

Finchingfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115107
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326124
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Maria Coles

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	53
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 Francis Goodfellow
Headteacher	Ms Paula Hagan
Date of previous school inspection	17 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Vicarage Road Finchingfield Braintree Essex CM7 4LD
Telephone number	01371 810423

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2008
Inspection number	326124

Fax number

01371 811186

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector

Description of the school

This is a much smaller than average school serving the village of Finchingfield and its surrounding rural community. A third of its pupils travel in from neighbouring villages to attend the school. The large majority of pupils are White British and all speak English as their first language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The number of pupils in each year group varies on an annual basis. There has been significant staff turnover over the last few years. The school has an Active Mark award. The recently built school hall and playground for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) have enhanced the school provision. There is onsite private childcare provision caring for children between two and five years of age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Finchingfield Church of England Primary School provides a good standard of education for its pupils. The good quality of the teaching, the curriculum and pastoral care, guidance and support leads to the pupils' outstanding personal development. There is a strong sense of the school being at the centre of its village community. Pupils make excellent progress in developing personal qualities such as consideration, thoughtfulness and respect for others which will help them to become highly effective members of their community. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school its staff and the headteacher. As one put it, 'We're thrilled to have found a school which puts as great an emphasis on celebrating individuality as it does academic achievement.'

Children start school with skills that are broadly lower than those expected for children of a similar age particularly in their communication, language and literacy skills. Most children achieve well. By the end of Year 2 and Year 6, standards in 2007 were above national averages and the 2008 unvalidated results look to be equally as good. However, insufficient numbers of pupils reach the higher levels in writing.. The school has identified this as an area for development and is now providing additional support for higher ability pupils to raise their attainment.

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupil's behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. They like their school, are keen to do well and participate in all the activities provided with great enthusiasm. This positive attitude is demonstrated in their good attendance levels. The skills-based thematic curriculum provides many rich and stimulating opportunities for learning and helps to develop pupils' lifelong learning skills. One parent noted their appreciation by saying, 'Children are taught the skills needed to learn and not just what to learn.' Their excellent ability to work together cooperatively, to share their views and respect those of others help their consistently enthusiastic attitudes, and their participation in innovative business projects all help pupils to be exceptionally well prepared for their next step in education.

Teaching and learning are good overall and enable pupils to make good progress. Well-planned lessons that provide interesting activities that are effectively matched to the needs of different groups of pupils enable pupils to remain engaged and make good gains in their learning. Occasionally, lessons are rushed or activities and tasks are not pitched at high enough levels. In these instances, challenge and interest particularly for the more able is insufficient.

Pastoral care is good because the staff know their pupils and their families well. Pupils, particularly in older year groups, understand their targets in literacy and numeracy. The school's tracking procedures are effective in monitoring the progress of all pupils. However, teacher marking is not yet consistent in helping pupils to know what they need to do next to improve their work.

The impact of the leadership and management of the school is good. The consistently good leadership of the headteacher has helped the school to overcome its past difficulties, and impacts well on raising standards throughout the school. Her creativity in the deployment of staff to address shortages in subject leadership and the innovative approach to the curriculum has put the school in a good position to improve further. The governors ably support the headteacher. Recent turnover in membership means that skills in challenging the school have yet to be developed for some newer governors.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the school for their Reception year in the term in which they have their fifth birthday. Numbers of children joining the school can be very low and fluctuate on a termly basis. The general trend is that children start school with lower than expected levels particularly in their language development. They make good progress reaching standards that are in line with expectations for children of similar ages by the end of their Reception year. They enjoy their time in school and form good and trusting relationships with adults who care for them, and with their friends. School buildings do not facilitate free-flow play between outdoors and indoors but the school ensures that all its youngest children have regular opportunities to play in the newly built playground. Routines are well established. An appropriate mixed age class curriculum is in place that ensures that the EYFS children in the class, however few, are well catered for and given appropriate learning experiences. Planning is well focused on pupils' learning and is appropriately pitched and matched to meet the needs of pupils. Detailed observations enable staff to monitor progress of children well. The new EYFS leader manages the provision well and has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. She makes the best of the facilities they have. For example, where opportunities for child-initiated activities have been lacking in creative development, a creative table has been set up inside and painting easels outside. Teaching and learning are good because the provision is constantly adapting to meet needs as and when they arise, enabling children to make good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that tasks and activities are challenging enough to help more able pupils make better progress, especially in writing, and to reach the higher levels.
- Ensure that there is consistency in teachers' marking across the school so that all pupils know what they need to do next to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards have improved since the last inspection because pupils are now making consistently better and good progress across the school. There are sometimes fluctuations in standards from year to year due to the changes in pupil numbers that have a greater impact on results in smaller schools. By the end of Key Stage 1, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2007 were above average and the unvalidated results in 2008 demonstrate a similar picture in English, mathematics and science, and achievement is good. The number of pupils attaining at the higher levels is lower than that found nationally, particularly in writing. School data demonstrates that the trend for rising standards is set to be maintained as pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 are on track to reach standards similar to those of 2008 and achievement remains good overall.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similarly good progress and achieve well because of the focused support that they receive. Diligent monitoring of progress ensures that pupils are provided with well-matched support if they are at risk of underachieving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual moral, social, and cultural development is outstanding and their Christian beliefs alongside their respect for cultural diversity contribute greatly to this. Good links with the local church are also in place. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are friendly and polite and all get along extremely well whatever their ages, taking care of and supporting each other. They talk in a highly enthusiastic way about the many things they like about school and their attendance is good. In lessons, they are very attentive, apply themselves diligently, and show outstanding attitudes to learning. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of staying healthy and taking regular exercise and fully participate in the many sporting opportunities the school provides. They feel very safe and have great confidence in approaching members of staff for help and support. Pupils contribute exceptionally well to the school and wider community. They willingly take on responsibilities such as play leaders or 'buddying' a new pupil to help them settle into school. They feel that their views are listened to and they voice their opinions confidently. The school council are proud of their influence in improving the school's environment, including the new school hall and resurfaced playground. Pupils participate in a wide range of activities and raise funds to support those less fortunate than themselves. They have recently contributed the funds raised from their Harvest Festival to children in Russia and have held a non-uniform day for the Children In Need Appeal. Pupils' are excellently prepared for the next stage of their education and take full advantage of the many opportunities to develop their life skills and knowledge of business. These include redesigning the village Guildhall, including detailed costings, sourcing suppliers and contributing to the monthly village magazine.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers' good subject knowledge is used well in planning lessons, which are usually appropriately matched to the ability levels of pupils. This engages pupils in their learning so that they remain focused and interested and make good progress. Parents commented on effective teaching helping their children 'to reach their potential' and most are pleased with the progress their children make. Occasionally, lessons and activities are not as well pitched, particularly for the more able pupils who are more than ready to respond positively to challenges set. The less able pupils are offered good support to help them make good gains in their learning. Support staff work well alongside teachers and are effective in helping pupils in their learning. There are excellent relationships with parents and carers to enable them to support their children to succeed with homework and other tasks.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The development of a skills based, thematic curriculum works well for the school organisation and contributes much to pupils' enjoyment. Parents are supportive of the many learning opportunities that the school provides through its curriculum and enrichment programmes. There are many meaningful opportunities for pupils to use their literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other subjects. For example, following a visit to Clacton, older pupils are designing and writing a tourist leaflet for the resort, combining

literacy, art and ICT skills. Visiting teachers teach music and sports so that pupils get the benefit of their specialist knowledge. There is a wide range of clubs such as computer club, athletics, dance and football, which are well attended by pupils. Trips and visits also enhance the curriculum provision. These include places of local interest and further afield, such as the London Aquarium. Older pupils benefit from a residential visit to Mersea, which helps to develop their social skills and contributes to the 'wider dimension' that parent's value.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Compliance with all requirements for safeguarding and the health and safety of pupils are fully in place. These are reviewed regularly and managed well. The recently improved playground surface has reduced the number of accidents and helps pupils to play safely. Staff have a good knowledge of individual pupils, their circumstances and backgrounds, which ensures that their welfare needs are fully met. When required, the school makes use of its links with external agencies to provide support for pupils that is tailored to their individual needs.

Pupils' progress is tracked well in English and mathematics so that any pupils at risk of underachieving are identified quickly. Appropriate programmes to support and extend pupils learning are rapidly put into place. For example, a commercial scheme to help those with gaps in awareness of letter sounds, especially when combined with other letters, has been used effectively to improve their reading and writing skills. Similarly, weekly philosophy sessions are helping to improve pupils' higher level thinking skills. Assessments in foundation subjects are not yet consistently applied throughout the school. There is a lack of consistency in teachers' day-to-day marking in helping pupils to understand what they need to do next to improve in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Many parents comment positively on the 'dynamic' leadership of the headteacher. The small nature of the school has meant that most of the strategic leadership has emanated from the headteacher, as there are no other staff in senior positions to share this. This has not meant the school has been disadvantaged as the headteacher has been highly effective in helping the staff to work together to raise standards. Clear and challenging targets have been set and met. The headteacher has been successful in creating a common sense of purpose amongst the staff who all contribute positively to a team approach to subject leadership. This is still under development but offers an effective solution to the small number of staff able to take on subject leadership responsibilities. Staff feel valued and comment on their 'corporate responsibilities'. This enhances the school's good capacity to improve. Inclusion is high on the agenda of the school although the provision has, until recently, been better for the less able than for the higher ability pupils as demonstrated in the lack of pupils attaining higher levels, especially in writing.

The school and pupils reach out to the local and wider community in an excellent manner and the school is at the hub of village life. School self-evaluation demonstrates that it knows itself and its place within the community very well. The new hall is used extensively for village events such as public meetings, village fundraising, community assemblies, local Guides and toddler groups. In addition, pupils have developed a very strong understanding of their place in the

world that extends well beyond their locality through the school's excellent provision for ensuring community cohesion. The governing body is supportive and put their expertise to good use in helping the school. Its role as a critical friend is not as strong due to the changes in its membership with several new governors having joined recently.

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?	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?	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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	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?	1
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

20 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Finchingfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Finchingfield,
CM7 4LD

Thank you for making me welcome at your school. I agree that yours is a good school. Here are some of the things I liked:

- you all work hard and achieve well
- your behaviour is excellent and you take very good care of one another
- you know all about staying healthy and know it is important to take plenty of exercise
- the teaching is good and makes your lessons interesting
- there is good leadership and management from the headteacher.

I would like you all to keep working hard so that even more of you attain the higher levels especially in writing. I have asked your teachers to make sure that the work is always challenging enough for all of you. I have also asked them to make sure that marking tells you what you need to do next to improve.

My very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Maria Coles

Lead inspector