

Birdham CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125972
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315376
Inspection date	28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	151
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	V.J Henson
Headteacher	Peter Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	16 September 2002
School address	Crooked Lane Birdham Chichester PO20 7HB
Telephone number	01243 512399
Fax number	01243 513453

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following: • reasons for the recent decline in standards in Year 2 tests, particularly in writing • the benefits to pupils' learning of using the outdoor environmental resources • whether the breadth of learning across the curriculum results in good achievement overall • the quality of marking and other guidance about how pupils can improve and how involved pupils are in evaluating their progress towards targets. The inspector gathered evidence on the day from discussions with staff, pupils, governors and others. A range of school documentation was examined and first-hand evidence was gathered from observing pupils in lessons and at play. Parents' views were gathered from questionnaires completed prior to the inspection and through talking to some at the start of the day. 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 small village school in a relatively advantaged socio-economic locality, with five mixed-age classes. The proportions of families claiming free school meals, from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak native languages other than English are very low. There is a relatively low percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Prolonged periods of leave and bereavements amongst staff have recently affected deployment. The school has Healthy Schools status and awards for Investors in Health, Active Mark, Travel Mark and Eco Schools Silver level. It is compliant with Financial Management Systems in Schools criteria.

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 includes some outstanding features, such as an excellent curriculum which, amongst other things, provides pupils with exceptional opportunities to learn about environmental matters and sustainability. Because of this, pupils develop excellent knowledge and understanding of these issues and many feel it is one of the most important aspects of their education. Pupils describe Birdham with pride as, 'An eco-friendly school and a friendly school', and they are right.

Pupils achieve well in all subjects from an average start in Reception. Staffing difficulties in 2007 led to some underestimation of standards at the end of Year 2, which were higher than national data suggest, but assessment is now accurate and secure. Pupils progress well across the school, including in the content of their writing, where the school has improved its provision successfully. However, some technical aspects, such as pencil grip, posture, or placing paper vertically, slow some pupils down in getting their ideas on paper. Monitoring of progress is good and pupils are on track to meet or exceed challenging targets in both Year 2 and Year 6. Standards in both years are above average. The school carefully targets extra support for those who need it and provides good challenge for more able pupils to ensure they achieve as well as they can.

A great strength of the school is the extensive range across which pupils achieve so well. Parents greatly value this successful balance of social and academic learning. As well as the highly beneficial impact of environmental education, the arts are strong, with good singing and music adding significantly to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. 'Lots of PE and sports', as one pupil said, keep them fit and healthy. Many pupils participate in the wide-ranging extra-curricular programme which is 'wonderfully varied' to quote one parent, and often involves parents and others from the community. An early morning judo lesson seen was well attended and pupils are very keen to learn in this and many other situations. They are inspired by exciting activities ranging from the information and communication technology (ICT) based robotics event happening on the day of inspection to visits from authors, and a 'treasured, signed book' in the words of a parent, and being 'inspired to be an eco-warrior when she grows up' in the words of another. Many talk confidently about the 'grow it, cook it, eat it' slogan which underpins their gardening and cookery learning and are fascinated by the 'going green to spend a penny' sanitation system being developed.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The overwhelming majority of parents greatly appreciate the strong ethos where staff know their pupils very well and provide individual levels of care and support which create growth in confidence and social skills. Attendance is high and behaviour excellent. Good English and mathematics, combined with an excellent sense of teamwork, often taking unusual responsibilities such as being composting monitors or being on the active Eco-committee, prepare pupils outstandingly well for their futures. Several comments to the inspector indicate that pupils sometimes lead the community in matters such as environmental awareness and protection and are changing family habits through their own enthusiasm. Pupils feel safe and happy in an environment that encourages them effectively to enjoy all learning.

Teaching and learning are good. An interesting variety of styles and approaches by teachers, assistants and visiting specialists keeps pupils well engaged and keen to extend their learning at home and elsewhere. Staff set targets that pupils understand and some marking provides

helpful information about how to improve. This is not consistent though and has been identified as an area for improvement. Pupils' sensible, mature attitudes are not harnessed sufficiently to involve older ones much more in assessing their own improvement towards learning goals and in setting some targets for themselves.

Leadership, management and governance are excellent with the staff team working very effectively together to maximise enjoyment and learning for all individuals. Parents comment on this as a major contributory factor in 'counting ourselves very fortunate', as one said, that their children attend the school. The headteacher justifiably commands the respect of the overwhelming majority of parents and others, as the leader whose clear vision determines the trajectory of improvement. Difficult issues, including bereavements amongst staff, have been sensitively managed. These and other setbacks have been overcome effectively to minimise adverse impact on pupils' experience. As a result, pupils themselves care sensitively for others and develop a deep respect for their environment and changes within it. Self-evaluation is strong, resulting in swift, flexible interventions to improve matters if achievement falters, for instance in writing. These interventions are then monitored well to ensure that areas for development improve. Subject leaders play an effective role in this process. As a result of good monitoring of individual pupils' progress, the school has revised agreed targets. Tracking shows that many pupils are likely to exceed levels previously agreed and internal targets are challenging. Good improvement since the previous inspection, especially in standards and assessment, combined with the track record of curriculum improvements show excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

From an average start, children make good progress in the Reception class. Many benefit from having older Year 1 pupils amongst them and all learn and play happily together. Children achieve well in aspects of literacy and numeracy, but as with other pupils in the school, all benefit from an excellent curriculum range. Dedicated indoor and outdoor facilities are good and supplemented by access to all the environmental resources for older pupils. Highly effective teaching was preparing children for a visit to see hatching chicks for instance, which was the source of much excitement and interest and linked very well to a writing task. From this young age, children are fascinated by the web-cam, which shows them activity around the school pond. The balance of teacher-chosen and self-selected activities is good. Children are well prepared for transition to Year 1 and interact confidently with older pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the technical aspects of some pupils' writing so that they get ideas recorded more easily and quickly.
- Develop marking systems which provide consistently good guidance about how to improve and which involve pupils themselves in assessing their own progress towards targets.

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?	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	2

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?	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	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	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

13 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birdham Church of England Primary School, Birdham, PO20 7HB

I am writing to thank you very much for welcoming me so warmly into your school in February and to tell you what I found out. It was a pleasure to be at Birdham, to look at some of your lessons and to talk with you and the adults in the school.

Yours is a good school, with some excellent things about it. Some of you described it as, 'an eco-friendly school and a friendly school' and I agree with you. I was very impressed by how well you understand about looking after your environment, for example, composting, recycling, growing and cooking food. This prepares you very well for being good citizens and several adults told me that you are already changing the way in which your family and the community look after the environment. Many of you feel that this is one of the most important and enjoyable part of your learning, but your English, mathematics and other subject learning is also good. Your writing has improved lately because of what the school has done, but there are a number of things which some of you could do to make writing even better. It is important that you hold pens and pencils properly, sit upright, have the paper horizontally in front of you, so that your writing is quicker and easier. I have asked the staff to make sure you develop these good habits and I feel sure you will help them. Your achievements in music and physical education (PE) are good and I liked the way you take part in lots of extra-curricular activities and get you parents interested too.

Teaching is good and you enjoy the variety of lessons staff provide. All the adults in school take very good care of you and make sure you are safe. School management is excellent and this leads to an atmosphere where you enjoy learning and become sensible, considerate people as you grow up. Almost all your parents agree with this and are happy to have you at the school. Because you are so interested to think about things, I have asked the school to find ways to get you more involved in judging your own progress towards your targets and, as you get older, thinking for yourselves about what your next targets could be.

Thank you again for your welcome.

Yours sincerely

Janet Simms Lead inspector

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Janet Simms
Lead inspector