



Countess Wear Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113079
Local Authority Devon
Inspection number 289502
Inspection dates 31 January –1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Geoff Burgess

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Glasshouse Lane
School category	Community		Exeter
Age range of pupils	4–11		EX2 7BS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01392 203560
Number on roll (school)	225	Fax number	01392 203542
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Stephen Salter
		Headteacher	Jill Mahon
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an urban area in the suburbs of Exeter. It changed from a combined school catering for pupils up to the age of 12 to a primary school in 2005. Levels of social deprivation in the community the school serves are high. Almost all pupils are White British. Pupils' mobility is relatively high. A well above average number of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Nearly half of all pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities with a high number of pupils with statements of special educational need. This includes nine pupils with hearing impairment, three of whom have British Sign Language as their first language.

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, working hard in challenging circumstances to provide its pupils with an education which meets their many needs. Most children start school with very poor language, physical and social skills. Despite good provision, few reach expected levels at the end of their Reception Year. Many need help with their learning throughout their time in school. The sheer number of pupils involved, and the complexity and magnitude of their needs, present a constant challenge to the school. It is a challenge which the extremely hard-working staff meet daily with great professionalism, sensitivity and care. A parent comments, 'I don't think the school could have worked harder for my child.' The school's efforts to value and include all pupils are outstanding. A member of staff sums this up by stating, 'All of our children are special.'

Standards are below average. In some classes, with very high levels of special need, they are very low. Progress as shown by national tests improved to satisfactory in 2005, then fell back in 2006. However, in this school, that is only half the picture. The school's records show that most pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with hearing impairment, make good progress and go on to reach suitable learning targets. However, for those who have social and emotional problems as well as learning difficulties, academic progress can be slow, despite the school's best efforts. Big improvements in provision are seeing pupils' achievement growing through the school into the older classes. The achievement of pupils currently in the school is good.

By using all available funding, big improvements have been made to the school's facilities and resources. However, the school recognises that work needs to be done on the outside areas. Staff make every effort to provide activities which enthuse and motivate pupils, many of whom otherwise soon lose interest. The curriculum is good. Teaching is good throughout the school with very effective teaching assistants making a vital contribution. Pastoral care is outstanding with a wide range of provision, much innovative, to help pupils cope. Procedures to guide and support pupils academically are particularly good for pupils with learning difficulties, but they are not used consistently to fully challenge other pupils. The good overall quality of care, guidance and support helps to ensure that pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The improvement pupils make in this area from a low base during their time in school is outstanding. They love school, know how to stay healthy, fit and safe, and eagerly take on any responsibilities in the community they are offered.

Great improvements since the last inspection across every aspect of the school's work have led to pupils making outstanding progress in their personal development and good progress academically, and this shows that leadership and management are good. Along with a range of ambitious plans to expand provision, this also shows that the school is well placed to keep on improving.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations of what pupils can achieve by using the school's good assessment and tracking systems to set more challenging targets for improvement.
- Make the outside play areas as good a place for pupils to work, learn and play in as the inside environment.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Recent national test results show that achievement improved each year over the three years to 2005 from weak to satisfactory, but it fell back in 2006 in English and mathematics. This was mainly because Year 6 girls did not do well. However, the make-up and history of this year group were such that this fall was expected. This is confirmed by an analysis of the school's records and pupils' work, which also show that the improving trend in overall achievement has been restored. Better progress in the Reception class is seeing more children achieving the early learning goals by the end of the year. With good teaching, achievement has improved year on year in the younger classes. This improving trend can now be seen in most year groups. Pupils with learning difficulties, including those with hearing impairment, make good progress. Achievement throughout the school is now good.

Standards in Year 2 have been just below average in recent years with writing usually the weakest subject. In Year 6, they have been well below average in all subjects. In 2006, with many more pupils with learning difficulties in Years 2 and 6, standards were very low in both year groups. Current standards in Years 2 and 6 are below average. Girls usually reach higher standards than boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is very successful in enhancing pupils' personal development with all adults acting as excellent role models. Parents agree, commenting that it is 'definitely one of the school's strengths'. As a result, pupils enjoy school and attend very regularly. A key feature of the school's approach is to seek pupils' views and involve them in making decisions. School council members are proud that they make a positive contribution to the school as well as raising funds for charity. Older pupils take their reception duty responsibilities very seriously and are real ambassadors for the school. Although literacy and numeracy standards are below average, improving information and communication technology skills and the school's excellent work to enhance pupils' self-esteem and confidence, prepare them well for moving on to secondary school and later life. This is particularly important for pupils with hearing impairment. Behaviour is generally very good with pupils taking responsibility for their own learning through a personal behaviour plan. Occasional 'wobbles' are exceptionally well managed. Pupils support each other well and show that they understand other people's needs. Pupils do not feel that bullying is an issue but know that adults will support them if there is

a problem. They have a good understanding of the benefits of healthy eating and the 'daily bounce' activity session contributes greatly to their physical well-being. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school's focus is on learning, and on making sure that everything it does helps pupils to learn better. Good teaching is the crucial part of this. Recognising that many of its pupils are not natural learners, the school has worked very hard on improving their confidence and attitudes to learning to very good effect. Staff ensure that activities are seen as 'fun' and provide plenty of skilled adult help, so that pupils stay on task and any potential behaviour problems are minimised. Consistently valuing and openly celebrating any success, however small, means that all pupils see learning as a positive experience. Involving pupils in a conversation about what it takes to learn ensures that they understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. However, better use could be made of marking to help pupils to know how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Reading, writing, mathematics and personal development are necessarily emphasised, but the effective use of links between subjects ensures that all aspects of the curriculum are well covered. However, more use could be made of information and communication technology in this area. Pupils enjoy lessons because the activities are interesting and relevant. They are enriched by visits and visitors to school. Good use is made of the local environment to support learning and Years 3 and 6 benefit from a residential visit. Pupils are very keen to join in with any extra opportunities provided during and after school. A 'signing' club for pupils and staff has a positive impact on communications and the inclusion of hearing impaired pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The high quality of the care provided is shown in the well-being, confidence and self-esteem of pupils. The school is a harmonious community where pupils feel valued and safe. One parent writes, 'My child feels special and cared for.' Another parent comments, 'The system for rewarding good learning and behaviour choices is excellent.' Everything possible is done to safeguard and protect pupils. The school's excellent partnership with a wide range of agencies provides much appreciated support for vulnerable pupils.

Pupils with learning difficulties are provided with good academic support and guidance. The support hearing impaired pupils receive is vital to their success. However,

information gained from the good procedures to track the progress of other pupils is not always used well enough to raise pupils' expectations of what they can achieve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

People who have known this school for some time say that the transformation they have seen in recent years has been 'truly amazing'. Tired, underused buildings have become a vibrant 'Aladdin's Cave' of places to learn and work. Staff who were coping and doing their best have become a very effective team of good professionals who are beginning to believe that anything is possible. Pupils who endured school and had low expectations and self-esteem now enjoy school immensely and have the confidence to make good choices.

The catalyst for all this has been the headteacher, whose contribution has been phenomenal. To quote a parent, 'The leadership of the head is inspirational.' Her ongoing analysis of what needs to be done to improve is first class. Her ambitions for the school are such that, despite all the improvements, she will not be satisfied until every pupil is achieving as well as they can. With this in mind, the school is already thinking of ways of meeting even more challenging school targets.

Key to her success has been her ability to involve everyone in the process of change by empowering staff and pupils to take responsibility for their own development. A colleague comments, 'Adults and children have the opportunity to grow and learn.' Consequently, she is now very well supported by all staff carrying out their responsibilities very efficiently. The governing body's role in sustaining and supporting the school through a period of considerable change has been vital.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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?	2

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.

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	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Mrs Haywood and I would like to tell you how much we enjoyed our two days in your school. Everybody was very friendly and chatty, and we particularly enjoyed the garlic bread some of you shared with us. What really impressed us was how well you all get on together and how good you are at looking after each other when things do go a bit wrong. The school is really well cared for with all the lovely displays and the floors gleaming. It runs like clockwork. We think that Countess Wear Primary is a good school.

These are the good things we found:

- You behave really well, love learning, work hard and always do your best.
- We agree with you that your teachers and helpers are good at making sure you learn well.
- The things you do in class are interesting and fun.
- Everybody is special - you and all the grown-ups make everyone welcome at the school and include them in all there is going on.
- You know you are safe and that there is always someone to turn to.
- We know you appreciate all the grown-ups do to make sure your time in school is as happy as possible.
- Your headteacher is brilliant at making things happen, and making it possible for everyone to do their best.

To make things even better, this is what we have asked your school to do now:

- If you were all set tough learning targets, we know you would enjoy meeting the challenge and do even better than you are doing already.
- There is plenty of space outside but you told us that it is a bit boring. We would love to see everybody working together to create an exciting place for you to work and play in.

We hope you enjoy the rest of this term.