

RAF Benson Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123028
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	340260
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Doris Bell

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	173
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martyn Spence
Headteacher	Matthew Attree
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff, pupils and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, including teachers' planning, pupils' books, the school improvement plan, monitoring and evaluation records, assessment records, individual educational plans, minutes of meetings and the termly reports of the school improvement partner. The responses from the pupil and staff questionnaires were analysed as were the responses from the 71 parents' questionnaires.

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

- progress of pupils, including in Reception, and why pupils do better in English than in mathematics by Year 6
- pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe, fit and healthy, their knowledge of different communities and cultures in this country and abroad, and their understanding of how to improve their work.
- how well teachers plan and assess pupils' work to ensure they make as much progress as they can while at the school, and how the curriculum supports them in this
- the procedures the school has for safeguarding pupils at all times
- whether leaders and managers are as clear and focused as they need to be to improve teaching and learning, and therefore pupils' achievement.

Information about the school

This smaller than average primary school draws its pupils almost exclusively from the RAF service community within which it is based. Therefore, the proportion of pupils who join or leave the school part way through their education is well above average. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The school has had an acting headteacher since February 2009 because of the headteacher's long-term absence due to illness. It has been awarded the Active Mark and it holds a Healthy Schools Award. The Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of a Reception class.

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. The governors' determination to achieve stability in leadership and management, and the excellent way in which the acting headteacher rose to the challenge of bringing this about, have enabled the school to move forward on several fronts in the past year. The restructuring of management responsibilities to include phase leaders has, with support from the local authority and another school, pulled staff together to form a strong team. It has instilled in everyone a good awareness of their collective responsibility for providing suitable outcomes for pupils. Overall, leadership and management, including governance, are satisfactory. The new leaders and managers are already beginning to have a positive impact on achievement and standards, so that pupils make steady progress and attain standards that ensure that they have the skills ready for the future.

Children learn and develop well in Reception. Their good progress ensures that they are well prepared for their work in Year 1. In the rest of the school, achievement is satisfactory. Standards are average in Year 2 and Year 6. They have risen at Key Stage 1 since the previous inspection, and, while satisfactory overall at Key Stage 2, improvements in teaching, learning and assessment led to higher standards at Key Stage 2 in 2009. The school's momentum for improvement is gathering pace through accurate self-evaluation and a well-focused school improvement plan. Taken together, all of the above points demonstrate that the school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Assessment data now provides accurate information about pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding when they join the school, whenever that might be, and their progress is tracked from that point on. Assessment information is beginning to be used more effectively in planning pupils' next steps of learning, although it is not yet consistently developed throughout the school, for example by making sure that when teachers mark pupils' work, they always indicate exactly what they need to do to improve their writing.

Overall, teaching, learning and the curriculum are satisfactory. Leaders know that the proportion of consistently good teaching is an area for improvement, including raising teachers' expectations of pupils, especially of the more able, and adapting the curriculum more to meet pupils' individual needs.

The inspectors looked closely at why pupils appeared to do better in English than in mathematics. They found that standards in mathematics have improved, but pupils' ability to recall number facts rapidly is not as sharp as it might be. Pupils do better in English because their performance is pulled up by their good reading skills. However,

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their writing is not as good. This is because there are too few opportunities to write at length, and pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to use their writing skills in different subjects. The curriculum, although satisfactory, lacks a clear focus on promoting basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) within a wide range of other subjects and this hampers pupils in making faster progress.

Most pupils enjoy school and their behaviour is satisfactory. They feel very safe in school and they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, fit and healthy. Pupils respect each others' differences but have only a limited awareness of the range and diversity of culture beyond their immediate community. The school is highly aware of the emotional needs of its vulnerable community and it provides good support for them and their parents in these areas.

The difficulties the school has faced, due to changes in leadership, meant that what it had started to do to promote community cohesion faltered. There is a clear understanding of what still needs to be done, and meetings have been arranged to get everything back on track this term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' achievement by:
 - promoting basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT more explicitly in all subjects
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length using their writing skills consistently in all subjects
 - focusing pupils, including through marking, on what they need to do to improve their writing.
- Increase the proportion of consistently good teaching in the school by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of all pupils, and especially the more able
 - using assessment information more consistently to plan well for pupils' individual needs.
- Widen pupils' understanding of community beyond the camp, and of the range and diversity of cultures in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average in Years 2 and 6. Pupils leave the school adequately prepared for their future. They now have targets for writing, and their understanding of how to reach their targets is improving. However, progress is hindered by the lack of opportunities to write at length and use their writing skills for a wide range of purposes. This was evident in their literacy books and also in their topic books. Standards in mathematics have improved because of the increased opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve mathematical problems. Pupils who are vulnerable for whatever reason, including those with special educational needs

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and/or disabilities, also make satisfactory progress. Well-briefed teaching assistants and the good systems of pastoral care within the school support them in this.

Pupils appreciate and care for the world around them. They readily accept responsibility, for example as school councillors, and Year 6 pupils relish the 'Young Leaders' project undertaken with the local secondary school. They say it 'gives us confidence and prepares us for high school'. The pupils' good understanding of healthy eating was demonstrated clearly when, in their 'caf'□□, Year 1 pupils 'ordered' meals and explained why they were healthy. Pupils also understand the importance of taking regular exercise. They participate wholeheartedly in the wide range of sporting activities available to them.

Attendance is satisfactory. While most pupils enjoy school, some younger pupils say they are unhappy at times, especially when behaviour disrupts lessons. Pupils report that there is a small amount of bullying but that they feel very safe in school because they say that 'the teachers are aware of it and it's getting better'. Inspectors found the school is vigilant in this.

Pupils contribute well to their immediate community and learn how to help others, for example, through raising funds for charity. Their links with a school in Madagascar is raising their awareness of life in another country, and their work in religious education, art and music is developing in them a growing respect for different faiths and cultures. However, their understanding of the range and diversity of culture in the United Kingdom is relatively limited.

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	3
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	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

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 develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Staff respond well to advice and guidance and this is improving the quality of teaching and learning. For example, in good lessons, they are beginning to adapt their questioning better to suit pupils' responses, and to plan exciting activities that extend pupils' learning. This was evident in a session with Year 6 pupils that led to a greater understanding of what rationing really meant during the Second World War. Teachers' planning now shows what is expected of different groups of pupils, although it is not always translated effectively enough into class activities, particularly for more able pupils. Lesson objectives are clear and they are shared with pupils, but the learning expected from them is not always explicit enough, and they are not always revisited frequently enough during lessons to check progress towards them. Where this does happen, pupils' progress benefits greatly. Occasionally, teachers keep pupils together as a whole class for too long instead of moving them onto the tasks planned for them and this can make pupils restless. Teachers know their pupils well and form good relationships with them.

The curriculum is satisfactorily adapted to meet the needs of most pupils, including vulnerable groups and those whose learning has fallen behind for whatever reason. However, it does not always support the needs of more able pupils. The curriculum sometimes misses the opportunity to promote basic skills in a meaningful way by making links between subjects. For example, although pupils wrote a letter as part of their history work in Year 6, they did not always remember to use spelling, punctuation and grammar in the same way they would have done in a literacy session. Sporting, activities, along with visits, visitors and partnerships with other schools, support pupils' personal development.

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils give due regard to the heightened vulnerability of families on the base. Parents recognise this, praising, for example, the social circle and the parent-teacher relationships that support them and their children. The school is rightly reviewing its behaviour policy because it does not set high enough expectations for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities relating to behaviour.

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

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	
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The acting headteacher has a clear educational direction which links to raising achievement and he has successfully raised staff morale. His work is respected by staff, parents, governors, the local authority and the nearby school that is supporting him. He has focused everyone on raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress through the effective use of assessment information in planning, and the regular checks made on teaching and learning. There is more to do in all of this, and it is encapsulated well in a clear well-focused school improvement plan that provides a secure scaffold on which to build future improvement.

Using the relatively new information about pupils' progress, governors have set challenging whole-school targets. These have been translated into performance management targets for staff, to which they are responding well. All leaders and staff are focused on providing equal opportunities. Assigning many staff to new year groups has given them renewed impetus to do well for their pupils. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities so that they can contribute to accelerating pupils' progress further. The school's good partnerships with parents, carers, external agencies and other schools contribute to pupils' personal development and well-being.

Safeguarding procedures, including those for child protection, are satisfactory. Case studies of vulnerable pupils confirm that all requirements are met, helping the pupils to overcome barriers to their learning and personal development.

Governors are keenly aware of their duty to promote community cohesion but have had to pay more attention to sorting out the leadership and management of the school this year. As a result, community cohesion, although satisfactory, is not as far advanced as they had intended and this is why it remains an area of development.

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2

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	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

In most years, children enter Reception with the skills expected for their age. However, a significant minority have weak communication, language and literacy skills and underdeveloped personal, social and emotional skills. Partnerships with parents are good and effective induction procedures ensure they and their children settle quickly into school routines. Regular communication and an open inviting atmosphere successfully foster working and learning together and contribute to the children's good progress. Provision for the children's learning, welfare and well-being is good. When they leave Reception, children are well prepared for their work in Year 1. Standards are improving in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the proportion of children working securely within the nationally agreed early learning goals by the end of Reception is above average. The close liaison between Reception and Year 1 staff eases them gently into their next class.

Children behave well. They successfully learn to solve problems, cooperate with others and work creatively. Within the exciting well-planned activities, there is a good balance between those directed by adults and those the children select for themselves. Children form good relationships with adults and their learning benefits from adults ensuring that they learn as they play in all activities. The sensible use of praise and well-focused feedback on how to do better motivates and encourages children to succeed. Staff observe children closely, listen to them and record their learning carefully, and information gained from formal and informal assessments is used effectively in planning. Resources are good, indoors and out. They support the children's growing independence, curiosity and creativity well.

Leadership and management are good. There is a firm vision of what outstanding provision looks like in this age group, and a clear understanding of how to get there. Currently, ICT is not used as effectively as it could be by staff or children, to promote learning.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Just over half of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaires were entirely positive about the school's work and the efforts of the staff. Just under one third voiced concerns, and three quarters of those were to do with the lack of stable leadership and management in the school. Comments such as, 'The acting head is doing a fantastic job' or 'He has carried out the duties of acting head most admirably' and 'maintained an appropriate level of forward momentum' typify the responses on the questionnaires. Parents are however, concerned about the absence of a permanent headteacher. Inspectors found that the governors, with the support of the local authority, are doing everything possible to solve this crucial leadership and management issue and parents can be assured that leadership is satisfactory.

Much smaller proportions of parents voiced concerns about behaviour disrupting lessons, or children not making enough progress. Observations during lessons, at break and at lunchtime indicated behaviour is satisfactory. With regard to progress, inspectors examined the school's records, and analysed pupils' work. This showed that progress is satisfactory overall but there needs to be more challenge in the work given to more able pupils.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at RAF Benson Community 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 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 173 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	48	68	19	27	4	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	61	26	37	2	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	30	46	65	2	3	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	32	38	54	7	10	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	37	35	49	6	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	41	34	48	5	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	41	58	30	42	0	0	0	0
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)	34	48	33	47	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	37	37	52	5	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	31	40	56	5	7	2	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	32	39	55	7	10	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	23	32	29	41	11	16	5	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	44	32	45	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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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 pupils' 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.



16 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of RAF Benson Primary School, Wallingford OX10 6EP

Thank you very much indeed for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. It was a delight to talk to you, and we were particularly impressed with the mature way in which those of you who are in Year 6 conducted yourselves. We found that your school is satisfactory but that you get off to a good start in the Reception class.

Your behaviour is satisfactory. You told us there is occasionally some bullying in the school but that you feel very safe there because you know what to do if it occurs, and are confident that the staff will always sort it and any other problems out for you. Those responsible for leading and managing your school are doing everything they can to improve it for you. You could help them, your teachers and each other by always behaving well, listening to what you are told to do and trying hard to improve your work.

When looking at your work, we found that standards are improving in English and mathematics, and you are starting to make better progress because your teachers are improving how they plan and mark work. However, there are a few things we think the school could do to help you make faster progress and they are:

- Give you more opportunities to write at length, and to use your literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in all different subjects.
- Make sure that when teachers mark your writing, they show you how to improve it at all times.
- Give you more good lessons and plenty of challenges, especially for those of you who find learning easy.
- Help you to understand even more about the different communities in this country and abroad, and improve your understanding of the vast range of cultures that exist in the United Kingdom today.

We hope that by doing these things, the school will help you all to make the best possible progress at all times. Please help your teachers by always working hard and by behaving really well at all times.

Yours faithfully

Doris Bell
Lead Inspector

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