

Huxley CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111286
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325338
Inspection date	24 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	31
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Ankers
Headteacher	Mrs Lynda Herrick
Date of previous school inspection	26 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Church Lane Huxley Chester Cheshire CH3 9BH
Telephone number	01829 781296
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Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The pupils who attend this very small village school come from a wide range of backgrounds. A smaller than average proportion has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All pupils are of White British heritage. There are two mixed-age classes, which mean that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) children in Reception year are taught alongside pupils from Years 1 and 2. There is an arrangement with a neighbouring primary school for pupils to attend an after-school club on its premises. The school has been awarded the Artsmark Gold for its promotion of the arts, an Activemark for its contribution to sports, the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark and the National Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Since its last inspection, the school has maintained its good overall effectiveness and ensured that pupils' personal development, their curriculum and the quality of the care, guidance and support they receive are outstanding. The school is well managed with the headteacher providing very good leadership and personal example to pupils and staff. Parents are vociferous in their praise for the school, highlighting, 'Such a lovely, supportive, family atmosphere' as the key feature that helps their children to be settled and to enjoy school so much.

Pupils are articulate, confident and responsible. Because they are taught in mixed-age classes, older pupils readily make friends with and look after younger ones, helping them in the playground and when they eat lunch together in the hall. The school ensures that pupils are outward looking by providing them with many opportunities to visit urban areas, theatres, concerts and museums, and to take part in residential stays. The extensive school grounds provide pupils with many chances to take regular exercise, to sit and chat quietly and to extend their learning outside in the wildlife area, the 'pavilion' classroom or the pond area. The recent addition of a spacious hall has enhanced provision for physical education (PE) and provided parents and other members of the local community with a fine facility in which to hold village activities and events.

Pupils are outstandingly well cared for. They are confident that they are safe and that relationships are extremely good because, 'Teachers care about you so much and everyone gets on well together.' Pupils make good overall progress. They enter the school with broadly typical skills and often reach above average standards by Year 2 and Year 6. Any national comparisons of standards are statistically invalid given the very small number of pupils subject to national tests and assessments each year. However, recent trends indicate that pupils often make the best progress and attain the highest standards in reading. These are invariably exceptionally high. Key Stage 2 pupils' standards are not as strong in mathematics nor do they make such rapid progress as in English. The school regularly earns the Artsmark Gold Award which reflects high standards in art, music and drama. Pupils' ability to write award-winning poetry is a powerful feature of their writing.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers, ably supported by their teaching assistants, manage mixed-age classes well, ensuring that pupils of all abilities work at tasks that appropriately challenge them. Pupils particularly enjoy and benefit from opportunities to explore problems and to devise their own investigations. This is particularly evident in science, with pupils creatively using the school grounds as a resource for testing out their hypotheses about the most abundant type of flower or the number of different trees in the school field.

The school has a generally realistic view of its own effectiveness, which enables it to plan pragmatically for improvement. There is strong teamwork, which means that all staff play an integral part in the day-to-day running and development of the school. Much of the success of their work is due to very effective guidance by the headteacher, who has the great confidence of parents and governors. Governance has continued to improve well over the last three years and now provides a knowledgeable support to the school. The continued improvement since the last inspection is evidence of the school's good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children are introduced in the Reception class in a well planned phased manner. There is a very productive liaison between the school and the local pre-school, which results in children entering Reception comfortable with their surroundings, knowing the staff who will be teaching them and the other pupils in the mixed-age class they join. They are helped to develop and achieve well in all areas of their learning, with some entering Year 1 with skills well in advance of those expected. This is particularly so in their personal, social and emotional development, a strength which is reflected in their outstanding personal development in Key Stages 1 and 2. Adults set tasks which encourage children's independence and cooperation. Children are taught letter sounds systematically and basic number well. Some limitations in the accommodation result in children not having constant access to their outside area, which means that the children's EYFS curriculum is good rather than outstanding. Adults record children's development meticulously, which enables them to set tasks that match children's needs well. The EYFS is well led and managed. Many parents attest to this with copious praise for how well their queries or concerns are dealt with and how happy their children are at school. This also reflects outstanding welfare in this key stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the Key Stage 2 pupils attain as high standards and make the same very good progress in mathematics as they do in English.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well overall. Standards vary from year-to-year given the tiny numbers taking national tests and assessments. Nevertheless, pupils invariably reach high standards in reading, which is testament to their commitment and to the careful and systematic way in which letter sounds are taught in the EYFS and in Key Stage 1. Although standards and progress are generally uniform in Key Stage 1, in Key Stage 2 pupils do not make as rapid progress in mathematics as they do in English. The school's own analysis reveals that these pupils have some difficulty applying their mathematical knowledge to solve problems. A particular strength in pupils' writing is their poetry. This skill has been regularly acknowledged, with the school and individual pupils being awarded top prizes in the county poetry competition. In contrast, pupils' handwriting in their everyday work does not reflect its quality in their handwriting books. Pupils who have more difficulty learning than most receive effective care and support which enables them to make similar progress to other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

There is no question that the close family atmosphere prevalent in the school encourages pupils to be considerate, to express their opinions confidently and to overcome shyness or any lack of self-esteem. Without the need for formal titles, older pupils naturally assume responsibility, for example, organising the hall for assemblies and overseeing younger ones in the playground and when they eat in the hall. Members of the school council are nominated, voted into office, set out their own 'manifesto' and manage their own budget. This is a good example of how well the school promotes pupils' very strong contribution to the school community, their very

good sense of citizenship and their understanding of economic matters. Pupils throughout the school behave very well and have very positive attitudes to all the school offers. Their excellent attendance and punctuality and their willingness and good ability to work in teams equip them very well for the world of work. Pupils have contributed to the school's National Healthy Schools Award and its Activemark by demonstrating a keen awareness of how to eat sensibly and by participating enthusiastically in PE lessons and in the many sports activities organised by the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are taught well. They enjoy learning and their very positive attitudes mean that most work enthusiastically in lessons. Underpinning the good quality of learning are the warm relationships which exist between pupils, and between adults and pupils. These result in pupils having the confidence to learn from their mistakes and to question teachers when they are uncertain. Overall, staff set work in the mixed-age classes which suitably matches pupils' ages and abilities. A parental comment, endorsed by several is that, 'It (mixed age class teaching) must be very challenging but the quality is good.' A very positive feature, which pupils find stimulating, is the specialist teaching in French, PE, music and art. Visiting artists contribute significantly to the high standards pupils achieve in the subject. Occasionally, the pace of learning drops for pupils who work independently and are not the immediate focus of an adult's attention. This is because the expectations of the quality of work these pupils are expected to complete in a given time period are sometimes not made explicit enough. Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully included in lessons and given the appropriate help to enable them to make good progress. This was evident in a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson where the patient guidance of the teaching assistant helped pupils gain a clearer understanding of the properties of common two-dimensional shapes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The excellent curriculum is a major factor that contributes to pupils' good achievements and to their outstanding personal development. For such a small school, the range of experiences and opportunities provided for pupils is exceptional. These include many visits to venues which promote pupils' deeper understanding and great enjoyment of the arts. The impact of these, together with influence of visiting artists, musicians and theatre groups is evident in the school's Artsmark Gold Award and in pupils' excellent ability in singing, drama and their art and design work. Effective links with individuals and groups from minority ethnic backgrounds raise pupils' awareness of the traditions, art and faiths from countries around the world. There are lots of interesting things for pupils to do at lunchtime and after school, many of which provide pupils with opportunities to exercise, learn new skills and develop leisure interests. The school's very good partnership with other schools and with the local community also give pupils access to video conferencing, enables them to contribute to their community and to mix with pupils of their own age. Residential stays, which all pupils attend, including Reception children, are thoroughly enjoyed and make a telling contribution to pupils' sense of responsibility, their independence, to team building and to problem solving.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The excellent quality of the care and support provided for the pupils is at the heart of the school's Christian ethos. Parents are in no doubt about how well their children are cared for and supported. Among typical parental comments are, 'There is such a lovely family atmosphere, the advantage of a small school,' 'The children are so confident and content,' and, 'Staff know the children so well and treat them as individuals'. I never thought I would hear my six-year-old read out a passage in the church.'

The procedures for protecting and safeguarding pupils are in place. The school has very good links with outside agencies, which provide specialist support for any pupil with a particular difficulty or need. The systems to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who have a particular gift or talent, for example in the arts and sport, are effective in helping them to achieve well. All the actions and programmes to promote pupils' personal development and well-being are highly successful. Close links with parents enhance pupils' personal and academic development. The systems the school uses to track pupils' progress through the school are thorough and for the most part helpful in enabling teachers to meet pupils' academic needs and, therefore, to make good progress. Parents appreciate the information they receive about their children's progress as a result of informal discussions with class teachers and through more formal progress reports and discussion evenings. They welcome being party to their children's targets in order that they can support their work and improvement at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. In such a small school a team approach to management is predominant, with a small number of staff sharing many responsibilities. However, the very experienced headteacher gives a very strong steer to staff, provides a very positive role model through her teaching and has the great respect of parents, governors and the local community. All areas of the school's work are systematically evaluated through regular checks on pupils' work and detailed analysis of test results and of teachers' assessments of pupils' standards and progress. Close attention is paid to the needs of staff to update their skills and relevant training provided. Challenging targets for pupils' and teachers' performance are set and in most cases met. It is only in enabling Key Stage 2 pupils to meet their targets in mathematics that the school has been less successful. The school has forged many close partnerships which have benefited the pupils academically and personally. The fruitful partnerships with the church enhances pupils' spiritual development considerably and that with local high schools contributes very well to aspects of pupils' achievements in French and to their comfortable transfer to secondary education.

Governors have developed their role well since the last inspection, particularly in their closer involvement in checking on the effectiveness of the school's provision. They make regular visits to liaise with subject leaders and to observe pupils at work. Their good governance is also evident in prudent financial management. Leaders and managers make an outstanding contribution to pupils' excellent personal development, to their vibrant curriculum and to the high quality of care and support pupils receive. Together with pupils' good overall achievement these qualities mean that the school offers good value for money.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	2
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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

Inspection of Huxley Church of England Primary School, Chester, CH3 9BH

I very much enjoyed my recent inspection of your school. You made me feel very welcome and I was most impressed with your behaviour, how polite and friendly you were and how confidently you chatted to me. You and your parents told me how much they liked the school, particularly the way in which you are so well looked after, how much the school helps you to grow into nice young people and that you get on well with your work.

I agree with you and your parents that you go to a good school. It does quite a lot of things brilliantly. Apart from looking after you so well and helping you to become so confident and responsible, it also gives you lots of wonderful experiences, including visits out and interesting visitors. These especially help your art, music, drama and sport and there are lots of interesting things to do at lunchtime and after school. Your headteacher is always trying to make things even better for you and your teachers help you to learn well.

One of my jobs is to work out ways in which I think the school could improve even more. I have, therefore, asked your headteacher and the other people who run the school to make sure that those of you in Years 3 to 6 do as well with your work in mathematics as you do in English.

Thank you again for your welcome and I hope that you continue to enjoy school and continue to work hard, especially to improve your mathematics.