

Polehampton Church of England Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134899
Local Authority	Wokingham District Council
Inspection number	316292
Inspection dates	7–8 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Christopher Grove

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Allistaire Leighton-Young
Headteacher	Mrs Paula Montie
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Kibblewhite Crescent Twyford Reading RG10 9AX
Telephone number	0118 9341338
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Age group	7-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated in a village near Reading, and is smaller than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, principally moderate or profound learning difficulties or hearing impairment, is about average. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is growing and is close to average; none is at an early stage of learning English. The school was re-designated as a Church of England voluntary controlled school from January 2005. The school has the Healthy Schools award and has secured Active Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'Since coming to Polehampton, the headteacher has worked tirelessly with her staff to improve every aspect of our school.' This accolade recorded in one parent's questionnaire response encapsulates well the principal reason why this is a good school. It also has some features that are outstanding. The headteacher provides outstanding, inspirational leadership resulting in an excellent shared vision for and direction of the school. Effective support by the deputy headteacher and the other member of the senior leadership team has resulted in good overall leadership and management. This in turn has led to the highly positive ethos within the school and the cohesive team of teaching and support staff. This is recognised by parents, who without exception agreed that the school is well led and managed. The partnership with parents, with the local infant and secondary schools, and with other organisations, including the church, is excellent.

The result of the school's ethos is seen in its thriving pupils. Almost all aspects of their personal development are exemplary, including their outstanding attitudes and behaviour, and outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In their work in school, pupils show very good levels of independence, and in their relationships with adults, they demonstrate high levels of maturity, politeness and self-confidence. These positive qualities make a major contribution to their learning and lead to their outstanding enjoyment of school.

Pupils' achievement is good. Their attainment is variable when they enter the school, but is broadly average. Pupils make good progress across the school because the quality of teaching is consistently good, and on occasions outstanding. As a result, their standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 have been consistently above average for each of the last three years. Pupils' overall progress has improved each year since 2005, and in 2007 was significantly above average.

The very good relationships between pupils and the teaching and support staff lead to very good levels of interest and participation in lessons. Teachers also set high expectations for their pupils. Together, these factors greatly aid effective classroom organisation and pupils' learning. Planning and teaching methods are well devised. Longer-term assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is good. However, short-term assessment of pupils' learning is less secure. Teachers' marking of pupils' work does not focus sufficiently on improvement. Furthermore, teachers are not yet consistently checking with pupils their understanding of the learning in lessons.

The headteacher and staff have made major improvements to the curriculum over the last three years, to the point where it is now outstanding. The curriculum enables pupils to make good progress, and ensures that learning is exciting. It contributes very well to pupils' excellent personal development. Good links between subjects add relevance to their learning. Several innovations have been introduced. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities in which participation rates are high.

The school ensures very well that pupils work and play in safe and secure surroundings. This is a very inclusive school, in which pastoral care is strong. Safeguarding procedures and the transition arrangements between schools are very good. However, the targets set for pupils are not yet sharp enough to enable them to improve their work and progress.

Self-evaluation is accurate, and this has enabled school leaders to diagnose weaknesses well. It is by this means that improvements to teaching, and especially to the curriculum, have been introduced. Hence, the school's capacity to make further improvements is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of target-setting arrangements in order to clarify more precisely for pupils how they can improve their work.
- Improve the marking of pupils' work by indicating the next steps in their learning.
- Seek more consistent feedback from pupils in lessons so that teachers gain a clearer view of the extent of their understanding.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school is aware that in the case of English the results reflect higher standards in reading than in writing. However, as a result of the measures taken by the school almost a quarter of pupils reached the high Level 5 standard in writing in 2007, which was a great improvement on the previous year. The school has also noted that boys scored markedly more highly than girls in mathematics. Consequently, teachers are involving girls more actively, for example by encouraging them to explain their thinking when pupils are engaged in solving mathematical problems. Pupils with moderate or profound learning difficulties or with hearing impairment, make the same good progress as other pupils because of the good quality of teaching. In 2007, the school exceeded all of its challenging targets in English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils really enjoy school life and learning. They are keen to help one another and cheerfully take on responsibilities in school and in the wider community. Their understanding of multicultural aspects of society is successfully enhanced by the link with an inner-city school. They have very good opportunities for contacts with pupils from different cultures. For example, links with schools in India and Uganda have recently been established. Pupils share their everyday experiences as penpals. One penpal wrote recently 'I have learnt a lot about your life'. Attendance levels are well above average and unauthorised absences are extremely low. Pupils' understanding and practice of healthy lifestyles is excellent. They make very good use of opportunities to raise funds for charities. The school council makes a major contribution to the school. The council makes democratic decisions on which actions will be of most benefit to the school, such as choosing how to spend money raised by parents. Pupils are well prepared for future life through involvement in teamwork, which contributes well to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is well planned to provide for the needs of different groups of pupils. Teachers build well on new learning, for example by providing opportunities for consolidation in order to deepen understanding. Lessons are well paced, and this engages and motivates pupils. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboards as an interesting stimulus for lessons. Teachers'

questioning challenges pupils well to extend their thinking, and this has a positive impact on pupils' achievement. In the best teaching, opportunities are taken to seek feedback from pupils about the extent of their understanding of their learning or the task which they have been set, but this is not consistent across the school. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and offer them appropriate praise, but they do not sufficiently point out the next steps in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The introduction of philosophy for children, French from Year 3 and the history unit on the school's founder, Edward Polehampton, attest to the range of curriculum innovation undertaken. The school also uses interesting topics to give pupils inspiring contexts for writing, and provides plenty of opportunities for them to apply and develop investigative skills in mathematics and science. Healthy lifestyles and personal safety are promoted very well across the curriculum. Other outstanding elements include wide opportunities for sport, very good use of visiting specialist teachers from the local secondary school, many after-school clubs and involvement in competitions. The school provides activities which promote pupils' understanding of community and diversity, for example, visits to places of worship and developing links with schools in other countries. The very good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities adds excitement to pupils' learning and provides them with many opportunities to develop their personal qualities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides very good pastoral care and guidance, building on adults' excellent relationships with pupils. High levels of care are evident in the effective routines and practices to ensure pupils' health and safety. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and well established. School staff know the pupils extremely well, and any who are vulnerable or disadvantaged are particularly well supported. Pupils who find learning difficult receive effective support, and this enables them to make good progress. Very good arrangements are in place for the transition from the infant school and to secondary education. Targets are set for pupils in English and mathematics, but the clarity of the targets is not yet sufficiently precise and consistent to enable all pupils to have a clear understanding of their current progress or of the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In addition to the strengths in the senior staff's leadership and management, the governance of the school is outstanding. Through their strong working relationship with the headteacher, the governors have developed a clear strategic overview, enabling them to offer strong challenge for further improvement in addition to their support for the school. They have an excellent understanding of the strengths of the school, and of what more could be done to improve the school further. The school's monitoring and evaluation activities have already been highly effective in developing the school's outstanding ethos, the well-structured and innovative curriculum and consistently good teaching. Aspects of short-term assessment and target-setting are, however, less effective. Parents appreciate what has been achieved. One parent referred

to the 'group of teachers who have inspired a love of learning in my child'. The school has a clear view of its own recent performance. The school provides good value for money.

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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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	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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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?	1
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	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	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	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

19 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Polehampton Church of England Junior School, Reading, RG10 9AX

We would like to thank you very much for your help during the inspection. We liked seeing you at work in your classrooms and talking to you at playtimes and lunchtimes. We think Polehampton Junior is a good school. Some things about it are outstanding. It is a very happy place for you as pupils. There are lots of things we thought were really good about your school. These are the most important ones.

- You greatly enjoy school, and your attitudes and behaviour are outstanding.
- You have excellent relationships with the teachers and other adults, who take very good care of you, and this helps you to learn well.
- Your headteacher and the other school leaders are really good at their jobs. They know what is good about your school and want to make it even better.
- Your school has got something really special about it, and gives you lots of opportunities, so your personal development is outstanding.
- Pupils in Year 6 are doing well in the National Curriculum tests, and right across the school pupils are making good progress.
- The teaching in your school is always good, and some teaching is excellent.
- The teachers have planned an outstanding curriculum for you so that it is always interesting and exciting.
- The governors of your school are doing an excellent job.
- Almost all of your parents are very pleased with the school.
- Your school has excellent relationships with your parents, other schools and the people they ask to come in to help you.

We have asked the school to help all of you to make even better progress by:

- helping you to understand how you can improve your work through making the targets they set for you more clear and precise
- improving the marking of your work by telling you what you could do next to improve your learning
- getting a better idea in lessons of just how well you understand your work.

We wish you every success in the future. We really enjoyed our time in your school.

Chris Grove

Lead Inspector