

Swallow Dell Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133488
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	367436
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	362
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judith Slack
Headteacher	Clare Hollingsworth
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 25 lessons, observing 15 teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and members of the governing body, including the Chair. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and school improvement plans. Inspectors analysed 85 parental questionnaires, 158 responses to the pupil survey and five responses to the staff questionnaire.

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

- What has been the impact of action taken to reverse the recent decline in achievement?
- How effectively does teaching meet the needs of all pupils?
- How effectively does the school support the development of its more vulnerable pupils?
- How effective is the contribution of middle leaders in driving improvement in their areas?

Information about the school

Pupil numbers are rising in this much larger than average-sized school. The large majority of pupils are White British. A quarter of the pupils are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, although few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals has increased to above average. The school has identified that a large proportion of its pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their needs are mostly associated with learning difficulties related to literacy. Considerably more pupils than in most schools join or leave other than at the usual times. The headteacher was appointed in September 2009. The school has recently received the Quality in Study Support award and has achieved Healthy Schools status.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Swallow Dell Primary School is improving under the determined leadership of the headteacher. She has galvanised the enthusiasm of staff, tackled shortcomings head-on and laid firm foundations for the future. The leadership role of other staff is becoming much more clearly defined and increasingly effective in supporting the drive for improvement. The pupils' progress is showing signs of accelerating and attainment is rising, particularly in mathematics in Years 1 and 2.

Pupils make satisfactory progress from Reception to Year 6, but with some variation between classes. This is because there are inconsistencies within a pattern of satisfactory teaching, although an increasing number of lessons have good and outstanding features.

The most effective teaching stimulates pupils' thinking, encourages them to become independent and drives their learning forward. In the less effective lessons, teachers do not engage the pupils fully through their questioning or plan work to move forward the learning of all pupils.

The recent emphasis on developing speaking skills has benefitted achievement in mathematics because pupils are expected to explain the reasoning behind their answers and so deepen their understanding of new concepts. This improvement is also supported through the application by the pupils of their number skills to the solution of real-life problems.

Teachers focus on developing basic skills, but spelling lessons, where pupils learn the sounds letters make, do not always have sufficient drive and challenge to move pupils' learning forward.

Assessment practice has become more consistent and data gathered more accurate and reliable. Information is used carefully to check on pupils' progress in order to identify any emerging underachievement and take action.

Marking is thorough and has improved but is not consistent in the guidance it gives pupils on how to improve their work. Consequently, some pupils are unclear how well they are doing or the steps to take to meet their targets.

Behaviour is good and has improved by involving pupils in reshaping school policy. The manner in which they conduct themselves adds greatly to the atmosphere around the school.

Pupils are proud of their school and their contribution to its development. They are starting to have a voice in shaping their learning and are showing concern for the environment through their 'Eco council'.

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Pupils say they feel safe in school, which is a view shared by parents and carers. They are confident that any issues they raise will be dealt with quickly and understand how to stay safe such as when using the internet.

The school is very aware of the situations of pupils and their families enabling them to direct action to support their specific needs, particularly where their circumstances make them potentially more vulnerable.

Pupils from different backgrounds work and play happily together, helping to generate a harmonious environment. They are keen to learn about different ways of life and show respect for the customs and values of others.

Most pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and are motivated to do their best. However, attendance has fallen to an average level in recent years because of an increase in the number of pupils persistently absent.

The headteacher has introduced robust systems for monitoring the school's performance. The evaluation of the evidence obtained enables staff and the governing body to identify key priorities that need tackling and to plan appropriate actions. The headteacher has also used external expertise adroitly to support this drive, particularly in improving teaching and learning. However, many actions are at an early stage and have not had time to show sustained impact on pupils' achievement. Because of this, the school has demonstrated satisfactory rather than good capacity for further improvement.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress in English and mathematics by:
 - using assessment information to pitch lessons at the right level for all pupils
 - maximising opportunities for pupils to participate in lessons by reducing the amount of time spent listening passively to their teachers
 - ensuring questions are targeted to provide challenge for all pupils
 - providing more effective guidance through the marking of pupils' work
 - generating greater pace to activities where pupils are learning the sounds letters make.
- Improve attendance and reduce levels of persistent absence by:
 - more effective engagement with outside agencies and authorities
 - increasing the extent to which rewards and incentives are used to encourage pupils and their families.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When learning is most effective, pupils work with interest, particularly enjoying practical activities. They are very attentive of their teachers and each other, concentrate for long periods and persevere with their work. Pupils collaborate well when working in pairs and groups, and greatly enjoy discussing their ideas with a partner. They are responding well

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to the drive to improve their speaking skills and are mostly happy to answer questions in detail in front of the class. Learning occasionally slows and the pupils' concentration wavers when teachers talk for too long or do not engage pupils through targeted questions.

There are no variations in the achievement of different groups of pupils, including those of different ethnic heritages. Attainment is broadly average. Year 6 test results fell in 2010 but represented satisfactory progress from the pupils' starting points. Older pupils have had less time to benefit from changes introduced by the new headteacher, but an increasing proportion are working at least at nationally expected levels for their age in both English and mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. Carefully focused support enables them to participate fully in lessons and they are starting to benefit from specific small group activities outside the classroom.

Pupils take their responsibilities seriously, such as through the buddy system and in paired reading. Most are able to explore how others are feeling and understand the consequences of their actions. Peer mediators help to resolve conflicts and Year 5 pupils are benefitting from their participation in resilience training to help with anger management and conciliation. Pupils are generally respectful and polite towards each other and adults. The recently-formed link with a school in India is helping pupils to appreciate the lives of others. Year 5 pupils thought about meaning within poetry as they studied *The Highwayman*. Pupils are very aware of how to be healthy and the importance of exercise and a balanced diet.

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

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	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
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?

The most effective teaching engages pupils when they share ideas in discussion with others. Their positive response to their teachers contributes to the calm atmosphere in classrooms. Teachers explain the purpose behind each lesson and how pupils' learning will build on from what they have done before. In these lessons, pupils' thinking is extended through skilled questions, resources such as information and communication technology are used creatively, and support staff are carefully deployed to maximise their impact on learning. However, not all teachers use assessment information to pitch methods and activities closely to meet the needs of all pupils.

Changes to the curriculum to link learning between subjects and strengthen the cross-curricular development of basic skills are in their infancy. Pupils are increasingly having a voice in shaping what they would like to learn in each topic. The school has received national recognition for the support it provides for learning beyond the school day. Pupils enjoy the clubs available, particularly when they are of a sporting nature. These are often made possible by the expertise of outside coaches or through secondary school links.

The school provides a welcoming environment for the pupils, who trust staff to advise, guide and support them. The staff team are very aware of individual needs, particularly where a pupil's circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Prompt action is taken to provide support packages, including the 'Nurture Group', where pupils receive additional guidance to support their personal development, and seeking the expertise of staff from

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outside agencies. There are carefully planned transition arrangements to secondary school, including additional support for pupils who might find the transfer difficult. The school monitors absence very carefully but actions to reward, recognise and encourage better attendance have been less effective. The school has not always engaged successfully with agencies that could support the better attendance of individual pupils.

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 headteacher's commitment to raising achievement by tackling shortcomings in teaching is shared by staff. She is ably supported in this drive for improvement by the deputy headteacher and a rapidly developing team of middle leaders. They are becoming more effective in fulfilling their roles, and are taking a stronger lead in monitoring performance and driving improvement in their areas. Action to overcome weaknesses has led to improved teaching and learning but some inconsistencies remain. The drive to break down barriers to learning, promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination makes this a harmonious school in which there are no significant variations in the achievement of different groups of pupils.

Governance is satisfactory. Key governors visit the school and understand its qualities, but the governing body is not always sufficiently involved in self-evaluation or forward planning. The governing body ensures that safeguarding arrangements are implemented rigorously by staff and their impact carefully evaluated. Procedures include careful checks on staff and a regular training programme that ensures all are up to date with current practice. By teaching pupils about safety issues, pupils are equipped to identify and deal with risks.

The school makes an effective and carefully planned contribution to promoting greater community cohesion but has not evaluated effectively its actions in order to identify the next steps to take. It engages well with local groups and points families towards agencies where they can find further support. The school is strongly committed to partnership working by bringing in skills, not otherwise available, to extend the opportunities provided for the pupils and to support their welfare. Furthermore, the expertise of external practitioners has been utilised to good effect to support the drive to improve teaching.

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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	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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Close links with 'feeder' settings help to give the children a smooth start to their time in Reception. Children join the school with skills below those expected for their age and make satisfactory progress. The early identification of their learning and language needs enables the school to put in support quickly and at the right level. Developing children's speaking and listening skills is a priority as this has been identified as a weakness on entry. A successful programme includes input from a speech therapist, and the school has plans for this to be developed further for the next cohort.

The staff team focuses on ensuring the welfare of the children at all times. As a result, children feel safe and are confident that adults will help them if they have a problem. The children work and play happily together and become more independent as the year progresses. They start to take the initiative for aspects of their learning but can become distracted when the purpose of activities is unclear or does not engage their interest. Sometimes, when adults are occupied leading sessions, there is no member of staff to monitor the children in their other activities or to intervene to move their learning forward.

Teachers are starting to make better use of their regular assessments to plan activities to meet the needs and interests of the children. However, as in the rest of the school, sessions where children are starting to understand the sounds that letters make in order to develop their early spelling and reading skills lack drive and pace. Training and external expertise have been supporting improvements to provision based on the identification of priorities by the school.

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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

A relatively small proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. The level of satisfaction is high in response to almost all of the questions. Inspection evidence endorses their positive views about the school, particularly that their children are helped to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle. Through discussions with staff and pupils, inspectors investigated the concerns of a small number of parents and carers about how well the school manages behaviour. Inspectors concluded that behaviour is good. This reflects the views of the majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire. Inspectors also judge that the school is increasingly seeking to take account of their views, as is the opinion of the very large majority who submitted responses.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Swallow Dell 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 85 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 362 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	51	60	32	38	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	56	66	29	34	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	49	58	30	35	5	6	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	47	55	34	40	1	1	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	51	60	29	34	4	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	44	52	37	44	3	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	41	48	43	51	1	1	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)	38	45	40	47	5	6	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	41	48	39	46	4	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	39	46	36	42	10	12	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	45	32	38	5	6	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	52	61	29	34	3	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	56	66	27	32	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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.



15 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swallow Dell Primary School, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3JP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We saw that you work very hard and are proud of the part you play in school life. Inspectors were particularly impressed by your confident answers to their questions. These are our main findings.

Swallow Dell Primary School is satisfactory and improving because the headteacher and staff are doing their utmost to help you all to succeed.

Members of staff take good care of you and make sure you are kept safe.

Your behaviour is good and you show respect towards adults.

Your positive attitudes to learning contribute significantly to your progress.

The curriculum is starting to become more interesting and provides you with opportunities to decide what you want to learn in each topic.

The school works well in partnership with others to support your learning and has formed strong links with your parents and carers.

Teaching is satisfactory and improving, but marking is not used consistently to help you to understand what you need to do to improve and spelling lessons lack drive and pace.

You develop a good understanding of how to keep yourselves safe and healthy.

We have asked the school to take a variety of actions to push up your achievement in English and mathematics. These actions include making your spelling lessons more effective and making marking more helpful so you can see clearly how to improve your work. We have also asked the school to work with you and your families to improve attendance. All of you can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector

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