

St George's Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109467
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	356553
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Sudworth

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debra Brock
Headteacher	Margaret Cooper (interim headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, one of whom spent just half a day in the school and looked mainly at safeguarding. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 11 lessons or parts of lessons of differing duration and also the nurture group, all taught by seven members of staff. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, the interim headteacher and other staff and a group of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, for example, that relating to safeguarding, curriculum organisation, pupils' work and information about their progress. The seven questionnaire responses from parents and carers were analysed and also staff and pupils' responses.

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

- Why have results fallen at Key Stage 1, what is the school doing about it and why do so few pupils reach the higher levels?
- How effective is the provision of care for the large number of pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities?
- How secure are assessment systems?

Information about the school

This is a below average-sized primary school with four classes of which the Key Stage 2 class is of mixed age catering for pupils in Years 3 and 4. Additionally, there is a part-time nurture group class which has just begun and caters for pupils who have specific social and emotional needs. Children begin the Reception class in the term after their fourth birthday, with the Easter intake commencing part-time. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs/and or disabilities is just over double that found nationally, although there are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties but some have emotional problems that affect their learning. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is lower than in most schools. The school has the National Healthy Schools Award. There have been a lot of staff changes during the last two years for a variety of reasons. The substantive headteacher has not been at the school since February 2010 and alternative arrangements have been made. An interim headteacher was in post during the inspection. The school has a close link with the local schools sports partnership.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. It provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The pupils enjoy school and express confidence in the range of opportunities that they are offered. Interim arrangements at headship level are currently pushing the school's development securely forward. A particularly good feature of the school is the attention that individual and small groups of pupils receive when they are found to have special educational needs and/or learning difficulties. New initiatives to help pupils make up for their slower start to learning mathematics, reading and writing than is usually found are helping them to overcome their difficulties. The children achieve satisfactorily, although their attainment is often well below that expected for pupils of their age in Year 2, but it has, occasionally, been nearer to that expected at Year 4 as pupils consolidate and build up their basic skills further. Pupils' progress is accelerating securely and quickly. This is because of the close attention to individual needs through small group work and carefully planned programmes of work in reading and writing and through individual tuition.

The pupils feel safe. This is largely due to the good level of care that they receive. The staff have a good awareness of pupils who may be vulnerable and are vigilant on their behalf. The recent initiative to form a nurture group for such pupils is proving worthwhile.

Teaching is satisfactory overall with some that is good. Teachers are not always consistent in using their knowledge of pupils' stages of learning when planning class activities. This means that pupils who show a higher level of ability especially are not always challenged well enough. Consequently, not enough pupils reach the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. A new progress-tracking system for pupils is now in place and the staff are beginning to analyse progress more effectively.

Pupils have a good appreciation of healthy living. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community. However, despite the school's good efforts and those of the local authority, attendance and punctuality are below that of most schools. This is because a few parents and carers do not send their children to school regularly or punctually enough, which adversely affects their children's progress. Although the school itself is a cohesive, supportive community, it recognises that it has not yet taken enough action in community cohesion to help the pupils understand the different beliefs and cultures in society well enough.

The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve. It has generally maintained standards at Year 4 and these show improvement on those in Year 2. Its self-evaluation is accurate. Better tracking of pupils' progress is having an increasingly positive impact on teaching quality. The governing body recognises where improvements need to be made and staff are concentrating their efforts effectively on raising attainment through small-group work. The strategies being adopted are the correct ones.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly but not only, in Key Stage 1 by:
 - planning more effectively for all pupils' learning needs based on their previous performance
 - having high expectations of what is possible and of the quality of how pupils present their work
 - using the new tracking system even more rigorously to analyse the pupils' progress and taking swift action where progress is not fast enough.
- Increase rates of attendance and improve punctuality through continued efforts with parents and carers to stress the importance of regular attendance, and taking action against any who fail to send their children to school regularly.
- Improve the school's provision for community cohesion and plan more rigorously to improve pupils' knowledge of how different people live in the national and international communities.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment on entry to the Reception class is very low, especially but not only, in language and communication skills. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall. Attainment in the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics is usually well below average at the end of Year 2. Pupils increase the rate of their progress in Years 3 and 4 as they consolidate their skills. Exceptionally in 2010, Year 4 pupils reached broadly expected standards for their age, as the group contained several able pupils who attained well, but attainment is usually below expectations overall.

The intensity of the school's use of small-group tuition and individual working is helping pupils to increase their progress and providing well for the many pupils with specific learning and/or emotional needs. Consequently, they currently make satisfactory progress in line with that of others. These approaches are developing the pupils' confidence in their own abilities. 'Reading recovery' and writing-support programmes were seen to work effectively with many pupils. Pupils from all social and ethnic backgrounds concentrate well in these sessions and work very positively because of the individual support that they receive through them. In these lessons seen, pupils' quickly applied their knowledge gained of letter sounds and blends to their writing. They frequently tried out sentences on individual whiteboards. In some mathematics lessons seen, however, the more-able pupils are not always being challenged well enough.

Pupils really enjoy school and also their lessons and improvements have been made in attendance. They say that they particularly enjoy science because of the practical approach adopted. Pupils feel safe in school. One said, 'I like the teachers for how kind they are and they do a lot for us.' Pupils also have a good appreciation of keeping themselves safe outside school. They know, for example, that they should hold an adult's

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hand when crossing roads. Pupils have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and take part in out-of-school activities and also join in physical activities beyond the school. They know the types of food that are nutritious and the importance of 'five a day'. One mentioned that it is important not to get dehydrated. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are satisfactory. They have a sound understanding of right and wrong. Despite the better progress in Years 3 and 4, basic skills are still low for their age.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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?

Teachers' marking of pupils' work is generally good with an equal balance of praise and pointers for improvement. The individual targets that teachers set for pupils' next steps in learning are better in English than in mathematics because they are written in terms the pupils can more easily understand. Systems to track pupils' progress have improved and greater rigour is being adopted to make sure that pupils make better progress. Staff have good relationships with the pupils and manage them well. Teachers make effective use of information and communication technology to present lessons visually. At times, teaching is really imaginative. In a Year 2 lesson, the class received a letter from their adopted crocodile which needed some instructions to help another crocodile with a particular task. Pupils eagerly set about the task and wrote for a guide book with real purpose. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of pupils, for example, in the presentation

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of their work. The work of teaching assistants is helpful but, occasionally, they give the pupils too much help so that they do not think enough for themselves.

A good emphasis is given to the pupils' needs in reading and writing. Satisfactory use is made of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects. There is a sound provision for extra-curricular activities. Physical education receives good attention, well supported through the sports partnership, and includes swimming. The curriculum for personal, social and health education is developing well with the introduction of new materials. Occasional visits to the local community help pupils understand the meaning of national traditions, such as joining others at the local cenotaph for Remembrance Day. Visitors, such as the police, make an important contribution to the pupils' understanding of safety and right and wrong. Pupils really enjoyed the recent visit of an African drummer. The school is working to develop a more creative curriculum so that pupils find their learning even more enjoyable and subjects interlinked.

Pupils feel well supported and say, 'The teachers are always behind you.' The staff know the pupils well as individuals and also their families through the home visits before they enter. Such good arrangements for induction support the positive way that the children settle into school. First-aid experience is readily available. A nurture group for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has just commenced and provides good support for the pupils who have specific emotional and social needs. The pupils have good opportunities in these sessions to receive individual support which assist their progress. Health and safety matters receive good attention to ensure that the school is free from risks.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has gone through a difficult period which has impeded its efforts to embed ambition and drive improvement further. More recently, under the interim headteacher's leadership, substantial improvements have been made in the school's systems, for example in the support for the pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and in the rigorous systems to track pupils' progress. These improvements are also being supported by local authority staff working alongside school staff and pupils. There is a greater incidence of monitoring of teaching and learning and teachers' skills are developing well. Equal opportunity is promoted satisfactorily. Pupils' needs are identified accurately, but able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently. There is no evidence of discrimination. Safeguarding matters are secure and all requirements are in place. Child protection arrangements are good.

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The school's links with parents and carers are satisfactory. Links with other schools support aspects of the school's work well, such as physical education and music events. There are established links with the schools to which the pupils transfer.

The governing body has recently gone through several changes in its membership and has a new Chair. A core of the governing body is experienced, while others are learning their roles. The Chair of the Governing Body is leading the governors strongly and has a good perception of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has done much to make the governing body more effective. Members now have specific class links and aspects of the school to oversee. They make visits to keep abreast of their responsibilities and so are able to inform other members of these. Subject leaders are developing their skills in identifying aspects of the curriculum which need further development. Partnerships with subject leaders in another school are being trialled but these are at an early stage of development. The school is itself a cohesive community but recognises that it does not yet develop community cohesion nationally and internationally well enough.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

The children make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although their attainment is below average in all areas of their learning by the end of the Reception year, particularly in writing. Leadership and teaching are satisfactory. Both are developing well with good features, such as the positive relationships with the children, careful and accurate assessments of progress and the collection of evidence to assess attainment. Very good care is taken of the children. Not enough use is always made of the outside as a natural extension to the activities undertaken in the classroom. Nevertheless, the outdoor area is spacious with good-quality fixed equipment for children's physical development and enough cover so activities can take place in wet weather. There are not

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always enough activities that make extra demands on the pupils, such as a marked track along which the children can manoeuvre their large wheeled toys. The staff give a good emphasis to the teaching of letter sounds and opportunities for the children to 'make marks' as their first steps towards writing. Staff worked particularly well with the children in one lesson getting them to make simple repeating mathematical patterns in practical ways. For example, some of the children used different coloured shapes and others printed a pattern using bobbins and paint. The children make good progress in developing confidence and independence through their choice of activities.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Very few parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Most expressed positive views about the school. It is understandable why two parents and carers responded negatively to the leadership and management of the school, given the recent changes. The interim headteacher has taken the school forward on many fronts and is providing a good lead. Evidence obtained indicates that pupils' behaviour is much improved and was found to be satisfactory. Clear systems are in place to deal with behavioural issues. Pupils stated that they get along well together.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St George's Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received seven completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 72 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	2	29	4	57	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	29	4	57	1	14	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	2	29	5	71	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	29	4	57	1	14	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	2	29	4	57	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	1	14	6	86	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	29	5	71	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)	1	14	5	71	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	0	0	6	86	1	14	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	29	3	43	2	29	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	1	14	3	43	1	14	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	2	29	2	29	2	29	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	2	29	4	57	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.



9 December 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St George's Lower School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1EW

Thank you for your welcome when we visited your school and for letting us see your work. Thank you also for completing the questionnaires to tell us what you thought of your school. We enjoyed meeting you. We found that your behaviour was satisfactory. You clearly enjoy school and make some good friends. You look after one another well. We were pleased that you enjoy swimming and taking part in sport which helps to keep you healthy. You told me how safe you feel in school because the staff take such good care of you.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Not many of your parents and carers told us what they thought of the school but those who did are mainly pleased that you attend St George's.

We have asked your school to improve three things:

- help you to reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- help the few of you who do not attend regularly to do so
- give you more help to understand how different people live and the customs that they have.

You can help by attending school regularly, working as hard as you can and always doing your best.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sudworth

Lead inspector

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