

Penhill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131902
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	315885
Inspection dates	18–19 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Liz Kounnou

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ben Schmidt
Headteacher	L Rankin
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Alton Close Penhill Swindon SN2 5HF
Telephone number	01793 723677
Fax number	01793 723807

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an area of significant economic and social deprivation. Around half the pupils have some learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and this is far higher than the national average. Children's attainment when they start school in the Nursery at age three is very low. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is among the highest in the country. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups, a much lower proportion than is typical. During the last academic year several unavoidable staffing problems resulted in a high proportion of temporary teachers being employed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education despite the very low standards reached in English, mathematics and science. Standards are low partly because there is a very large group of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall from the Foundation Stage to Year 6. Those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in English and mathematics but make better progress in their emotional development due to the school's good pastoral care for this group. This is a school that rightly prides itself on the good pastoral care provided for pupils, particularly for those who are vulnerable. The great majority of parents are pleased with the school because their children are happy there. However, the guidance and support that pupils receive to help them achieve well is satisfactory overall. Guidance for pupils often lacks challenge and contributes to some underachievement for a very small minority of pupils. These are mainly boys. Overall, boys reach standards that are considerably lower than girls throughout the school.

Teaching and learning are improving and are satisfactory in a large majority of classes and good in a small minority, but in a few lessons pupils' progress slows considerably because teaching is inadequate. In Year 6, good teaching enables pupils to catch up some of the lost ground. The Foundation Stage provides a satisfactory start for children.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors are fully involved in checking how well the school is doing and planning for further improvement in partnership with the school management team. This has led to a continued trend of improvement in standards, and in teaching and learning. However, school leaders do not use all the information they gather sufficiently well to plan how to bring about improvement where it is needed most. Consequently, the school's strategic planning lacks a sharp focus, and does not spell out precisely what needs to change in order to raise standards further. This is particularly evident in relation to raising boys' attainment, where it is not clear what strategies senior staff expect to see in all lessons to engage boys more effectively in learning.

Pupils are prepared adequately for the next stage of their education because they are confident and work well together, but their literacy and numeracy skills are well below average. Their personal development and well-being are satisfactory, including enjoyment of lessons. However, pupils' attendance is very low and not improving. The school is not yet taking sufficiently rigorous action to tackle the high level of absences. School leaders identify a clear match between some pupils' poor achievement and their low levels of personal attendance. The extent to which pupils feel safe at school and understand the requirements of a healthy lifestyle is good due to the school's good provision in these areas. Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory throughout the school, and many make a good contribution to the school community through their work on the school council. Pupils' contribution to the wider community is more limited.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in all the Foundation Stage classes. Nonetheless, a large majority do not reach the expected levels for their age by the time they move into Year 1. Staff are skilled at helping children to settle in and provide plenty of enjoyable activities, both indoors and outdoors, so that children are happy and content throughout the day. There is a focus on developing language skills because many children come to school with significant speech

difficulties. However, this has had mixed success because many activities in all areas of learning do not provide a real challenge for developing children's speech and this limits their overall progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that, across the curriculum, and especially in English and mathematics lessons, teaching and learning in all classes fully engage boys and raise their standards of attainment.
- Use data and other information from school self-evaluation more effectively to plan how to bring about improvement where it is needed most.
- Introduce effective strategies to improve pupils' attendance.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Almost half the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and this has a considerable impact on the standards reached in each key stage, as many pupils struggle to reach the expected levels for their age. There is appropriate support for all these pupils so that they make satisfactory progress despite the very low standards they attain. Over the past four years the school has achieved a steady increase in pupils' progress in Key Stage 2, and more recently in Key Stage 1. However, the upward trend in pupils' progress is not even throughout the school, in different subjects, or from one year to the next. The improvements in Key Stage 2 have been secured partly by good teaching in Year 6, which accelerates pupils' progress. This year, improved teaching and learning are beginning to even out pupils' progress across the school. Nonetheless, a very few year groups do not make enough progress, and boys' standards remain lower than girls. Boys make broadly satisfactory progress, and a few are doing really well, but the school has not yet made a significant impact on raising boys' attainment in all classes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. They move safely, in an orderly way, and demonstrate safe practices around the school. At times some are restless and silly in lessons. Pupils refer to some bullying and 'scraps' in the playground but feel safe because potential incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively; 'It stops', said one. Pupils know about healthy lifestyles. Year 5 pupils said, 'We don't have fizzy drinks.E numbers in them affect our behaviour.' Attendance levels are well below average and declining. A significant number of pupils regularly miss school. The majority enjoy the security of school but at times lack a real joy for learning. They have limited experience of art, music or drama and knowledge of cultures other than their own. The school council is influential: 'Everything outside is our idea', they say. It represents the views of others fairly. However, pupils' involvement with the community outside school is more limited. Although pupils leave the school with low standards of basic skills in numeracy and literacy, their information and communication technology skills are adequate and their self-confidence is good so that they are developing appropriate life skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Improvements in teaching and learning contribute to the steady improvement in pupils' progress. Effective recruitment procedures led to a further improvement in overall teaching quality this year. The very high proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive plenty of appropriate support from skilled staff. Teachers gather a great deal of information about how well all the pupils are doing, but make too little use of it when planning lessons. Consequently, there is inconsistency in the level of challenge for pupils of all abilities. Whilst many lessons capture pupils' interest, a minority fail to motivate them, so their progress varies from class to class. In Years 5 and 6, pupils say that lessons are lively and interesting. They know what is expected of them and make good progress in both these year groups now. In lessons where progress is slower, there are fewer opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in learning, and too little emphasis on improving spoken language. This particularly affects boys, who are seen to lose interest when listening to staff for long periods.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is enriched well, and pupils particularly enjoy the extra sports activities. The Year 6 residential visit to Braeside is typical of the good provision for developing pupils' team working skills. Pupils are enthusiastic about leading healthy lifestyles because the school has been committed to the Healthy Schools programme since 2002. The steady improvement in reading opportunities in Key Stage 2 resulted in a significant improvement in English standards in 2007. Writing skills have not improved as significantly, mainly because there are too few opportunities to develop writing skills across the curriculum in both key stages. Mathematics standards improved in Key Stage 1, where pupils learn effectively through a good range of practical activities. In Key Stage 2, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical and mental arithmetic skills and this limits their overall achievement. Despite the overall improvements, the curriculum is not contributing fully to raising standards in the core subjects for boys because some lessons lack interest for them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good procedures to monitor attendance ensure that the school knows the reasons for pupils' absences, but it has not yet taken effective action to reduce the high level of absences. Arrangements to ensure pupils' safety are good. Staff are well aware of the robust and sensitive child protection procedures. Pupils value comments made by staff and parents in the 'Home-School Book'. They think that most members of staff manage behaviour fairly and consistently, especially in relation to bullying. Most pupils know their learning targets for English and mathematics and discuss them regularly with their parents and teachers. However, teachers' marking and other guidance for learning often lacks sufficient challenge and this limits pupils' attainment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

School leaders embraced the intensive support provided by the local authority to help raise standards. As a result, there is clear direction for raising standards and a steady improvement has been secured in pupils' achievement. Targets set for pupils are mostly appropriate and the capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. School leaders are clearly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school to raise standards further. They have succeeded in Years 3, 5 and 6, partly due to effective staff recruitment procedures, and partly due to good quality professional development. Firm action is being taken to improve and eradicate inadequate teaching. School self-evaluation is mostly accurate. The few differences between the school's judgements about its own effectiveness and those of the inspection team occur largely because the school has anticipated the improvements it expects to take place as a result of recent changes. Senior managers collect a wealth of information about pupils' progress and attainment. However, it is not analysed succinctly and provides limited information to staff and governors. Consequently, strategic planning is not quite sharp enough. This has contributed to the slower pace of improvement in boys' standards.

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?	3
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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

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

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

20 September 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Penhill Primary School, Swindon SN2 5HF

Thank you all for making us so welcome and helping us when we visited your school. The school is satisfactory and helps you make satisfactory progress, but many of you do not reach the levels expected for your age in English, mathematics and science. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but varies from class to class. The headteacher, all the senior teachers and the governors are working hard to improve teaching and learning and help all of you to reach higher standards.

- Here are the things that we think are best about your school:
- You know how to stay safe and how to keep yourselves healthy.
- Staff look after you well so that most of you are happy at school.
- You told us that teaching in Year 6 is particularly good and we saw that it helps you to catch up in your work.
- You really enjoy the extra activities, especially the visits and the sports clubs.
- Those of you who find the work difficult get a lot of help and support.
- These are the things that we think could be better:
- Boys make satisfactory progress but they are not reaching the same standards as the girls. We think this is because the boys are not always interested in the work.
- There is a lot going on to make your school even better, but the school plan to improve things does not show exactly how the most important things will be tackled in every class.
- Too many of you have poor attendance because you often stay at home, and this makes a big difference to the standards that you reach. You could help by making a big effort to come to school every day.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when we came to see you.

Yours faithfully Liz Kounnou Lead inspector

Annex B

20 September 2007

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Liz Kounnou
Lead inspector