

Stonehill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117345
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379399
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Raminder Arora

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Millar
Headteacher	Michelle Dent
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2009
School address	Western Close Letchworth Garden City SG6 4SZ
Telephone number	01462 620262
Fax number	01462 630508
Email address	admin@stonehill.herts.sch.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 13 lessons or parts of lessons. Eight teachers were seen teaching. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and pupils. Parents and carers were spoken to as they accompanied their children to school in the morning. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at some of the documentation. This included the school development plan, monitoring, tracking and assessment information, as well as planning and the governing body minutes. The school's procedures for ensuring pupils' safety were closely scrutinised. In addition, 88 parental questionnaires were analysed as well as 20 returned by staff and 78 from pupils.

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

- The team considered whether pupils' progress and achievement are consistent across the school.
- It explored the impact of the school's work in raising achievement in mathematics and writing.
- It looked at whether teachers have appropriately high expectations and provide sufficient challenge in lessons.
- It scrutinised the quality of leadership and management at all levels to see how effective this is in securing improvement.

Information about the school

Stonehill School is broadly average in size when compared with other schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the number from minority ethnic groups, or who speak a language other than English, is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most needs are related to moderate learning difficulties. The number on roll has risen in the last two years. Pupil mobility within the school has also increased with 25% of admissions last year outside of normal times. The Nursery and Reception children learn together in a single Early Years Foundation Stage unit established two years ago. The school has National Healthy Schools status, Travel to School Gold Award and more recently Information Communication Technology Mark.

The school operates a breakfast club. An independent playgroup on site, called 'Little Stones', is inspected separately.

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

This is a satisfactory and improving school. It provides a happy, harmonious environment in which all pupils are valued. As a result, pupils say they feel safe and secure in knowing that adults will always help them. Pupils are polite, well-behaved and enjoy learning. They are very proud of their school, enjoy looking after each other and organise a variety of events to raise money for charity. They know the importance of living a healthy lifestyle and the school fosters their emotional development well.

Children enter the school with skills and knowledge at levels generally expected for their age. Their achievement and progress across the school is satisfactory and they reach broadly average standards by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. However, attainment in writing is lower than in other areas of learning. In both English and mathematics, insufficient numbers of pupils reach the higher National Curriculum levels because teachers' expectations are not high enough and tasks are not always matched to pupils' ability. The school recognises that more targeted support, based on accurate assessment of the performance of pupils of all abilities is needed if progress is to accelerate. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make consistently good progress because of the good quality targeted support they receive.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and sometimes good. The quality of displays provides visual stimulus to enhance pupils' learning. The curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' interest in learning. The topic and skills-based approach is beginning to foster better progress in literacy and numeracy. Pupils enjoy the interesting range of extra-curricular activities, trips, visitors to the school, sporting activities and the residential trip to the Isle of Wight.

Parents and carers and pupils are correct in their belief that care, guidance and support from all adults in school are good. Several parents and carers wrote comments and gave freely of their time to speak to the inspection team about how seriously the school takes the development of their children. One parent wrote, 'My daughter has blossomed since being at this school, both in her knowledge and confidence.'

The headteacher and senior leadership team have an accurate view of the school's performance and are well aware of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The quality of teaching has begun to improve now that all the

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

inadequate teaching has been eradicated. The leaders have engendered a strong sense of teamwork amongst all staff and there is an agreed vision for how the school should develop. As a result of the actions already taken, particularly in relation to improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement is beginning to improve and the school has demonstrated that it has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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?

- By July 2012, improve attainment especially in writing across the school by giving pupils enough opportunities to write in different subjects and apply the skills learnt.
- Secure good or better teaching in Years 1 to 6 by:
 - ensuring learning proceeds at a demanding pace so that pupils are fully engaged
 - matching work more closely to pupils' needs and abilities
 - increasing levels of challenge by providing more opportunities for pupils to explore their own ideas and work independently in order to increase their rates of progress.
- Improve the way in which assessment is used to support learning by:
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to be involved in evaluating their own work and that of others, so that they have a better understanding of what is required to accelerate their rate of progress
 - ensuring that marking in books gives clear guidance, so that pupils understand the next steps to be taken to improve their work
 - strengthen links between pupils' targets and their learning in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and improving steadily. Children start school with skills and knowledge at levels generally expected for their age, except in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage to reach standards that are average overall and better especially in their personal development by the time they start Year 1. Learning and progress are satisfactory overall in English, mathematics and science in Years 1 to 6. Attainment in most years is broadly average, but it is lower in writing across the school than in other areas. There are many pupils who join the school during the year who are still catching up with their peers. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good overall. Early identification and good quality intervention programmes effectively meet their academic, social and physical needs. The school works with increasing success in guiding parents about how they can support their

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

children's learning. The progress made by pupils in some year groups is inconsistent because the tasks teachers provide do not always closely match their needs. The pupils whose circumstances have the potential to make them vulnerable achieve as well as their peers.

Inspectors noted good learning and progress in some lessons that they visited. For example, in a Key Stage 2 lesson, pupils were thinking hard about powerful words to add suspense to their stories. In a Key Stage 1 lesson, well-informed individual guidance from adults ensured pupils of all abilities were working hard to improve their word recognition and understanding of their favourite story, through encouragement in talking and the teacher's effective use of questioning to suit pupils' ability. Progress in reading is comparatively better than in writing because teachers provide books that both challenge and interest pupils. Those who struggle with reading are given effective extra help that speeds up their progress.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They reflect sensibly on their emotions and the feelings of others. A clear moral code underpins their good behaviour. Occasionally, pupils fidget when they spend too long listening to the teacher talking. Pupils show respect for people from different backgrounds and have a sound understanding of diversity within British culture. They feel very safe because the school deals quickly and effectively with the rare cases of bullying or racism. Most of them eat a healthy diet and take plenty of exercise. They have a clear understanding of the dangers of taking drugs, alcohol and smoking. Many pupils readily take responsibility in school, for example, as members of the school council. The council is beginning to help make decisions about learning and the environment. Pupils generously collect for charity and participate in carol concerts for residents of local sheltered housing. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and try their best. Their attendance is above average, because it is consistently promoted and rewarded. However, pupils' average attainment means their preparation for secondary school and future employment is satisfactory.

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	2
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	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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

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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Relationships in lessons are very positive and pupils are keen to learn. The frequent opportunities teachers provide for pupils to discuss and clarify their ideas with their talking partners reinforce learning well and promote good understanding. In well-taught lessons, learning proceeds at a lively pace and pupils are kept busy and work hard. Sometimes, the rate of learning and progress is affected because of the slow pace or the mismatch of tasks to pupils' abilities. Teachers do not always provide sufficient opportunities to challenge pupils, or let them explore their own ideas and work independently. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to learning, especially for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those few at the early stages of acquiring English. The quality of marking is inconsistent. It does not always provide specific guidance to show pupils what they need to do next to improve their work. Pupils are not sure of their targets and are, therefore, not able to take responsibility for their own progress.

The curriculum supports many aspects of personal development well. For example, swimming lessons promote healthy lifestyles and pupils enjoy sharing each other's religious festivals. There are signs that the measures to improve pupils' use of vocabulary in written work and more opportunities to apply skills learnt in writing are beginning to improve progress in this area. The many educational visits successfully broaden pupils' horizons and add to their enjoyment of school. Most pupils keenly participate in drama productions, sports and other clubs, which raises their aspirations.

Adults use their detailed knowledge of each pupil expertly to provide a good standard of individual care. The school's targeted support for pupils whose circumstances have the potential to make them vulnerable is very effective and ensures they settle quickly into the routines, gain confidence and behave well. The school works effectively with outside agencies to support pupils' education. For example, close liaison with the educational welfare officer has enabled the school to exceed its challenging attendance targets. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support that ensures they take a full part in school life.

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

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

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 drive to improve the quality of education is enthusiastically shared by staff. Some previous inadequate teaching has been eradicated and a committed team of subject leaders is set to take full responsibility for raising standards in their areas. The headteacher and the deputy headteacher have been proactive in raising teachers’ expectations of what pupils’ can do. This has made them more accountable and sharpened their teaching skills, particularly in the use of progress data to plan activities that match closely the needs of each pupil. Through their regular pupil progress meetings and scrutiny of pupils’ work, senior leaders check the performance of teachers and pupils. If any pupil's progress slows, the school quickly provides them with effective additional support, often on an individual level, so that they can catch up.

The governing body works hard on behalf of the school. Its members are not afraid to challenge the school over its performance and the quality of teaching, and this has helped to promote improvement. However, they do not always use data effectively to judge the quality of the school's successes and to identify areas in need of further improvement.

Safeguarding and child protection procedures are robust and of good quality. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults to work with children. The school is fully committed to ensuring equal opportunities. The inconsistencies in the progress of some groups, particularly in writing, are being suitably tackled through appropriate planning. The school has evaluated its religious, ethnic and socio-economic context thoroughly. It supports local people well in many ways through its close ties with the local area. Its overall promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory rather than good, however, because national links are limited. The engagement of parents and carers is satisfactory and improving. The school actively supports pupils’ families and is keenly developing parents’ and carers’ engagement in their children’s education.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	3

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

The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle quickly, happily and confidently in the Nursery and make good progress. By the time they enter Year 1, many children have exceeded expected levels for their age, although not so in linking sounds and letters in writing. Attainment has improved strongly, especially in personal, social and emotional development and areas that were previously less strong. Mathematical development has been enhanced by introducing calculation into as many activities as possible. A close focus on phonics, enhanced by adults working with small groups of children, has helped to improve progress in this area.

Adults provide well for children's welfare. Relationships are good between adults and children, and behaviour is good. Children are happy to take turns, work together and share resources. There are well-established routines to promote their personal and social development, such as handwashing and tidying up.

Teaching is generally good, but adults in their teaching occasionally exert excessive control and provide limited opportunity for children's independent learning. In one lesson, children were kept on the carpet for too long listening passively to the teacher talking. However, when allowed to choose for themselves, they show enjoyment in activities, share and take turns, and interact happily with each other developing their speaking and listening skills well. The recently developed outdoor area is helping to mirror indoor activities well. Staff are well deployed to assess individual children's learning, particularly in those activities that children choose for themselves. The manager of the Early Years Foundation Stage is supported effectively by the senior leadership team to ensure that outcomes are good. The team works successfully together to give the children experiences that they really enjoy. Systems to check on what children know, understand and can do are becoming more robust and assessment information is increasingly being used to inform future planning and transition into Year 1.

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

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
--	---

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers are happy with the school. They all report that their children are very well cared for and enjoy coming to school. One carer who met with an inspector talked about being very impressed with the care and support the school provided. Inspectors agree with these views. A few parents are dissatisfied with the way unacceptable behaviour is managed. The inspection team explored this and found pupils' behaviour to be consistently good in lessons and around the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stonehill 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 88 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 213 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	53	60	33	38	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	64	73	24	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	41	47	42	48	4	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	43	40	45	6	7	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	42	48	38	43	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	47	53	41	47	2	2	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	50	40	45	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	43	46	52	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	35	40	46	52	4	5	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	38	43	35	40	7	8	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	35	46	52	4	5	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	54	61	28	32	2	2	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	45	51	38	43	3	3	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



3 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stonehill School, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 4SZ

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave us during our visit to inspect your school. It was good to meet so many of you and a special thank you to those of you who gave up your time to talk to us and tell us all about the many things you do. We found that you are very polite in the way you speak to visitors. Your school gives you a satisfactory education, but a lot of new changes are working so well that things are beginning to improve.

You know how to keep yourself safe at all times, and you are all very keen to lead a healthy lifestyle, knowing the importance of eating sensibly and taking regular exercise. In lessons and around school, you behave well and all try hard to do your best. Your teachers provide you with an interesting range of enrichment activities, including trips, visitors to the school, residential visits and sporting activities. Your teachers and teaching assistants care for and look after you well. Those of you in the Early Years Foundation Stage learn well and make good progress. Your parents and carers are very pleased with the work of the school.

Your headteacher and all the other staff are trying very hard to make your school an even better place to learn. To try and help, we have asked them to do a few things to increase your progress particularly in writing. For example, we have asked them to challenge you to reach for the higher National Curriculum levels. We have also asked them to look even more closely at how well you are doing so that they can plan just the right work to meet your needs. We have also asked them to be sure that all your learning targets help you to make the best possible progress.

Thank you again for your help, and keep on working hard to help your teachers to make your school an even better place to learn.

Yours sincerely

Raminder Arora
Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.**