

Aslacton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120779
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	327360
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Brown

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	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	71
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 Mark Worley
Headteacher	Mr Steven Boyce
Date of previous school inspection	12 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Church Road Aslacton Norwich Norfolk NR15 2JH
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is much smaller than average sized school. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. Around 4% are entitled to free school meals, which is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) takes in children in the September of the academic year in which they have their fifth birthday, but because of the small numbers involved, they are taught alongside the Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. There is no substantive headteacher in post and an interim headteacher, appointed by the local authority, is currently running the school.

The school gained an Activemark award in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Aslacton Primary School has had three difficult years since it was last inspected. Staff illness and turnover have disrupted the day-to-day running of the school and the education of the pupils, particularly those in Key Stage 2. The main issues for improvement identified at the previous inspection have not been addressed. Indeed, there has been a substantial deterioration in these areas and standards at the end of Key Stage 2, in the essential areas of writing and mathematics, are now unacceptably low. Standards for pupils currently in Key Stage 2 remain inadequate overall. The school has lacked clear direction, guidance and adequate support over a long period of time, despite the efforts of the staff and governors to hold it together. Even at the start of the current academic year there was no substantive headteacher in post. At this point, the local authority then arranged for a partner headteacher from a neighbouring school to assist. This headteacher quickly realised that there was an even greater need than was first thought and much more substantial help was required. As a result, an interim headteacher was appointed mid way through September. A lot of work has been done since then and some positive systems put in place. In the last month, pupils have been given targets for their learning, which they have started to use, but it is too early for these to show any significant impact on accelerating their learning. Teachers' expectations of the pupils are too low and as a result, pupils are too optimistic in their assessment of the progress they have made towards these targets.

There are some positive features to the school. Children get a good start to their education in the EYFS, and thrive in Key Stage 1. There is now evidence of pupils' learning beginning to accelerate towards the end of Key Stage 2, but there are significant gaps in their skills, knowledge and understanding. While there are examples of good teaching, the overall quality of teaching is too variable and its impact on pupils' learning is inadequate. Teachers, like the parents, are now much more positive about the school but teachers are only just beginning to adjust to their new leadership roles and responsibilities. Pupils' personal development has been less affected by the turmoil at the school and in many respects it is good. The great majority of pupils behave well and the new school council is already having a positive impact and bringing about change and improvement. However, because the basic skills that pupils need for the next steps in their education are inadequate their personal development is only satisfactory overall.

The crisis at the school is clearly understood by the parents. One wrote. 'Without a headteacher the school falls apart and is not a thriving community'. However, a third of those who responded to the inspection questionnaire are now delighted about the transformation since the arrival of the interim headteacher. 'A breath of fresh air', is a common phrase they use. However, this is not sufficient. The future leadership at the school is still uncertain. Governors have wisely extended the tenure of the interim headteacher to the end of this academic year and the partner headteacher continues to give support; but there is no clear plan for what happens after this year. There are limited options available but no decision has been reached. The leadership, management and governance of the school are inadequate and along with the continuing uncertainty, the school lacks the capacity for sustained improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their education in the EYFS. Their achievement on entry is in line with the expected levels for their age and good teaching ensures that children make good progress. As a result, by the time they move into Year 1 standards are above average. The friendly atmosphere ensures that children settle well, knowing that they can approach older children or adults for help if needed. They are happy to come to school, confident to talk about their work and enthusiastic about learning. The children are eager to take part in activities, many of which they initiate. They enthusiastically act out stories, and are beginning to recognise words, sound out letters and count for themselves. The leadership of the EYFS is good. Effective planning ensures that all six areas of learning are covered well. Good use of assessment strategies to track children's progress ensures that their individual needs are well met. The immediate outdoor learning environment is limited, and staff are rightly looking at ways of improving this. However, they do make good use of other areas of the school grounds such as the sensory garden to ensure the children get a broad range of learning experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in pupils' writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2.
- Raise teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement at Key Stage 2.
- Fully involve pupils in understanding their own learning development.
- Create a leadership team capable of developing, monitoring and evaluating the work of the school in order to raise and sustain the achievement and standards of all pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

At the previous inspection standards were above average in English, mathematics and science. While this is still true of pupils at Key Stage 1, it is no longer the case at Key Stage 2. Pupils at Key Stage 1 have consistently made good progress, attaining levels in reading, writing and mathematics that are at least above and at times well above average. At Key Stage 2, this pattern is reversed and standards in English, mathematics and science have fallen for the last three years. At Year 6, test results in 2008 were very low, with only just over a third of the pupils reaching the expected level in writing and only two-thirds in mathematics. When this same group of pupils were assessed at the end of Key Stage 1 four years previously, their attainment in writing and mathematics was well above that expected. This represents a significant decline in both achievement and standards. Standards in reading and science have not fallen as far but too few pupils attain the higher levels so that when compared to national averages, pupils are still underachieving in these subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

While many aspects of pupils' personal development are good, overall, this is no better than satisfactory because the level of skills needed for the next steps in their education are too low. Attendance is good. Pupils want to come to school and enjoy being there. Almost all pupils are well behaved and teachers' expectations in this respect are made very clear. Pupils take responsibility for their own actions and genuinely care about their school and their friends. They work and play together well. They feel safe and secure and know who to turn to for help

when required. They have a good understanding of keeping healthy and like the opportunities they have to participate in sports activities. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community and are active participants in the new school council. The council members have already helped to bring about improvements and have more ideas for when the new building extension is opened in the New Year. Teachers plan lessons so that pupils learn to work together in pairs or small groups and help each other, which they do well. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good while cultural development is satisfactory. They have a good understanding of village life but most are sheltered from the wider world and even the older pupils have many misconceptions about towns or even the nature of high school. Their contribution to the wider community beyond the school is more limited. A strategy for developing wider community cohesion is not developed and this area of work has not been a priority in the school. Pupils are not well prepared for the next stage in their education as their essential skills in writing and mathematics are too low.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is characterised by inconsistency. In part, this is the result of frequent changes in staff, a fact that was mentioned by many parents in their inspection questionnaires. It is also the result of inadequate guidance and support over time, especially for new teachers. This inconsistency is confirmed by observations during the inspection and by recent observations undertaken by the interim headteacher. There is some good teaching, but it has not been sufficiently sustained to overcome the deficit in the pupils' skills that has built up over time. Consequently, the good progress made by pupils in some classes is undermined by inadequate teaching in others. In lessons where the learning is weak, pupils sit for too long listening to the teacher. In addition, the time and skills of teaching assistants are under-utilised and there is little of interest, challenge or excitement in what is taught. Teaching fails to capitalise on pupils' good behaviour. Teachers' professional development has been too limited. Ideas, good practice and the development of techniques around assessment and the interpretation of data that have been embedded in most other schools are only now being introduced. Teachers' expectations of what the older pupils can achieve are too low, even in basic matters such as the presentation of their work. As a result, pupils are not challenged to achieve high enough standards.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The quality of the curriculum is uninspiring. There has been no effective cycle of reviewing and monitoring the curriculum. Staff have introduced changes. For example they are starting to link subjects through topics, but this has failed to bring about improvements where they are needed. There has been no special emphasis on writing and consequently this aspect of the pupils work has deteriorated. Pupils like the visits and extended activities that are available, but older pupils are reticent when asked to say which topic, subject or theme they like best. However, they have noticed and approve of the new higher quality displays of their work. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well by the pupils. In the ICT club in Key Stage 1, there was both excitement and enjoyment from the pupils as they discovered links with their current topic and explored how they could use the computers to create pictures and images on the screen. They were well supported in this by the staff and two older pupil

volunteers. Unfortunately, the quality of the ICT provision at the school is proving frustrating for both staff and pupils. There is a good ratio of equipment to pupils, but the school's network is inadequate and fails to meet basic requirements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils' safety and well-being are looked after well and the staff's caring attitudes are greatly appreciated by the parents. The school carries out the required checks on those who work with pupils and all staff have received child protection training. Most pupils feel that rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Older pupils help the younger ones and the good quality of relationships between pupils and between the pupils and adults makes school a positive experience. Staff do not make effective use of assessment data to identify pupils with particular gifts and talents. The target setting process, which was introduced last month is at too early a stage to have had any impact on pupils' learning. Nevertheless, it is clear from initial observations that pupils have not been given realistic guidance on assessing their own learning. There is no school-wide marking system. Although individual teachers usually mark all the work and praise where appropriate, there is no consistency, nor is the marking particularly helpful in guiding pupils about the next steps in their learning. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good in relation to their personal development but the support for their academic progress is no better than that of their peers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Until the current term, there has been no consistent leadership at the school for a considerable time. The governors have not been sufficiently active in seeking help or demanding support for the school. The school's successful past, the continued success of the younger pupils and the good quality of relationships in the school and with its community have all contributed to a false sense of well-being. However, governors have not been advised well, and until recently they have not had the professional support they needed. The warning signals, that were clearly present in the data, were consistently ignored. The support and leadership that has now been put in place is too late to salvage the standards for many of the pupils who have passed through the school. The future nature of the school's leadership is still uncertain. Consequently, there is no certainty that the decisive action that has been taken in the last two months will be maintained, or the future success of the school guaranteed.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

26 November 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Aslacton Primary School, Norwich NR15 2JH

Thank you for your warm welcome when I visited your school. I would like to explain what I found when I spent time in your lessons and talked with you and your teachers.

I know that your school has had many difficulties over the last three years as some of your teachers have been away for a long time, or have moved on. Therefore, I was pleased to hear from you and your parents that you feel that things have become much more settled and better this term. There are some good things about your school such as the way you keep healthy and feel safe around school. Your attendance and behaviour are also good.

However, I am still concerned that the standards at your school are not as high as they used to be for those of you in Key Stage 2, and that the progress you make is not good enough when I compare it with that of children in similar schools. As a result, I have said that your school is not giving you an acceptable standard of education. To put this right I have asked the school's leaders to do four things.

I would like them to:

- help you to do much better in writing and mathematics, especially at Key Stage 2
- help teachers understand how well you can do, especially in tests at the end of Key Stage 2
- help you recognise how much progress you have made and what to do next
- decide how they are going to make sure that the improvements that have now started can continue and be maintained for a long time.

My best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Brown

Lead inspector