

Beechcroft Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126210
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	315441
Inspection date	21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Liz Kounnou

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	247
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angie Deakin
Headteacher	Lynne Harper
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Beechcroft Road Upper Stratton Swindon SN2 7QE
Telephone number	01793 823278
Fax number	01793 331880

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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:

how effectively school-self-evaluation has helped the school maintain good standards over time

how successful the school has been in raising standards of reading and writing for boys

how well the school helps pupils who have learning difficulties to make progress in their learning.

The evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, analysis of information about pupils' progress and attainment, scrutiny of pupils' work in books and on display, discussions with staff, pupils and governors, and analysis of the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found little 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

Although the school is about the same size as most primary schools, it is larger than a typical infant school. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. When children start school in the Reception class, their skills and experiences vary, but overall are well below those expected for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. The school was awarded Healthy School Status in 2007. In addition, the Primary Quality Mark was renewed for the third time just before the inspection, and Investors in People status has also been achieved for a third time in succession. The school set up a new breakfast club this year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

When entering this good school, you are met with galleries of amazing artwork and an opportunity to study duck eggs that are hatching in the incubator. As you walk around, there is yet more fascinating and eye-catching work - on Florence Nightingale, the Great Fire of London and the Elves and the Shoemaker, to name but a few. These vibrant displays reflect the children's enthusiasm and enjoyment and the above average standards that children achieve. Standards have been consistently above average in English and mathematics since the last inspection. Children continue to achieve well, and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Improvements in the Foundation Stage have led children in the Reception class to make excellent progress. Very high quality artwork on display throughout the school signals the outstanding provision in the Foundation Stage.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and they cannot praise it enough. 'Excellent', 'absolutely fantastic', 'exciting', 'challenging', 'brilliant' are some of the words they use. They feel extremely welcome in the school, due to the efforts of the headteacher over many years. 'The headteacher leads her team superbly,' wrote one. They also appreciate the careful way that resources have been managed over time to ensure that there are delightful outdoor areas to complement the very wide range of well-kept learning resources, which even include a small on-site museum.

Despite the good overall achievement, some groups of children do not progress as rapidly as others. Good leadership and management include detailed tracking of pupils' progress. This revealed that boys were not making the same rate of progress as girls in English. Girls make excellent progress in developing writing skills, while boys' progress in both reading and writing has been satisfactory up to now. The whole curriculum was reviewed to motivate boys, and setting was introduced in Year 2 to raise standards further. Improvements have accelerated progress this year, and especially among the boys in Year 1, who are now making similar progress to girls as a result of the changes introduced. One Year 1 boy explained he liked school a lot 'because you get to make lots of stuff!'

The school's good overall academic success shows it to be well placed to bring about further improvement. There is a good range of activities to check how well the school is doing, but these do not always focus sharply enough on the impact of the school's work for different groups of children. As a result, the school over-estimates its impact in some areas and is overly modest in its view of others. Staff enthusiastically tackle areas they identify for development, undertaking a wide range of actions that result in improvement. However, they do not always check that their actions have made a difference for the children. For example, children who have learning difficulties in Years 1 and 2 make relatively slower progress than most children in the school. At the moment there is no clear plan in place that identifies why this is, and what needs to change to increase their achievement beyond its present satisfactory level.

Teaching and learning are good overall, and outstanding in the Foundation Stage. Teaching is characterised by high expectations and careful planning to capture children's imagination. Together with a good curriculum, packed with interesting topics, this leads children to enjoy school and work hard. Children's behaviour is excellent because they want to learn in lessons and are trusted to behave well all around the school. A wide range of extra activities leads to good overall personal development, with some outstanding features. Children support their local community very well by, for example, planting bulbs in the local park. They enthusiastically

contribute to the wider community and collected items for 40 shoeboxes for 'Operation Christmas Child'. The school council makes an especially good contribution to the school, designing and posting notices to improve safety on the play equipment outside, for instance. Children who are members of the ICT club (information and communication technology) are engaged in making a video to demonstrate how to play safely. These enterprises demonstrate children's outstanding awareness of safety issues. They talk about this project with enormous pride. Walking to school to take part in the 'Walk Once a Week' initiative, adds to the many opportunities for exercise, as does the very wide range of equipment and games on the playground. Children eat healthy snacks at school, but parents raise a few concerns about the quality of school meals. Children's attendance is broadly satisfactory and has improved slowly since the last inspection. However, a significant proportion of absence is due to children taking term time holidays, which are not reducing, despite the school efforts.

There are robust procedures to ensure children's safety. Staff make good use of challenging targets to help children achieve well. Children know how to reach the next steps in their learning. The good quality care, guidance and support for children are much appreciated by parents. One noted her thanks to the staff who run the 'wonderful breakfast club' and many more wrote of the caring, helpful and friendly ethos. One parent wrote to say, 'The teachers are always there to listen to any worries and queries you have and give support where needed'.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The stunning range of activities provided in the outdoor environment play a significant part in the outstanding progress that children make in the Foundation Stage. When they start school, around two thirds of the children reach much lower levels than are typical for their age in communication, language and literacy skills. The fun that is generated on the 'Safari bus', with binoculars, video cameras, walkie-talkies and something to make notes on when you spot a crocodile lurking in the water tray, leads to excellent development of these key skills. These activities are particularly popular with boys, and ensure that they make the same outstanding progress as the girls during this first year. As a result, when children leave the Reception Year, most are reaching average standards across all areas of learning. Indoor activities are equally challenging and hugely enjoyable, and lead to much individual originality in the quality of children's work. Children talk with considerable excitement about the 'Under the Sea' boxes they designed and made, and cannot wait to explain all about the pirates' treasure they found.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the rate of progress for children who have learning difficulties in Years 1 and 2 so that they make good or better progress.
- Focus monitoring activities much more sharply on the impact on learning in order to gain good and better achievement for all children.

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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?	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	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 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	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

Dear Children

Inspection of Beechcroft Infant School, Swindon SN2 7QE

Thank you all for making me so welcome and helping me when I visited your school. Yours is a good school and you are making good progress, so that standards are above average for those of you in Year 2. The staff and governors work well together to help you to succeed at school.

Here are the things that are best about your school:

- The activities in the Reception class are excellent, especially the outdoor things, so that children in this class have lots of fun and learn very quickly.
- You behave excellently all through the day and work hard in your lessons.
- The headteacher and staff have made sure that your parents feel especially welcome at school.
- Teaching is good and you have to think hard in your lessons.
- The school looks fabulous because of your beautiful artwork.
- There are delightful outdoor areas for you to play and work in.
- The school council takes a lot of responsibility and its members have helped to make sure that playtimes are safe and enjoyable for everyone.

There are just a few things that could be better. I have asked the school to help those of you who find learning more difficult in Year 1 and Year 2 to make faster progress. I have also asked all the staff and governors to check very carefully all the things they do to improve the school to make sure that the changes help you to learn even more quickly.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when I came to see you.

Yours faithfully

Liz Kounnou

Lead Inspector