

Benington Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117389
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312599
Inspection date	8 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Newell

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jenny Cobb
Headteacher	Mrs Gillian Hollingsworth
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Walkern Road Benington Stevenage Hertfordshire SG2 7LP
Telephone number	01438869254
Fax number	01438869254

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- boys' achievement in writing and girls' achievement in mathematics
- how incisive is target setting, tracking and academic guidance
- the involvement of pupils in their own learning and target setting.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, sampling of pupils' work, assessment, tracking and target setting information, evidence of the impact of different initiatives to raise standards further and discussions with pupils, key members of staff and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessment of its performance, if a little modest, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Benington is a smaller than average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of pupils who need extra support with their learning is broadly in line with the picture nationally, although there are no pupils with a statement of special educational need. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. Of the small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, none are at an early stage of acquiring English. The school has gained Healthy Schools accreditation and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Benington is an outstanding school. The school has many excellent features that form a winning combination in providing a high quality of education where pupils thrive both academically and socially. When pupils leave, they are very well equipped to tackle the next challenges in their educational lives. At the heart of the school's work lies a shared vision and commitment amongst all staff not to rest on previous successes but to set the bar of expectation ever higher. This, and its track record of accomplishment since the last inspection, put the school in excellent stead for the future.

The modest yet outstanding leadership of the headteacher has been instrumental in driving the school forward and she has brought staff, pupils, governors and parents with her. Her determination to make Benington an outstanding school has become a reality and the school fully deserves the high reputation it holds within the local community. A high percentage of parents speak highly of the school and a comment made by one parent, 'An excellent school where children are at the centre of whatever the school does,' reflects the views of many.

Children start school with levels of attainment that cover a wide ability range but overall are a little below expectations. A number of pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 to enter into the Hertfordshire middle and upper school system. Data indicates that for the smaller, but increasing number of pupils that stay on to Year 6, standards when they leave are significantly above the national average and that pupils have made excellent progress from their starting points. The very challenging targets the school sets are at times exceeded. Standards in writing, particularly for boys, have improved significantly as have girls' standards in mathematics. This is because the school tackles weaknesses with rigour and innovation and leaves no stone unturned in its efforts for sustained improvement. Add to this the school's very good procedures for assessing pupils' progress and holding teachers accountable for the achievement of pupils in their class and it is evident why pupils' learning accelerates at such a rapid rate.

Pupils have a very good awareness of their individual targets and the National Curriculum levels they are working at. Although they assess their own work and increasingly older pupils assess that of their classmates, pupils are not yet fully involved in setting and reviewing their own targets. The last few months has seen improvements in the quality of marking of work because pupils are being provided with incisive pointers as to what they need to do to improve.

It is no coincidence that pupils' achievement and progress are matched by excellent teaching and learning. Much of the teaching is very lively and energetic and makes learning interesting and full of fun. Work is very well planned to match the differing abilities of the pupils who are left under no illusion as to what is expected of them. A strong emphasis is given to pupils learning through investigations, problem solving and finding things out for themselves, challenges that pupils relish and respond to with gusto. Just occasionally, not enough is done to ensure that pupils listen attentively enough to teachers and to each other, but this is the exception rather than the norm. Across the school, teaching assistants contribute significantly to the quality of pupils' learning.

A significant strength of the school is undoubtedly the pupils. Their behaviour is excellent and their enthusiasm infectious. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in the very high attendance rates. Pupils have a good understanding of what is needed to follow healthy lifestyles and an excellent awareness of how to manage risk in their lives. Through the school council, fundraising, the buddy system, the recycling scheme and their very active involvement and help in organising

events such as the summer fair, Harvest festival and Christmas concert, pupils readily demonstrate their commitment to the school and local community.

The richness and vibrancy of the curriculum adds greatly to pupils' enjoyment and achievements. Music, drama, sport and personal and social education are all high profile. Pupils play musical instruments such as the cello and trumpet and French is taught across the school. The school participates successfully in inter-school competitions and its excellent links with other providers enhance pupils' learning. A wide array of extra-curricular clubs including choir, many sports, art and computers together with a variety of visits and visitors help put the icing on the cake. The school has rightly identified the need to broaden pupils' multicultural awareness and horizons through more first-hand learning experiences. Strengths in academic guidance have already been alluded to and these are added to by the strong sense of pastoral care and safeguarding that wrap around the school. Pupils feel very safe, secure, valued and respected and are adamant that bullying is a very rare occurrence. Relationships are excellent and pupils know they have a voice that is listened to. All factors that help pupils' individuality, confidence and self-esteem to flourish.

Everybody at Benington plays their part in moving the school forward and the headteacher is the first to recognise the contributions of the senior team and other teachers. They have contributed much to making the school what it is and their role in monitoring teaching and achievement continues to develop well. Governors have an excellent grasp of where the school is at because of their active involvement in all aspects of school life and because they ask the searching questions when needed. Added together these leadership attributes indicate the school is in safe and accomplished hands.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage. The excellent teaching and management of provision ensure that all children make exceptional progress and reach standards a little above expectations by the end of the Reception year. Adults work together very well in providing activities that are exciting, challenging and fun. An excellent emphasis is given to developing children as inquisitive and independent learners but not at the expense of the direct teaching of key skills. Ongoing assessment and the annotation of children's work are outstanding. All these attributes take place in accommodation that is a riot of colour and an atmosphere where children are totally engrossed and captivated in their work. Improvements to the outdoor accommodation have been made with further additions planned to add even more fun to learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils play an active role in setting and reviewing their own targets for improvement.

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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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

9 July 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Benington CE Primary School, Benington, Stevenage, SG2 7LP

You will probably remember that I visited your school not too long ago and I am now writing to let you know what I found out. Before I do, I would first like to say thank you for making me feel so welcome and making my visit one that I will remember for a long time. I have told your teachers how you were all so helpful and polite. Through my discussions with you it was great to hear how much you love coming to school and how much fun you find it. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel in school, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried.

I found so many wonderful and impressive things about Benington School that I have to say it is an outstanding school! Teachers and other staff make teaching and learning challenging and fun and help you to achieve exceptionally well. The curriculum, the clubs, the visits and visitors are all excellent. The way in which the school helps you to keep safe and healthy and how it cares and supports you are all excellent. Mrs Hollingsworth is an outstanding headteacher and together with all the staff and governors, makes the school such a great place to learn.

There is another tremendous strength of the school that I have not mentioned yet. That is you, the children. What great ambassadors for the school you are! I was so impressed with your behaviour, your enthusiasm, how you know a lot about keeping healthy and the way that you make a difference in school through the school council and other examples. Well done!

Even outstanding schools like yours can get better. I have asked your teachers to give you the opportunity to set some of your own targets for improvement. Mrs Hollingsworth, the staff and governors want the school to continue to be successful, and I know you will play your part by continuing to behave well and work hard. I wish you every success in your future. It was a pleasure and privilege to meet you.

Martin Newell

Lead inspector