

Whitehill Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114392
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	354509
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Jon Carter

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian McAteer
Headteacher	Tracy Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Ten lessons and one assembly were observed and six teachers were seen. Meetings were held with school staff, representatives from the governing body and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at progress monitoring information, planning documents, minutes of the governing body and school improvement documentation. The responses on 77 parental questionnaires and 25 staff questionnaires were also considered.

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

- how successful the school's leaders and managers have been in raising pupils' achievement, particularly in writing
- how well the school supports pupils in their spiritual development and their adoption of healthy lifestyles
- how well the Early Years Foundation Stage is preparing children for their next stage of learning, particularly in the skills of communication, language and literacy.

Information about the school

Whitehill is an infant school of smaller than average size which serves the rural market town of Crowborough and the surrounding villages. It has recently federated with the local junior school and Whitehill's headteacher is now in charge of both schools. There is a privately run nursery on site which does not come under the remit of this inspection. The school has fewer pupils eligible for free school meals than is typically found. The school has a lower than average number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and no children with a statement of special educational needs. Speech and language needs are the most dominant of these. There are very few children who speak English as an additional language and none are at an early stage of learning English. The school is proud to have been awarded its third Eco-schools Green Flag and it holds the BECTA information and communication technology (ICT) Mark.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Whitehill is a good school. Underpinning its work is a pervading ethos of improving pupils' skills and raising their ecological awareness. As a result, pupils' attainment is above average and they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is recognised by their parents and carers, one of whom observed that the school gave their child 'a great start in life'. The quality of care, guidance and support given to pupils is outstanding and this enables them to feel exceptionally safe and develop strong relationships with school staff.

Since the last inspection the staff have been led exceptionally well by the headteacher, who has been strongly focused on improving achievement. Consequently, there is a clear and shared culture of accountability. Pupil's learning and progress is good because teaching engages and enthuses pupils. In some lessons the pace of learning is slower because too much time is spent in the class group and individuals do not have sufficient opportunities to become completely involved in the learning activities.

The school's curriculum is outstanding and makes full use of the inspiring grounds the school is set in. The wildlife area is an excellent resource for exploring the natural world and the school uses this effectively to promote purposeful connections with others in the local community. It also contributes very well to pupils' outstanding spiritual and social development as they reflect collectively on their discoveries. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the facilities for indoor learning are well organised, provide a wide variety of well-focused tasks and entice pupils to learn. However, the outdoor learning environment is less stimulating because purposeful links with activities indoors are not well established and the appearance of the area is far less exciting than the classroom. The school engages parents and carers very well and several commented that they are particularly pleased about how easy it is to speak to staff about their children's progress and welfare. Attendance is average, mainly because a few parents take their children on holiday in term time.

Accurate self-evaluation, target setting and development planning are of better quality because of the high expectations set by the headteacher. The improvements that have taken place reflect the outstanding effectiveness of the school's leaders and managers; they have secured more rigorous use of assessment information and have ensured that teachers who lead aspects of the school's work are better placed to build upon the good level of progress maintained since the last inspection. Consequently, the school has demonstrated good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Accelerate pupils' progress, through improving teaching so that more lessons are outstanding, by:
 - ensuring all pupils are more actively engaged in their learning
 - improving the pace of learning with a better mix of whole-class and independent work
 - making sure activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage in the outdoor area are of high quality and are purposefully linked to the activities provided indoors.
- Improve pupils' attendance by:
 - setting ambitious targets at class and whole-school levels
 - effectively promoting good attendance habits to parents and pupils
 - reviewing and rigorously enforcing the school's policy on authorisation of leave of absence for family holidays.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils move on to junior school, having achieved above-average levels of attainment. This represents good progress overall from their starting points. Pupils are particularly enthused by the recent focus on improving their writing skills and this initiative is having a positive impact upon the quality of pupils' writing and presentation. Pupils' achievement in writing has increased significantly this year, indicating that the school has been very successful in identifying and addressing an important issue of underperformance. Similarly, pupils' achievement in reading has improved because those needing additional help are identified and appropriate interventions are provided through the 'Reco Readers'. Pupils with speech and language needs usually make good progress and where this is not the case, further support is identified and put in place. Pupils in vulnerable groups make as good progress as their peers overall.

The school's focus on skills for learning is clearly apparent throughout all lessons and, as a result, pupils become more confident learners. This makes a very strong contribution to pupils' good preparation for their lives. Similarly, pupils develop the skills required to make good choices, this leads to consistently good behaviour and contributes strongly to pupils feeling safe in school. Pupils play an important part in their school community. The school council has its own version of the school improvement plan which helps pupils to further develop their social and moral awareness through meaningful actions and promotes an exceptionally strong understanding of ecological and fair trade issues. In this way, pupils' healthy lifestyles are seen not only in their excellent eating and exercise habits, but also in the choices they are making for the future. They seek to educate others; as one parent commented, their child 'is always very inspired by the "healthy" message and has a strong understanding of our effects on the planet'.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Pupils are known as individuals and staff ensure that the care they receive is outstanding. This is particularly true when pupils start at the school and when they make the transition to junior school at the end of Year 2. Where pupils have additional needs, they are very well supported so that their progress does not fall behind that of their peers. Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, both in the classroom and in more focused intervention groups. Here the tasks they are set are strongly linked to the theme of the work continuing in class. For example, one group were observed to develop their descriptive language while writing clues to describe mini-beasts. In this way, pupils' learning was extended and they were able to share this later with their classmates. Pupils with particular gifts and talents benefit from regular small-group sessions and teaching in these groups is exemplified by high-quality, developmental questioning.

Teachers maintain appropriately high expectations with very effective classroom and behaviour management. They are good role models for their pupils and form strong relationships with their classes. When planning lessons, teachers usually use their current knowledge of pupil progress to ensure that tasks are well matched to ability, although sometimes more-able pupils are insufficiently well challenged. Where lessons involve a high level of independent work with well-targeted support, the pace of pupils' learning is good. Occasionally, however, too long is spent on introductions on the carpet

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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and activities are not planned to involve each pupil through the task. This reduces their engagement and enjoyment and they do not then learn as quickly.

The school bases its outstanding curriculum upon its eco-friendly and fair trade credentials, ensuring that pupils develop an outstanding sense of wonder which drives their learning about the world they are growing up in. They are able to communicate energetically what they have learned about being responsible citizens, demonstrate their adoption of these principles through their work on the 'Green Team' and encourage others in their community to share their understanding and change their lifestyle.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Significant progress has been made since the last inspection in ensuring that all staff share a common vision and drive for continued school improvement. Subject leaders monitor the progress of learning well through scrutiny of work and joint planning but need to have more involvement in the monitoring of teaching through direct observation. Their role in school is more focused and purposeful with greater emphasis on quality and accountability, which is leading to clearly tracked improvements in outcomes for all pupils.

The school's good understanding of its context has focused the way in which the curriculum is structured. For example, to tackle a perceived imbalance of knowledge between pupils who have previously experienced a more diverse range of places of interest than their peers, such as museums, the school uses visiting speakers at the start of topics to help close that gap. Leaders and managers have been proactive in identifying the kind of stereotypical views pupils bring to school. They have devised and implemented links with schools in Malawi and Streatham so that pupils' understanding of community cohesion and diversity is tackled well. There is a clear commitment to excellence around equality of opportunity and eradication of discrimination as indicated in the formal tracking of the progress of vulnerable pupils, showing that they make similar progress to their classmates.

The governing body, many of whom are experienced governors, is currently rising to the challenge of amalgamation following the recent federation with the junior school. They monitor the work of the school with increasing effectiveness and have been instrumental in providing support and challenge during difficult financial times. The federation is now the main partnership for the school, but excellent networking with other schools

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continues to provide a good broad range of training and curriculum opportunities. The safeguarding of pupils is good and the way the school works with outside agencies to support pupils experiencing significant difficulties is outstanding. Governors have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities in this area. However, arrangements with a co-located, privately run nursery for ensuring continual, appropriately qualified first aid cover for the Early Years Foundation Stage are too informal.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Reception class with skills at a level below age-related expectations. From this starting point they make good progress and transfer to Year 1 with broadly average levels of skills. The caring attitudes of staff ensure that children's personal, social and emotional development is especially well supported. Parents particularly comment upon the 'great relationships' that they have with staff who give them 'fantastic support'.

Well-resourced classrooms link areas of learning well through a themed approach which stimulates and excites the children. Their skills in communication, language and literacy develop well because teachers provide a variety of activities and make clear connections to help children make use of their learning. For example, in a phonics session, children were encouraged to talk to their partners and discuss how they could use today's new sound in their writing. Sometimes, however, teachers miss opportunities to reinforce learning effectively during child-led activities and more-able children are not always sufficiently challenged.

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Though the leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is relatively new, leadership and management has helped staff develop a secure and often good level of teaching. Teachers ensure that children know their targets and they monitor children's participation in the activities they can choose by getting children to move their photograph from the card to the pot. Organisation of learning is usually good. However, there are insufficiently strong links between the themed tasks indoors and the activities available in the outdoor area. There are also fewer supporting resources on display than indoors.

Children have many opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world through the use of information and communication technology and through investigative work with staff support. Bean diaries and experiments with floating and sinking objects show their fascination with the natural world stimulated by the school environment. Where they meet new objects, they make attempts to use their prior learning to describe them and staff respond well to extend what they know. For example, a shell was described by one child as 'metally' and staff took the opportunity to talk to him about the origins of the object. This kind of support is helping children to develop good specific vocabulary.

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

An above-average number of questionnaires were received from parents and carers; they were overwhelmingly supportive of all aspects of the school. They particularly praised the open and welcoming attitude of staff. Inspectors endorse their positive views about the quality of leadership and the impact of being an eco-friendly school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Whitehill Infant 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.

The inspection team received 77 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 139 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	51	66	25	32	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	52	68	24	31	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	42	43	56	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	40	52	34	44	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	44	57	33	43	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	36	47	40	52	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	50	65	26	34	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)	52	68	24	31	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	52	36	47	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	48	38	49	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	47	38	49	2	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	51	66	25	32	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	52	68	25	32	0	0	0	0

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.



18 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitehill Infant School, Crowborough, TN6 2HW

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when we visited your school recently.

We think Whitehill is a good school that looks after you very well indeed. Your teachers are working hard to make sure you get to do exciting lessons and learn as much as you can before you go to junior school. This is why you do so well at school. We were pleased to see how well you behaved in lessons and on the playground. You told us that your school is a safe place to be and how much you enjoy all the clubs you get to go to. Your school has helped you to have a really good understanding about the world and we were impressed with how much you know about being healthy and looking after the planet.

We have asked the headteacher to do these things to help make your school even better:

- make sure everyone in class is involved in the work your teachers set and make the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage more exciting and better linked to what you do indoors
- make sure children do not miss too much school.

You can help your school to be even better by making sure you come to school every day.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter

Lead Inspector

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