

Ashleigh CofE (VC) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113386
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325806
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	260
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	Zoe Marsh
Headteacher	Mark Henderson
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bevan Road Barnstaple EX32 8LJ
Telephone number	01271 345149
Fax number	01271 329367

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is of average size, although the number of pupils on roll has declined steadily in recent years, reflecting demographic changes in the area. Within the Early Years Foundation Stage, the youngest children are taught part time in a Nursery class. Older children within this stage are taught in two Reception classes. Pupils in Years 1–6 are taught in parallel mixed-year classes, mostly in temporary accommodation alongside the playground. The very large majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average, with the majority of these pupils having speech, language and communication difficulties.

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 good school. It has a few outstanding features, notably the high quality care, guidance and support provided by the whole staff team for all pupils, the exceptional leadership of the headteacher, and the pupils' very obvious enthusiasm for school and enjoyment of the many stimulating activities provided. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good, and they learn to behave well. Relatively few parents responded to the inspectors' survey but of those that did, the overwhelming majority appreciated the many good features of the school. Views such as, 'We find Ashleigh warm, welcoming and very professional' and 'The children have a very good relationship with the teachers and understand the importance of education' were common threads in the comments received. Pupils achieve well. The overall attainment of children on entry to the school is below the expectations for their age. Standards are rising and are average by the time pupils leave the school. Progress in writing is satisfactory rather than good, and although it is now accelerating, it is slower than in other subjects. Many pupils have limited speaking skills and do not have enough opportunities to develop these. This makes it more difficult for them when thinking about what to write. Teaching and learning are good, as is the curriculum. Teachers skilfully involve the pupils in thinking about and planning their work, which includes many practical activities that inspire them to learn. In a few lessons, opportunities for challenging and extending the most able pupils are missed and this tends to slow their progress from time to time, with very few exceeding age-related expectations. The school is well led and managed. It has effective and comprehensive systems for checking all aspects of its performance. These provide the school with a clear and accurate view of how well it is doing, which areas need further improvement and what needs to be done to achieve this. The relatively new governing body, although committed to the school, is inexperienced. Governors recognise that they need more training to help them fulfil their duties and responsibilities, including carrying out checks and balances and holding the school to account. The headteacher's excellent leadership and the professional commitment of all the staff combine to ensure that the school is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Teaching throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Careful and sensitive induction programmes enable the children to settle quickly and all staff ensure the children's welfare is a priority throughout their time in school. This is appreciated by parents, one of whom wrote, 'The staff have made my child feel very secure and welcome.' Children make good progress in all six areas of learning, from, in some instances, very low starting points. Their personal development is good and standards in all areas are rising. Nevertheless, by the end of the Reception Year, standards remain a little below average, particularly in language and communication skills, and no children exceed national expectations. Recent changes to the way children are taught about letters and sounds is increasing their rate of progress and preparing them well for beginning to write.

Children in all three classrooms are helped to learn independently through a range of play activities in a very stimulating environment. The school has worked with determination to develop a designated, secure outdoor area and this is very well equipped with apparatus to stimulate the children's curiosity. However, by necessity, this area is a long way from the three classrooms. This severely restricts the free-flow in and out of doors, which in turn limits the

opportunities for children to make independent choices and spontaneous responses. Effective leadership and management create a shared philosophy that promotes a common style of working in all three classrooms. This supports learning well. All the adults work well as a team, carefully observing children's responses and planning further activities accordingly. There are effective systems for observing and assessing children's learning and the assistants are fully involved in this process.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop speaking and listening skills in order to raise the rate of progress and standards in writing.
- Ensure there are consistently challenging and high expectations of the most able pupils so that more exceed age-related expectations.
- Provide training for the relatively inexperienced governing body so that it fulfils its statutory responsibilities and holds the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well throughout the school from their low starting points on entry. Standards are steadily rising so that by the end of Year 6 they are average except for writing, where they are below. The results of this year's national tests at the end of Year 6 are some of the highest yet for this school with more pupils reaching the expected levels in mathematics and science than is found nationally. Standards in English are also rising, but more slowly and from an even lower base than mathematics.

Many pupils struggle to talk about their ideas and to think of the right words or phrases to use when trying to explain what they are thinking. This makes it more difficult for them when it comes to writing. Although progress in writing is now accelerating following the many initiatives introduced, a small proportion of pupils, especially the more able, are not yet achieving the challenging targets set for them. The considerable proportion with learning difficulties frequently make very good progress, enabling most of them to reach standards expected for their age by the time they leave the school, particularly in reading, mathematics and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' exceptional enjoyment of school is evident in all aspects of school life, in and out of class, and as they take part in the outstanding assemblies or use the outdoor areas. Pupils take a great interest in their work, are keen to do their best and are enthusiastic throughout the day. Attendance rates are average. Although most pupils' attendance is good, a few are frequently absent. The school works strenuously, with others, to overcome unwarranted absences.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Relationships throughout school are very good and there is a warm 'family' feeling wherever you go. Pupils feel safe and well supported and are usually careful as they move around the challenging school site and cope with the difficulties of using mobile classrooms or sometimes having to go outside to the toilets. They know how to stay safe on the internet and watch out for strangers.

Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong. They are well aware of the need for a healthy diet and plenty of exercise, and playtimes and lunchtimes are filled with organised and

spontaneous games and other opportunities for exercise. Pupils take care of each other. In particular, the older pupils watch out for the younger ones and help them at lunch and break times as play buddies, or by sorting out worries or disputes. Pupils also care about others beyond school, for example raising money or collecting gifts for those less fortunate in other countries. They have less understanding of the diversity of communities and cultures within modern Britain or of the prejudices that certain citizens might face. The pupils' average standards in basic skills, coupled with good personal learning habits, help prepare them satisfactorily for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There are several key factors that contribute to the consistently good teaching and learning found in all sections of the school. Teachers work determinedly to overcome the limitations imposed by the site and scattered temporary accommodation. They plan effectively in teams, sharing ideas and expertise, and ensuring broadly similar experiences in parallel classes. They strive to make the activities relevant to pupils. For example, they use photographs taken during a visit to the park when helping pupils to write about events in chronological order, or conduct a survey of worms in the school field before embarking on a mathematical investigation into irregular shapes and the worm population in the field. This motivates the pupils well, as does the very highly developed practice of involving the pupils in planning what it is they are going to learn about. Another strong feature of teaching and learning is the way pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning and to assess the progress they and their peers are making towards short- and long-term targets. This is a cornerstone of almost every lesson. However, an occasional over-reliance on self-assessment by teachers sometimes means higher attaining pupils are not always challenged as much as they might be. This is also the case in a few lessons when similar activities and expectations are set for pupils of all abilities, regardless of their attainment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

While ensuring full coverage of the National Curriculum, the curriculum rightly places great emphasis on the pupils' own interests and experiences, and on developing basic skills. As a consequence, work is rich and detailed, based on relevant and practical activities. Effective curricular planning ensures that pupils' experiences are consistent and their learning continually reinforced as they move through the school. There are good cross-curricular links that successfully enable pupils to express their ideas about, for example, Australia or sharks, through art work, written reports, poetry, a multimedia presentation or a list of French vocabulary. The curriculum is adapted very well to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but less so for those who are most able. The use of computers and other technology is satisfactory with most pupils becoming competent. However, the distance from the mobile classrooms to the computer suite makes access and spontaneous use of computers difficult. The curriculum is enriched well with exciting visits, an emphasis on the environment and sporting activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils receive outstanding care, guidance and support. The social and emotional development of all pupils permeates every aspect of school life, from the planned curriculum programme to playground interactions, regular assemblies and lunch in the dining hall. Every pupil is valued and the most vulnerable are nurtured very well and helped to learn with great skill, commitment and effect. Interactions with families are good and the school draws well on a wealth of expertise in school and from the various outside agencies to support pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Health and safety are paramount. All required procedures designed to safeguard pupils are implemented rigorously with ongoing, frequent staff training. The school has established a range of innovative practice providing very effective academic guidance, for example adapting a 'Dragons' Den' idea, and pupils are very clear about how to improve their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The clarity of vision, commitment to pupils and communication skills are features of the exceptional leadership by the headteacher, who is respected by all sectors of the school community. He is supported well by senior leaders, who, with other leaders, fulfil their roles well within a spirit of shared responsibility and clarity of purpose. The school has comprehensive systems for checking its own work, involving all staff. The findings are collated and presented, and are clear about the aspects most in need of further improvement. There is a very efficient and effective system for tracking pupils' progress. The information from it is used well to identify patterns in pupils' progress, to determine where additional help is needed and to set challenging targets for the following year. Governance is satisfactory. Governors, several of whom are new, are committed to the school and are beginning to become involved in strategic planning and decision making. However, they remain heavily reliant on the headteacher and do not feel fully comfortable in holding the school to account. The school leadership team has worked effectively to strengthen community cohesion, for example by chairing community meetings on issues such as drug rehabilitation and acting as the hub for an annual multicultural week across the learning community.

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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?	1
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?	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?	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	3
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?	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	1
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?	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?	1

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?	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	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**

9 July 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Ashleigh Church of England Primary School, Barnstaple EX32 8LJ

- Thank you for the way you made us feel very welcome when we visited your school recently on two exceptionally hot days. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with some of you and visiting all of your classrooms. Ashleigh Primary is a good school and we were pleased to see how very much you all like school and the many interesting things on offer. Here are some of the highlights we found during our visit:
- You know how to behave well and many of you take on important jobs helping others around the school.
- You concentrate well and work hard in lessons, and this helps you make good progress with your learning in all classes.
- Assemblies are great and you have lots of fun while also thinking about how to respond to some of the mysteries of life and problems around the world.
- We were particularly impressed by the way teachers get you thinking about the things you might like to learn and how they then plan lots of ideas to make your work very interesting.
- Your teachers are particularly good at finding ways for you to become clear about what you have learnt and how you could improve further, including, for example, Ashleigh Dragon's Den.
- Everyone who works in school takes exceptionally good care of you all. They do their very best to help those of you who have problems from time to time.
- Your headteacher is always thinking about ways of improving the school and the way it is run so that you get even better opportunities. Other leaders and staff help him well in this.
- We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on three things to make the school even better:
- Give you lots more chances to talk about your ideas, using interesting words and phrases, to help you make faster progress with your writing.
- Make sure that those of you who find work easy at times are challenged to do even harder work so that you can reach even higher standards than you do now.
- Help the governors, many of whom are new, to learn how best to carry out all their important work.

We know you will want to talk to your school councillors about your own ideas of how to improve the school.

Yours faithfully Martin Kerly

Lead Inspector