

The Ilsleys' Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109813
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	325034
Inspection date	15 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	61
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Linda Curson
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Prickett
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	East Ilsley Newbury RG20 7LP
Telephone number	01635 281 225
Fax number	01635 281 363

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- Can the school produce evidence to confirm the good progress of the current Year 6 pupils from their starting points in Year 2?
- Is the school's deployment of teaching assistants making significant contribution to pupils' progress, especially that of those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?
- Are the school's strategies for developing a thematic curriculum making a positive impact on learning, and in particular on pupils' writing?

These issues were explored by gathering evidence from school assessment data, conversations with pupils, the analysis of their work and lessons observations, and discussions with staff, governors and parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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 small school draws the majority of its pupils from the villages of East and West Ilsley, with a few coming from outlying hamlets. Almost all are of White British or other White backgrounds, and speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The needs of these pupils include moderate learning, speech and language, and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals. At the time of the inspection, Year 6 pupils were completing their final papers in the national tests.

The school has received the Healthy School Award and Sport England's Activemark.

Since September 2008, the school has been led by an acting headteacher who moves to a permanent position at another school at the end of the summer term. A permanent headteacher takes up post in September 2009.

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 fantastic school where the kids come first. The environment is caring and supportive, and the teaching mostly first class. The kids all care for each other - from the smallest to the largest.' This parent's wholehearted endorsement of the work of The Ilsleys' is representative of the overwhelming majority of parents' questionnaires. Inspectors agree that the school continues to provide a good quality of education for its pupils. A key strength lies in the pupils' excellent personal development and well-being. Pupils clearly enjoy school and are proud of any opportunity that they have to represent it in sporting or cultural events arranged by the local federation. They are polite, helpful and considerate to visitors, and their behaviour is excellent. Those pupils who spoke with the inspectors say they feel safe and happy at school. Year 6 pupils are unanimous in their appreciation of the progress that they have made while at school, and confident that they have the necessary skills and abilities to cope happily with transfer to secondary education. Pupils welcome the many opportunities to keep fit through regular physical exercise, and speak knowledgeably about their healthy eating habits.

The profile of attainment and ability within each small year group varies considerably from year to year. Typically, by Year 6, standards are generally above the national average. The current Year 6 contains a significant number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the results of their assessments in Year 2 were well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The inspectors' analysis of their work and the school's carefully recorded assessments show that, taken overall, they have made good progress over the past four years. More-able pupils are working successfully at the higher levels, and those with learning difficulties are fast approaching the levels expected for Year 6. However, within that overall picture lies inconsistency in writing, a crucial aspect of pupils' work.

The school's evaluation of its performance correctly identifies that pupils' writing development is not as good as in reading, mathematics and science. Inspectors discovered a number of reasons for this. Teachers have adopted an overly complicated approach to developing pupils' handwriting. While the selected style should ultimately enable pupils to achieve a joined cursive script, the inclusion of some unnecessary and inaccurate joining strokes sometimes confuses pupils and slows progress. This is particularly the case in the Reception, Year 1 and 2 classes, where the first-rate displays and printed matter used to promote reading do not reflect the same text and letter formation that children are expected to use for their writing.

While teachers ensure that pupils write in a variety of styles and genres, their expectations of what constitutes good work are inconsistent. For example, the science books of Years 5 and 6 reveal high-quality accounts and explanations of the pupils' many hypotheses, tests and experiments over the course of the past year. Work is presented carefully and neatly. Marking acknowledges pupils' achievements and tells them how they can improve. While there is evidence of similar quality writing and marking in other subjects, it is not sustained or consistent.

The school has started to increase the breadth of opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills. The 'Philosophy for Children' initiative undoubtedly assists pupils' skills in thinking, reasoning, and speaking and listening, but the impact of this on pupils' writing remains at an early stage of development. Pupils are occasionally writing more extensively across the curriculum, but their folders reveal a considerable volume of worksheet materials that constrain rather than encourage written expression.

The school's investment in a team of well-trained teaching assistants supports teaching and learning effectively. Well-considered systems for tracking the progress and attainment of individual pupils mean that those with learning difficulties are swiftly identified, and support provided. The school has trained teaching assistants in the skills and techniques of a good variety of strategies to help those pupils struggling to master basic literacy and numeracy to improve. For instance, the use of the Catch Up programme is helping those pupils who struggle to read and spell to build their knowledge of the sounds of letters, as well as developing their confidence as readers. Pupils with other needs, such as speech and language difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties, are also well supported. They have appropriate individual plans with well-defined targets which are regularly reviewed and altered to reflect improvements and ensure continuing good progress. Effective liaison with external agencies such as health and speech therapy contribute well to the provision made for these pupils.

The acting headteacher has worked effectively with the governors over the past year to ensure that the school continues to move forward. Their good communication with parents and the wider community has ensured continued confidence in the work of the school. A sensible induction programme ensures that the headteacher designate is already working successfully with the governing body and acting headteacher to ensure a smooth transition to new leadership. The school is well placed for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children thrive because the staff team works together very closely, offering a secure environment and a stimulating variety of learning experiences. The confident way that children arrive at the start of each day and work and play alongside their older Year 1 and 2 classmates is a testament to the excellent personal, social and emotional development fostered by the school.

The profile of children entering Reception varies considerably from year to year, but is generally in line with the age-related expectations for four-year-olds. This year the profile was similar, but with lower attainment in communication, language and literacy among the boys. The children have made good progress over the course of the year. The teacher's assessments reveal rapid progress in their personal, social and emotional development and their problem solving, reasoning and number skills. Children's communication, language and literacy have also improved, so that the majority are reaching a good level of overall achievement and working comfortably within the early learning goals for the end of Reception Year.

The teacher's planning and expectations are based firmly on her thorough knowledge and tracking of individual children. She provides an interesting variety of activities well suited to individual needs and interests in both indoor and outdoor classrooms. For instance, the children have recently been examining a variety of hedgerow plants and using these to create pictures. During the inspection, this work was effectively extended, the teacher successfully challenging the children to identify common three-dimensional shapes within their art.

Adults in the Arctic class are skilled in their observation of the children's development, and through careful questioning and engagement move learning forward at a good rate across all the areas of learning. The teaching of the sounds of letters is successfully helping the pupils to read with increasing confidence. The school's current approach to handwriting is not best suited to children of Reception age. However, they all have a secure pencil grip and demonstrate good fine-motor ability when painting, drawing and mark making.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish greater consistency in the teaching of handwriting and teachers' expectations for the presentation of work across the school.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to write more extensively across the curriculum, and reduce the teachers' reliance on worksheet materials.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 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

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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

01 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Ilsleys' Primary School, Newbury, RG20 7LP

Thank you very much for your friendly welcome during our recent visit to The Ilsleys'. You shared a great many thoughts and opinions with the inspectors, and these were all very useful in helping us to understand your school.

The school council and Year 6 were unanimous that The Ilsleys' is a good school. We agree. One of the main reasons is because you are turning into excellent citizens of tomorrow. You are clearly proud of your school, and your behaviour is excellent. You treated us with great politeness and spoke honestly about yourselves and your work.

We particularly like the way that the school feels like a big family, with the staff taking good care of you. Some of the older pupils told us that they remember being younger and feeling rather nervous, but that this memory helps them to be kind and considerate to the Arctic class when you're on the playground together. It is good to see young people of different ages getting on so well and taking care of each other.

Overall, you do well in your work, especially in reading, mathematics and science. However, we agree with you and your teachers that your writing could be better. Most of you can write pretty well, but as Year 6 said, 'Sometimes we let things slip!' In order to help you do as well as possible we have suggested that teachers:

- make handwriting simpler
- always expect you to do your best to present your work neatly
- give you more exciting opportunities to practise writing in other subjects like 'Philosophy for Children'.

With every best wish for the remainder of the summer term and beyond.

Yours faithfully

Hugh Protherough

Lead Inspector