

Ringshall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124604
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328178
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Jill Bavin

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	93
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	Major Mark Howard-Harwood
Headteacher	Miss Monica Gibb
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Offton Road Ringshall Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 2JD
Telephone number	01473658307
Fax number	01473657373

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school catering for children up to Year 4. Small numbers mean that Reception-age children learn alongside Year 1 children during the autumn term. Year 3 and Year 4 children are in a class together. The majority of children are from service families and many of these are involved in active service in Afghanistan. Children come and go in line with their families' postings so there is much greater mobility than is usually found in most schools. There is a higher-than-average proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of children from minority ethnic families varies from year to year but is usually lower than average. There are similar variations in the proportion speaking English as an additional language. A new headteacher joined the school in September 2008, following a period of significant turbulence with staffing. The chair of governors took up his role in October 2008. The youngest children join the nursery with knowledge and skills that are broadly average for their age.

The school was awarded Activemark in 2007.

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 and recently improving school. The new headteacher has rapidly made a thorough and accurate assessment of the school's strengths and what it needs to do to improve. Governors provide perceptive support and the chair of governors is a driving force for school improvement, in partnership with the headteacher. Consequently, much has been achieved in a short space of time. Most importantly, the school has recognised that assessment data may be unreliable and is taking steps to improve this. The headteacher has introduced new and clearer systems for checking how well children are doing. Inevitably, this means that governors are still developing their skills in analysing information that the school generates. Their willingness to actively support the headteacher's endeavours means that the school has a satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The headteacher's initiative in ensuring that assessment is more reliable means that teachers are held increasingly to account. Subject leaders' roles are more clearly defined now but staff are at an early stage in developing their skills in checking how well children are doing. Leadership and management are, therefore, satisfactory overall.

Following a fall in standards between 2005 and 2007, standards rose significantly in 2008. Assessments at the end of Year 2 indicated that children then were above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Children currently working in Year 3 are working broadly within expected levels. Evidence from children's work in lessons and in books indicates that they make satisfactory progress given their time in school and their starting points. Inspection evidence supports the headteacher's judgement that achievement is satisfactory. Her appraisal of the school's situation means that staff are beginning to recognise what needs to be done to accelerate children's learning. While the satisfactory curriculum supports expected gains in knowledge, they recognise that a recent 'pilot' in Year 2, when the teacher planned greater links between subjects, enhanced children's learning and enjoyment. Parents also remarked on this. The school has begun to address the latest requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). However, staff recognise that children's opportunities to exercise choice, and resources to stimulate independent enquiry, are limited.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have begun to work with the headteacher to assess children's learning and so position themselves to use prior attainment more rigorously to plan for progression. Recent improvements in the way lessons are planned means that teachers are better at meeting the differing needs within their class. While this contributes to satisfactory achievement for all groups of children, expectations of their work are not consistently high enough to challenge them and accelerate their learning. Relationships between adults and children are good. Pastoral care is good; consequently, parents appreciate the school's 'family atmosphere' and children enjoy school and feel very safe within it. These strengths contribute to children's good personal development. Because teachers are at an early stage of sharing learning intentions with children and involving them in assessing their own learning, and because useful systems for checking children's progress over time are so new, academic guidance is satisfactory. Consequently, care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall within the EYFS, and sometimes good in the nursery. Throughout the EYFS, staff manage children's behaviour positively and effectively, and relationships between adults and children are good. This helps children's willingness to co-operate and supports satisfactory progress. While different year groups and individual children vary, most commonly when children join Year 1, they are still working at broadly expected levels. Adults set a good example to children of how to behave and communicate. They record children's achievements and plan suitable activities to promote the next steps for their learning. Staff rightly focus on developing children's social skills and readiness to learn. There is a satisfactory focus on promoting the key skills of literacy and numeracy. Teaching and learning are not better than satisfactory because adults tend to over-direct. When teaching is good, adults facilitate children learning more through discovery. Opportunities for children to exercise choice are limited, as is access to the outdoor learning environment. The headteacher recognises that resources are not sufficiently stimulating to promote children's independent enquiry fully.

The EYFS co-ordinator leads the provision satisfactorily. She helps relationships between the nursery staff and families to get off to a good start by making home visits. Recent developments include improved records of these visits to ensure that staff have the most useful information to help children settle. There is a sound focus on children's welfare but staff do not use the key worker system fully to enhance this further. During the inspection, evidence from Nursery and Reception Class children, working in their rooms and in the outside area, indicated that they have the level of social skills expected for their age. The co-ordinator recognises that recent assessments do not demonstrate this. She has made a sound start to meeting the new curricular requirements to make greater use of children's interests as vehicles for learning. This is developed better in the Nursery than in the Reception Class.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all assessment is consistently accurate and up to date and provides a secure basis for planning, checking and promoting children's progress.
- Raise expectations and the pace of learning and increase the challenge for all children.
- Increase children's opportunities for independence in the EYFS and provide more stimulating activities, both inside and outside.
- Promote equally rigorous checking of how well children are doing in order to drive school improvement forward by leaders and managers.

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

Children of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress. When recent improvements in planning, for children to learn through greater links between subjects, combine with expectations adjusted effectively for different groups of children, children make good progress. Work in lessons and in children's books indicates that children in Year 2 are currently on track to reach broadly average standards in

reading, writing and mathematics. This represents satisfactory achievement from their starting points. Currently, children in Year 4 are on track to reach standards that are broadly in line with expectations for their age in English. They are on track to attain standards in mathematics and science that are lower than in English because of the absence of more challenging work that leads to higher attainment in these subjects. Inspection evidence indicates that their achievement is also broadly satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral and social development is good. They have a good understanding of what constitutes acceptable behaviour and report that the school is a friendly place where others may be 'silly' but not 'mean'. They are very welcoming of the steady stream of children new to the school. Those recently arrived appreciate that it is easy to make friends. Children have a good understanding of how to make healthy choices and stay safe. They feel entirely secure in school because there is always someone they can go to for help and 'because the doors are shut'. They enjoy their lessons, especially when they have practical activities. They embrace the roles of responsibility that are on offer willingly by taking part in the school council or playground friendship schemes as well as other jobs around school. They are developing a sense of responsibility to the wider community through recycling projects. While satisfactory, their cultural development is not better because it is not promoted throughout the curriculum. Given their good personal development and satisfactory academic achievement, children are soundly prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is no better than satisfactory because, in many lessons, the pace is pedestrian when teachers spend too long repeating information. Children are ready to learn because they like and trust teachers and teaching assistants and they want to please adults. Teaching assistants make a positive contribution by helping children, usually those who find learning difficult. Teachers have begun to share lesson aims with children so that they know what to expect, but this is inconsistent across classes. Taking this further and sharing precise expectations for different groups of children is rarer. Teachers have begun to share learning targets with children for English and mathematics. These are usually recorded in children's books but their usefulness is undermined because they are rarely in child-friendly language. Children's recollection of them, therefore, varies. Marking in children's books exemplifies that, mostly, teachers' expectations are too low. Too often they praise as excellent, poorly presented work. Teachers are better at planning harder work for those children who find learning relatively easy, but this is at an early stage and its effectiveness is inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school is in the process of making activities more interesting and relevant. Older children enjoy learning French. The effective use of specialist sports coaches is helping to broaden children's experience of sports and raise fitness levels. Programmes to support children with particular difficulties in literacy work well and parents are very pleased with the support their

children receive. Programmes to support higher-attaining children are not embedded in the curriculum but made available through clubs. This term, the Year 2 children have worked on a project about 'the ocean', which has inspired creative writing and observational drawing, scientific research and recording data mathematically. It has been well received by children, parents and staff. The school recognises that there is still a way to go with such developments. Governors and staff are currently exploring the financial implications of making information and communication technology more available to support children's learning across the curriculum: this is a well chosen priority. Children enjoy special events such as the recent Victorian day and working with a local artist.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Required procedures to ensure children's safety are securely in place. Staff empathise with children. They understand that many are concerned about where their parent is working. Children and families rate this aspect of the school's work highly and feel well supported by the school. Good care supports children's good personal development. A new system for tracking how well children are doing is gradually spreading through the school. It is ensuring greater accuracy in identifying children's levels of understanding and incorporating greater challenge into the targets being generated for individual children. It is, therefore, becoming increasingly effective in raising standards and achievement but it is too soon for the full impact to be evident.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and governors are successfully kick-starting school improvement. Their astute evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is providing a good basis for school development. Most importantly, the headteacher not only knows what needs to be done, she also knows how to do it. Governors appreciate the transparency of the development process and the level of increased accountability throughout the school. One governor represented the governing body when he commended the headteacher for 'giving us the platform to judge her against'. The governors are developing their roles sensitively and increasingly effectively throughout this period of change and development. The headteacher and governors are in the process of developing other leadership and management roles with a view to increasing staff responsibility for evaluating the school's work and promoting further development.

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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?	3
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?	3
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?	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	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?	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**

5 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Ringshall School, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP1 4ER

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when I visited your school recently. A special thank you goes to the children who shared their work and their ideas with me when we met in the library.

I am glad that you enjoy school and I was pleased to see how friendly you are with each other. You are particularly good at welcoming new children into school and helping them feel at home quickly. It was good to hear how well you understand about how to keep healthy and safe. I was interested in how some of you had helped to choose the new headteacher, and I am glad that you have made her very welcome. She has come up with lots of good ideas about how to make your school even better and the governors are working closely with her to help. She is encouraging your teachers to try out lots of new things this term. I know Year 2 children really enjoyed their 'ocean' work and your teachers want to make more work as interesting as this.

You behave well in lessons and make the kind of progress you should make. You mostly work hard, although sometimes the work is a bit easy for some of you. Here are the things I have asked your headteacher and teachers to do to make the school even better:

- make sure that they are always absolutely clear about what you know and how well you are doing
- make sure they give you work that helps you to do the very best you can
- give the youngest children, in Saplings and Cherries, more interesting things to do and more chances to choose and explore activities in the way they want
- share ideas more about what is working well and what needs to be improved.

You can help by continuing to behave so well and by telling teachers if your work is a little too easy for you.

Thank you again for being so helpful to me and I wish you all well for the future.

Jill Bavin

Lead inspector