

West Down School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113172
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325767
Inspection dates	12–13 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Laurie Lewin

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lisa Tossell
Headteacher	Sandra Clement
Date of previous school inspection	25 May 2006
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited nine lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and parents. He observed the school's work, and looked at school policies, the school improvement plan and a range of samples of pupils' work and 31 questionnaires returned by parents.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at the following:

- the accuracy of the school's recorded information pertaining to children's ability when they start school and how well they progress during their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage class
- the progress of pupils at Key Stage 1 and whether the school has successfully addressed the dip in school results for this age group
- the reported change in the last few years in the backgrounds of pupils now attending the school and how well the school has adjusted to catering for their needs
- the extent to which the dip in mathematics achievement for pupils at Key Stage 2 has been addressed and how effective the school has been in adjusting and improving teaching in this area
- the impact of the school's measures to improve attendance since the last inspection.

During the inspection, work seen also drew a focus on the progress of pupils in writing across the school.

Information about the school

West Down is a small school in a small rural village not far from Ilfracombe. Some of the pupils come from the village area. However, a large number travel from outside the immediate catchment zone. There are above average proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and individuals having statements of special educational needs attending the school and these proportions have increased significantly in recent years. The proportion of pupils joining the school other than at the usual times of starting is higher than in most other schools. Pupils are nearly all White British.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

West Down is an outstanding school. It has a considerable reputation in the local region and thereby attracts a significant number of parents and carers to bring their children here from areas often well outside the immediate catchment zone. Amongst the pupils drawn to the school in this way are individuals who have not achieved very well in other larger schools but who flourish within the nurturing environment provided here. The main pulse of the school, driven by the headteacher, is one that inspires staff to ensure that all individuals, no matter what their problems are, do not 'slip through the net', but instead achieve the best they can. The pupils themselves best describe the school's all-pervading ethos: 'We are like one big family....we are very sheltered here ...we all look after each other!' And they do. At playtimes, pupils eagerly share freshly-made toast with each other and the older ones gain much pleasure from helping the younger ones with games. The school's excellent support, guidance and care are highly successful in helping all groups of pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to succeed. Staff, especially the headteacher, are particularly skilled at providing the right kind of support to any pupils who may be vulnerable due to difficulties in their personal circumstances.

The school achieves great success in developing pupils' personal skills. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, high quality provision ensures children achieve outstanding progress and, in particular, become confident and enthusiastic learners. This strong personal development is sustained across the year groups so that older pupils have a mature approach towards work and school life in general.

Teachers are adept at using innovative approaches to sharpen their teaching and to bring the curriculum alive. For example, they make very imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) and a wide range of resources within the good, and often outstanding, lessons that they teach. Their work is superbly supported by the school's relatively large number of skilled teaching assistants. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the high level of individual support that results, making good, and sometimes exceptional, progress in their work. In this way, the school achieves excellent value for money. By the time they reach the end of Year 6, pupils achieve above average attainment. Because of the exciting work and activities provided across the curriculum, they gain a very broad range of skills, knowledge and understanding that equip them comprehensively for moving onwards and achieving success in the future.

Very clear tracking of pupils' progress helps staff rapidly pick up on where pupils need extra support. At this time, for example, writing has been rightly identified as being weaker than other areas of pupils' work and already very effective strategies have been deployed to address this.

The school accurately and rigorously evaluates the quality of its own performance. Its strong capacity for sustained improvement is very evident in the way staff show dogged determination in constantly adapting provision to match pupils' needs through fully exploiting all resources at their disposal. The headteacher is highly skilled in creating the right kind of working atmosphere that ensures that staff, governors, pupils and parents are fully signed up to maintaining this approach.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable all pupils to achieve as well in writing as they do in all other areas of their work by:
 - building on and sustaining the work with current teaching initiatives in literacy in the younger age group classes and extending the approach to become a common feature of teaching in all year groups by the end of the current academic year
 - focusing especially on improving pupils' spelling skills and the breadth of exciting vocabulary they use in their writing.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In all lessons visited, there is a buzz of purposeful activity, with pupils' attention riveted on what the teacher is explaining or asking them to do. As a result, pupils set about tasks in a no nonsense way and are quick to support and help each other where necessary. They show much resilience and persistence with tasks and often gain much enjoyment from working out the solutions to problems together. They respond well to teachers, and older pupils were often seen confidently quizzing the teachers about areas where they felt unclear. Pupils show very good sustained concentration with all tasks. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding.

The school's results show pupils generally attaining above average standards by the time they leave the school. An initial look at recent results for Key Stage 1 shows a dip in performance over recent times. However, closer investigation shows that this is closely associated with an increased proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in these particular cohorts, some of whom joined the school recently. Lessons and work seen show these individuals catching up rapidly, due to the strong support provided. Similarly, the school was quick to spot that some Key Stage 2 pupils were experiencing problems with mathematics, and corrective actions have now brought their performance back on track. The current focus is rightly related to improving the relative weaknesses noted in pupils' writing.

In discussion, pupils show that they feel proud of their achievements and especially

enjoy the way in which the school regularly celebrates their success. This applies equally to all groups of pupils, including success achieved by the school's gifted and talented pupils, for example in sports, through to celebrating the successes of those pupils with learning difficulties. A striking example of this was seen in a pupil with a huge smile, proudly receiving a certificate for having achieved his personal target to behave well and keep focused on his work for the day. Pupils know a great deal about how to keep themselves fit and healthy. Science lessons seen showed very clearly how they have a keen awareness of keeping themselves safe; for example, older pupils understand the dangers of electricity and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a clear knowledge of how to avoid any problems while 'pond dipping' in the school garden. These lessons also showed young children and pupils exhibiting a genuine awe and wonder and excitement in learning.

Contributing very effectively to the school community is at the heart of pupils' understanding of how they see the need to sustain the school's 'happy family atmosphere'. They understand the benefits of supporting each other and getting along well together in this respect. Charity fundraising to enable a Kenyan girl to go to a proper school is an excellent example of their understanding about the things they can personally do to make the world a better place and gives them a strong social awareness. Despite this very good example, the school realises that scope remains for expanding pupils' understanding of life in a multi-ethnic community. The school has done a very good job of improving the attendance of the very small number of pupils who experience difficulties in this aspect.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Lessons throughout the school show that teachers have an innate understanding of how pupils' learning is best encouraged. For example in one class, pupils respond enthusiastically as Bert (a glove puppet) is ranting about his writing difficulties and whether the children can help him. Meanwhile, in the class of the oldest pupils, there are enthusiastic small group debates going on around laptops as to how best to edit the recently filmed news broadcast. Walking into the class for Early Years Foundation Stage children and Year 1 pupils, it is hard to spot the main class teacher amongst the high quality support being given by adults to different groups. The varied approaches applied are the key to the school's success in helping all individuals to progress well. This capability to vary teaching approaches is also the key to the school's success in adapting provision to cater so effectively for the changing needs of different cohorts and different ability groups. For example, it caters very effectively for the increased number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities now attending the school. Alongside this, teachers make very good use of tracking information about pupils' progress to identify weaknesses and to sharpen targets and lesson plans. In this way, relative weaknesses in writing have been picked up and new initiatives put in place so that there is now much fine grain concentration on developing pupils' use of vocabulary, punctuation and connectives. The school is now aware of the need to reinforce and extend this approach to ensure it is applied consistently for all age ranges of pupils. Similarly, whilst staff have worked well to improve the way they teach mathematics, they realise that there remains scope for broadening the way in which pupils use and apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum.

The pupils are big fans of the school's wide-ranging programme of extra activities. Sports activities and the 'forest school' work are particular favourites. Performances in the local community, specialists coming into school to work with them and a very good range of trips also provide high grade enrichment to the pupils' work. Very attractive displays around the school reflect the wide-ranging and exciting work projects undertaken right across the curriculum.

The high quality care, guidance and support offered for all individuals is something that many parents comment on. The school's thorough approach in this area is what helps all individuals, especially those who are vulnerable due to their personal difficulties, to thrive and find success. The support offered by the school often also extends outwards to advice and counselling for parents and carers in need. In this way, the school builds strong partnerships to underpin the support for the pupils concerned. Excellent links with all external support agencies further boost the support provided. The school is rigorous in all matters concerned with ensuring pupils' safety, with a full range of procedures in place that are kept under constant review.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
The use of assessment to support learning	2

The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has developed a very close-knit and highly committed staff team. They work closely and enthusiastically together on all areas to rigorously evaluate performance and to develop sharply defined action plans to keep things improving. There is a very clear shared philosophy that all individuals will be enabled to succeed. All aspects of the school are managed in a thorough and efficient way to ensure the best for all pupils. The school's approach towards ensuring the safeguarding of pupils is exemplary. All activities are carefully risk-assessed and there is a comprehensive understanding of procedures and practice on the part of all staff and governors – with the governors, for example, recently involved in training in this area. The school maintains top quality links with all external agencies to support its work in this area and ensures the best use is made of all external agencies such as the police and fire department to boost pupils' awareness and experiences. The make-up of the governing body comprises a group of people with wide-ranging backgrounds and skills. They are enthusiastic, involved, maintain a frequent presence at the school and are kept fully informed by the headteacher. They provide good 'critical friendship' for the headteacher and have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Many of them are new to the role, but rapidly finding their feet. Through their links with curriculum coordinators, frequent visits and close liaison with staff, they monitor the school's activities closely. At the same time, they recognise the need to introduce a more formalised and systematic approach to carrying out their monitoring activities. The school engages with parents in a very thorough manner and is often prepared to 'go the extra mile' in helping families overcome any particular difficulties. Parents are actively involved, as in the recent development and implementation of a new sex education policy. Their views are canvassed on a regular basis and, where possible and appropriate, the school reacts to any suggestions for improvement.

Considering its geographically isolated position, the school does a good job of promoting community cohesion. It often makes links with organisations some distance away, for example to extend pupils' after-school play opportunities at nearby Woolacombe and to stage shows regularly at the main theatre in Ilfracombe. Much very effective work is done to strengthen links with families and organisations in the immediate community, for example the excellent work done to guide and support local pre-school providers. Nonetheless, the school is rightly aware of the need to strengthen its engagement further afield with other schools or organisations to help pupils gain awareness of life in a multi-ethnic society.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1

The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Analysis of the school's data shows that children are very precisely and accurately assessed when they start school. The knowledge of the children's ability at this stage is also very well enhanced through home visits made and a comprehensive induction programme for the children and their parents. When they start school, most are working at the expected levels for their age and they make outstanding progress, reaching above average, and in some cases well above average, attainment by the time they are ready to start Year 1. This strong picture of achievement is brought about by excellent leadership and management that ensures not only high quality teaching, but also that the children receive a wide-ranging and exciting diet of activities. Children noted as starting off as being shy and unresponsive become confident and outgoing by the end of the year. The excellent deployment of very skilled teaching assistants ensures that all individuals, especially those with particular learning needs, have precise support and guidance so that they rapidly gain in confidence and skills. These children also benefit greatly from the strong supportive interface they have with older pupils, for example at playtimes and in assemblies. This helps to boost their personal development to an excellent level and gives them a confident social awareness. Not only do children progress to a good level in their work, but they also develop a broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding as a result of the rich array of practical experiences provided for them. Children are very well looked after by staff, who have an in-depth knowledge of all individuals. All aspects of ensuring that the children are kept safe are rigorously adhered to.

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at West Down School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspector received 31 completed questionnaires and, with 65 parents and carers registered at the school, this represents a good return rate. Most parents are very happy with the school and those spoken to in the playground were keen to emphasise what a happy and friendly working community the school provides. There were no particular trends in the very few critical comments received. Nonetheless, the criticisms made were checked during the inspection and did not concur with the evidence gathered.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	7	2	0

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

14 May 2009

Dear Pupils



Inspection of West Down School, Ilfracombe EX34 8NF

It was good fun coming to see you. Thank you for making me so welcome, talking to me and helping me during the school's inspection. You will be pleased to hear that I have judged the school to be outstanding. Here are some of the most important points from the report that I thought you might like to know about.

- You work at a good, and often rapid, pace in lessons and your achievement as you move up through the school is good, and sometimes excellent.
- Your personal development is excellent. You behave really well and are polite and friendly. You clearly know a lot about how to stay fit and healthy and how you can contribute to make the world a better place for everyone. I especially liked the way you are all keen to help each other and work together well.
- You have an excellent curriculum that provides you with lots of exciting opportunities.
- Teachers and teaching assistants make a great team, and I agree with your view that they do a good, and sometimes excellent, job of teaching you.
- The school does a first-rate job of looking after you at all times and making sure you are safe.
- Your headteacher is a really good 'Captain of the ship' and keeps everybody in good spirits and working hard. She is especially good at making sure all resources are put to the best possible use to help you enjoy your work and become successful.

To improve further, I have asked staff to do the following:

- Build on the current work they are doing to make your writing even better. You can help a lot here by making sure you practise to make your spelling even better and try as hard as possible to follow your teacher's advice about using the 'wow' words to make your writing as interesting as possible.

I am sure you will all want to keep working very hard in the areas mentioned here to keep your school improving. Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when I came to see you.

Yours sincerely

Laurie Lewin
Lead inspector

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