

Staplecross Methodist Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114531
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	357565
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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 of pupils on the school roll	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Platten
Headteacher	Liz Avar d
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Very heavy snowfall at the end of the first day of the inspection caused the school to close for two days. The second day of the inspection took place as soon as the school reopened. The inspectors observed eight lessons or parts of lessons, taught by three teachers and a higher level teaching assistant. They held meetings with groups of pupils, staff and the chair of the governing body. They observed the school's work, and looked at work in pupils' books, tracking data showing pupils' attainment and the progress they are making and the school's development plans. They also considered the 29 responses to the questionnaire received from parents and carers, and the 33 questionnaires completed by pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics.
- The way the curriculum caters for the mixed-age classes of pupils and for those pupils with special educational needs and/disabilities.
- How well the pupils' understanding of others from contrasting localities much further from the school is fostered.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average size school. The five Early Years Foundation Stage children are taught alongside Year 1 pupils in one class. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is near to average, but the proportion of pupils with a statement of educational needs is above average. There are no pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has achieved Healthy School status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Parents and carers particularly value the good level of care, guidance and support provided for their children in a family atmosphere. Parents' and carers' good involvement and appreciation were typified by a comment, 'I am very happy with the school ♦ it has a very friendly atmosphere like an extended family.' At the heart of the school is good team work, guided and fostered well by the headteacher and governing body. This teamwork, which has been harnessed to good effect despite some staff changes, is one of the reasons that the school's effectiveness has improved. Pupils' good understanding of how to stay safe was evident during the snowy weather, given that they played sensibly and realised this was a fun way to stay fit and healthy. Excellent behaviour only dips occasionally according to the pupils. These positive qualities promote very good attitudes to learning throughout the whole school community. Not surprisingly, pupils enjoy attending.

Children have a good start to school life and, although sharing the class with older pupils, those in the Early Years Foundation Stage enjoy learning and feel secure as their welfare needs are catered for effectively. Since the last inspection attainment in English has been above average, and pupils' current quality of writing, their reading skill and general level of speaking skills all reflect these levels. This is the result of a clear focus on teaching these aspects. Pupils' attainment in mathematics, particularly in their investigative understanding, has not been quite at the same level. Although improving, planning does not always ensure that pupils follow in-depth and challenging investigations to help them apply their skills. The school realises that, on occasions, more able pupils are not always challenged in their thinking or work rate. In other subjects, including music, art, and information and communication technology (ICT), pupils often achieve levels above those expected. Consistently good and sometimes outstanding teaching, combined with a curriculum which takes good account of mixed-age classes, is increasingly engaging the interests of pupils. These are significant factors in ensuring most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress and achieve well by the time they leave the school.

Systematic improvements in the use of target setting help pupils to know and understand how well they are doing. Their progress is monitored well, ensuring that appropriate support is in place for those identified as in danger of falling behind. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and weakness. Efforts to broaden the pupils' understanding of others from differing backgrounds have been partly successful, such as the school's links with a partner school in Malawi. However pupils' understanding of others in the United Kingdom from differing backgrounds is not developed sufficiently well. Despite having only a small number of staff, there is a clear drive and ambition to improve pupils' attainment and progress further, while maintaining a broad range of experiences.

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As a result, improvements in English are now very secure and appropriate actions in relatively weaker areas, such as mathematics, are already planned. These factors all indicate that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' investigative skills in mathematics in Years 1 to 6 in the coming academic year by ensuring that:
 - more relevant 'real life' activities are planned within mathematics to help them apply and develop their problem-solving abilities
 - more able pupils are regularly given particular tasks which are more challenging
 - ensure that planning regularly incorporates opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support their work.
- Improve the school's promotion of community cohesion in the coming academic year by:
 - developing the relationship with the school in Birmingham
 - seeking to exchange simple information about the school, its pupils and the area each serves for the benefit of all pupils at Staplecross.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' excellent behaviour and willingness to engage with each other and staff contribute to their enjoyment of school and improving levels of attainment. The school's good promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is the key factor for these outcomes. Pupils' enthusiasm is a feature of most lessons. In a well-taught lesson in the Year 4, 5 and 6 class pupils really enjoyed devising their own phrases into poems as they imagined they were the real vegetables and fruits they had in front of them! In another lesson, excellent teaching of observational sketching resulted in pupils learning new skills quickly and they could talk about their 'inspiration' for their chosen approach. In mathematical work, pupils' secure number and calculation work is evident in all classes, but problem-solving activities are not always planned to best effect to really stretch pupils' thinking or to apply their number skills. From starting points on entry into the Early Years Foundation Stage that are often below those expected for the age range, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 has risen and is average overall, and above average in English. In their day-to-day work, boys and girls achieve equally well. Good support from teaching assistants, aided by specifically planned activities, helps those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same good progress as their classmates.

The school council enjoys its role and has pushed through simple suggestions such as napkins at lunchtimes and wanting more hot water in the toilets. Although all pupils are helpful and willing to contribute to the school's success, they say sometimes they would like more formal responsibilities, such as collecting recyclables or turning off lights to save energy. Their links with village activities are good and awareness of local historical towns such as Battle help widen their horizons, as does their link with a school in Malawi. That said, the pupils' understanding of others' backgrounds and beliefs found in this country is not fully secure. Pupils' understanding of how to stay healthy is good, and most know what foods are good for you and which should be eaten more occasionally. Some admit,

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however, that putting theory into practice is more difficult. The extra-curricular sporting clubs aid the pupils' level of fitness, as does the simple, but effective, 'trim trail' on the playground.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Despite the small number of pupils and staff, the school provides a good range of activities for pupils to enjoy. Work with an artist in a local town, science investigations in local woodland, annual residential trips, musical tuition and learning to speak French are typical features of the curriculum. Basic skills are well catered for, particularly in English work, where teachers' concentration on developing pupils' writing has paid dividends as the pupils are enthusiastic writers. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from well-briefed teaching assistants, who skilfully guide pupils' learning to good effect. Mathematical activities are planned with some skill, although these do not always capitalise enough upon the pupils' abilities to investigate problems which have a 'real world' flavour or application. Teachers in all classes make good use of interactive whiteboards to help enliven learning. Introductions are kept short and the aims of lessons are clear and shared with pupils. Questioning is usually pitched right for most, although more able pupils are not always stretched in their thinking by more challenging questions. Classroom displays are well conceived in that they not only present pupils' work to good effect, they entice pupils to find out more about the subject. The new ICT suite enables

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pupils to hone their computer skills although, in day-to-day work, opportunities are sometimes missed to incorporate ICT skills into activities. Pupils know their next steps in learning through the use of simple target setting. Teachers' marking usually provides pointers for improvement as well as praise.

The school provides good levels of care, guidance and support in that pupils are mature and feel well cared for. They say that the school promotes a family feel and atmosphere which they appreciate. Pupils are honest enough to say that upsets do occur but, when they do, the school is quick to try and resolve difficulties quickly. The school's provision for potentially vulnerable children is good, given they are supported sensitively, but also encouraged to feel part of the school either in their learning or their involvement in sporting or musical activities. Links with outside professionals and local schools to help prepare pupils for their next schools are well established.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Effective teamwork, against the backdrop of staff changes since the last inspection, has provided the good impetus for improvement and the capacity to maintain it. A rise in pupils' attainment and progress in some subjects has ensured that the pupils' academic progress is keeping pace with their personal development. The drive and ambition of staff are most apparent in the way the staff spot areas to improve, such as pupils' writing skills, and then remedy them to good effect. Much of the school's self-evaluation is accurate, if occasionally too modest. The headteacher monitors teaching regularly, which has led to improvement. Observations are usually perceptive, although more attention is given to the quality of teaching than pupils' learning. Adults at all levels are good at promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination. Teachers are vigilant about ensuring pupils have equal opportunities to attend clubs and have access to resources. Good monitoring of pupils' progress means that any groups under achieving are quickly spotted and helped.

The governing body is keen to support this desire for improvement. Governors' regular visits to observe the progress of school improvement priorities provide good levels of information to aid the process of holding the school to account. The governing body ensures that safeguarding, including the vetting of staff appointments and health and safety routines, are carried out well. Parents and carers voice their appreciation of the school and the links with them are good so pupils feel the benefit.

The school has developed strong links with a school overseas to help promote community cohesion and broaden pupils' understanding of those from a different country. Regular activity weeks include an international theme and pupils' involvement in local events is

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good. Pupils' understanding of others' backgrounds and beliefs in the United Kingdom are not as well developed, although the proposed links with a school in Birmingham sound promising in boosting pupils' awareness of these issues.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in Reception year fit in well with their older Year 1 classmates. They settle in well and feel secure as the relatively small number means they can be given individual attention. Activities are well planned and the teaching takes good account of the differing ages, making sure the younger children have full access to activities which stretch their learning. Their basic knowledge of letter sounds develops well, sometimes aided by simple activities on the audiovisual whiteboard, as are basic number skills. The very heavy snow fall during the inspection reduced the number of outside activities taking place, but groups of children were very excited to see just how much snow remained and why. Snowy-based pictures were also very popular, and these reflected good levels of both imagination and skill in using simple painting techniques. Children are confident speakers and are extremely well behaved, listening intently to the teachers or helpers when working in a group. Children work well independently, using construction toys to make trains or in eventually venturing outside to look at the sand tray to see if the ice had melted. Staff plan for these activities carefully, but occasionally children work alone for too long before they are given a bit more help to redirect their learning. All staff ensure that children mix together well, take careful note of their emerging progress and the children's learning journey books reflect the good progress children make. This means that all children, including those in Year 1, are well prepared for their next class.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

About half the questionnaires were returned by parents and carers. A smaller proportion of these contained comments. The vast majority were positive, citing the friendly nature of the school, the quality of the care, the helpfulness of staff and range of activities on offer. The very small number of concerns were followed up with the headteacher during the visit, but followed no particular pattern.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

The inspection team received 29 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 57 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	41	17	59	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	17	59	11	38	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	34	17	59	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	34	17	59	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	14	48	13	45	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	59	10	34	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	48	13	45	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	14	48	11	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	48	12	41	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	41	12	41	4	14	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	41	13	45	2	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	59	10	34	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	55	11	38	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



7 December 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Staplecross Primary School, Robertsbridge TN32 5QD

Many thanks for making us feel welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed looking and hearing about what you like doing. Thank you for coping so well in the snowy conditions. Yours is a good school that has got even better since the last time it was inspected.

Here are some of the things we found out

- The Reception children make good progress and enjoy all of the activities that take place, sometimes with the Year 1 pupils.
- You reach above the expected standards in English, with mathematics not far behind. You achieve well in most aspects of your work.
- You are good at keeping active at playtimes, despite the snow, and I know most of you try to eat healthily.
- You behave brilliantly and work very hard in lessons.
- You all said you feel extremely safe as the school cares for you so well.
- The range of things you do, such as music, film club and sports, sound good.
- The school helps those of you who sometimes find work difficult or have a particular physical difficulty to achieve well.
- The staff teach you well and the school involves your parents or carers in the life of the school effectively to help it become even better.

We have asked the school to do two things to help it improve further

- Give those of you in Years 1 to 6 more investigative activities in mathematics that will really make you think hard and apply your skills to solve problems.
- Help you learn more about others from different places and cultures through your links with the school in Birmingham.

You can help the school to improve by continuing to behave exceptionally well.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge

Lead inspector

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