

Ash Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110261
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325119
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Rob Crompton

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)	190
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 Maggie Bull
Headteacher	Mrs Jennifer Gamble
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Herbert Road High Wycombe HP13 7HT
Telephone number	01494 523 218
Fax number	01494 537 906

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2009
Inspection number	325119

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ash Hill Primary School is smaller than average. Almost half of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the majority of whom are from Asian families, with the next largest group having a mixed British and Black Caribbean heritage. About a third of all pupils have English as an additional language and some are at an early stage of learning English. Forty per cent of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is well above average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Others have behavioural or emotional problems or have speech, language and communication difficulties. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The school provides for the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Ash Hill Primary School provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education. Good headway has been made on several fronts. The headteacher plays a pivotal role in moving the school forward. Very well supported by the deputy headteacher, she has led the school astutely through the period of considerable change, successfully promoting a common sense of purpose and a shared determination to improve.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. From a very low start children make satisfactory progress in the Reception class but, as they start Year 1, levels of attainment are below those typical of the age group. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 is now close to average in reading, mathematics and science, although their skills in writing are below average. The standards reached by Year 6 pupils have risen significantly this year in mathematics and science. Although they remain below average, they are much better than the exceptionally low standards reached in previous years. Accelerating pupils' progress in writing has proved more difficult and this remains the key issue for the school to address.

In recent years the quality of teaching was not good enough to ensure pupils developed the basic skills necessary to move their learning forward. The quality of teaching has improved. It is now satisfactory with much good teaching observed during the inspection. Teachers have established good relationships with pupils and the atmosphere in classrooms is calm and purposeful. Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good, but some lack confidence in responding to pupils' misconceptions in mathematics and science. Pupils have positive attitudes and most try to do well. This is exemplified in their enthusiasm for the termly competition to be a 'learning champion' and to be awarded the coveted T-shirt. Pupils are increasingly aware of what they need to do to improve through individual target-setting. As a result, standards are improving.

The school provides a high level of care which benefits all pupils, particularly the most vulnerable. The impact of the school's efforts is reflected in pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes. One parent commented, 'This is a very happy school. All of the teachers are willing to listen and take on board what is said.' Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, and have a strong awareness of the benefits of a healthy diet and exercise. They make a good contribution to the life of the school.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Work is carefully planned to meet the needs of different groups, and pupils benefit from a good range of enrichment activities. Opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence in information and communication technology (ICT) are adequate, but there is room for the increased promotion of computer skills across the curriculum. Indoor activities in the Reception class are well planned and provide a good range of learning experiences. However, the constraints of the building restrict the free flow of movement between indoors and outdoors. This reduces the range of physical and creative activities that children can choose from independently.

Good leadership and management are enabling the school to build on its success and address weaknesses. The school has a secure view of overall its effectiveness and puts this understanding to good use when planning further developments. It has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Links with pre-school groups and with families help children to settle into school life. They develop positive attitudes to learning. They want to please their teachers and respond enthusiastically in lessons. Sound leadership and management and effective teamwork are the main factors in the smooth running of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Progress is carefully monitored and individual profiles give a clear picture of the levels at which each child is performing. Children's personal development is good. They feel secure and well cared for, and they quickly learn to share and cooperate with each other. As they start school, children's skills in linking sounds and letters and counting are well below those typical of the age group. They have a very limited knowledge of the world outside home and school. A sustained emphasis on speaking and listening is helping to improve children's communication skills but, as they leave Reception, their early reading and writing skills are weak. Similarly, children lack confidence in basic number work.

The teaching strikes a reasonable balance between tasks that are led by adults and those children choose for themselves, but this is constrained because the classroom is not directly linked to the outdoor area. Plans are in hand to improve the outdoor facilities as the area is sparsely equipped. Children have no dedicated climbing apparatus and few wheeled toys, so opportunities for physical development are limited and children's progress in this area is constrained.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing across the school.
- Improve the outdoor learning environment for Reception children so they can have easier access to the outdoors and better opportunities for their physical and creative development.
- Improve teachers' skills and knowledge to take account of how pupils learn best in mathematics and science.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' progress has accelerated due to improvements in teaching and learning. From a below-average start, pupils are progressing well in reading and mathematics in Years 1 and 2. This is evident from the most recent national test results where the attainment of Year 2 pupils was close to the national average, a significant improvement in recent years. Efforts to raise attainment in writing are leading to better progress but standards remain below average. The picture is similar in Years 3 to 6. In recent years the standards reached by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science were generally exceptionally low and too many pupils were not building well enough on their achievements in Year 2. Although standards in these subjects are below average, results of the most recent national tests show significant improvement, reflecting the drive by senior staff, the considerable efforts of teachers and the hard work of pupils. There are still some significant variations in the rates of pupils' progress in different subjects, however. Although standards in writing have improved a little, currently they are well below average.

The gap between the attainment of boys and girls is narrowing due to successful strategies to engage and motivate boys. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make sound progress towards their individual targets. Although staff make every effort to support all pupils, those from minority ethnic backgrounds tend to progress more rapidly and reach higher standards than those with a White British heritage.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils take pride in their school and behave well. In class and in the playground they treat each other with respect and fairness, demonstrating that they can take turns, collaborate successfully with their learning and share ideas. A broad curriculum enables pupils to acquire a wide range of skills. For example, the learning of woodwind, percussion and brass instruments in Years 5 and 6 makes an impressive contribution to pupil's learning and confidence. Pupils enjoy school, and parents express their confidence in the supportive environment. One parent wrote, 'My children are doing very well in this school and their progress is excellent.'

Relationships throughout the school are positive; pupils say they feel safe and secure in school and feel free from harassment. They know what to do about bullying and do not see it as a major issue. They know that there is someone on the staff they can talk to should the need arise. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy. They know why it is important to eat healthy food and keep fit. The take-up of extra-curricular sporting activities is good. The school council has an important role, and through class discussions ensures that children can have their say. The school recognises the need to ensure pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy are secure enough to provide a more solid base for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

As a result of monitoring by senior leaders and additional staff training, good progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils usually try hard and are keen to do well. Improvements have had a positive impact on how well pupils engage with their learning and the progress they make in lessons. Teaching assistants provide good support in lessons, particularly in providing help for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those at an early stage of learning English. Teachers explain tasks well so that pupils know what to do. They make good use of resources, such as the interactive whiteboards, to enliven their teaching. Pupils respond well to practical tasks, such as investigations in science. Not all lessons are as successful, however. Pupils said that 'lessons are boring when the teacher talks for too long or when you get a worksheet'. A renewed focus on speaking, role play and encouraging pupils to talk things through with their classmates is raising pupils' confidence in writing.

Teachers' subject knowledge is generally sound, but their use of mathematical terms is not always accurate. Some teachers lack confidence in addressing pupils' occasional lack of understanding in science and mathematics. Although improvements in teaching mean that pupils' progress is accelerating, there remain some gaps in their past learning, particularly in regard to their skills in writing. Teachers' are systematically addressing these, but it is taking time to ensure all pupils are achieving well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' personal development. Links between subjects are being developed to give pupils opportunities to use and apply their skills in different contexts, although opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate their ICT skills across the curriculum are limited. Through the curriculum and other activities, such as circle time, the school provides very well for pupil's emotional well-being and for their awareness of the needs of others. A well-planned personal, social and health education programme makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development.

Pupils enjoy the good range of enrichment opportunities. Participation levels are high and there is great enthusiasm for activities such as football, dance and gymnastics. Pupil's social and moral awareness is developed by the thoughtful displays in corridors and classrooms. A good range of educational visits and visitors support pupils' enjoyment of topics and enhances their work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a strong ethos of care in the school. This is shown in the warm relationships between pupils and staff. Together with effective arrangements for safeguarding pupils, this helps pupils feel safe and confident in talking to adults about their problems. The school knows the pupils and their families well and works harmoniously with other agencies to obtain the right support for individuals. Learning mentors work hard to encourage positive attitudes to learning, enhance pupils' self-esteem and ensure they attend regularly and punctually. They are highly effective in helping pupils with behavioural or emotional difficulties. Academic guidance is satisfactory with some good features. A good start has been made with new marking initiatives, backed up with clear learning objectives and carefully defined success criteria in lessons. Many pupils know their targets well and what they need to do to move up to the next level, but this is not yet consistently the case. Regular assessments and increasingly close tracking and analysis of pupil's performance ensure early identification of those falling behind and that there is extra help to help them catch up.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has a caring ethos where all pupils are valued and included. The headteacher and deputy have successfully shared their determined commitment and clear vision with all staff and have galvanised their support. Senior leaders have developed greatly improved processes for tracking pupils' progress and this is a powerful driver for the school's improvement. Regular meetings are held to discuss pupils' achievement and to identify the next steps needed to improve it. Senior staff have worked to good effect with external partners, such as the local authority, to monitor the quality of teaching, share effective methods and address weaknesses. This has led to greater consistency in teaching, more effective learning and better progress. As a result, standards are rising.

The school's self-evaluation accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement, leading to a clear agenda for action. Governors, several of whom are new, are increasingly involved in

review and development. The recently appointed chair of governors, a governor trainer, has helped colleagues develop their role in supporting the school and holding it to account. Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily by the good relationships established across different groups of pupils and the school's work with families. Establishing a sense of community and pride in the school has been, understandably, the main focus. The school is aware that there is scope for a more systematic approach to enhancing pupils' global awareness and governors are currently undertaking a review of their effectiveness in this area.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
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?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	3
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**

10 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ash Hill Primary School, High Wycombe, HP13 7HT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave my colleague and me when we visited your school. It was good to see how much you enjoy school and get along with one another so well. A highlight of our visit was the concert by Years 5 and 6. These children showed how well you can do if everyone pulls together. We found that the school is providing you with a satisfactory and improving education. Although the standards reached by children in Years 2 and 6 are below average, they are getting better because your learning is improving. The teachers have worked very hard to find out what you are good at and where you need extra help. It was pleasing to see that you know how important it is to do as well as you can. We saw this in the way you set to work in lessons. Most of the time teachers make learning fun, and they try to help you learn through practical activities. They generally explain things well, but we have suggested that teachers could look for other ways of helping you understand things that you find difficult in mathematics and science. The main thing to work on is improving writing as this is the weakest area. You are making good efforts to improve and we are sure that, with the teachers' help, you will gain more confidence and improve your skills.

You told us how much you enjoy all the extra activities, particularly sports. The number of you taking part shows that you know the importance of keeping fit and healthy. The school takes really good care of you but also helps you learn how to take care of yourselves, stay safe and watch out for one another. You make a good contribution to helping the school run smoothly, for example by taking responsibilities in the playground and offering suggestions through the school council. You are fortunate to have such extensive grounds for play and sport. The children in Reception enjoy these too, but we agree that the plan to improve their outdoor learning is a good idea.

Your parents told us how pleased they were with the way the school is run. They can see how much the school is improving and so could we. This is because the headteacher and staff have a really good idea of what needs to be done to make the school even better. You are rightly proud of your school and we are sure that you will do everything you can to keep Ash Hill Primary forging ahead.

Yours faithfully,

Rob Crompton

Lead Inspector