

# St Helen's Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110888
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cambridgeshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	356832
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29–30 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Sheridan HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	221
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gary James
<b>Headteacher</b>	Kay Potter
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 February 2008
<b>School address</b>	Colne Road Bluntisham, Huntingdon PE28 3NY
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed learning in 20 lessons taught by eight different teachers. Inspectors met with pupils, middle and senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. An inspector also talked informally with a number of parents and carers at the beginning of the school day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, school policies, school improvement plans, tracking data and local authority reports. They also considered the views of pupils, staff and 92 parents and carers through an analysis of returned questionnaires.

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

- Are higher-ability girls making better progress in Key Stage 2 than those who were in Year 6 last year?
- How effectively are leaders driving improvements in teaching and curriculum?
- Has pupils' enjoyment of learning improved since the last inspection?

## Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Most pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of one Reception class. The school hosts a playgroup and an after-school child care provider. These are not managed by the school and are inspected separately. The school has recently gained the Leading Parent Partnership Award.

Since the last inspection, staff absence and turnover in some classes has been high and this has resulted in several classes having a significantly higher than usual number of teachers in a year. The headteacher resigned last year after a prolonged absence. The acting headteacher was appointed into the substantive role the week before inspection. An acting deputy headteacher has been seconded to the school for the current academic year.

**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

For a period following the last inspection, standards of attainment fell to be in line with the national average. Turbulence in staffing and leadership led to the quality of teaching deteriorating. This resulted in significant numbers of pupils not making the expected progress in Key Stage 2 from their above-average starting points. As a result of recent improvements in the quality of teaching and the curriculum, outcomes are improving. Pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to make better progress with standards of attainment that are likely to be above average. This represents satisfactory achievement for this cohort. Where pupils have fallen behind, particularly in Years 5 and 6, extra focused support is helping them to catch up. The school's tracking data and work in pupils' books show that these pupils are making accelerated progress although some in Year 6 are unlikely to make up all of the lost ground.

In 2010, too many higher-ability girls in Year 6 did not reach the higher levels expected of them. Inspection evidence shows that higher-ability girls are now making progress in line with their peers with most on track to meet expectations this year. Pupils throughout the school are currently making at least satisfactory progress and there are clear signs that this is improving as a result of improvements in the stability and quality of teaching. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are on target to reach challenging targets. However, pupils in the current Year 5 and 6 have some way to go to achieve the high standards of attainment they are capable of because of a legacy of underachievement that exists. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve in line with their peers.

The curriculum is improving with pupils speaking positively about how they enjoy their learning. However, in some lessons, some boys lose interest in their work and, when this happens, their behaviour deteriorates and learning slows. This tends to happen when teaching is satisfactory and the curriculum is not used effectively to capture pupils' imagination through motivating activities.

Comprehensive notes from local authority visits show that the profile of teaching has improved considerably over the past year. Previous inadequacies have been eradicated and the proportion of good teaching is steadily increasing. Teaching remains satisfactory overall because of several inconsistencies. In satisfactory lessons, the pace of learning is slower. This is often because teachers talk for too long and give insufficient thought to engaging and exciting pupils. In these lessons, questions are less well thought out and teachers miss opportunities to ask open-ended questions. Pupils are not always given sufficient time to think and talk about their answers. That said, in some other satisfactory lessons, teachers give pupils too long to consider and talk about answers to simple questions. This leads to the slowing of learning as pupils become distracted and their conversations wander away from the initial learning focus. Teaching assistants are not always well used with many spending a significant amount of time listening to the teacher

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and making little contribution to learning, particularly during the whole-class part of lessons. The usefulness of marking and feedback varies across classes. While all teachers follow the school's policy for marking, some comments do not give pupils any meaningful guidance on how to improve their work. The best marking seen enabled pupils to improve their work immediately after reading their teachers well-placed comments.

The new senior leadership team has shown that it has the capacity to continue to move the school forward. Teachers are overwhelmingly positive about the impact of leaders in enabling them to see how they can improve their practice. One teacher commented, 'I know that we are not perfect and I know that we are only part-way through our journey but it would be nice if the progress and changes we have made are recognised. The improvements that the new headteacher has led us through as acting head have been very positive and now as she has been confirmed as permanent head teacher, we have a stable and secure platform on which to continue moving forward.' This view was echoed by several members of the teaching staff who, collectively, have demonstrated a real determination to move forward after a difficult period. Senior leaders have a very clear understanding of the task in hand. They have made an impressive start by taking difficult decisions and tackling previous inadequacies in the quality of teaching. Parents and carers have commented on the improvements seen with several noting the difference that the headteacher has made. Leaders at a senior level have worked with determination to set the school on a firmer footing. Leaders at all levels recognise that middle leaders are ready to become much more involved in driving the school improvement agenda. They are eager to make a difference and understand the school's priorities but are yet to be fully involved in driving school improvement. This means that too many leadership functions remain with senior leaders.

About 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.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the consistency of teaching so that it leads to consistently good learning by ensuring all teachers:
  - teach lessons that are well paced and engaging
  - give good-quality feedback that supports pupils in improving their work
  - plan purposeful, well-paced opportunities for pupils to discuss and develop their ideas and suggestions
  - plan and communicate well with teaching assistants so they have a very clear understanding of how they are to support learning in each lesson.
- Ensure behaviour in class remains focused and conducive to learning by:
  - setting clear expectations for behaviour and participation in lessons
  - ensuring the curriculum is equally interesting for different groups of pupils.
- Develop the role of middle leaders so that they are fully involved in the development, monitoring and implementation of the school's improvement plans.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

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Pupils say that they feel safe and almost all parents and carers who gave their views agree. Pupils understand about staying safe and recognise the steps they need to take to avoid dangers, including those found when using technology. Behaviour around school is often very good but this is not consistent in all classes. In a few lessons, behaviour deteriorates because pupils are not well engaged in their work. When this happens, pupils spend less time thinking about their answers and show little interest in the work they are doing, although they do complete tasks as required. In good lessons, pupils are enthusiastic, contribute willingly and listen to their peers with interest. For example, in a good lesson where pupils explored the properties of numbers, they responded to the teacher's well-paced and probing questions with maturity and enthusiasm. Pupils considered carefully the views of their peers before supporting these or giving an alternative suggestion. This lesson moved at a good pace because the teacher was skilled at asking questions that challenged each individual. Behaviour on the playground is generally good although a few parents and carers expressed concern over some bullying. The school's records suggest that these incidents are rare. Pupils say that there is very little bullying and incidents are dealt with quickly.

Pupils develop a clear understanding about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They know the importance of exercise and diet. Many take part in a good range of extra-curricular sport and the school is diligent in monitoring the participation of different groups of pupils' engagement with these. Pupils say they enjoy their learning. They have generally good relationships with their teachers and other adults in school. After a fall in achievement since the last inspection, pupils' achievement is now satisfactory and there are clear signs that this is improving, particularly in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Improvements in teaching and the curriculum are driving this school's recovery. Teachers are developing their classroom skills but there remain inconsistencies. In the good lessons seen, teachers skilfully link different aspects of the curriculum together so that pupils learn to apply their core skills in different subjects. In one science lesson, pupils applied their recently developed mathematical knowledge when estimating temperatures and reading scales on thermometers. This link enhanced pupils' scientific understanding because they were able to use the mathematical skills they had to explore their scientific hypothesis. In many good lessons, teachers are using assessment information well. Group work that is matched to pupils' different learning needs is a regular feature in most classes. In satisfactory lessons, more-able pupils are given harder work but they are stretched more in good lessons when the task they have involves thinking deeply and having to justify their views and answers. The quality of marking varies but is satisfactory overall. All teachers are using the school's marking policy. This involves pupils' work being marked in different colours to show where the teacher is pleased with work and where some improvement is needed. This is particularly effective in the lessons where the teacher gives very specific advice and gives pupils time to read their advice and improve their work as a result. Teaching assistants are under-utilised in many lessons. In some lessons, they spend too long listening to teachers rather than supporting pupils in class. During group work, some teaching assistants are too focused on helping pupils complete the task rather than supporting them to work independently.

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Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Teachers and other adults know pupils well. Potentially vulnerable pupils are recognised and their needs are met effectively through careful assessment and matching support. Guidance at the transition to secondary school is not fully developed and some pupils in Year 6 express concerns about the future.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have worked effectively with the local authority and schools within the cluster group to move the school forward. A secure basis now exists for the school to deliver its well-thought-out plans. Senior leaders have galvanised the support of staff. They have a clear understanding of the areas still to develop. Different groups of pupils are monitored accurately so the school is able to take action when patterns of underachievement exist. Gaps between different groups are closing. Self-evaluation is honest and accurate. Middle leaders are enthusiastic about the task ahead. However, they are yet to play a significant part in leading school improvement.

The governing body fulfils its statutory duties. Its members have worked with the headteacher in eradicating a substantial deficit budget that has existed for several years. They challenge and support senior leaders appropriately and recognise the need to regularly review the effectiveness of the school's actions. Safeguarding procedures are effective and meet requirements.

The school has worked hard to build relationships with parents and carers as demonstrated through achieving the Leading Parent Partnership Award. Several parents and carers said that the school is now a much more open and welcoming place. However, some are yet to fully trust the school's judgements following a period of high staff turnover and uncertainty in leadership.

Senior leaders have evaluated the context of the school. The school is a cohesive community and increasingly involved within the local area. Leaders recognise the need to broaden pupils' awareness of cultural diversity and have plans to develop this aspect through the curriculum.



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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage is a bright and welcoming setting where children play and interact well together. A good range of resources are well organised so that children can choose their activities easily. They enjoy the range of activities on offer and thrive when working independently. Children behave well and think about each other's feelings. Personal development is strong. Careful thought is given to the balance between child-initiated activity and adult-enhanced provision. Adults clearly care for children and relationships are good. However, at times they are too keen to direct pupils to complete a task or activity in a particular way, as a result, children tend to follow instructions rather than think for themselves.

The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving as a result of some well-targeted professional development for the new early years leader and teacher. Adults have ambitious plans to improve the provision further so all areas of learning are well represented both inside and outdoors.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
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

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## Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers presented a wide range of views about the school and its effectiveness. As the table below illustrates, most views expressed were positive. Many comments were in support of the changes that have been made under the newly-formed leadership team, although this was not a view shared by all. A small number of parents and carers expressed concerns over the recent high turnover of teaching staff. Inspectors recognise that this is likely to have been unsettling but leaders have done all that is reasonable to ensure staffing is now stable. Other parents and carers raised a concern about the inconsistency of teaching. Inspection evidence shows that this is a reasonable concern although all teaching in school is now at least satisfactory. A few parents commented about the lack of communication, particularly around the progress that pupils are making. Inspectors found that the school has secure systems in place to report to parents regularly but these are very new and their impact is yet to be felt. A few parents and carers raised concerns about the 'golden apple' reward scheme. Inspectors asked different groups of pupils about this scheme and their view was that this system works well.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Helen's Primary 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 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 221 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	46	50	40	43	5	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	49	53	42	46	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	31	34	49	53	12	13	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	32	49	53	10	11	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	32	35	48	52	8	9	3	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	33	46	50	14	15	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	35	47	51	11	12	1	1
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	25	49	53	9	10	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	28	51	55	10	11	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	33	44	48	10	11	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	36	44	48	11	12	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	37	40	42	46	6	7	7	8
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	41	44	48	6	7	4	4

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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



31 March 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Helen's Primary School, Huntingdon, PE28 3NY**

You may remember that we came to inspect your school recently. Thank you to those of you who talked with us. This letter is to let you know what we found.

We found that your school has been through some changes over the past two years. You have a new headteacher and some of your teachers have changed. These changes have been difficult for your school community. I am pleased to say that, after a dip, your school is getting better and is satisfactory overall. I know that your headteacher and other adults in your school want it to be good in the near future and they are working hard to get there. We have asked them to concentrate on some things to help your school move towards being good.

We found that different teachers are better at different things. We want your teachers to learn from each other so your lessons are always interesting, so the work you get always makes you think hard and the guidance you get helps you to improve your work. We found in some of your lessons some of you did not behave as well as you should. This was a shame because it made learning difficult for you and those sitting near you. We have asked your teachers to work hard to make sure lessons capture your imagination. You need to do your bit too. You must remember why you are in class and you must work hard to make sure you listen well and behave responsibly. I am sure you will be able to do this.

We have also asked your headteacher and deputy headteacher to give different teachers different responsibilities. We call this middle leadership. This means that your headteacher and deputy headteacher will be able to concentrate their efforts on making sure the school continues to improve rapidly.

I have to say that I was very impressed by some of the conversations I had with you. I particularly enjoyed talking to you about the things that you enjoy in school. You have my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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