

Oakhurst Community First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113685
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325863
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Collard

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	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	156
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	S A Gillham
Headteacher	Melanie Davy
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Shaftesbury Road West Moors Ferndown BH22 0DY
Telephone number	01202 871577
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves its local area. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and there are no pupils who are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varies from year to year and at present is slightly above the national average. These are mostly connected with literacy, numeracy or behavioural issues. Some classes have had a number of different teachers in the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory but improving school. There are also a number of good features and a few that are outstanding. The very good leadership qualities of the headteacher have been instrumental in overcoming many barriers since the last inspection. She, along with an effective senior leadership team and governing body, is putting in place the right developments to ensure sustainable school improvement. As the school's vision states, a high priority is given to ensuring pupils become effective learners. While the school rightly recognises that standards still need to rise further, pupils are being well prepared for their future lives.

Pupils' attainment on entry varies but is broadly similar to that expected for their age, except in communication, language and literacy and in personal and social development which are below average. Good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage means that children start Year 1 with broadly average standards in all areas of learning. Progress through Years 1 to 4 is satisfactory but achievement is more rapid towards the top end of the school. This is because teaching, while satisfactory overall, is more consistently good in the upper years. In these good lessons, pupils understand more clearly what is expected of them and the tasks they are set challenge them to think hard. Pupils leave Year 4 with the standards expected for their age, although there are indications that increasingly stronger teaching is having a positive effect on improving these standards. An area that is correctly being focused on is ensuring that teachers make better use of the wealth of assessment information available. In some classes, the tasks set do not take enough account of what has been already learnt and so do not provide the highest levels of challenge for everybody.

Pupils' personal development is good, due in most part to the excellent pastoral care that pupils receive. Each individual is carefully nurtured or counselled when difficult circumstances occur and a keen eye is kept on ensuring that any personal troubles do not escalate. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils willingly take on responsibility and the school council plays an integral part in developing ideas that have helped enhance the school environment. Their contribution is valued; for example the governing body regularly hear representation from them and suggestion boxes provide a good way of channelling ideas.

The school has successfully implemented a good and more creative curriculum aimed at showing pupils how different aspects of learning link together. Pupils enjoy these tasks, many of which are highly practical or involve visits. This has helped them take more responsibility for their learning, for example by researching information at home or making models in their own time. Outstanding partnerships have been fostered and developed. The local cluster of schools provides very good opportunities for pupils to work with others. While at an early stage, opportunities are developing for special classes for pupils who show a particular talent.

Self-evaluation is good. It is generally realistic and has set the right priorities. At the heart of developments is the need to raise the quality of all teaching to that of the best and to ensure pupils can see a purpose for learning. This is now starting to have a positive impact on teachers' and pupils' expectations and demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve into the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The good provision provides a stimulating learning environment in which children flourish. Teaching, leadership and management are good, which results in good achievement by the children. Observations and assessments are used effectively to inform planning so that activities are well matched to children's abilities and interests. The school recognises that these assessments need to be consistently accurate to provide a good basis upon which to judge children's future progress and is working to achieve this. There is a good balance of teacher-led sessions and play activities which allow children to choose where they want to work and learn. These provide continuous learning experiences both inside and outside, which all helps children develop their independence through making their own choices. A clear focus on developing personal and social skills has resulted in children being supportive of one another and working and playing together well. They are able to concentrate for sustained periods and show perseverance in their activities. For example, girls making kites tried again and again to refine their designs and helped each other by holding string or tape. They waited patiently for the wind because 'you need wind to fly a kite'. Targets are shared regularly with parents and they are actively encouraged to help support their children. They appreciate the work that is being done for their children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure pupils' achievement is continuously good throughout the school by raising the quality of teaching to that of the best.
- Use assessment information in lessons more effectively so that pupils know what they need to do next and are fully challenged by what they are asked to do.

A small proportion of 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

After a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils make satisfactory progress through the rest of the school. School assessments show that this is becoming more rapid as teaching has improved and in some classes, particularly at the top end of the school, progress is good. Standards by the end of Year 2 and 4 are broadly average, which is also reflected in national test data. Where the school has had a particular focus, such as on mathematics and writing, there is good evidence to show that progress is improving. Pupils' improved progress in Years 3 and 4 is due to their being given very clear information about what they are learning and what they can do to improve. However, even in these classes, a legacy of slower progress is yet to be fully eliminated although more pupils are achieving above the levels expected of them by the end of Year 4. The better identification of need and appropriate support means that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress against their own targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are good examples of pupils taking responsibility such as through the 'Rights Respecting Schools' charter. This has successfully developed pupils' understanding of world issues such as children's right to play and to have clean water. It has also helped to ensure pupils do not stereotype different cultures but can value beliefs, religions and traditions very different from their own. In classes, pupils generally behave well although there are some pupils who are more challenging and, when teaching is not so focused, there are minor disturbances or interruptions. Nevertheless, pupils say that this does not 'really distract them'. Relationships are strong across the whole school community, so it is not surprising that attendance is above average. Pupils and parents note that this was something dealt with quickly when the headteacher arrived. Pupils have a good understanding of being healthy and staying safe. The strengths of this area have been recognised through national awards for 'Healthy schools' and 'Activemark'. Pupils also make a good contribution to their own community and to other communities further afield. This includes an understanding about basic human rights and the part each individual can play, such as through 'Fair Trade' awareness. These specific lifeskills of tolerance, understanding and responsibility mean that even though standards in basic literacy and numeracy are only average at present, pupils are being prepared well for what life holds in store.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school has improved the proportion of good teaching since the last inspection. Planning is thorough and is used well to combine different subject skills. In general, lessons move at a good pace and in the best lessons, this is also combined with consistently challenging discussion, questioning and subsequent independent work. Teachers handle behaviour well, particularly with the small proportion of more challenging pupils. Because of this, these pupils rarely disrupt the learning of the class. Teaching assistants use their expertise well to divert any possible incidents so that lessons are calm and orderly. They also ensure that various ability groups, but especially those with learning difficulties, make similar levels of progress. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good it is because teachers do not provide a sufficiently clear direction to what is being learnt. Consequently, pupils are not sure what is expected of them, they do not get on as well with their work as they might and so their learning slows.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has successfully developed a more creative approach to the curriculum. Pupils are very excited by this and enjoy the more varied topics and themes. It has helped them develop their enquiry and research abilities and has enabled them to see a real purpose in what they are learning. This can be seen in their work, where they have been able to write historical newspaper reports and undertake archaeological digs. Personal, social and health education plays an important role in the curriculum and pupils have a good understanding of, for instance, global rights. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities which pupils willingly and actively participate in.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The outstanding pastoral support for pupils has had a positive effect on learning. The school rightly states that the many initiatives have 'provided a structure for developing children's capacity to make considered decisions about their behaviour and relationships'. Pupils feel safe and secure because of the strong support systems that are in place. Pupils and families with difficulties at home are counselled carefully and, where necessary, the very strong partnerships with outside agencies help them through these difficult times. Good academic assessment has improved considerably. This is used well to target specific support, to check whether any pupils are underachieving. It is used well by most teachers but less effectively by some. As a result, not all pupils are clear about the next steps in learning or they are not challenged enough to improve as rapidly as they might.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has developed an effective senior leadership team that is taking ever-increasing responsibility for whole-school decisions. This has led to a clear direction for school improvement and to increasingly challenging targets. In the past, the continuity of developments has been hindered by unavoidable staff absences but this is now more stable. Consequently, improvement has been rapid this year. Recent success can be seen in the improved achievement of pupils. The school acknowledges that there is still more to do to ensure that this achievement is high through all year groups so that all pupils leave with the highest possible academic standards. The school development plan has set the right priorities for this to happen. Knowledgeable governors take a full and active role in developing their own expertise and in gaining a wide overview of the school's progress. This includes having regular meetings with staff and pupils as well as observing the school's work. The repayment of the deficit budget, inherited by the present headteacher, is now scheduled to be completed ahead of time.

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
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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?	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?	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?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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	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	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

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?	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	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	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**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oakhurst Community First School, Ferndown BH22 0DY

Thank you for looking after us so well during our recent visit. We very much enjoyed meeting you and hearing all about what happens at your school. You clearly enjoy your learning and the many activities you get involved in. We were especially impressed with the way that the school council, through all your suggestions, are so heavily involved in changing things for the better. As I promised some of you, I have included the main points of our report below.

- We have said that you receive a satisfactory education although there are a number of good things and some that are outstanding.
- You told us that your learning was exciting. We have said that you are provided with a good curriculum that links many different subjects. This helps you use what you have learnt and so helps you understand things better.
- We have said that you are looked after exceptionally well. You told us that if there were any problems, these are dealt with quickly and that, most of the time, everybody gets on extremely well.
- We have said that your behaviour is good. You are aware that on just a few occasions, this is not always the case but you rightly said that teachers deal with these well.
- You make progress in each of your lessons because of the satisfactory teaching. In some lessons, your learning is good. This is when you are very clear what is expected of you and are given highly challenging work to do. You told us how you like it when this happens. We have asked your teachers to make sure this happens as often as possible. We have also asked that your teachers make sure that you are clear about what you need to do next.
- Your headteacher, along with the staff and governors, know what to do to help things improve. They have many exciting developments in store over the next few years. You can help by making sure you continue to take an active part in suggesting things that can be improved.

Finally, we wish you all the best for your future education. Keep coming to school regularly, behaving well and helping your teachers. This will all make sure your school becomes one of the best.

Yours faithfully

David Collard

Lead inspector