

Exminster Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113201
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311149
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

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 on roll	
School	302
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alwyn Reeves
Headteacher	Bob Foale
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2004
School address	Exminster
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	EX6 8AJ
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. Most pupils come from the expanding village of Exminster but around one fifth travel from further afield. The number of pupils continues to rise. With the exception of Year 6, there are two parallel classes in each year group. Year 6 pupils, who make up a smaller group, are taught in one class, although they are frequently divided into two groups between two teachers. Almost all pupils are White British and very few are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is exceptionally high, with significant numbers having emotional and behavioural difficulties. The overall proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most of the pupils with statements of special educational needs come from beyond the school's normal catchment area, and many arrive after the Foundation Stage. There has been a significant turnover of staff, including senior staff, in the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that serves its community well. It has some outstanding features and relatively few aspects that need to improve. The care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. All the staff, led by the headteacher, demonstrate commitment to the inclusion of all pupils. They provide individuals, particularly those who are most vulnerable, with a much wider range of highly skilled support than is usually found, enabling these pupils to play a full part in the life of the school. This excellent provision contributes to all pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. Pupils are very positive about school and are exceptionally thoughtful about one another. Almost all parents appreciate the school's good qualities. One reflected many similar comments received by writing of the 'very happy and caring environment for a child to be in'. Another commented, 'All the staff have welcomed my children into the school...they are valued as individuals.' The school's comprehensive systems for checking the quality of its work give it an accurate view of its performance. It makes good use of the information gained and has improved significantly recently, following a period of decline that coincided with a substantial turnover of staff. The school is well placed to improve further.

The attainment of children on entry to the Foundation Stage is broadly as expected nationally. The most recent entrants have made good progress in their first year in school. This is an improvement on previous progress in this stage, which was largely satisfactory. Older pupils are also making good progress overall. In writing, progress is satisfactory rather than good, and for a few pupils, particularly in Years 3 and 4, it remains slow. Some pupils in other year groups do not feel confident about writing, especially when being tested. Although pupils are now making good progress overall, standards by the end of Year 6 are average, rather than above average, because some of these pupils are still catching up, having made slower progress during their time in Years 3 and 4.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are supported by an extensive team of well-qualified assistants. Teachers plan interesting activities which capture the pupils' imagination, within a broad curriculum with lots of enriching experiences. They assess pupils' learning thoroughly, frequently involving them in the process, and this helps them to match work to pupils' different abilities. Sometimes work in writing is not as well matched as that in mathematics. Pupils enjoy using computers, but the school is relatively under-resourced in this area, and so provision for developing skills is limited.

Leadership and management are good. The relatively new leadership team has responded well to the dip in progress two years ago, establishing a clear focus on raising standards, improving systems to track pupils' progress and ensuring governors are fully informed about the school's performance.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The provision has improved significantly and is now good. The current extensive team of practitioners is led well. Staff plan well together and ensure children experience a wide range of activities. They make imaginative use of the extensive indoor accommodation to set up stimulating experiences. The school is about to create an extra designated outdoor area to enable an even wider range of activities and more independent learning to take place. At present the outdoor covered area is underdeveloped. A very sensitive induction programme enables

children to begin learning from day one. Children make good progress, including those with significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities. New approaches to teaching about letters and sounds have contributed to the good progress in early reading and writing skills, and children take obvious delight in writing independently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' confidence as writers and increase the rate of progress they make in writing.
- Increase provision for information and communications technology (ICT) across the school so that pupils are able to develop all their skills in the use of computers across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils are making good progress and achieving well. The rate of progress has been accelerating over the last two years. Progress in writing has not kept pace with other subjects. It is satisfactory, and in some lessons, pupils make good or even exceptional progress, but a few pupils, particularly in Years 3 and 4, are still making slow progress. These pupils say they find writing difficult and are uneasy when they know they are being tested, despite many imaginative techniques teachers use to encourage them. There are several reasons why standards are average rather than above average. One factor is that in recent years, pupils had to catch up after making limited progress in Years 3 and 4. A few parents have identified this as a concern. Progress in Years 3 and 4 is now improving. The high proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs make good, and sometimes very good, progress given their starting points, but do not reach standards expected for their age by the time they leave the school. This lowers the overall average levels attained. The school sets challenging targets for pupils. Those in Years 5 and 6, many of whom are making rapid progress, are on track to meet their targets, with some exceeding them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils show great enthusiasm for school. The behaviour of the overwhelming majority of pupils is exemplary. Those with behavioural and emotional difficulties respond exceptionally well to the excellent support programmes. This enables them to be fully included and is a strong factor in the overall good preparation for the pupils' next stage of education and adult life. Pupils are unfailingly polite and considerate, work very hard and strive to do their best. Excellent assemblies contribute strongly to the pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are very reflective and have a strong sense of moral values and empathy for those less fortunate than they are. Most pupils' attendance is good, but overall attendance is average because there are a few pupils whose attendance remains low despite the school's best efforts. Pupils feel very safe in school and know how to take care of themselves. Pupils' understanding of a healthy lifestyle is good. They are committed to the 'wake-and-shake' sessions and the many other physical activities provided. The school recently received the Activemark award in recognition of its good work in this aspect. Pupils know about healthy eating but the contents of some of their lunchboxes do not always constitute a healthy diet. The school council is influential and many pupils very conscientiously help around the school, for example as play buddies, and when fundraising for the multi-sensory room or a national charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Effective joint planning promotes equality of experiences between parallel classes. Small class sizes contribute to the good learning. Teachers make sure pupils are clear what it is they are learning and they are good at asking probing questions and helping pupils to evaluate their own progress. There is good planning to ensure that lessons meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped very well by the large team of assistants, but these assistants are less frequently deployed to extend the learning of the most able pupils. Teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboards in every classroom as a tool for stimulating learning through visual images. However, pupils receive relatively few opportunities to use computers themselves to help with their learning. Consistently good use is made of 'talking partners', in lessons and even in assemblies, and this enhances progress through sharing ideas. Previous inaccuracies in how teachers assessed writing have been largely eliminated and teachers make good use of short-term targets to ensure pupils are clear about their next steps in their learning. Pupils' work is regularly marked, but teachers are not yet consistently implementing the recently agreed marking policy, especially in relation to marking writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has adopted new national guidance for the curriculum, providing good sequences of lessons that respond to pupils' interests and aptitudes. Teachers make good links between subjects to make them relevant for pupils and inspire them with special experiences, such as a mock Great Fire of London. Pupils have only limited access to computers to help them with work across the curriculum. Imaginative materials are used very well to promote pupils' personal and social development and the curriculum is adapted well to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils with complex difficulties. The school is implementing a plan to strengthen the provision for the gifted and talented pupils, recognising this has not been as strong. There is a good focus on the creative arts, and the recent Artsmark award recognised this. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including clubs, visits and special events that enhance pupils' experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care and support of all pupils are outstanding. All pupils are closely monitored and any special needs are identified early so that the right support can be arranged. The strong commitment to include and celebrate all pupils has been recognised by the recent Leading Aspect award for inclusion. One parent reflected other comments received, when writing, 'we are very happy with the high level of support he gets...we wouldn't want to send him anywhere else.' The staff are trained to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils, whilst minimising any disruptions to the learning of others. This they do skilfully. They work exceptionally closely with many outside agencies to ensure pupils receive support of the highest quality. Academic guidance is good. Pupils are clear about their short-term targets and value the regular dialogue and feedback from teachers about the next steps in their learning. They are responding well

to recent initiatives to help them think more about their own learning. The school rigorously implements the statutory procedures designed to safeguard pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The experienced headteacher moved resolutely to address the decline in standards that coincided with a major staff turnover, including the loss of three leaders. The new leadership team have quickly improved the way the school checks on its performance and have strengthened the focus on raising standards. Together with subject leaders, they carry out regular checks, for example analysing pupils' approach to mathematics or the quality of their writing, and report most of the findings clearly to the staff and governors. The improvement plan contains appropriate priorities and is backed up by clear detailed action plans. However, it does not always contain enough guidance about how the school will measure its success in addressing the priorities. The school has a good system for collecting and tracking the progress of pupils, and has used the information well in deciding where best to deploy staff, and what long-term targets should be set in order to help raise standards. Governors are exceptionally committed. They have effective systems for keeping tabs on the school and are well informed about its work, although they do not have a systematic approach to holding the school fully to account for its performance.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A**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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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**

1 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Exminster Primary School, Exeter EX6 8AJ

Thank you for welcoming us to your school recently. We enjoyed talking to groups of you, seeing some of your work and walking round your school. My colleague particularly enjoyed the discussions with groups of you in the sensory garden. You were very helpful in answering our questions. We are pleased you like your school so much and you are right to say that it is a good school. Here are some of the highlights we noticed.

- You are exceptionally thoughtful towards one another and behave very well, for example in your brilliant assemblies when you are all fully involved.
- In many lessons, you have a lot of fun and obviously enjoy learning about new things. You are making good progress in nearly all your work because you work hard in your small classes and your teachers are good at planning activities for you that are interesting and are not too hard or too easy.
- Everyone who works at the school cares for and supports you all exceptionally well. They know you individually and are very pleased to have you all in the school. You told us about this and so did many of your parents. The school has extra staff and many special things, like the multi-sensory room and the 'cheerful chatter group' to help support those of you who find things difficult from time to time.
- The school's leaders are good at checking on your progress and on how well everything is working in school, so they quickly find out what needs to improve, and are able to do something about it.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on two things to make the school even better.

- Help you become more confident in your writing, so that you make good progress and become proud of it.
- Improve the provision for ICT so that there are more chances for you to use computers in your classrooms as well as in the computer suite.

We are sure you will have your own ideas about ways to improve the school and will want to talk to your teachers about these.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kerly Lead Inspector