activities as the ECO committee and road safety committee they make an excellent contribution to their own and the wider community. The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils to work cooperatively, take responsibility and develop above average basic skills ensuring that they are extremely well prepared for their future lives. The school provides an excellent curriculum, which offers innovative opportunities for pupils to make good progress, although full use is not yet made of the excellent outdoor resources available to them. There is an outstanding level of pastoral and academic support and guidance for pupils. Staff ensure all requirements for safeguarding pupils are met.

The success of the school is due to good leadership and management, and in particular the headteacher's outstanding enthusiasm and desire to do the best for the pupils. This attitude is shared by staff and pupils, and is a major reason for the school's success and the friendly ethos. As one parent said, 'They care for the children deeply and for this we are very grateful.' The governors provide a good level of support but do not spend sufficient time evaluating the school's success, most notably from a lack of focused visits to see the school in action. Taken together, the clear improvements since the last inspection, the willingness to try new ideas and

to look beyond the school for any required expertise and the lack of complacency show that the school has an excellent capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Reception children spend part of the day working together and part in a class with Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. The teacher plans the work well and ensures that it is appropriate for them given their ages and pre-school experiences. They have good opportunities to work and play with older pupils as well as having activities that help them to make good progress. The teacher maintains detailed on-going records of their learning, which ensures that their progress is well tracked. The teaching assistant who often works with the youngest children effectively leads their play activities and encourages their use of language. The children have a good start to school. They make good progress in all expected areas of learning and are well prepared for their future education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the leadership skills of governors so that they can contribute to school evaluation more effectively.
- Develop the outdoor facilities to provide all pupils with a more effective learning resource.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The very small size of year groups makes year on year comparisons unsafe. Over time, however, the picture is of rising standards and good progress. Many of the pupils with learning or behavioural needs make outstanding progress in their learning and do better than similar pupils nationally. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys or girls, pupils from ethnic minority groups or the more able; all make equally good progress. Current standards in Year 6 show that there is some very high quality and imaginative written work, such as that based on Hamlet. Standards in mathematics, reading and writing are often above average and phonic skills are improving too. Standards in science are exceptionally high and this reflects some excellent teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding because of the high level of care and support provided by the school. Pupils' excellent behaviour and their excellent attitudes towards school are major factors contributing to their good rate of learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and the school works hard to teach pupils about other cultures and faiths as well as developing a deep spiritual appreciation of art and the environment. Older pupils look after the younger ones with little prompting and all show a genuine care for each other. Attendance is above average. Although the school does not authorise this, a significant number of parents still take children out of school for holidays. Opportunities such as fruit selling, ECO awareness and their road safety work provide pupils with excellent levels of personal development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The teachers work very hard to ensure pupils receive good quality teaching in all subjects. They are supported well by talented teaching assistants whose skills and expertise are used effectively to support younger and less able pupils, and to assist in assessing pupils' progress. Teachers plan well for the mixed age classes and lessons are effective in meeting the needs of a range of abilities. Teachers know their pupils well and they have excellent relationships with them. Resources are used well and the use of ICT is a strength. However, too much of the marking of work consists of praise and does not always make clear how pupils can improve, especially in mathematics. However, teachers' oral feedback to pupils is productive and the pupils say teachers are effective in helping them to learn new things, as well as being very supportive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

This is outstanding because the school does much more than provide the basic required curriculum and is willing to innovate and try new ideas. In science, for example, all of the work is based on investigations and is mainly recorded as computer presentations. This is one way the school gives pupils excellent opportunities to develop their ICT skills through other subjects. The use of drama and the extension of opportunities for developing good speaking and listening skills is also very effective. The school provides excellent opportunities, given its size, for pupils to take part in residential and other visits. The outdoor environment provides an excellent opportunity for the school to develop outdoor learning at all ages, although this work is yet to be fully developed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This is a very caring school. It provides an excellent balance between support and challenge to help most pupils achieve well. This is especially evident in the provision for those with emotional and behavioural needs or those who find learning difficult. Their early identification, and rigorous support through a range of outside agencies as well as school staff, results in excellent progress. Outstanding pastoral and academic care ensures the school retains its highly praised family ethos and pupils talk about how they feel safe and how they can trust the adults with any concerns they may have. Pupils know their targets and these are appropriately challenging.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is excellently led by the headteacher whose enthusiasm for the school and its pupils has remained undimmed for many years. He ensures the school is well run and available funds are used appropriately. Innovative ideas, such as the allocation of some additional teaching assistant time to raise extra funds through grants and other sources, add a great deal to the school resources. The headteacher has created a climate of continuous improvement that demonstrates a lack of complacency in the school's efforts to raise standards further and ensure more consistency in pupil progress. The governors are supportive of the school and they have

a sound knowledge of major strengths and weaknesses. Developing an effective link between the excellent self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and the headteacher's report to the governors is beginning to create a focused view of school improvement. However, insufficient time is spent reviewing the school in action through making focused visits to inform governors' decision-making.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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

27 February 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Mendham Primary School, Mendham, Norfolk, IP20 0NJ

I am writing to thank you for the way you made me welcome when I visited your school recently. You were very friendly and helpful and told me a lot about the things you enjoy doing at school.

I agree with you and your parents that Mendham is a good school with many outstanding features. There are many very good things about the school, of which you and your teachers can be proud.

You work very hard and your behaviour in lessons is excellent. This helps your teachers and they work very hard to provide you with interesting and exciting activities. Because of this you make good progress, and those of you who find learning difficult are helped very well and you make excellent progress.

The school is helping you mature and grow into thoughtful young people through activities such as the ECO committee or the responsibilities you have such as selling the fruit. It is obvious how much you enjoy being at the school. As one of you told me, although you feel well prepared for the high school, 'I will definitely miss this school.'

I have asked Mr Digby and your teachers to make more use in the future of the excellent outdoor facilities. I have also asked the governors to try to spend more time in school to see how well it works and to help them find ways to improve things even more.

Thank you once again for the way you made me welcome. Enjoy your time at Mendham and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms Lead inspector