

Southill Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109481
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	356557
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Hubbard
Headteacher	Franziska Murray
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed teachers teaching the three classes and 11 lessons. They met with the headteacher, members of staff with management responsibilities and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body. They observed the school at work and looked at a range of documentation including policies related to safeguarding and planning for school improvement. In addition they scrutinised the questionnaire responses from 45 parents and carers, 24 pupils in Years 3 and 4 and 14 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Given the school's small size, how balanced are the formal and informal systems to monitor the school and plan for future development?
- What initiatives have the school's leadership undertaken recently and their effect?

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than the average sized primary school. It serves the Southill and surrounding villages with many pupils coming to school by bus. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic heritage backgrounds; almost all pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils on the register of special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is above. A small number of four year old children attend the Early Years Foundation Stage part-time, prior to their full admission in the term that they reach their fifth birthday. The school has gained National Healthy School status. The current headteacher took up post in September 2010, after a period when the former headteacher worked part-time for one year leading up to retirement, with staff covering her teaching commitment.

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. It continues to improve and develop. Pupils enjoy school, reflected in their high rate of attendance, make good progress and achieve well. This is because the adults create a very secure, safe, warm and friendly environment. They know the pupils extremely well and the good relationships and outstanding care and guidance they provide underpin and enhance the pupils' learning.

Pupils develop confidence and self-esteem because they are recognised and supported particularly well as individuals. All staff know all the pupils because of the wide age range of classes across the school. This helps stitch the school community together even more closely. All pupils benefit from the many informal interactions they have with adults during the school day. Often these are based on the strong informal network among adults which allows achievement in one area to be recognised and reinforced in another. Pupils are friendly towards one another and it is, in their words, a 'happy school'. Respect and kindness are core values within the school and pupils respond to these so that it is a very inclusive and cohesive community with all children playing and working together well. Their behaviour shows a mature understanding and respect for difference. Behaviour is good and pupils say they feel exceptionally safe. Pupils have a good understanding of how people live in different parts of this country and in the world, although the school wants to develop this aspect further. Overall, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Pupils make good progress because teaching is good in the large majority of lessons. Teachers plan effectively for the wide range of learners' needs in their classrooms. All adults are clear about their roles in lessons and are effective in the support that they give to pupils. On occasion, pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress because there is a lack of clarity about the learning to be gained in the lesson. This results in the lesson not always moving forward purposefully enough so that the pace of learning drops. In addition, teachers' checks on learning or the progress being made are not always timely in these lessons. Some staff share the criteria for pupils to judge the success of their learning or what the lesson is about and how it fits in to other learning, but this is not a consistent feature.

The headteacher has a clear and accurate view of the school and, building on existing strengths has raised expectations further by setting challenging targets. Supported by the outstanding effectiveness of the governing body, she has also introduced a number of initiatives, which, although they will take more time to work through fully, have resulted in increased progress. There is strong teamwork; all staff are proud to work at the school and all value the headteacher's leadership as do the parents, carers and pupils. Given the improvements that have taken place since the last inspection and more recently, there is good capacity for sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils make even better progress by raising the quality of teaching to the next level by refining how teachers plan lessons and units of work so that:
 - what they want pupils to achieve by the end of the lesson or unit of work is always made very clear
 - learning objectives are always shared with pupils
 - the steps in the process of learning are always carefully judged
 - careful checks are made on the quality of learning of each pupil during the course of the lesson or unit of work as well as at the end
 - pupils regularly evaluate the quality of their own learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils behave well in lessons and focus on their various tasks and activities. They work effectively with partners or in groups, for example, playing a dice game as preparation for creating various types of graphs. They respond well to the fun in learning and to practical tasks in many lessons. They demonstrate good levels of independence and, in a research lesson using information and communication technology, there was a strong sense that they were working in partnership with the teacher. Pupils want to achieve well, although this is not always reflected in the presentation of their work. In a physical education lesson, they demonstrated that they were able to identify key aspects in others' performance showing clear understanding of the specific criteria for success although this is not a consistent feature in all lessons.

The range of children's skills on entry is broadly in line with that of their age group. Attainment at the end of Year 4 is generally above expectations for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. The current Year 4 is on track to attain academic standards above those of their age group and is doing particularly well in their reading. The headteacher has raised further expectations about the rate of pupils' progress from Year 2 to Year 4 and this is reflected in pupils' increasing rate of progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their academic and social development, for example, taking increased responsibility for their behaviour.

Pupils have a good understanding of what goes to make up a healthy lifestyle, the importance of nutrition and exercise and participate in the school's health-promoting strategies, such as healthy lunch-boxes. They also make a good contribution to the school community. The school council members take their roles very seriously and other pupils take on various roles helping around the school such as monitors and playground 'buddies'. Pupils collect for their chosen local and global charities and contribute to village life. Attendance for the last full academic year was high. The school prepares pupils well for the next steps in their education, providing a good foundation for their future learning.

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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	2
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	1
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?

Adults' good relationships with pupils underpin the learning. There is a warm, positive ethos in lessons. Staff are enthusiastic, have good subject knowledge and are skilled practitioners managing classroom organisation of the mixed-age classes well. As a result, pupils are engaged and motivated. Praise is used well to encourage and support pupils. Most pupils felt that adults explained how to improve their work and knew how well they were doing in school. There are good examples of detailed marking and feedback to pupils, which praised what they had done and gave points for improvement. Because classroom staffing is relatively stable, adults are able to refer to earlier prior learning and make connections - in some cases back to specific memorable trips or visitors - which have a particular impact on individual pupils.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good specific support in lessons from staff who know them very well and, where appropriate, all adults apply consistent approaches which support pupils' improved attitudes, confidence and skills. In addition, all pupils' progress is monitored carefully and, if necessary, adjustments are made to the way they are supported.

The headteacher has introduced a more creative approach to the curriculum, developing links between subjects and pupils have responded well. For example, a group of school council members talked about lessons being 'fun'. The school uses specialist teaching for English and mathematics and pupils experience a wider range of teaching staff and

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expertise than might be expected from the size of the school. Enrichment through trips and visitors is good. During the inspection, the whole school dressed up as book characters to celebrate World Book Day, providing a memorable learning experience. Reading is given good emphasis with parents, carers and other adults encouraged to come into school to listen to and talk to readers about their books. Emphasis on story writing is less obvious although writing for a range of purposes is evident within, for example, the Mexico topic. The headteacher has also introduced daily practice of mathematical skills as part of the early morning routines. Pupils clearly enjoyed and gained from the mathematical games and activities in which they were involved. The personal, social, emotional, health education programme makes a significant contribution to pupils' sense of citizenship and personal development.

The outstanding care, guidance and support does not stem solely from the size of the school, but from staff sensitivity, knowledge of the children and their families, vigilance and, above all, high commitment to the pupils in their care. During the inspection there were striking examples of a running thread of care and support to individual pupils to enhance their experience of school. There are good links with a range of specialist agencies to extend the learning opportunities for all pupils and to provide specialist support to individuals.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has successfully built on existing strengths while providing additional challenge and vision, which in combination with the outstanding effectiveness of the governing body, is moving the school forward. She and the governing body are ambitious for the school and its pupils. Staff know what the school is trying to achieve and feel involved in the process. Morale is high. Aspects of teaching have improved and target setting is challenging. The headteacher has gained an accurate perception of the school based on formal and informal monitoring and, with staff and the governing body, established clear priorities within the school improvement plan. Careful monitoring of pupils' progress by subject coordinators and headteacher and the increased frequency of review has led to improved progress.

The governing body provides a high level of strategic support. It has established clear systems to review the school's work and policies and its own effectiveness. It ensures that the school meets statutory requirements and that staff and pupils are kept safe. Above all, it provides clear support but appropriate challenge to the school's leadership, supporting

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the momentum for on-going improvement. Safeguarding is good. Staff are well trained, vigilant and clear policies, which are reviewed appropriately, are all in place.

The school is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all its pupils, tackling discrimination and ensuring that it works to remove barriers to learning. It monitors the progress of all pupils carefully, identifying individuals in danger of slipping behind and putting in place appropriate support strategies. The school has a very good understanding of the needs of its local community. The school itself is very cohesive; pupils respect differences and are inclusive in attitude. The school actively seeks to extend pupils' experience of how others live in this country within the curriculum by comparing two contrasting settlements and globally, through their study of specific countries and other faiths.

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	1
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 get a good start to their education in the Reception class. Numbers are small and attainment varies with individuals. Children make good progress to attain above national expectations in all areas of learning by the time they leave the Early Years Foundation Stage. The accommodation constrains the curriculum and its organisation, as well as limiting the use of the hall for other pupils. Adults work hard to compensate for the shortcomings. Their considerable warmth and enthusiasm, good teaching, careful planning, rich range of resources and the high ratio of adults to children enable the children to make good progress. Adults listen to children carefully and talk to them in a way that fosters their language skills effectively. In one session, for example, children took turns questioning a child on the 'hot seat'. The teacher encouraged a deeper level of questioning and response, fostering children's confidence well and exploiting fully the good language opportunities.

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Adults know the children very well. They anticipate the children's interests effectively so that the range of activities and resources they put out match children's current interests and enthusiasms. Consequently, there is a balance of activities chosen by the adults to reinforce skills and others where children take the initiative. Children play and work together well. For example, a small group built their own 'airport'. They sustain their concentration and involvement, moving sensibly from one activity to another within the room. Behaviour is good. Routines are well established and used effectively to reinforce children's number skills. Careful on-going assessment is used to record significant steps in children's learning and the information is used well by staff to target and challenge individual children. Suitable opportunities are planned for the children to use the outdoor area, for example, to fly their kites. Leadership is good because there is evident strong teamwork and on-going commitment to improvement. The governing body is committed to improving the accommodation for the Early Years Foundation Stage and, although in the past initiatives have been frustrated, currently they are more confident about the future progress of their plans.

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

There was a higher rate of return of the questionnaires and overall responses to each question were often more positive than those recorded nationally. Most parents and carers are positive about all aspects of the school. All parents and carers think that: the school keeps their children safe; it informs them of their children's progress; teaching is good; school encourages their children to have a healthy lifestyle, meets their needs and is led and managed well. All parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at the school. A very few parents and carers have concerns about the school's management of behaviour. Behaviour is good and it is managed in a positive manner leading to improved behaviour over time as individuals learn to take responsibility for their actions.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Southill 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 45 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 58 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	71	10	22	2	4	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	37	82	8	18	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	56	20	44	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	56	16	36	2	4	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	32	71	12	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	58	14	31	3	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	69	13	29	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)	23	51	19	42	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	58	16	36	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	67	11	24	4	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	58	16	36	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	34	76	11	24	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	76	9	20	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Southill Lower School, Biggleswade SG18 9JA

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. I really enjoyed seeing the efforts you all made to dress up as book characters for World Book Day and your work in lessons.

Yours is a good school. It continues to improve. You make good progress and attain standards which are above expectations for your age by the end of Year 4. You also develop well as young people. This is a friendly school and you get on well with each other and behave well. Adults care a great deal about you and look after you extremely well and this helps you do well. You told us that you feel safe in school and you clearly are confident to approach an adult if troubled about something.

You have skilled teachers who work hard to make lessons interesting and fun. I asked the headteacher to work with staff to ensure that you make good progress in all lessons by teachers making very clear what it is that they want you to learn and how to help you achieve this. I also want them to share their aims for the lesson with you and to keep a careful eye on your progress so that if, for example, you are finding the task too easy they can change their plans.

The school has improved since it was last inspected. The headteacher and staff have already put in place things which are helping to improve the school. You can all play your part by taking every advantage of what the school provides, working hard and ensuring that it keeps its very friendly atmosphere.

Yours sincerely

Roderick Passant

Lead inspector

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