

Okehampton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113260
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325784
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Karl Sampson HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	575
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	Barbara Stevens
Headteacher	Brian Cunningham
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Glendale Road Okehampton EX20 1JB
Telephone number	01837 52866
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Okehampton Primary School is a larger than average school serving the town of Okehampton and surrounding area. Most pupils are of White British heritage and almost all have English as their first language. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, is above average. Principally, these pupils have moderate learning or speech, language and communication difficulties. The school has a number of nationally accredited awards, including the Activemark and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge, understanding and skills below those expected for their age. They make good progress and most children have reached the goals expected for their age by the time they enter Key Stage 1. However, by the end of Year 2, pupils' progress has slowed and their attainment particularly in reading and writing is below average. This pattern of underachievement continues throughout Key Stage 2. Too many pupils make insufficient and inconsistent progress in English and mathematics which means that their achievement is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching ranges from outstanding to inadequate and is satisfactory overall. Several positive strategies have been introduced to raise pupils' achievement. However, given the history of underperformance, these recent changes have not yet had sufficient time to bring about improvement across the school. Teachers do not use assessment information consistently to ensure activities are matched closely to pupils' different levels of ability, limiting the effectiveness of some teaching. Marking does not always specify what pupils need to do to improve. Teachers have made progress in developing the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning since the last inspection.

Weaknesses in the provision for literacy and numeracy mean that the curriculum is unsatisfactory overall. A lack of coherence in planning for progression in skills from year to year and across key stages has hampered pupils' progress, especially in writing and mathematics. Too many pupils fail to develop key skills to the levels required to prepare them adequately for the future. This is particularly evident with the more-able pupils who do not achieve as well as they might. However, pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because individual intervention programmes are effective.

The provision for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage continues to be a strength of the school, as do many aspects of pupils' personal development and well-being. Pupils enjoy coming to school. There are many opportunities in sport and music and pupils feel that they can make a positive contribution to their community. The school provides a caring environment and has good links with other agencies to support pupils' social and emotional development. Nearly all parents who returned the inspection questionnaire hold totally positive views of the school. Parents are particularly pleased with the caring and 'friendly family atmosphere' that the school provides. A small number of parents expressed concerns that their children were not always challenged enough in their learning.

The school's view of its effectiveness is too positive. Leaders have not tackled the issues of declining standards successfully. Concerns about standards and achievement in mathematics raised at the time of the last inspection remain. Pupils' progress in writing, and the school's performance overall have deteriorated. Although some actions to bring about improvement appear to be appropriately focused, they are very recent, despite pupils' underachievement being evident since the last inspection. Recent support from the local authority in literacy and numeracy and a renewed emphasis on the national intensifying support programme are starting to give focus and to bring improvement, but there is still a long way to go. The governing body provides school leaders with wholehearted support but governors have not held the school to

account regarding standards and pupils' achievement. They play a limited role in checking the school's performance and driving school improvement. Given the weaknesses in leadership and management, the school does not demonstrate the capacity for improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their education in both the Nursery and Reception classes. During activities that children initiate for themselves, they display strong personal, social and emotional skills. They behave well, are independent, confident, and able to share and communicate with their peers and adults. They choose from a range of well-organised activities both indoors and outside. These activities allow them to develop and practise skills in all areas of learning. The outdoor area is used well to promote learning. This is evident, for example, when the nursery children explore the differences in slugs and worms. Effective questioning, good teaching and well-matched activities enable the children to make good progress from below expected starting points. By the time they enter Year 1 most are working securely within the expectations for their age in all the areas of learning.

A change to the phonics programme has been particularly successful in developing the children's ability to read and write. This was evident, for example, as the children happily listed the creatures they found in the outside play area. The boys especially enjoyed recording instructions for building a rocket. However, a few children are finding the level of the programme difficult to follow. Health and safety are high priorities as evidenced in clean, safe play areas, appropriate risk assessments and the offer of milk, water and fruit. Effective procedures such as home visits, a reception induction day and parent/child workshops establish positive relationships with parents. Links with other professionals such as speech therapists provide good support for specific children. Leadership is good across the Early Years Foundation Stage. The provision is regularly reviewed to ensure it matches the needs of the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement in writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that the curriculum promotes progression in skills from year to year and across key stages, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that all teaching draws on assessment and is closely matched to pupils' different needs.
- Make sure that marking provides all pupils with clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their performance.
- Rigorously evaluate the school's effectiveness in order to take swift and focused action for improvement and develop the role of the governing body in holding the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children achieve well in the Nursery and Reception classes. However, too few reach the standards of which they are capable in reading and writing by the end of Year 2. This underachievement is particularly evident among boys and more-able pupils. Between the start of Year 3 and the end of Year 6 progress is inconsistent between classes and unsatisfactory overall. While reading skills have improved as a result of better targeted support, standards in writing and mathematics have declined over the past two years. Attainment in science is better than in English and mathematics where standards at the end of Year 6 are below average. Well-focused individual

support ensures that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. However, too few of the more-able pupils gain the higher levels, particularly in English. The latest assessments show that, in 2009, the school is unlikely to meet its statutory targets for the end of Year 6.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Aspects of pupils' personal development are good. Pupils say that they feel really safe and that any incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good, enabling them to develop their personal skills and think about others. Pupils form good relationships and trust the adults that work with them. Most pupils enjoy coming to school, attend regularly and are punctual. However, despite the school's efforts to discourage parents from taking their children on holiday during term-time, overall attendance, though improved, is still below the national average. Most pupils work hard but a few lose concentration when lessons lack interest and challenge. Pupils are aware of the importance of different cultural traditions, although this is generally a weaker area of their personal development.

Pupils take on a wide variety of responsibilities within the school and appreciate that serious notice is taken of their views. The school council has contributed well to improving the provision for outdoor play and healthy meals. The 'Eco Watch Group' has helped to promote sustainability. Pupils understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. Many select healthy lunches and attend the school sports clubs. Pupils' links with the community are strong and enhanced by a good range of activities, including very popular musical concerts and productions. Despite some of these good aspects, pupils' preparation for their future lives and education is limited by the low attainment in their basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In all lessons there are good relationships fostered by the care and skill of the teachers. Teaching and learning are improving as more effective use is being made of external consultants to support teachers in planning for pupils' learning and progression in skills. However, there remains inconsistency in how well teachers use assessment to match teaching to pupils' different needs. In good lessons, pupils are engaged well in their learning. This is especially evident when pupils understand what they are aiming to achieve, activities are varied and proceed at a brisk pace, and all pupils are challenged to achieve well regardless of their starting points.

In less successful lessons, the pace is often slow and there is insufficient challenge and excessive direction by the teacher. For example, at times teachers talk for too long and pupils do not have enough time to get their work done. Although teaching is satisfactory overall, it is not strong enough to ensure pupils make up for their slow progress in recent years. Adult support is generally used well in lessons and for small groups, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

While the curriculum makes a strong contribution to some aspects of pupils' personal development, weaknesses in the provision for literacy and numeracy result in pupils making insufficient progress in writing and mathematics. This is because planning in these subjects does not always ensure that pupils move on well enough from year to year, with new work building on that completed previously. Although the school has recently adapted its use of the revised national strategies for literacy and numeracy, these changes have not yet had time to have sufficient impact on pupils' performance. The school is now revising its planning to give better links between different subjects, and more opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in writing and mathematics. However, the full effect of these recently introduced initiatives has yet to be demonstrated, especially in terms of raising standards.

Provision for ICT has improved and pupils use computers regularly to support their learning. Provision for modern foreign languages benefits from the skills of a specialist teacher. The school has also achieved 'Activemark' in recognition of high quality provision for sports. Music is a strong feature of the curriculum and the pupils benefit from specialist teaching as well as opportunities to participate in musical events out of school. The school organises a good range of visits, visitors and clubs to enrich learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral care and support ensure that pupils feel safe and their social and emotional development is supported. Procedures for safeguarding pupils, including health and safety policies are in place and meet statutory requirements. There are good links with a range of agencies that support the wide range of pupils' personal and welfare needs and assist pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school works closely with the educational welfare officer to help particular pupils who have difficulty attending regularly. The arrangements for pupils to move to secondary school are carefully managed.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Procedures for tracking pupils' progress over time are being used in all classes. While many teachers have made a promising start on using targets to help move pupils on in their learning, some inconsistencies remain. Most pupils have an understanding of their targets but the quality of marking is variable with regard to the steps that they need to take to improve their work. In some classes it is not always apparent that pupils have been given the opportunity to respond to written feedback and secure their learning before moving on. The school has recently introduced a new system for pupils to have one-to-one discussions with teachers about their progress. Although this appears to be a positive development, it is too soon for its impact on raising achievement to be clearly measured.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The headteacher and senior leaders have established an ethos of care for each pupil's welfare, which is shared by staff and governors. Despite setting challenging targets which are often not met, senior leaders have held an over-generous view of the school's performance. Although senior leaders have taken action to try to direct improvement, raise standards and tackle

weaknesses, these actions have not been sufficiently effective. A number of overlapping initiatives and interventions have resulted in inconsistent practice and variable impact on pupils' progress. Governors are supportive but have not questioned or challenged sufficiently the information provided by senior leaders with regard to standards and achievement.

It is only recently with the help of intensive external support that the school has started to evaluate its actions more rigorously. The school is developing a more realistic view of its strengths and where it needs to focus its energies. This has led to the recent introduction of a tightly focused action plan to raise pupils' attainment. However, it is too early in its implementation to have made a demonstrably beneficial impact in improving standards and pupils' achievement, especially in mathematics and writing. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion at a local level but recognises that further work is needed in developing wider cultural and global links.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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?	3
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	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	4

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?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

26 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Okehampton Primary School, Okehampton, EX20 1JB

Thank you for making us so welcome on our recent visit to inspect your school. We enjoyed spending time with you and finding out about your work and life at the school. You were very polite and helpful. There are some good things happening in your school, but the school needs special help to ensure that you all make enough progress with your work. This means that an inspector will visit regularly to make sure your learning improves.

Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and in Reception. Your headteacher and the staff care for you well and they work closely with other adults to get you support if you have a problem. You told us that you enjoy coming to school, feel safe and have good opportunities to take responsibility and support each other. Your involvement in sport keeps you fit and you know about healthy foods. You gain confidence as you contribute to your school and the local community and are particularly proud of your choir and school orchestra. Some lessons do not challenge you enough and you do not always know what you need to do to improve your work and develop your skills, especially in writing and mathematics. As a result, you do not make the progress you are capable of by the time you leave the school at the end of Year 6.

The leaders of your school have recently started to make some improvements to help you all to do better. However, there is more to do. We have asked the teachers to use information about your progress to make sure that work is always set at the right level for each of you. The work you do each year needs to extend your knowledge and skills, especially in writing and mathematics. We have asked your teachers to explain what you need to do to improve and help you move on to the next step in your learning when they mark your work. All these improvements need to happen as quickly as possible. This means that the school's leaders and governors will need to keep a close eye on how well the school is helping you to learn. Your school will have extra help to do these things.

You can help by doing your best at all times. Please ask for harder work if it is too easy. You can also make sure that you follow the advice teachers give you when they mark your work.

Yours faithfully

Karl Sampson

Her Majesty's Inspector