

4West Croft Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113132
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	338099
Inspection dates	15–16 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	327
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neil Blackburn
Headteacher	Andrew Brierley
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 13 lessons and 13 teachers, held meetings with pupils, governors and staff, and informally met parents and carers at the start of the day. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's plans, policies, records of progress made by the pupils and 63 completed questionnaires received from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- evidence of a recent acceleration in pupils' progress following a decline since the last inspection
- the consistency in teaching and assessment across the school and in the parallel classes
- developments in the curriculum to reflect pupils' interests and to promote their spiritual and cultural awareness
- the effectiveness of the new leadership team in checking the work of the school and responding to identified weaknesses.

Information about the school

The school is larger than most junior schools, although the number of pupils on roll is steadily falling in line with population trends in the area. Pupils are taught in mixed-ability single age classes, with three parallel classes in each year group. Almost all pupils are White British and speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that found in most schools. These pupils' needs are varied but in the main relate to emotional and behavioural and/or speech and language issues. There has been an exceptionally large and continuing turnover of staff in recent years. The entire leadership team is new since the last inspection, with the majority taking up post at the start of this school year. Around two thirds of the teaching staff have joined the school since the last inspection. The school has a number of awards, including Activemark and Healthy School Status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. It has been through a period of uncertainty and an exceptional number of staff changes at all levels, during which the progress by pupils declined quite substantially. However, the new leadership team, under the purposeful and sure-footed leadership of the headteacher, has successfully established a clear vision for the school, raised expectations of pupils and staff and together improved the quality of teaching. As a result, the progress by pupils has accelerated substantially this year. This progress is now satisfactory and, in the majority of classes it is often good, most consistently in Years 5 and 6. However, attainment remains lower than it should be as pupils have much 'catching-up' to do. There are good arrangements to provide for the pupils with special educational needs and these pupils make good progress, albeit some from low starting points. However, a minority of the more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged and make more limited progress.

The quality of teaching remains too inconsistent, although it is improving strongly. Most is at least satisfactory, much is good and there is some that is inspirational. However, teaching in a small minority of lessons remains inadequate. The school has identified the need to develop the curriculum, but progress in this has been patchy, especially in relation to planning clear connections for pupils between subjects, providing them with frequent access to computers and making their learning feel purposeful and relevant. This, together with the wide variation in the quality of teaching from one class to the next, means that pupils' experiences and progress, even in parallel classes, still varies considerably, even though this variation is diminishing markedly as the leadership team addresses some of the difficulties.

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Several aspects of pupils' personal development are good. The most significant of these is their behaviour, which is good, and at times exemplary. Pupils' moral and social development is strong, with a clear understanding of right and wrong and how to treat one another. However, there are many missed opportunities to promote their spiritual

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development or their awareness of the cultural diversity beyond Bideford. Pupils feel safe in school. This was recognised by almost all parents and carers who replied to the inspectors' questionnaire, and reflects the good care, guidance and support provided for all pupils, including those who are vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils are keen to help out around school, for example as peer mediators or eco-councillors, but there are relatively few opportunities for them to express their ideas or take initiative and the school council meets rarely.

The leadership team has introduced a number of practices, including effective tracking of pupils' progress and frequent checks on the quality of teaching. It has a perceptive and accurate view of the school's performance and a clear vision for the future. This is contributing to the school's significant recent improvements and its sound capacity to improve further. Most of the staff appreciate and recognise the improvements being made. However, it is taking time to establish a clear culture of high expectations and attainment and to embed the improved practices introduced over the last year or so. Governors fulfil their roles well and work effectively in partnership with the leadership team.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure progress accelerates consistently across the school by establishing good or better teaching in the majority of lessons in all classes by June 2011 by:
 - building on the best teaching already evident in each year group
 - ensuring all teachers implement agreed school approaches and make full use of the assessment information when planning and setting work so that it is carefully matched to the pupils' different abilities
 - ensuring all teachers have high expectations of pupils, including the way they set out their work.
- Develop a broad and stimulating curriculum framework by July 2011 that:
 - takes full account of pupils' interests
 - is sufficiently adapted for the more able and inspires and motivates all pupils
 - makes effective links between subjects and strengthens the creative arts
 - ensures the use of computers and other technologies is routinely integrated into the day-to-day learning.
- Strengthen pupils' spiritual and cultural development and ensure there are more planned opportunities designed to increase their awareness and understanding of the cultural diversity of modern Britain and the world beyond.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities and express their ideas and provide a greater role for the school council by January 2011.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Attainment has been below average for several years. This year it has risen, and pupils

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leaving Year 6, having mostly made good progress this year, are attaining standards close to the national average in English and mathematics, especially in writing, where a significant proportion exceeded the attainment expected nationally for their age. Evidence from lessons, pupils' books, work displayed in classrooms, discussions with pupils and the school's much improved assessment records shows attainment in other year groups is also rising as progress accelerates. In Year 5, most pupils are working at levels expected for their age. However, the rate of improvement is not fully consistent, especially so in Years 3 and 4, with different outcomes in parallel classes. The school is aware of these differences, sets challenging yet realistic targets and is working energetically to minimise the variations in progress. This has resulted in the overall satisfactory achievement noted by inspectors which is underpinned by the improving attainment and accelerating progress evident throughout this school year and which the leadership team is clearly determined will continue. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond well to the well-coordinated support programmes. They receive additional help from well-trained teaching assistants and make good progress, narrowing the gap with their peers by the time they leave the school.

Pupils tell inspectors they enjoy the school, especially when engaged in stimulating activities such as working as a film crew in Year 5. However, their attendance is a little below average, with more pupils than usual taking family holidays during term time. Pupils have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe. They know about such things as the firework code and internet safety and appreciate the need to eat healthily and take exercise. This is recognised by the Healthy School and Activemark awards. Pupils collaborate well in teams, often with boys and girls working happily together, and are beginning to respond well to the opportunities to reflect on their learning. These skills contribute to their satisfactory level of preparation for the next stage of education and adult life, although there are relatively few opportunities for them to develop independent and enterprise skills. Some assemblies and other whole-school or phase gatherings are too low-key, with only limited opportunities for celebration, joy and wonder to encourage inspiration or deep reflection.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum is sufficiently broad and balanced to enable it to meet national requirements, and most teachers plan jointly in their year-group teams. However, some of the medium- and long-term plans need updating and there is relatively little to ensure a clear progression of key skills. Proposals by the school to revise the curriculum have been somewhat delayed and it lacks innovative or imaginative features designed to inspire pupils by making links between subjects or providing relevant 'real-life' experiences. An exception to this is the film-making project about a tightrope walker recently undertaken in Year 5. Here pupils worked extensively and independently in small teams on producing a film, with work of a good quality linked to English and art and design whilst making effective use of computer technology. The curriculum is adapted well to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs, and this contributes to their good progress, but there is little systematic planning to extend the more able pupils.

Teachers increasingly plan jointly in their year-group teams; however, the pace and enthusiasm with which lessons are led, and teachers' expectations of pupils, varies substantially. For example, in one lesson, pupils were seen steadily writing Haiku poems obediently but with little enthusiasm. In the parallel class, pupils were being inspired to reflect on different types of poems, were thrilled to 'discover' for themselves the structure of Haiku poems and then eagerly set about using their new knowledge to write their own imaginative poems. Variations in expectations are also clear from pupils' workbooks. In most, but not all, classes, their work is neat, with clear evidence of progress during the year, but in a few instances, book covers are scruffy and work is untidy. In several classes, there is some outstanding marking with excellent detailed feedback and dialogue between the teacher and the pupils, helping to extend learning, but this is not established across all year groups or classes.

The school works effectively to provide good care, guidance and support for all pupils. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable are carefully monitored and nurtured, with effective liaison with parents and carers and external professionals. The learning mentor knows individual pupils and their families

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well and successfully helps in such things as anger management and workshops for families. The school works effectively in partnership with the local authority to improve attendance and has acted swiftly in cases of poor attendance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management at all levels are improving strongly. The headteacher and the new leadership team have introduced many good features to strengthen the performance of the school. They include the detailed and comprehensive ways pupils progress is tracked and analysed, the frequent discussions with each teacher about the progress of pupils in the class, the regular observations of lessons and checks on planning and pupils' books. These are giving the leadership team an accurate view of all aspects of the school's work and are already having an impact, as can be measured by the recent accelerated progress and higher attainment by pupils. However, some of the new practices have not been in place very long and some continuing variations in classroom practice mean that the school's capacity to improve at this stage remains satisfactory rather than good. The school has embraced additional support from the local authority and used it well to help clarify an agenda for school improvement whilst retaining overall responsibility for its work. The governors have been an important part of this improved leadership, responding to encouragement from the headteacher and also being proactive in improving their own practices. Over the last two years, they have taken on a substantial role in setting strategic direction. They are very well informed through, for example, their monthly monitoring meetings, carry out frequent and robust checks on the school's performance and hold it to account. Safeguarding policies are fully in place and the staff carry these out rigorously, for example conducting risk assessments or adopting safe recruitment practices. There is an extensive and ongoing training programme for staff and governors to ensure this is maintained.

The school is strongly committed to promoting equal opportunities, and discrimination is not tolerated. The comprehensive systems for tracking pupils' progress have been used effectively to identify variations in progress, especially between some parallel classes. The school has worked decisively to address these and reduce the variations. The school has identified the need to work more systematically towards promoting community cohesion. It has looked carefully at existing practice and produced a clear action plan to develop links nationally and globally, recognising the pupils' limited knowledge and

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understanding of communities beyond Bideford.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

A very small minority of parents and carers responded to the inspectors' questionnaire. Among those that did, there was modest support for the work of the school, with the large majority agreeing with most questions, but relatively few strongly endorsing the work of the school. Almost all parents and carers recognised that the school keeps their children safe, and inspectors agree. Almost a quarter do not feel the school takes account of their suggestions or that leadership is effective. Whilst inspectors note these concerns, it is their view that leadership is making appropriate changes designed to improve the pupils' progress and experiences, although these changes may not always be fully explained to parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at West Croft Junior School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	43	30	48	5	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	54	26	41	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	11	17	48	76	1	2	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	27	39	62	3	5	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	26	41	33	52	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	21	42	67	7	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	17	45	71	3	5	1	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	17	27	39	62	3	5	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	25	36	57	4	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	21	38	60	7	11	2	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	8	38	60	9	14	6	10
The school is led and managed effectively	14	22	31	49	8	13	6	10
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	30	34	54	4	6	2	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of West Croft Junior School, Bideford EX 39 3DE

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school towards the end of last term. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing some of your work. Yours is a satisfactory school that is improving and already has several good features. There are also some things that need to improve more. We were impressed by the way you all behave, in lessons and around the school. Sometimes your behaviour is brilliant, especially in the really exciting lessons. We saw that you are keen to help around school, such as being eco-councillors or peer mediators. However, it is a pity the school council has not met very often. You know a lot about how to stay healthy, for example by eating healthy food and taking lots of exercise. That is why your school has received the Activemark Award and Healthy School Status. We are pleased you feel safe in school. Almost all your parents and carers who replied to our questionnaire agree that the school keeps you safe. This is because everyone who works at the school takes good care of you and someone is always available if you need extra support.

In lessons, you listen carefully and get on sensibly with your work. Many of you are making much quicker progress than you were a while ago. This is because the headteacher and teachers have much better information about how well you are each doing and what you could achieve next. In a few classes, the work in your books is not as tidy as it could be. Your headteacher and all the new leaders, along with the governors, are good at keeping a careful check on how well the school is doing and thinking of ways to improve the school. We have asked them to work together with all the staff on four things to make it even better.

- Help you make even more progress with your work by ensuring teachers share their good ideas and always give you work that is not too hard or too easy.
- Find ways of giving you more interesting activities linking different subjects together, such as the film-making project we saw in Year 5.
- Help you to learn more about your beliefs and the most important values in life, and the ideas and customs of people in other communities beyond Bideford.
- Provide more ways for you to take on responsibilities around the school and the local community, including by strengthening the work of the school council.

You can help by continuing to work hard in lessons, and make sure you feel pleased with the way you have set out your work.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kerly

Lead Inspector

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