

Ulcombe Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118631
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326862
Inspection date	25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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)	72
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	Terry Shortland
Headteacher	Vincent Hampton
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	The Street Ulcombe Maidstone ME17 1DU
Telephone number	01622 842903
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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 school is much smaller than most other primary schools. The very small year groups make the statistical analysis of data unreliable. The school provides for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class with children from Years 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and a below average proportion is eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are of White British ethnic group. There are several local sites for Travelling families in and near the village and currently 14 pupils have Travelling backgrounds. The school has received a Healthy School award and a Green Flag award as an Eco-School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. After recent leadership changes, the current headteacher has brought a time of stability and he has re-focused school improvement priorities. He is energetic, has a clear vision for the future development of the school and successfully manages several crucial roles in this small school. Several systems to make self-evaluation more robust have been introduced and provide an accurate view of its performance. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall because procedures have not yet been successful in securing better achievement for pupils. Although the small staff team works well together, there is further scope for the other leaders to be more involved in using assessment data and in evaluating the success of initiatives. Governors support the school well and help to give it a high profile in the local community. Children in the Foundation Stage and pupils in Years 1 to 6 make sound progress as they move up through the school, and achievement is satisfactory. However, there is a wide variation between the different year groups. Standards attained at the end of Years 2 and 6 have fluctuated in recent years but have been mostly average, with an above average proportion reaching the higher levels. Current standards in Year 2 and Year 6 are just below average and this is confirmed by the school's own data. Despite this, pupils are making at least satisfactory progress from their different starting points. Pupils who find learning difficult and some of the travelling pupils also make satisfactory progress in their learning. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning because teaching overall is satisfactory. Good elements of otherwise satisfactory teaching are where teachers manage pupils well and provide interesting and challenging work. However, teachers' lesson planning does not consistently show in sufficient detail the work planned for pupils of different abilities in each class. Some teachers' expectations of the pace at which pupils can work and the quality and depth of their written contributions are not high enough. The new 'creative' curriculum is beginning to show clearer links between different subjects but it is satisfactory because it is still being embedded. Enhancements are good. A notable strength is an outstanding range and variety of after-school and lunchtime clubs which widen pupils' learning experiences significantly.

Strengths in pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are reflected in pupils' good personal development and well-being, behaviour and relationships. Pupils from different ethnic groups are well integrated and all work and play together constructively. They show an excellent appreciation of healthy lifestyles and clearly know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils say how much they really enjoy school, but rates of attendance, which are seriously skewed by one or two families, have remained well below average since the last inspection. Too many pupils are late in the morning, preventing a smooth start to the school day. Pupils have a good appreciation of their part in the local and wider community and are prepared satisfactorily for the next stage of their education. The good care shown by the school is appreciated by several parents. All adults know the pupils and their families well and all pupils are cared for and looked after well. Pupils are given good levels of sensitive, individual support when required and access to other agencies for further guidance when appropriate. Nonetheless, academic guidance is only satisfactory. A good range of assessment data is collected but it is not used consistently by leaders and teachers to track clearly enough the progress pupils are making, neither is it used to set useful learning targets for pupils to help them understand how to improve. Given the recent changes, the school has a sound capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Most children start the Reception class with the knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. Children's achievement is satisfactory and the majority make sound progress to reach broadly average standards by the beginning of Year 1. Teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory because school routines and expectations are promoted well. As a result, behaviour is generally good. Children are looked after and are cared for well. However, some children lose concentration quickly when they are not sufficiently occupied or challenged. The work of the other groups in the mixed age class is integrated well, and there is a smooth transition from the Reception to Year 1. The classroom provides access to a good range of experiences and equipment and allows children opportunity to explore making choices about what they should do. There is scope for children to be more involved in helping to record the choices that they have made. Satisfactory links are made between learning in the classroom and in the outside activity area, which is being further developed. There are secure procedures for recording the progress that children are making, and assessments are accurate. Leadership is satisfactory, though development priorities are not yet sufficiently prominent in school improvement planning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress and ensure that leaders and teachers use assessment data more accurately, and involve pupils more in setting their own learning targets.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching and ensure that lessons fully meet the needs of pupils of all abilities in each class and raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Work with the small number of parents and pupils to improve overall rates of attendance and levels of punctuality.

A small proportion of the 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

In recent years, standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 have been broadly average. In 2008, the proportion reaching the higher Level 3 was slightly above average. Standards in English, mathematics and science in Year 6 have also been average recently, with an above average proportion reaching the higher Level 5. The result of the wide variations in the spread of ability between the different year groups means that currently pupils in both Year 2 and Year 6 are on track to reach standards which are just below average, especially in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels. However, the targets which the school has set for these pupils are appropriately challenging given their starting points. Achievement across the school is satisfactory. Pupils who need extra help with their learning, and some from travelling backgrounds, make sound progress because of the satisfactory support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision is good. They have a good appreciation of the need for rules and some of the consequences of not keeping them. They are well aware of

their part in the school and the wider community. The recent 'Wagon' visit helped pupils appreciate the lifestyle and culture of travelling families. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles, including why some foods are healthier than others. They have a good understanding of why they must keep themselves safe and minimise risk. They are confident that there is a member of staff they can go to if they feel worried or upset. Pupils' behaviour is good. They work well to support each other both in lessons and while at play. They are pleased to represent others on the school council and act as peer mediators. Pupils say how much they enjoy school, particularly the number of clubs that they can take part in. However, rates of attendance have remained well below average since the last inspection and too many pupils do not attend regularly enough or come to school promptly enough each morning. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for the next stages of the education and their future life choices.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers generally manage pupils well and work effectively to encourage their good behaviour. Pupils contribute willingly to class discussion and work purposefully and co-operatively when required to do so. Other features of good effective teaching are where exciting activities are provided and resources are carefully selected to interest and challenge pupils. This was seen in a Year 5/6 class where a thought-provoking collection of newspaper articles was considered with effective use of computers to interest pupils. Teaching assistants are mostly used well to support and encourage pupils in their learning. However, teachers' expectations and the quality of lesson planning are too variable, and activities provided do not consistently meet the full needs of pupils of all abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a sound focus on the development of pupils' basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. The planned approach to developing a more 'creative' curriculum is being managed well, but this is still being fully embedded across all areas. This approach is leading to an increase in pupils' enjoyment and their commitment to their work, but is not yet impacting on securing better overall progress. Personal skills, such as an awareness of safety and how to be healthy and the importance of physical activity, are promoted well. The curriculum is made interesting and relevant by additional opportunities through music tuition, and through the teaching of French across the school. There are an excellent number and variety of lunchtime and after-school clubs to involve pupils of all ages across the school. A number of interesting visits also help to make learning fun for the pupils. There are good links with the local community such as visits to local farms, the church and other places of interest.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The strong ethos of pastoral care is based on all adults' knowledge of pupils and their families. All adults are appropriately police checked and the school works hard to ensure that pupils are safe and that risks are minimised wherever possible. The needs of travelling pupils and those with learning difficulties/disabilities are assessed and managed well, but their individual learning

targets are often too general. Teaching assistants are used effectively in class to support and encourage pupils, and appropriate links are established with outside agencies, such as social services, for specialist advice when appropriate. The school is aware that it needs to continue to work closely with a few parents to encourage their children's more regular attendance and a more prompt start to the beginning of the school day. A good amount of assessment data is beginning to be collected but it is not yet being used sharply enough to track the progress pupils are making or to set clear enough learning targets to show pupils the next steps in their learning. There is insufficient opportunity for pupils to assess their own work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher leads the school well but leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The staff work well together as a team but teachers in charge of subjects are still developing their roles to enable them to have more responsibility in evaluating the success of initiatives and planning for improvement. The school has an accurate view of its performance and where it needs to improve. Self-evaluation procedures are accurate but they are not yet impacting significantly on raising standards and accelerating progress. School improvement planning is clearly at the heart of the school's work and is helpfully focused on specific priorities and the Every Child Matters criteria. However, there is scope for developments to be more closely focused on raising standards and improving pupils' achievement. Governors have a secure knowledge of the school and are very supportive. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily through the way it has analysed its contribution to the village and is beginning to extend this to more distant communities.

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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?	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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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	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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	3
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**

26 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ulcombe Church of England Primary School, Maidstone ME17 1DU

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to the school recently to see how well you were doing. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing you at work and at play. Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education.

Here are some of the best things about your school:

- The school provides an outstanding number and range of clubs and activities for you at lunchtime and after school.
- You have an excellent appreciation of what it means to be healthy.
- All staff know you well and they make sure that you are looked after and cared for well.
- You behave well in class and around the school and contribute positively to the whole school community.
- Your school plays an important part in the life of the village and children from different groups work and play well together.

We have asked the school to do a few things to help it improve further:

- Speed up the progress you make and use the information about how well you are doing more effectively, and involve you more in setting your own learning targets and explain how you can improve your work.
- Make sure teachers plan work which gives everyone the right amount of challenge.
- Work more closely with the small numbers who do not attend school often enough and improve punctuality.

You can help too by looking carefully at your targets as you complete your work to check you are meeting them.

Yours faithfully

Paul Missin

Lead inspector