

Erpingham Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121036
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	291968
Inspection dates	24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Jill Bavin

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	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Brian Faulkner
Headteacher	Miss Deborah Leahy
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 March 2004

School address	School Road Erpingham Norwich Norfolk NR11 7QY
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an exceptionally small school serving an isolated rural community. The headteacher shares a teaching responsibility for the older of the two classes. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than usual. All the children have White British backgrounds. There were no children of Reception class age at the time of the inspection, and only one child in Year 1 who had joined in the Reception year. The proportion of children attending the school who have learning difficulties is much higher than average. Attainment on entry varies extremely widely but is most commonly well below average. Almost half of children joined the school's older class during the last academic year. The headteacher has been in post for 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

Erpingham is a good school. Skilful leadership turns its unique features and small size to advantage. For example, the entire school is actively involved in the children's business, 'GREENS!' which provides invaluable experience of team work with a financial edge. Pastoral care is exemplary, because of the ways children are nurtured and enabled to thrive. Academic guidance is very good, because children are very involved in assessing their own learning. This involvement, combined with an extremely interesting variety of activities and highly flexible planning for children's individual needs, contributes to their exceptional personal development. The unusually strong focus on learning in the outdoor environment and through practical and creative activities means the school is well placed to provide for reception age children, should they arrive. These strengths are highly appreciated by parents who are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Children's immense enjoyment of school, their parents' appreciation of its work and the school's considerable effort to improve attendance are not reflected in the attendance rates. These are perfectly satisfactory for most pupils. However, the difficulties experienced by a very few families in getting their children to school regularly adversely affect the school's overall performance in this area.

Since her appointment, the headteacher has introduced rigorous procedures for checking individual progress in English, mathematics and science. This information is used effectively to set challenging but realistic targets for children and informs teachers' planning in these subjects. The headteacher has rightly recognised that the development of skills in other subjects is not recorded as systematically, so checking progress is not as easy. Teaching and learning are good because lessons are planned with meticulous attention to meeting the needs of different age groups and ability levels within the class. This accounts for the good progress children make during their time in the school, in spite of the high mobility levels. The extremely small numbers of children taking national tests in any one year means that standards fluctuate wildly. Over the last three years, they have most commonly been broadly average. Teaching assistants provide a valuable contribution to children's learning but, on occasions, they are underused for part of the lesson when the teacher is talking with the whole class.

This is a school where all staff share an exceptionally strong commitment to children's enjoyment and achievement whatever their starting points or circumstances. The extent of good improvement over the last two years means that more accurate information is shared with governors and staff. Consequently, all are better informed and increasingly effective and governance is good. The school is, therefore, well placed for further development.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school currently has no children of this age on roll and only one child in Year 1 passed through this phase at Erpingham last year. However, the quality of planning and assessment arrangements indicate that the provision for children in Reception is good, providing a good balance of teacher initiated and child initiated activities to help promote their independence in learning. There are well-established partnerships with other schools locally, especially to support children's personal, social and emotional development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen work with other professionals and families to improve attendance.
- Implement plans to record children's development of skills in subjects other than English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure that teaching assistants are deployed effectively in all parts of a lesson.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress, regardless of their starting points, because the school is very skilled at assessing and addressing individual needs. Its small size means that staff focus on the learning needs of each individual child and set work to extend and challenge them. Within the mixed age classes, work is set at appropriate levels to build upon what has been learned already. In this way, each child is enabled to make good progress in their learning and reach good standards in relation to their starting points. This individual attention means that staff can support individual children effectively in subjects they find hard and stretch them in those they are good at. The school attracts a high proportion of children with learning difficulties and meets their needs effectively, whilst also enabling the most able to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development and their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. They justifiably share pride in and an enormous sense of responsibility to their school community, because they feel highly valued and consulted about those issues that affect them on a daily basis. They embrace roles as school councillors, eco councillors, and playground buddies with impressive maturity. As company members, children have recently decided to develop from growing and selling natural produce, to selling items they have made, in order to increase revenue. Equally mature is their recognition of religious diversity within their school and their self-confidence in expressing tolerance of diversity beyond Erpingham. They demonstrate extremely positive attitudes to learning and to making healthy choices. The entire school walks at least part of the route to school three times each week and democratically shares turns on the quadracycle, for which they innovatively and successfully raised funds. Children feel totally safe in school and implicitly trust the adults around them. They flourish through warm, friendly but respectful relationships with the adults in school. Good achievement in basic academic skills combined with exceptional social development means they are extremely well prepared for their future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The school is successfully helping all children to make good progress, regardless of their starting points or when they join the school. This is because information about children's knowledge and skills is gathered quickly and then used consistently well to plan for different needs within the class. Teachers are skilled at balancing challenge with support. Children describe this as being 'like a twist.... fun but still learning every day'. Teachers regularly make good use of different learning styles to ensure that children remain actively involved and interested. Teaching assistants play an important part in lessons but they are not always used fully throughout the lesson. Consistent strengths in teaching are positive relationships between adults and children and exceptionally extensive and productive strategies for involving children in judging their own learning. Teachers share criteria for judging how well children are doing. Consequently, they are very well informed and explain that when they use the *marking ladders*, 'it's like it talks to you'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstandingly good. It is enhanced considerably by the extremely well planned use of the outdoor learning environment and through the 'Forest School' activities. Experiences such as raft building and jewellery making with natural materials have a considerable impact on children's enjoyment. They also successfully stimulate children's willingness to write, even when they find learning difficult. The school makes exceptionally good use of drama and is highly skilled at planning learning through links between subjects. There are countless examples of these strengths. They include written and mathematical work focused on local environmental issues regarding sea defences, learning Spanish, Brazilian dance and African drums a part of the recent theme, 'Celebrating Our World' and using the drama technique of 'hot-seating' to explore the character of 'The Snow Queen'. Children vote with their feet and there is 100% attendance at several clubs. The practical, innovative nature of the curriculum makes it eminently suitable for Foundation Stage children should the school attract any children of this age.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Staff share an exceptional commitment to welcoming every child, whatever their ability or background, and go out of their way to remove potential barriers to learning for each individual. They provide remarkably strong support for children's personal development, through extremely carefully structured opportunities for them to make informed choices and develop their independence. Potential risks are identified and managed well. Arrangements for child protection are up to date and fully meet current statutory requirements. Academic guidance is excellent. Because there is an exceptional array of strategies to involve children in checking their learning, they are highly confident in discussing their personal targets, selecting their best work and identifying what they have achieved. The headteacher tracks each child's progress in English, mathematics and science closely, with a view to ensuring that it is good. High quality care and guidance allow all learners to thrive remarkably well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is an effective leader providing a strong but sensitive steer for school improvement. She has successfully promoted a whole school approach to raising achievement. She has established effective systems for checking how well children are doing in those subjects which are tested. While the small numbers and high mobility means that in her two years in the school it has not been possible to identify recurring trends, she is quick to anticipate areas of relative weakness and to address them. The new system for sharing the development of subjects is sensible and manageable. The headteacher has rightly identified that teaching subjects as part of a theme has enormous benefits to children. However, it requires a more systematic record of specific skills gained in each subject in order to ensure that children's learning builds progressively. Staff are currently working to develop such a record. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and on-going challenges. As they are well informed, they act increasingly effectively as critical friends.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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	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

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	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	1
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



25 January 2008

Dear Children,

Thank you for being so helpful, friendly and sensible when we met recently. A special thank you goes to those children who spoke with me in the playground and those who shared their work and ideas with me when we met just outside Class 2. I agree with you and your parents that you go to a really good school. Here are some of the good things I found.

- You all make good progress in English, mathematics and science.
- You really love your school.
- You are very kind to each other and behave in a remarkably grown up way in lessons and around the school.
- You are extremely good at keeping healthy and taking responsibility.
- You are especially good at making sensible judgements about your work and how well you are doing.
- Your teachers want the best for you because they care about helping you to learn and want you to have lots of fun.
- There are many interesting things for you to do, including lots of outdoor activities and plenty of clubs.
- You feel very safe in school because everyone works hard to keep you safe and secure.
- Miss Leahy and the governors work hard to make sure all the adults keep sharing ideas and thinking of ways to keep your school even better.

A few of you are away from school a lot. I have asked Miss Leahy to keep talking to your parents about getting you into school whenever possible. You could help by making sure you always come to school unless you are really unwell. I have asked the teachers to make sure they plan for the teaching assistants to help with your learning all through the lesson. I have also asked Miss Leahy to carry on with her ideas about how to keep a clear record of how well you are doing in subjects like geography and history.

Thank you again for helping me find out about your school. I hope you keep having fun.

Jill Bavin
Lead inspector