

Sutton Valence Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118314
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379592
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Margaret Coussins

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	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Randa William
Headteacher	Sarah Drury
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 June 2009
School address	North Street Sutton Valence Maidstone, Kent ME17 3HT
Telephone number	01622 842188
Fax number	01622 844549
Email address	headteacher@sutton-valence.kent.sch.uk

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 14 lessons and seven teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other staff with leadership responsibilities, pupils and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, pupils' progress records and the safeguarding policies and procedures. Questionnaires from 70 parents and carers were received and analysed, along with those from staff and pupils.

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

- How well the school is improving pupils' writing.
- The level of challenge in lessons, particularly for more-able pupils, to determine the quality of teaching, the rates of pupils' progress and the impact on learning of support staff.
- How effectively assessment and progress information is used to inform teaching and learning.
- The impact of the work of leaders and managers at all levels on school improvement.

Information about the school

Sutton Valence is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Provision is made for the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class. A daily breakfast club is provided. The school has gained several awards including national Healthy Schools status and an Activemark.

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

2

Main findings

Sutton Valence is a satisfactory school. Children get off to a good start to their schooling in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school provides good care, guidance and support, and this ensures that pupils feel safe and secure and enjoy coming to school, which is reflected in their high attendance. Behaviour is good. Pupils' good understanding of how to stay fit and healthy is recognised by the Healthy Schools and Activemark awards.

Pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory. By the time pupils leave the school in Year 6, their attainment in mathematics, and English is average. Teaching is good and this is leading to rapidly accelerating progress. However, this has not yet had an impact on pupils' overall achievement, as pupils have yet to 'catch-up' their learning. In English, reading is a strength and pupils make good progress, mainly as a result of a successful whole-school focus on guided reading. Pupils' writing remains weaker, although it is improving as a result of developments in the curriculum that are providing meaningful and purposeful writing opportunities, and the school's continuing focus on this area. This is motivating all pupils as writers, and boys in particular. The school has correctly identified, from its analysis of data at the end of Key Stage 2, that some pupils who achieved the higher level (Level 3) at the end of Year 2 do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Assessment procedures are satisfactory and the tracking of individual pupils' progress is detailed. However, the use of assessment information to inform learning is not as effective as it could be. As a result, the work planned is sometimes not challenging enough for some more-able pupils, which can slow their progress. Leaders and managers do not always analyse assessment information with enough rigour as pupils move through the school in order to equip teachers with the information they need and to provide a strategic overview of pupils' progress.

Effective self-evaluation and monitoring give an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Leaders and managers have taken successful action to stem the decline in attainment and progress since the previous inspection. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and, where teaching is no more than satisfactory, leaders provide effective support and guidance for improvement. Recent developments to the curriculum to make learning more meaningful for pupils by linking learning across subjects are an important factor in improving progress across the school. These factors indicate that the school has a good capacity to improve further. One parent wrote, 'Recent changes in staff seem to have brought a renewed enthusiasm to the school. I have seen the school improve over the last six

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months.'

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?

- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress in English and mathematics by:
 - using assessment information more effectively to support learning and making sure tasks more precisely meet the needs of more-able pupils and provide consistent challenge
 - ensuring that all lessons provide exciting, memorable learning opportunities for pupils to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable
 - ensuring pupils understand how well they are making progress and how they can improve further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enjoy their lessons and are keen to learn when they can get on with their work quickly. They say they learn best when they get involved in practical and problem-solving activities that 'make us think, are fun and not boring'. This was seen to good effect in a Year 2 science lesson where pupils were experimenting with different materials, developing thinking skills and creativity, and predicting outcomes. They worked together very well, responding positively to the teacher's good questioning and made good progress developing their scientific understanding. Year 4 pupils were very motivated in a drama session linked to their topic of Tudor seafarers. One pupil said after the session, 'It gives me lots of ideas for my writing because the drama helps me to know how it feels. I know more than just being told or reading about it in a book.' In these active, engaging lessons, pupils are excited by and committed to what they are learning. However, in a few lessons, pupils remain passive and uninspired, and do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Sometimes, in English, pupils do not apply the skills they have learnt in the first part of the lesson in independent writing tasks and this restricts their progress. Overall, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to others because their needs are identified at an early stage and effective support is provided.

Pupils enjoy the responsibilities they are given and take them seriously, for example, as school council members, buddies, prefects and peer mediators. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and their cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils appreciate the range of cultural experiences afforded them through visits to theatres, art galleries and through their music, art and drama lessons in school.

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Some impressive artwork is displayed around the school. Their awareness of other cultures within the United Kingdom is less well developed, although plans are underway to link with a school in London. Pupils’ level of basic skills and their good personal skills prepare them adequately for the next stage of their education.

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	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

All adults work successfully to include pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, so they are able to participate fully in learning and make satisfactory progress. Support is targeted well. There is close collaboration between school leaders, the parent support adviser and external agencies to build relationships with pupils and their families, and this contributes significantly to good care, guidance and support. Pupils and parents and carers appreciate the well-attended breakfast club, which makes a good contribution to pupils’ well-being by promoting healthy eating and provides a safe and sociable start to the day.

Teachers and teaching assistants have good relationships with pupils and manage their classes well. Teachers generally make lessons interesting and enjoyable because increasingly, they link subjects together to make learning more relevant and meaningful to pupils. However, a few lessons are too dull and do not offer pupils memorable or exciting experiences. Occasionally, teaching does not provide the right level of challenge for pupils and teachers’ expectations are not high enough. A notable feature of almost all lessons is the opportunity for pupils to share and

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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articulate their thinking with a partner and the effective and skilled use of questioning by staff that extends pupils’ thinking and learning. There are good examples of marking and feedback that give pupils useful information on how to improve but this good practice is not evident in all classes. The good curriculum is enhanced well by a wide range of enrichment opportunities, including clubs, special events, visits and visitors to school. These activities effectively broaden pupils’ interests, experiences and skills.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a shared vision and good ambition for the school that drive its improvement. The governing body has recently revised its structure and code of conduct, and has rapidly become a challenging and strong influence on the leadership and management of the school. It is clearly involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the school and in strategic planning. The school also benefits from governors’ range of expertise and skills. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored through observations and regular checks on pupils’ work and, where weaknesses are observed, effective action is taken. The increased frequency of meetings about pupils’ progress ensures that all staff are accountable for pupils’ progress as they move through the school.

The inclusive ethos of the school ensures that pupils have equal opportunities to learn and develop without fear of discrimination. It ensures that all pupils have every chance to take part in all of its activities. However, currently, all groups of pupils are achieving satisfactorily. Good partnerships with local schools and organisations are well established, enrich the curriculum and contribute to pupils’ well-being and learning opportunities. For example, links with a local secondary school science teacher enabled pupils and their parents and carers to experience an evening event exploring light and dark. The partnership with a local independent school allows pupils to use its indoor swimming pool during the months when their own outdoor pool is out of action.

Leaders have developed the school as a cohesive community but its strategy to develop community cohesion at national and global levels to widen pupils’ horizons is less well developed. There are good and improving links with the local community. Along with staff, the governing body ensures that safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Procedures are known by all staff and applied across all aspects of the

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school’s work so that pupils feel safe. The school communicates with parents and carers through a range of media and keeps them informed about school events and news through regular newsletters and termly curriculum updates. The school knows, however, a small minority of parents and carers remain unconvinced that their views are sought, valued and acted upon.

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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
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 start school with skills and knowledge that are broadly at the expected levels for their age. Although children’s skills are often lower than this in emotional development, linking sounds and letters (phonics), writing, calculation, and knowledge and understanding of the world. As a result of good leadership and teaching, children make good progress in all areas and reach the expected goals by the time they move into Year 1. There are positive and trusting relationships between children and adults and, as a result, behaviour is good and children feel safe and secure. Children are confident, settle happily into the routines of the day, are well cared for and clearly enjoy learning. Good questioning by adults helps children to extend their thinking and learning. There are good opportunities for children to take responsibility and make their own choices, and these are balanced well by activities that are directed by adults.

Children quickly develop independence by, for example, storing their book bags and registering their names in the morning for a packed lunch or a school meal. They learn to take responsibility by tidying up their activities and, for instance, by taking the register to the office, which they said, ‘is a very important job’. Children understand the need to keep themselves safe and healthy, and know why they need to wash their hands before eating or after going to the toilet. Children enjoy many

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opportunities to play and learn in the outdoor area, although it is not yet fully utilised to maximise opportunities for children to develop in all areas of learning. The skilled and systematic teaching of phonics ensures children develop good reading and writing skills. Sometimes, however, children are not always taught at a pace commensurate with their abilities. There are effective induction procedures, enabling good links with parents and carers and a smooth transition into school life. One parent wrote, 'Staff have been fantastic in helping our child settle into his new school. They visited us at home and were very keen on understanding his outside-of-school interests and which areas of pre-school he'd enjoyed or not liked so much.' The assessment of pupils' progress is carried out thoroughly and regularly, and enables staff to keep track of where children are and plan the next steps in their learning.

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

Views of parents and carers

All parents and carers responding to the questionnaire said that their children enjoy school, which is reflected in high attendance, and the very large majority agreed that the school keeps their children safe. The main concerns, from a small minority of parents and carers, were about progress, how effectively the school deals with unacceptable behaviour, how well the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns, and how well the school is led and managed. A few were also concerned about how well the school helps them to support their children's learning. During this inspection, the inspectors found that the school is led and managed well overall. They found that pupils' progress is currently satisfactory but improving. The school is well aware that a number of parents and carers are unhappy about communication and has plans to address this issue. Inspectors found that behaviour is good and that the school manages any incidents of inconsiderate behaviour well should they arise.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sutton Valence 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 70 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 202 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	50	35	50	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	29	41	36	51	4	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	15	21	44	63	8	11	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	23	32	46	18	26	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	17	24	42	60	7	10	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	15	21	37	53	10	14	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	31	40	57	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)	21	30	38	54	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	21	30	40	57	5	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	24	34	49	9	13	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	23	35	50	13	19	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	16	23	34	49	15	21	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	19	27	42	60	2	3	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.



17 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sutton Valence Primary School, Maidstone ME17 3HT

Thank you very much for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school and for talking to us about your work. You are very polite and friendly. Your school is satisfactory overall, which means that some things are good and some things need to be better.

These are some of the things that stood out about Sutton Valence.

- You and your parents and carers told us that you really enjoy coming to school. We could see this because your attendance is high – keep it up. Those of you in Reception get a good start to school.
- Teaching is mostly good and those who lead and manage your school are doing a good job.
- Everybody in your school looks after you well because they provide you with good care, guidance and support.
- Some of you had concerns about behaviour. We found that you behave well in lessons and around the school and know how to keep safe and healthy.

By the time you leave the school, your attainment is average. We think this should be better and have asked the school to help you make faster progress in your English and mathematics lessons by:

- using all the information they have about your progress to make sure that the work they plan is just right for all of you, and especially not too easy
- making sure that all your lessons are exciting and memorable
- checking that you know how well you are doing and what you can do to improve.

All of you can help by always working hard and doing your very best.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins
Lead inspector

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