

Spire Nursery and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112660
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	378531
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Miller

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicky Sedgwick
Headteacher	Jane Garrett
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 19 lessons and 12 teachers were seen. Most teaching assistants were seen working with either individuals or groups of pupils. Inspectors held meetings with representatives of the governing body, and teaching and non-teaching staff. Inspectors talked formally with the school council and other groups of pupils. They attended assemblies and registration sessions, looked at pupils' work and talked informally with many pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of school documents. These included policies, development planning, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, curriculum and safeguarding materials and information provided for parents and carers. Minutes of meetings of the governing body were examined, including the headteacher's reports to the governing body and various reviews of the school's performance. Inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 28 parents and carers and 25 members of staff.

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

- The ways the school has been working to raise attainment in mathematics and numeracy to those of literacy and writing, particularly for boys.
- Inspectors explored the development of the school's use of assessment in order to improve further the quality of pupils' learning and their progress.
- The team explored the ways the school's leaders, at all levels, work together to raise standards and promote pupils' progress throughout the school.
- Inspectors evaluated the extent to which the pupils' personal development, and the care, guidance and support provided are emerging strengths of the school.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average-sized school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of girls attending the school is above average. Most children transferring from the Nursery to Reception continue at the school until the end of Year 2. The percentages of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and of those who speak English as an additional language, are below average. The proportion identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The percentage with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The range of pupils' special educational needs includes behavioural, speech and language and specific learning difficulties. There is a specially resourced provision for children with special educational needs, managed by the school, and known as the Bears Nursery. This facility is for children from across the local authority area with profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. Almost all transfer to other specialist schools at the start of the Reception Year. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The governing body runs a breakfast and after-school club for the children and pupils attending the school. The school currently holds an Anti-Bullying award from the local authority, the Health Promoting School award, an Active Mark and the Basic Skills Quality Mark. It holds a number of national awards for the quality and use of its school garden.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school where pupils make good progress. Most children enter the community nursery (the Bees) with attainment which is well below that typical for their age. Their personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy skills are often particularly weak. An excellent focus on these key areas enables the children to improve to below average expectations on transfer to the Reception classes. While about a third of children transfer to Reception in other schools, those staying at the Spire make excellent progress overall and the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Attainment is broadly average by the start of Year 1; pupils' progress is consolidated effectively during Key Stage 1, and their learning skills developed well. By the end of Year 2, attainment is average overall. In 2011, the majority of pupils in Year 2 were girls. They attained securely average outcomes by the end of Key Stage 1. The school has focused well on developing the curriculum for its minority of boys, and in 2011 their attainment was above average. The majority of pupils attending the school are known to be eligible for free school meals; such pupils achieved well compared with similar groups nationally.

The school is particularly successful in enabling the progress and achievement of its pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There is a great deal of expertise within the school, starting in the resourced Nursery unit (the Bears), which is led and managed highly efficiently. This results in notable teamwork. The excellent care and support provided for all children and pupils is a key strength of the school. Consequently, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress, from low starting points, to attain standards above those of similar groups nationally by the end of Year 2.

While there was a slight dip in performance following the last inspection, standards remained average by Year 2 but have been improving steadily over the past two years. The school is led and managed well at all levels, is establishing a good track record of improving standards, and its capacity for further improvement is good. All the areas for further development already form part of the school's thinking, good self-evaluation and improvement planning. The school has worked especially hard on curriculum development. This is in order to make learning interesting and relevant to all groups of pupils. This work has been reviewed, revised and is evolving to ensure additional links and extra opportunities for pupils to apply the essential skills learnt in one subject across a range of others. This good approach is close to completion but not implemented fully. Much of the work on the monitoring of lessons and learning

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has been carried out by senior leaders. Middle and subject leaders are starting to be more involved in this monitoring, but some are still developing the necessary skills and expertise. The school has developed good tracking systems to ensure the progress of pupils is monitored effectively and that any additional support is targeted well to underpin learning. However, while overall there is good practice, for a few teachers the use of day to day assessment during lessons, is not yet fully effective. This includes the use of questioning to check pupils' understanding, and the planning of the methods by which pupils learning during each lesson will be assessed.

There is excellence in the ways the school enables its pupils to appreciate and understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. The school's grounds, extensive gardens and field have been developed splendidly to enable pupils to become comfortable with an outdoor approach. They understand well the value of feeling safe in various environments. Under the excellent leadership of the school gardener, pupils grow their own fruit and vegetables and learn at first hand the importance of these to their health and diet. Pupils' appreciation and care of their environment and the allotments contributes significantly to their spiritual as well as physical well-being. Typical comments in the garden visitors' book include, 'An inspirational environment. Outdoor learning at its best. A wonderful legacy for future learners.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school, and enhance further its drive for improvement by ensuring all middle leaders develop the skills needed to help senior leaders monitor lessons and learning.
- Extend the school's work to increase the proportion of good and better teaching, and accelerate further pupils' progress, by ensuring that all teachers make the best use of focused assessment in the classroom.
- Ensure the completion, by the end of the current academic year, of the phased introduction of the school's creative skills-based curriculum, in order to challenge and inspire pupils even further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Attainment is meeting expectations for most pupils at this stage in Year 2. Pupils are currently continuing to achieve well and make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to receive good support in class and make excellent progress. Their individual education plans are effective working documents, targeting well their next steps in development. When pupils are withdrawn for specialist work with teaching assistants the work is planned to enable them to re-integrate quickly and contribute, for example, to reviews of learning at the end of lessons. Computers and interactive whiteboards are used well throughout the school to support learning. In a Year 1 mathematics lesson pupils used information and communication technology well in developing their understanding of,

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for example circles as 2-D and cubes as 3-D shapes. They were challenged very well when asked to classify such shapes by their properties. In a Year 2 English and history lesson, when writing about Bolsover Castle, pupils’ speaking and listening skills were promoted effectively through the use of discussion partners. They shared ideas well about what makes a good sentence.

While attendance is average, pupils say they enjoy school, and this is seen in their eager involvement in lessons. Attitudes to learning are good. The very large majority of pupils are invariably polite; the words ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and ‘excuse me’ are often to be heard. This is because pupils are encouraged to be kind and respect each other from their very first day at school. Pupils are proud of their school, not least because they are given time to think, reflect and respond, and the opportunity to take responsibility for themselves and others. They are developing well as young citizens. Pupils are good at writing letters to affect change. They wrote to the Council, for example, and secured a litter bin by a local bus stop. This has been effective in preventing littering. Pupils’ appreciation of the lives of others was reflected in their responses to an assembly taken by the local parish priest on the theme of ‘water’. They showed a good understanding of the value of water to many peoples in other parts of the world, as well as its role in keeping us all healthy. Their understanding and appreciation of the spiritual ‘cleansing’ nature of water was good.

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	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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

How effective is the provision?

The good teaching is typified by clear objectives for each lesson, good pace to the

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

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learning and effective adult support. There is good management of behaviour where a few pupils find it consistently difficult to manage well their own behaviour throughout a school day. The school’s inclusive ethos means that any unsatisfactory behaviour rarely interrupts learning. Pupils are usually supported well through questioning which challenges them to explain their thinking. However, this is not consistent across all classes and lessons. In the few lessons where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, opportunities for questioning, which checks pupils’ understanding, are sometimes missed. This is because relevant strategies and opportunities are not included in the lesson planning. Nevertheless, the use of more focused assessment is improving as the school’s creative curriculum is introduced. Pupils enjoy the opportunities this offers to develop and practise their skills and interests. What is taught is augmented well by a good range of extra-curricular activities provided by specialists and parents or carers as well as school staff.

Outstanding care, support and guidance are exemplified by the school’s sensitive awareness of the needs of its pupils and families. Partnership work with the children’s centre on the site is particularly good in this respect, as is the work of the school’s learning mentor. The school signposts many families to the children’s centre for additional help and support. Good breakfast and after-school club facilities meet requirements and support families well. The school works hard to support the few families who face barriers in ensuring the regular attendance of their children. Staff invariably go that extra mile on the pupils’ behalf.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is excellent leadership from the headteacher, strengthened by her assistant headteachers. Good support from an effective governing body, plus a good team of subject leaders, ensures an enthusiastic staff channel well their work on school improvement. Monitoring is good at senior level, but the role of middle leaders in the monitoring of teaching and learning is underdeveloped. Nevertheless, staff and members of the governing body use their personal and professional skills well to secure school improvement; in this they are being increasingly successful. Morale at the school is high. The good work staff have already undertaken on the curriculum, has resulted in a marked improvement in the attainment of boys. Staff know they can succeed because of the excellent outcomes achieved by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There is good promotion of equality of opportunity. The school is working purposefully to close the gap between the

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attainment of boys and girls and that between pupils' average and above average outcomes by the end of Year 2. The safeguarding of children is good, with particularly good expertise in child protection and support for those pupils whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. There are good working relationships between the school and its pupils' families. The school is active in its approach to working with support agencies and other education partners. Community cohesion is good. This aspect of its work is particularly strong within the school and its locality, although the school is developing and exploring wider additional links. It leads others nationally in the development and use of its gardens, and links with the adjoining local community garden are particularly strong.

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

In the Bears Nursery, the attainment of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties may be low, but they make good progress from their individual starting points. This is because of the very good focus on their sensory development. Those with autism develop well in the ways they are enabled to communicate with, and relate to, other children and adults, and make sense of the world around them. Focused support, and excellent assessment and leadership and management in both Nursery classes provide a firm foundation upon which the main school builds well.

Nursery staff have an excellent approach to establishing links with families. This is exemplified by the daily opportunities provided for parents and carers to work with their children during the daily supported play sessions. The Nursery staff are very successful in ensuring children develop not only the basic personal and social skills to ensure good attitudes to learning but also the speech and language skills necessary for them to express their ideas and respond to their experiences. 'Investigation' time

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is a vital part of encouraging and developing children’s curiosity and ensures they make outstanding progress. Assessment of progress is very regular and supported well by children’s ‘Learning Journey’ files. Observations of children are perceptive, and enable staff to share proficiently their understanding of the needs of individual children. Indoor and outdoor resources are used very effectively to support learning. In an excellent Reception lesson, planning and teamwork between teachers showed how a ‘themed’, cooperative approach helps children to achieve well. Children’s understanding of the numeracy concepts of small, medium and large when measuring and estimating outside equipment were complemented by their literacy work on the beginning, middle and end of a story about owls. The display of key vocabulary helped reinforce very well these links. Related investigations measuring and counting play bricks, and creative play with owl masks ensured great fun was had by all. The levels of curiosity and respect for others which are planted in these early years stand the children in very good stead for their next phase of education. Teaching and teaching assistant support are consistently good throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage; this helps explain why the children are enabled to make excellent progress. The high levels of care and guidance seen throughout the school are also rooted in the standards set by staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Working relationships are excellent between staff and children because outstanding leadership ensures planning and organisation are focused entirely on meeting children’s needs, whether in the Bears, Bees or Reception classes.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers returning the questionnaire was below average, but similar to the numbers typically responding to the school’s own questionnaires. The overwhelming majority, including those with whom inspectors talked at the school gates, are very happy with the school and responded affirmatively to all the questions. The few who did not respond to the question about the way the school prepares children for their future tended to be new to the school. A very few expressed some concern about the recent change in the time of the school day, but school consultations indicate no problems for the vast majority. Parents and carers spoke to inspectors about the many ways the school works together with its families to promote the learning and welfare of their children. As one parent/carer wrote, ‘The staff are kind, considerate and caring. They have always helped us in every way possible. Staff are sympathetic and supportive, and deserve recognition.’

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Spire Nursery and 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 28 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 191 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	64	10	36	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	23	82	5	18	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	19	68	9	32	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	68	9	32	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	64	10	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	18	64	10	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	71	8	29	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	14	50	8	29	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	21	75	7	25	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	71	8	29	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	68	8	29	1	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	64	10	36	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	22	79	5	18	1	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	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.



10 October 2011

Dear pupils

Inspection of Spire Nursery and Infant School, Chesterfield, S40 2EU

Yours is a good school. We enjoyed our recent visit and thank you all very much for your politeness, interest and the many ways you helped us to understand what your school is all about. We saw that you enjoy school, respect each other and are keen to learn. We loved your gardens, and saw that you do too; you look after them well.

These are some of the things we found that are best about you and your school.

- You receive an excellent start to your school life in the Nursery and Reception.
- You achieve well and make good progress during your time at the school.
- You behave well and know how to keep each other safe at school.
- Your understanding of the importance of living healthily is excellent.
- The adults at your school take excellent care of you.
- Your school works well with others, including your families, to help you learn.
- You have good teachers who set you a very good example.
- Your headteacher, other teachers and members of the governing body lead your school well.

We have asked your teachers to do some extra things to help all of you make even better progress. They will be developing further the ways they plan your lessons and check that you understand your work. You will find they will be asking you even more questions about your learning. Those teachers in charge of all the different subjects taught at your school will be working closely with your headteacher and her assistant headteachers to help them make sure you achieve well. Finally, your teachers will be finishing the work they have started to make sure that what you learn is always interesting, challenging and creative.

Around your school are some important posters, one of which reads, 'Does someone need your help today?' Please continue to help each other and work together with your teachers, and other adults at your school, to achieve further success.

Yours sincerely

Michael Miller
Lead inspector

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