

South Avenue Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118439
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358349
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Jon Carter

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	168
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Watton
Headteacher	Lesley Murray
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed ten lessons taught by six teachers and held meetings with school leaders and managers, a representative from the governing body and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at assessment information, the school's analysis of pupils' progress, curriculum plans, minutes of governing body meetings, records of the school leaders' lesson monitoring and many other documents. They analysed the responses from the 80 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from 19 staff.

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

- How effectively teachers plan and deliver lessons to ensure that pupils of all abilities can make good progress, especially girls in reading and writing.
- How effectively the recently restructured leadership team, including senior and middle leaders, has sought to address differences in performance by different groups of pupils.
- How effectively the school is preparing pupils for life in a diverse society through purposeful links with different communities.
- How effectively leaders and managers of the Early Years Foundation Stage are ensuring children make progress from their starting points, especially in writing and other aspects of literacy.

Information about the school

South Avenue is an infant school of average size. The largest group in the school consists of pupils from White British backgrounds. The school has a lower than average percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Few speak English as an additional language, and no pupils are at a very early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The school has a higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, these mainly relate to speech, language and communication needs or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of two Reception classes. The school holds the Healthy School and Eco-Schools awards.

An independent provider runs breakfast and after-school clubs as well as a nursery within the boundaries of the school site. This provision was not included as part of this inspection.

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

South Avenue Infant School is a good school. A carefully planned and stimulating curriculum excites pupils and engages them well. Teaching takes good account of their needs and interests. Consequently, pupils make good progress in their learning. Parents and carers are particularly pleased about the quality of care shown to their children by school staff. Comments such as, 'We are glad we chose this school for our child,' and, 'The school has done a brilliant job in supporting both my child and myself,' are typical of the written responses received on questionnaires.

School leaders and members of the governing body have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Accurate and thorough tracking of pupils' progress and good quality self-evaluation have enabled them to successfully identify and address key areas requiring attention. Necessary changes, for example to make the curriculum sufficiently interesting for both boys and girls, have successfully been made to address an imbalance of progress and attainment between these groups. In doing so, they have promoted equality of opportunity well and demonstrated a good capacity to sustain improvement.

Staffing difficulties as a result of illness have resulted in some variation in the quality of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Satisfactory lesson planning ensures that suitable activities are provided for children. However, assessment of children's development in the main areas of learning is not always well structured. As a result, planning does not always take sufficient account of pupils' individual needs. Consequently, some pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage make satisfactory rather than good progress because they are not guided towards the most relevant learning activities. Good progress is made through Key Stage 1 so that pupils move to junior school having reached broadly average levels of attainment.

Pupils feel exceptionally safe at South Avenue. Their generally good personal development is well supported through the good care and guidance provided by staff. Pupils' strong social and moral development is demonstrated through their genuine concern for their friends, their good behaviour in and around school and their willing participation in a range of school and community activities. However, their understanding of the diversity of the wider United Kingdom is more limited. Opportunities for pupils to engage and work with children of their own age but from a wider range of backgrounds and cultures are not well established. The school's promotion of community cohesion and pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are, therefore, satisfactory overall.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, so that children make more rapid progress, by:
 - ensuring well-focused assessments inform short-term planning more closely so that learning needs of individual children are met
 - ensuring teachers and teaching assistants extend children's learning through high-quality dialogue and questioning which promotes all of the opportunities in the indoor and outdoor learning areas.
- Develop pupils' understanding of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom and strengthen the school's contribution to community cohesion by:
 - planning and developing purposeful opportunities for pupils to engage and work with children from a greater diversity of backgrounds and cultures.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In lessons, pupils usually make good progress. School leaders have successfully ensured that recent differences in the progress made by girls and boys have been reduced in most subjects this year.

Pupils enter Year 1 with levels of attainment that are below average, particularly in writing and linking sounds and letters. However, the use of strategies that emphasises a 'phonics' approach to reading, spelling and writing and provides lower-ability readers with additional support has been particularly effective in promoting very good progress in reading for most pupils, especially girls. For example, a specialist teacher working with individual pupils has successfully raised reading ages by several months over just a few weeks of intensive work. Pupils in a Year 1 literacy lesson particularly enjoyed using time connectives in their writing, but progress in pupils' writing skills has been slower, particularly for boys with communication difficulties. Generally, however, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at a similar rate to their peers. This is often due to the active and skilled support they receive from teaching assistants in class. Their progress is particularly strong in science because investigations and explorations are well matched to the ways they prefer to learn. In addition to pupils' good scientific investigational skills seen, good use of numeracy skills was shown through their experimentation with different containers when checking how much water each could hold and whether it was 'more' or 'less' than others. Most girls are making rapid progress in mathematics.

Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is good. Pupils eagerly take on responsibilities within the school and help to organise each other during small group work. Imaginative play, encouraged through creative approaches to the curriculum, has enabled pupils to develop good levels of curiosity about the world they live in. Their willing participation in environmental events in school and the local community is recognised through the Eco-Schools award. Most pupils have a good understanding of what it means to live a healthy lifestyle. They participate enthusiastically in physical education lessons and enjoy being active at playtime. Awareness of healthy eating enables pupils to explain which foods are better for them and identify which parts of their packed lunches are most

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and least healthy. These positive attitudes have contributed to the achievement of Healthy School status.

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	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	3
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?

Teaching in Key Stage 1 classes is underpinned by strong and positive relationships between teachers and their pupils. Assessment of what pupils know and can do is thorough and accurate. A variety of strategies, including 'Mixel' the hairy assessment puppet in Year 1, is very effective in engaging pupils in the evaluation of their own learning. This information is used well to ensure that planning takes good account of what pupils know and can do. Consequently, pupils are motivated to learn and progress because the work they do is suitably challenging. Teachers have good levels of subject knowledge and make good use of resources, including information and communication technology. Teaching assistants are well deployed and are most effective during independent and small group work. However, not all teachers make best use of their support during whole-class teaching.

The curriculum covers all statutory requirements while being sufficiently flexible to take good account of pupils' strengths and interests. Learning is often focused on aspects of a topic that pupils have identified as being most interesting. The sense of ownership that is generated promotes high levels of engagement and rapid progress in learning. Resources constructed to focus interest and support learning, such as the 'time machine' in Year 1,

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support this well. They also make classrooms bright and exciting places to learn. 'Challenge time' gives pupils good opportunities to develop skills in experimentation and independent working. Extra-curricular activities are popular and well attended. The wide variety available caters for those with musical and academic interests, although the sports clubs receive particularly strong support.

Secure and effective systems are in place to ensure pupils' well-being. There are good levels of supervision around the school and within the playground. Staff take care to ensure that pupils clearly understand the routines and rules that keep them safe so that they are able to talk confidently, for example about what they are expected to do if someone may be hurt. Good attendance monitoring systems have contributed to reduced absence rates since the previous inspection. The welcoming and caring ethos of the school and all its staff ensures that new pupils quickly feel very safe and comfortable. Good arrangements for pupils transferring between year groups or leaving to go to the junior school ensure that there is a smooth transition to their new class. These and their good collaborative skills ensure they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

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?

The headteacher and her staff value being part of a friendly community and share a common view of the path the school is taking to improve. New members of the school's leadership team are establishing themselves well with her good support and guidance. The progress of different groups of pupils is well monitored by this team so that there is a full appreciation of how well those at risk of underachievement are making progress. Where necessary, timely and effective action has been taken to tackle the causes of differences in achievement. The effectiveness with which the school promotes equal opportunity and tackles discrimination is, therefore, good.

Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning are accurate and robust. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Risk assessments are in place for relevant activities. Recruitment systems ensure rigorous checks are made on both staff and volunteers who work with children. Collaborative work with external agencies ensures that pupils who may be at risk are well supported. Other partnerships, for example with Future Creative, help to develop teachers' skills in planning and delivering active learning opportunities. The governing body is active and supportive, with a clear understanding of its role in school improvement and ambitious plans for the future. Parents and carers are well represented and play a full part in the school's systematic evaluation and development processes.

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School leaders have an accurate understanding of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics of their school. Appropriate actions are planned and taken to address identified needs. Support from the school's family liaison officer, for example, has contributed strongly to improved attendance for some pupils. However, plans to enable pupils to work and play with those from a more diverse range of backgrounds are less well developed. Consequently, the effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion is satisfactory.

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	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress in their learning and development. They enjoy school and settle quickly to the appropriate balance of adult-led and child-chosen activities that are planned for them. During whole-class teaching, children are keen to be active and cooperate well with each other. This is fostered well through the bright and interesting learning environment indoors and outside. However, resources for some aspects of learning are less prominent than others, particularly those related to problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. Children's skills for independence develop appropriately. For example, children ensure their paintings are put in the correct place to dry and wash their hands after visiting the toilet.

The outdoor learning area has a suitable variety of experiences for children, particularly for developing their personal and social skills and their knowledge and understanding of the world. For example, children worked collaboratively with each other to collect and observe snails before determining that parts of them were sticky and others were not. However, children miss some exciting learning opportunities. Planning is not always sufficiently detailed about how children will be guided to engage in particular activities so that they can be observed and their learning assessed. Consequently, children are not

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always given sufficient prompts by staff to help them focus on particular activities or to extend their learning. As a result, their progress in certain areas of learning, such as writing and linking sounds and letters, is slower than in others.

The acting leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that day-to-day teaching and learning run smoothly. However, there has been more emphasis on providing stability, and less emphasis on driving improvement, over recent months during temporary staff changes. Children's active involvement in planning and reviewing their work, for example, remains at an early stage of development.

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

An above average number of parents and carers returned a completed questionnaire. While most of the responses were exceptionally positive, with parents and carers commenting particularly about the good leadership of the headteacher and the positive relationships they have with teaching staff, a very small minority felt that the school did not help them to support their child's learning. Comments indicated that these parents wanted more information about what their children were learning in class. Discussions with the headteacher showed that the school currently uses a variety of communication systems, including newsletters, to give parents information, although availability on the internet is at an early stage of development. A similar number of parents also expressed concern about the amount of progress made by their children. Inspectors consider that staffing difficulties have had some impact on the progress made by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at South Avenue Infant 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 80 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 168 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	55	69	24	30	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	53	66	26	33	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	42	53	33	41	2	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	42	53	31	39	3	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	46	58	29	39	1	1	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	54	29	36	1	1	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	55	27	34	4	5	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)	30	38	37	46	2	3	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	49	36	45	1	1	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	40	42	53	3	4	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	39	45	56	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	49	61	26	33	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	50	63	27	34	1	1	1	1

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



10 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of South Avenue Infant School, Sittingbourne ME10 4SU

Thank you for welcoming us into your school when we came to visit recently. We were very pleased to see how well you behaved and how much you enjoyed your lessons and clubs. You told us how well staff look after you and that this makes you feel very safe.

I am pleased to tell you that you go to a good school. Children who go to your school usually make good progress. Your teachers work hard to make your lessons interesting, so it was good to see many of you using places in your classroom, like the 'time machine', to help you explore and find things out. Teachers make sure that you have interesting activities to do and these are helping lots of you make really good progress with your reading well done! Children in the Reception classes make satisfactory progress.

You all enjoy listening to visitors talk about the different countries their families come from and the different customs and traditions their cultures have. This is helping you have a satisfactory understanding of what it is like to live in different parts of the United Kingdom and around the world.

We have asked your headteacher to concentrate on improving two particular things to help your school get even better.

- To improve teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that children make faster progress.
- To give you more opportunities to meet, work and play with children of your age who come from different backgrounds to help you have a better understanding of their cultures.

You can help by taking part in all the opportunities that you are offered, in the same way that you enthusiastically take part in your clubs and activities at the moment.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter

Lead inspector

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