

Blackthorns Community Primary School, Lindfield

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125946
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	328427
Inspection dates	5–6 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Bill James

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	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	210
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	Ian Linehan
Headteacher	Ruth Schofield
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	3 Blackthorns Close Lindfield Haywards Heath RH16 2UA
Telephone number	01444 454866

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	5–6 May 2009
Inspection number	328427

Fax number

01444 414670

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Blackthorns is an average sized primary school situated in the residential area of Lindfield. Pupils are drawn from the immediate neighbourhood and beyond. Most pupils are of White British heritage, with only a small proportion from other cultural backgrounds. A significant minority of pupils join the school other than at the usual time. A relatively small number of pupils speak a language other than English at home. The proportion of pupils with a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to the national average. The school has a small local authority funded Special Support Centre (SSC) for pupils with severe dyslexia, all of whom have statements of special education need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Blackthorns Community Primary School is a good school. This is readily recognised by parents who hold the school in high regard and feel appreciated as a valued part of the school community. 'I would have no hesitation in recommending Blackthorns to anybody' is a typical parental comment. Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding and the school sees this as an essential part of their education. As a result, pupils learn in a safe environment and grow in confidence, leaving the school as well-rounded young people who are well equipped to face the challenges of future life.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, their behaviour is excellent and they thoroughly enjoy learning. Children start school with expected levels of attainment for their age. The outstanding provision offered by the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that children make good progress in a stimulating and exciting environment. Throughout the school, pupils' achievement is good and standards are above average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they have very good support to help them improve. Pupils in the Special Support Centre make good progress as a result of good provision. Teaching is good and relationships between children and adults are excellent. Senior leaders effectively monitor teaching and provide constructive feedback for teachers. This is having a very positive effect on the quality of pupils' learning. The school has rightly identified that teachers' use of targets to help pupils improve their work is a developing area that is not yet fully effective.

The outstanding curriculum greatly enriches pupils' learning. The school's commitment to creativity, including outdoor learning for all pupils, is a key feature of the constantly evolving curriculum. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively as a tool to help understanding and learning. Music, sport and modern foreign languages are areas highlighted by the pupils that contribute to their excellent enjoyment. There is a very good range of clubs, visits and activities that greatly enrich pupils' learning and expand their horizons.

The good leadership and management have been effective in addressing the issues from the previous inspection, especially those related to improving teaching. Senior leaders are committed to raising standards and ensuring that all pupils achieve to the best of their ability. They give equal attention to promoting pupils' personal development as a fundamental priority in all learning. The role of middle managers in monitoring the quality of learning and improving provision in their subjects is less well developed. The school has a good capacity for improvement and is well supported by a proactive governing body. The school works very effectively in partnership with parents and the local community. It is at an early stage of developing plans to promote community cohesion in national and global contexts.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The provision for children's learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding and the excellent promotion of children's welfare and personal development is very much appreciated by parents. Children settle in quickly as a result of the high quality care that enables them to make good progress (and some outstanding) in a vibrant and exciting learning environment. Children's individual needs are met at all levels and as a result they are given every opportunity to develop and succeed. They acquire excellent independent skills and readily initiate their own learning. Children are confident, and they are encouraged to learn

and enjoy a wide range of experiences that help them to be so. Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. This enables children to make good progress and achieve above average standards in most areas of the curriculum. This then prepares them very well for entry into Year 1. The Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well led, with a team who are constantly seeking to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more effective use of pupils' individual targets to help them make the best progress they are capable of.
- Develop the role of middle managers in driving improvements in standards and achievement in their subjects.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop a broader understanding of communities within the United Kingdom and in the rest of the world.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

As a result of the outstanding provision for reception children, which includes carefully planned individual support programmes, their achievement is good and for some children it is outstanding. Good progress continues throughout Key Stage 1 and pupils reach above average standards in Year 2. Standards at the end of Year 6 have gradually improved over the last three years and are now above average. This consistency in standards by the end of Year 6 is an area the school is working hard to maintain. Standards in writing have improved as a result of sustained programmes that focus not only on the mechanics of writing, but also on interesting and vibrant contexts, that stimulate the pupils to write well. Progress from Year 2 to Year 6 is good and improving. There are no significant variations in the progress made by different groups of pupils in the school. More detailed tracking of pupils' progress is having a very positive effect. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They are encouraged to take a lead in what they learn, and understand the importance of being part of the local community. Pupils are polite, confident and have outstanding attitudes to learning. Their exemplary behaviour contributes much to the school's calm, well-ordered atmosphere. Pupils' excellent involvement in the school and local communities is a source of understandable pride. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to have their say on school matters through the highly effective school council. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as illustrated by their strong sense of right and wrong. The school recognises that pupils have too few opportunities to develop a better understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity within our society. Pupils trust the adults who look after them and say that help is at hand whenever they need it. Peer mediators are just one example of how the school is preparing the pupils to take responsibility and to become good citizens. Above average attendance reflects the pupils' enjoyment and their understanding that school is important. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others protected and safe. They have an excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy diet as part of a healthy lifestyle and are very appreciative of all the opportunities offered to take part in sports activities. Pupils develop a range of skills to prepare them for adult life, and older pupils especially feel well equipped for secondary school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know the pupils very well, relationships are excellent and pupils are eager to learn. Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are well planned in conjunction with the children. They are interesting and engaging for pupils and this helps them to learn. Teaching is enhanced by the effective deployment of well-trained support staff. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is not fast enough and some pupils, especially the most able, do not progress as quickly as they should. Effective assessment procedures give teachers a clear picture of how well pupils are doing and flag up those who need extra help. These pupils are given good support which helps them to overcome difficulties. The marking of pupils' work is good on the whole but there are inconsistencies. Pupils do not always have a clear understanding of the next steps they need to take to make learning even better. Pupils also have individual targets for improvement but these are not yet used well enough to ensure that all pupils make the best progress of which they are capable.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an exciting, interesting and stimulating curriculum. It is planned imaginatively and creatively around themes that capitalise on pupils' interests and build on their experiences. A key feature is the way the curriculum makes very effective use of outside areas to enhance learning for all pupils. Key skills are developed well and this is helping to raise standards in literacy and numeracy. There is a strong emphasis on pupils' personal development and promoting enjoyment in learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support learning in many subjects and topics. This approach is appreciated by both pupils and parents who say that it is exciting and fun. Opportunities for cultural development within the curriculum are somewhat limited and this is being addressed. The curriculum is enriched by a wide variety of clubs, events and visits. These provide considerable choice and opportunities for pupils to further develop their social skills, teamwork and independence. Pupils particularly enjoy the wide variety of sports activities. Music is a particular strength and all pupils learn French, Spanish and German.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of support and guidance for pupils with severe dyslexia in the Special Support Centre is especially good. These pupils have excellent programmes to help them become good learners and some make outstanding progress as a result. Arrangements to make sure that pupils are safe in school are good and are a high priority. There are effective systems to ensure pupils' safety and welfare and all legal requirements are fully met. Most importantly, pupils say that they feel safe and they understand that they receive high quality care. They are happy and are not afraid to say so. The school works well with a wide variety of agencies to provide outstanding support for pupils' well-being. This view is firmly endorsed by parents and pupils. Pupils' academic progress is now more carefully tracked and monitored. Pupils have targets in English and mathematics that are beginning to help them understand what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. The more effective use of targets is an area that the school is seeking to improve. The school runs a number of different programmes to support pupils

with additional needs. These focus not only on academic help but also address the social and emotional needs of some pupils. The school's learning mentor plays a key role in ensuring pupils are ready and able to learn.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leadership team gives a firm steer to strategic planning and has a shared commitment to raising standards and achievement. This is underpinned by the outstanding provision for pupils' personal development and well-being. Rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and thorough analysis of assessment data have led to higher expectations of pupils' achievement. As a result, any potential underachievement is quickly identified and resources targeted to make sure that pupils catch up and make the required progress. In addition, there is a clear commitment to inclusion, equality and high standards of care that enables pupils to develop as good citizens. Some middle managers do not play a sufficiently pivotal role in improving standards and the quality of learning in their subjects. Effective self-evaluation ensures leaders are well informed about the school's strengths and areas that require development. The school sets challenging targets to improve pupils' progress and these are usually met. The governors are well informed, supportive and understand the need to focus on standards. Their ability to effectively challenge the school is improving as the quality of information they receive from the headteacher gets better. The school's excellent links with the local community are a real strength. Leaders are now seeking ways to promote the national and global aspects of community cohesion through the curriculum.

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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?	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?	1
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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

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	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	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	2

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?	1
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?	3
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**

7 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blackthorns Community Primary School, Lindfield, RH16 2UA

Thank you for making us welcome in your school and for talking with us so maturely and openly when we visited recently. We really enjoyed talking to you, joining you in lessons and seeing your work. We think your school gives you a good education. Here are some of the reasons why.

- Children in Reception Year make an excellent start to their education.
- Your school provides you with lots of opportunities to decide what you want to learn.
- Nearly all of you are making good progress because you work hard.
- Your behaviour is outstanding and you told us just how much you like coming to school and learning.
- You appreciate all the opportunities your exciting curriculum offers you.
- You have an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy eating and exercise in order to stay healthy.
- Teaching is good and you like the support you receive in lessons from other adults.
- The adults at school offer you good care and support and this helps you learn.
- Your headteacher, and all the adults, including the governors, are working hard to improve your school.

We have three recommendations to help your school to get even better.

- To use your individual targets really well so that they help you make as much progress as you can.
- To make sure that the adults in charge of the different subjects provide you with even more good opportunities to learn and make good progress.
- To help you better understand communities in other places in the UK and around the world.

We were very impressed with the way you try to make yourselves good citizens. We hope that you will continue to work hard and enjoy your time at school. Pupils in your school council work really well so if you have a good idea on how to make Blackthorns Community School even better, why not tell them and they can bring it to the attention of your headteacher.

Yours faithfully

Bill James

Lead inspector