



Alconbury CE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 110809
Local Authority Cambridgeshire
Inspection number 288784
Inspection dates 12 March 2007
Reporting inspector Derek Watts

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	School Lane
School category	Voluntary controlled		Alconbury
Age range of pupils	4 - 11		Huntingdon
			Cambridgeshire
			PE28 4EQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01480 890341
Number on roll	217	Fax number	01480 890439
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Brian Gray
		Headteacher	Mrs Linda Dove
Date of previous school inspection	16 - 19 September 2002		

Age group	Inspection date(s)	Inspection no.
4 - 11	12 March 2007	288784

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector over one day.

Description of the school

Alconbury CE is a slightly smaller than average primary school. Most pupils are from a White British background. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and those eligible for free school meals is below average. Children's attainment on entry to Reception is just below national expectations.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Alconbury CE Primary is a good school. There are outstanding aspects to its work. Pupils achieve well and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. Parents are happy with the quality of education provided and give the school good support. They praise the caring attitudes, the positive ethos, the quality of teaching and the range of clubs available.

Good leadership and management contribute significantly to the school's success. The headteacher provides strong leadership and direction. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher and other leaders. The school has a clear overview of its own performance. Good assessment and tracking means that the school has a clear picture of how well each individual pupil is doing. Staff are committed and supportive. Effective action is taken to bring about improvements.

Outstanding care, guidance and support contribute significantly to pupils' academic and personal development and lead to harmony in the school community. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and this is reflected in the high levels of attendance. Clear expectations, outstanding relationships and a positive school atmosphere lead to exemplary behaviour. Pupils show a very good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. Academic guidance and support are effective; assessment is used well to plan pupils' learning and set individual learning targets. Pupils know what they are working towards and how to improve.

Children in Reception get off to a good start because of effective provision. They make good progress in all areas of learning. Good teaching and learning and a well planned curriculum enable pupils to make good progress across the school. The good curriculum is enriched with a wide range of additional activities. Activities are challenging and generally well matched to pupils' needs so they make good progress. However, pupils' progress in Year 1 and 2 in reading and mathematics has not been as good as it has been in writing. The school has recognised this as an area for development and is taking action to improve achievement. In Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils at Alconbury are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the current planning and action to raise achievement and standards in reading and mathematics in Year 1 and 2 so that they are in line with writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Children in the Foundation Stage make good gains in all areas of learning. Standards in 2006 were broadly average overall in Year 2. Attainment and progress were better in writing than in reading and mathematics. The school has successfully improved writing during the past two years through effective instruction and providing good opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes in a range of subjects. Effective action is being taken to bring progress in reading and mathematics in line with writing. For example, there is more emphasis on letter sounds and reading materials are carefully selected to meet pupils' needs. In mathematics, pupils are having more opportunities to use their numeracy skills in problem solving. From pupils' work and the school's accurate assessments, there are early signs that more pupils are moving towards higher levels. Progress accelerates in Year 3 to 6 and standards in Year 6 are above average. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because their needs are carefully assessed and effective support is provided. By the time they leave, pupils have acquired a good range of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. These, with their outstanding teamwork and the ability to work with others, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils show a very clear understanding of people's different backgrounds. They have consideration and respect for others. In an assembly, they reflected thoughtfully on the needs of children in countries with inadequate homes, food and schooling. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and this is shown by high attendance and high levels of participation in activities. Exceptional relationships and a positive system of rewards lead to outstanding behaviour. A parent correctly wrote, 'The school develops high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem'. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and have gained an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy diets and taking regular exercise. They participate well in the good range of sporting activities offered. Pupils thrive on the responsibility they are given and those on the school council serve their fellow pupils well. They have contributed to improvements to outdoor play facilities and to mealtime arrangements. Pupils contribute well to the local community through strong links with the church. They contribute to the wider global community by raising funds and collecting resources for well known charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Effective teaching and learning underpin pupils' good achievement. Examples of outstanding practice are evident. Pupils say, 'Lessons are fun'. Teaching in Reception provides a good blend of direct teaching and opportunities for children to explore and work independently. Across the school, teachers plan lessons well and pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn. Interactive whiteboards are used well to illustrate main learning points in an attractive and visual way. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to discuss their work in pairs or groups. As a result, their speaking and listening skills are well developed. Skilful questioning challenges pupils' thinking and checks their understanding. Assessment is used effectively to tailor activities and tasks to pupils' different abilities and needs. As a result, they are challenged, productive and make good progress. However, worksheets are occasionally overused in Year 1 and 2. These are not always well matched to pupils' needs and can impede their skills in organising their own work. When this happens, the rate of progress slows. Teachers work closely with teaching assistants who give good quality help, particularly those with learning difficulties. The marking of pupils' work is good and helpful. It provides praise for good work and comments to help pupils improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum enables pupils to make good progress and contributes extremely well to their personal development. It has been less successful in promoting good achievement in reading and mathematics in Years 1 and 2 but this issue is being tackled well. Good links between subjects are making pupils' learning enjoyable and meaningful. For example, there are interesting links between literacy and history in Year 6 and between art and design and ICT in Years 1 and 2. Pupils and staff use ICT effectively to enhance teaching and learning. Good quality construction kits are used extremely well to develop pupils' design and technology and ICT skills. Provision for music is a strong element of the curriculum. Pupils benefit from visits to places of educational interest. Three residential visits for pupils in Years 3 to 6 provide new outdoor experiences. Clubs such as football, gymnastics, craft, country dancing, netball, singing, and sewing are popular. The many additional activities enrich the curriculum and contribute to pupils' interest and enjoyment. Good quality displays reflect the good range of work across the school. A strong emphasis is placed on healthy lifestyles and personal safety.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school has highly effective procedures to ensure that pupils are safe and secure. Parents appreciate that their children are well cared for and pupils report that there is always an adult they can turn to. Staff know the pupils well; they are excellent role models and provide exceptional support. There are effective systems for assessing and tracking pupils' attainment and progress. Assessment information is used well to set challenging individual targets particularly in writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils are very clear about what they need to do to improve. A parent summed up this aspect of the school, 'My child is well supported and challenged'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are successfully promoting good pupil achievement and outstanding personal development. The experienced headteacher has worked with staff to create a positive and warm atmosphere. Teamwork among the staff is strong. Leadership responsibilities are shared effectively and roles have been strengthened by participation in the Primary Leadership Programme initiative. The leadership of English, mathematics, science and special educational needs is effective in promoting good achievement.

Self-evaluation is effective, although the school has been a little generous in judging a few aspects of its work. Nevertheless, it has a clear overview of its strengths and development areas. The monitoring and development of teaching and learning are thorough and supportive. Leaders respond well to teachers' development needs and check to ensure that minor shortcomings in practice are remedied. The need to improve aspects of achievement in Key Stage 1 is recognised and effective action plans are being implemented. There are challenging targets set for pupils in mathematics and reading in Year 2 but these are not yet incorporated into the development planning in order to measure its success.

Governance is good. The governors provide an effective blend of support and challenge. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and has demonstrated a good capacity to improve. Alconbury provides good value for money.

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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?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	NA
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	2
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 behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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

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

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?	2
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 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



14 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Alconbury CE Primary School, School Lane, Alconbury, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE28 4EQ

Thank you so much for welcoming me into your school and showing me your work. I enjoyed my visit and would like to tell you what I found out. Alconbury is a good school. Some areas are outstanding. You can be very proud of your school.

These things are strengths of the school

- You clearly enjoy school and this is shown by your very good attendance.
- Children in Reception get off to a good start.
- Teaching is good, which is why you learn so much.
- You are making good progress and standards by Year 6 are above average.
- Your behaviour is outstanding and you get on very well with others.
- The school offers a good range of additional activities for you, such as clubs and visits.
- The staff know you well and you receive excellent care and support from them.
- The school is well led by your headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior staff.
- Your parents are pleased with the school.

There is just one important thing the school has been asked to improve

- Some of you could make more progress in reading and mathematics in Years 1 and 2 and your teachers are working hard to make this happen.

Finally, thank you once again for all your help. I wish you all the best for the future.

With kind regards

Derek Watts
Lead inspector