

Poplars Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124639
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	314998
Inspection date	19 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Ruth Frith

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	352
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Joan Wright
Headteacher	Mr Ian and Margaret Sneddon
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	St Margarets Road Lowestoft Suffolk NR32 4HN
Telephone number	01502565757
Fax number	01502 531573

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards in reading and writing, strengths in pupils' personal development and well-being and the school's self-evaluation. She gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation form, lesson observations, discussions with staff, governors and pupils, pupils' work, information that the school keeps on how well pupils are doing, the school development plan and an analysis of the parents' questionnaire responses. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average size school situated in an area of high social deprivation. The percentage receiving free school meals is above average. Attainment on entry to school is frequently low, particularly in children's communication skills and their personal and social development. The percentage of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is nearly double the national average and rising. A high proportion of these pupils have a range of complex needs. An above average percentage has a statement of special educational need. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils are looked after by others than their immediate family. The two headteachers work part-time sharing leadership and management responsibilities.

The school has received the sports Activemark in recognition of its work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school, where the excellent care for each child lies at the heart of its work. Pupils flourish in this supportive and friendly environment. They thoroughly enjoy their learning and do exceptionally well. Excellent leadership and management focus clearly on promoting pupils' well-being and raising standards. This results in first-rate teaching and a stimulating curriculum, which lead to pupils' excellent personal development and high achievement. Nearly all parents are very positive about the school and the support and education it offers their children, as the following typical comments indicate. 'This is a very friendly and caring school. My children love coming here and have made excellent progress' and 'I couldn't wish for a better school for my child.'

The school's success stems from the innovative and inspirational leadership of the headteachers. Each uses his or her particular expertise remarkably well. Together they show great commitment to the pupils, their families and the local community. They are instrumental in creating a very positive, community school ethos. Both give an exceptional lead to colleagues who, in turn, work as a strong team sharing the headteachers' sense of purpose and vision. Staff morale is very high, seen, for example, in the way they enjoy their teaching and the successful impact this has on pupils' learning. Staff take on management responsibilities very successfully because their expertise is fully recognised and they are given very good support and training. Particularly good systems help staff identify accurately what the school does well and what it could do better. They support the consistent drive for improvement. Because of this, and the staff's exceptionally high aspirations, now and again their self-evaluation is somewhat modest. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school and this helps them to ask questions about its effectiveness. They give remarkably good support. The school has excellent capacity to improve further.

Despite low starting points on entry to school, pupils of all abilities achieve exceptionally well over time. This is because teaching is frequently excellent and pupils respond very well to the challenges set. As one pupil commented, 'It's good for work to be hard - a bit - because it challenges you'. Consequently, by the end of Year 2 standards are in line with national averages. Progress accelerates further in Years 3 and 4 so that, by Year 4, pupils are frequently working at levels above those expected for pupils of this age. Evidence provided by the school, work in lessons and in pupils' books show that all groups are progressing very well and are on course to meet their targets. For several years, staff have been particularly successful in the way they encourage pupils to write. The use of a good range of strategies and provision of interesting activities ensure that pupils feel they have something exciting to write about and are confident they can succeed. A more recent focus on the way pupils are taught to read is already raising standards and helping pupils' learning across all subjects. These two features of the school's work demonstrate the confidence of staff to adopt new initiatives and build these into the school's existing very effective practice.

Staff are never complacent and continue to strive to improve their teaching. Their high expectations and good subject knowledge are used well to plan lessons, which maintain pupils' interests and ensure learning builds systematically over time. Staff use questioning very effectively to develop pupils' thinking and assess their understanding. Work matches the pupils' abilities very well so they feel confident to tackle new work and succeed. Care, guidance and support are excellent. Through teachers' comments during lessons, marking of pupils' work and the setting of targets for improvement, pupils fully understand what they have done well

and how they can improve their work. No pupils can be in doubt that they are valued, what they say is important and that they are successful learners. Experienced and well-qualified teaching assistants play a very important role in the learning of all pupils but particularly for those pupils who need extra support with their reading, writing and mathematics.

A major feature of the curriculum is the way in which it engenders excitement and enjoyment in learning. Teaching pupils in groups of similar ability for literacy and numeracy, and the provision of nurture groups, ensure the needs of all pupils are addressed fully. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There is an extremely positive atmosphere throughout the school with a focus on developing pupils' self-esteem and awareness of the effects of their actions on others. Pupils respond very well and their excellent behaviour helps to create a harmonious community. It is particularly creditworthy that the small but significant number of pupils with behaviour difficulties behave so well. Pupils make a very positive contribution to the school and wider community through showing respect and consideration for others, whether it be through their work on the school council, acting as playleaders, raising funds for charity or linking with an orphaned community in Sri Lanka. Pupils have an exceptionally good understanding of how to live safe and healthy lives. This affects what they do, for example, in what they eat, the physical activities they take part in and in relation to their own personal safety. Pupils are very keen to come to school and attendance is improving. However, not all parents bring their children to school regularly and on time despite encouragement from staff. Pupils' personal development and well-being has improved significantly since the last inspection. Their excellent behaviour, attitudes and relationships provide a very good basis for their learning and, together with their high achievement, prepare them exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and beyond.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children's development is impressive in both Nursery and Reception and gains in learning are frequently excellent. By the time they enter Year 1, many are close to the levels expected for their age, although some reach lower levels because they have started from such a low baseline. Through discussions with parents and good observations and assessments, staff quickly identify children's needs and provide excellent support and challenge. The curriculum is particularly effective at developing children's communication skills by widening their vocabulary and use of language. Very good organisation also helps to develop children's personal and social skills as they have plenty of different opportunities to work with other children and staff in a range of settings. Leadership and management are excellent and are reflected in the high aspirations of staff and children's excellent achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend strategies to improve attendance.

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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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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	3
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?	1
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?	1
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	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

20 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Poplars Community Primary School, Lowestoft NR32 4HN

You may remember that I recently visited your school to talk to you about what you do and what you learn. Thank you for making me feel so welcome. I really enjoyed my visit. You and your parents think that you go to a very good school and I agree with you. I think Poplars is an excellent school. If you read on, you will see some of the things I found out.

- You try very hard and make excellent progress so that by the time you leave school, many of you are working at levels above those I often see in Year 4.
- Those of you who find learning a bit difficult receive excellent support from staff and try very hard, so you, too, make outstanding progress.
- You thoroughly enjoy school, work well with each other and make friends.
- I was very impressed by your excellent behaviour and politeness.
- You really know a lot about how to lead safe and healthy lives and I was very pleased to see that this affects what you eat, how much exercise you take and how you look after yourselves by acting sensibly and safely.
- Teaching is excellent and you find learning fun. It was great to see how happy you are in lessons.
- You feel safe in school because staff look after you very well. I was pleased to hear that you talk to a friend or member of staff if you have problems. You understand that bullying is wrong.

Your headteachers lead and manage the school exceptionally well and staff and governors help them a lot. They have agreed that they will try to make sure that you all come to school regularly and on time. I know that many of you already do this. Well done! To others, please try hard and remind those that bring you to school how important it is that you do not miss any of the lessons.

I left with fond memories of your school and wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Frith

Lead inspector