

Southlands Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109525
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	377938
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Emma Aylesbury

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	275
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Deirdre Byrne
Headteacher	Jennifer Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited two assemblies and observed 15 lessons taught by 11 teachers. They held meetings with the headteacher, senior leadership team, members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation documentation, safeguarding procedures, monitoring and assessment information, lesson plans and school policies. They analysed questionnaires from 49 pupils, 18 staff and 87 parents and carers.

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

- The impact of school actions to improve the quality of learning to raise the attainment at KS1, particularly in writing.
- Teachers' use of assessment data to ensure that all pupils make equal progress, including more able pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and how well are these groups catered for.
- The effectiveness of teachers' marking for improvement to accelerate pupils' progress, especially for the more able.

Information about the school

Southlands Lower School is larger than most primary schools. The largest group of pupils is of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average, as is those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. From January 2012 the school will operate under a temporary federation arrangement. The school has gained the International Award.

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

Southlands Lower School provides a satisfactory standard of education. The school is a welcoming community where pupils are happy. As one parent commented, 'The school has a lovely atmosphere'. Pupils display empathy and develop acceptance of each other and, as result, behaviour is good. Pupils say they feel safe and are secure that any rare cases of bullying will be dealt with promptly. Their awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural is satisfactory.

By the time they leave school at the end of Year 4, pupils' attainment is similar to the national expectations for their age. However, attainment has in some areas shown a decline reflecting the inconsistencies of teaching. Teacher assessment shows that the fluctuations have been in mathematics and writing, because too few pupils reached the higher levels. For example, too few girls reached the higher levels in mathematics. Pupils make better progress in reading when compared to writing. This gap is mainly due to the inconsistencies in the way pupils are taught writing and, although increasing, there are insufficient opportunities for them to practise these skills across all subjects.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory, with some being good. In the most effective lessons teachers help pupils to be independent in their learning and work is tailored well to their skills so that progress accelerates. However, teachers do not routinely take opportunities to promote pupils' skills in phonics (letters and sounds), especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage because they are not taught systemically or regularly enough. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress and are supported appropriately by teaching assistants, although the impact of this support varies across the school.

Adults are successful in encouraging pupils to work and play together, which fosters a sense of community spirit as a result of the satisfactory care and guidance provided for pupils. Attendance rates are above average reflecting how well pupils enjoy school. Their comments include, 'We love school'. This reflects the school's increasingly effective support for those pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable.

Senior leaders use monitoring data regularly to identify what the school does well and to plan for improvement. Their self evaluation is honest and identifies the correct areas for improvement. However, not all leaders, managers and governors use specific criteria in evaluating the impact of changes in teaching on learning in order

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to judge the impact on pupils' achievement. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained good attendance. These actions demonstrate the school has satisfactory capacity to make further improvements. The newly-formed interim federation with the middle school has made a positive start in providing support for the transitional arrangements and is focusing priorities based on the shared expertise across the federation. Members of the governing body meet their statutory responsibilities and are increasingly effective in challenging the school's academic performance.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be 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?

- Improve the teaching of phonics in the Early Years Foundation stage to ensure that all children make better progress in communication, language and literacy, and especially in early writing skills.
- Strengthen teaching to accelerate pupils' progress in lessons and raise attainment in all subjects by:
 - reviewing targets more systematically to ensure teachers provide challenging activities that are matched to all pupils' needs so that they promote independent learning
 - supporting the development of pupils' writing skills across all subjects.
- Strengthen the impact of leadership at every level, including the governing body, to drive school improvement by:
 - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is used effectively by all staff to raise expectations, broaden learning opportunities and accelerate progress for all pupils
 - ensuring that the impact of new developments is judged against clear success criteria
 - developing a teaching and learning coaching programme so that all staff are actively involved in lesson observation.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

From broadly typical starting points when pupils enter the school, they make satisfactory progress and reach average levels of attainment, with some weaknesses in mathematics and writing by the end of Year 4 when they leave. This is largely because of insufficiently high expectations being applied to the gaining of basic skills. Although the school has put in place plans to improve the quality of pupils' writing, there is still more to do to ensure that spelling and punctuation are more consistent.

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The teaching of phonics (sounds) is having a limited impact, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and, as a result, children enter Year 1 with only a limited understanding of letters and sounds. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress, as do those who are at the early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language. This is as a result of appropriate individual support.

Pupils are motivated to learn because they enjoy positive relationships with adults and each other. They behave well in lessons and have a developing desire to improve their learning. This was evident in a Year 3 literacy lesson where pupils' good behaviour had a positive impact on their learning. During the lesson, they were able to answer questions and were keen to demonstrate their knowledge. As a result of careful planning and matching tasks to individual needs, pupils' progress accelerated. Similarly, in a Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils were fully engaged in learning about estimation of numbers. As a result, most pupils made good progress.

Pupils say they feel safe and can trust adults to deal swiftly with the rare incidents of bullying or poor behaviour. The school has worked effectively with parents and carers to highlight the importance of good attendance, and the school has maintained this well since the last inspection. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle by participating regularly in sporting and physical pursuits. They are keen to take on responsibility and assist in the smooth running of the school. For example, older pupils' value the opportunity to help younger children by acting as playground buddies.

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	3
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
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

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

3

How effective is the provision?

Overall, teaching is satisfactory, and sometimes good, but it is not consistent enough to enthuse learners with a passion for enquiry or to show them how learning relates to the wider world. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made in the collection of data; for example, through moderation by external advisors of internal judgements on the quality of pupils’ work in English and mathematics. However, this good practice has not been consistently shared with pupils or across subject areas and, as a result, the impact has been variable. In some lessons, teachers’ explanations are too long so that pupils are not actively engaged fully in learning to help them develop their independent thinking skills. In the better lessons, teachers use good subject knowledge to plan work that engages and motivates the more able pupils while effectively challenging others. Assessment procedures are consistently applied across the school. However, in some lessons work is not always matched to pupils’ needs.

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs and interest of all pupils, for example, through whole class violin lessons. Pupils experience a good range of activities: puppets, musical activities and cross-curricular topic work. This, together with a range a range of visits and trips, provides suitable opportunities for pupils to broaden their personal and academic skills. However, the range of opportunities to develop pupils’ literacy and numeracy skills is inconsistent across all subject areas. Pupils develop an appropriate range of skills in all subjects that prepares them adequately for the next stage of their education.

Pupils are supported effectively with a satisfactory quality of pastoral support and guidance. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable benefit from a range of support and from the appropriate partnerships with a range of external agencies, which enable them to fully engage in school and benefit from what is has to offer.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is well supported by all stakeholders. Systems and structures have been put in place to improve teaching and learning and to raise pupils’ achievement.

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Consequently, pockets of good practice are beginning to develop. Nevertheless, a number of the leaders are newly appointed or are new to their responsibilities and although they have made changes, many of these are too recent to have had a tangible impact on learning. Opportunities are limited for the best teachers to coach others and for all teachers to observe teaching at first hand.

All staff are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity and inclusion for all pupils. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who displayed previously challenging behaviour now often enjoy their learning. Partnerships with local schools are improving, such as the development work with the middle school. The school’s contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. Pupils appreciate and learn about the main world religions with opportunities for them to learn about ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. However, the school is at an early stage of reaching out to the local community and beyond in order to allow pupils’ to gain the full experience of what it means to be a citizen in the United Kingdom.

Members of the governing body are supportive of the school, fulfil their statutory duties and are becoming increasingly effective in holding the school to account as they compare the school’s academic performance with schools nationally. Satisfactory procedures are in place for safeguarding. They ensure that safeguarding, child protection and risk assessment procedures are effective and implemented consistently. These meet all government guidelines.

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	3
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 enter the school with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for four-year-olds in all areas of learning, except communication, language and literacy in which they are below expectations. Children make steady progress, with good gains

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in their social development and in their disposition and attitudes. However, initial assessments are not completed with sufficient rigour. As a result, there is not a secure baseline to judge children's progress. Staff have implemented a letters and sounds programme; this has narrowed, but not eliminated, the gap which exists between girls' and boys' literacy skills when they reach the end of the Reception year. Children develop their knowledge of healthy lifestyles, curiosity, perseverance and vocabulary satisfactorily. Their welfare and safety needs are addressed effectively and risk assessments are carried out daily.

All areas of learning are catered for satisfactorily and there are meaningful links between areas of the curriculum under topic themes which develop children's understanding. During the inspection, children were learning about 'Halloween' and good links were made with 'the sounds of the week' and reinforced at every opportunity. For example, children were enthusiastically acting out the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, with one child taking the role of the teacher. A small group of boys had decided to develop a garage for their 'trike track' which gave good opportunities to develop number skills. They were well supported by an adult who developed their language skills and vocabulary effectively. However, there are too few opportunities for children to initiate their own learning and for adults to intervene successfully taking the learning to the next level. Often, there is an over-reliance on teacher-led activities and opportunities are missed to develop children's knowledge of letters and sounds and writing skills, especially in the outdoor areas.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed satisfactorily and the team work together well to plan units of work based on regular assessments of what children have achieved. Adults know individual children and their families well but they do not have sufficient opportunities to use this knowledge to develop children's learning further throughout the day. This is because activities are sometimes over-planned and do not allow opportunities for children to learn in different ways for themselves. Children have access to a safe and secure outdoor area. However, planning for the use of the outdoor area misses opportunities, to further support children's learning. Teachers' observations of children's activities to plan next steps in their learning are not conducted consistently or fully involving all adults present. This limits the ability of the Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator to develop a secure knowledge of trends, strengths and needs and to plan accordingly to develop the provision.

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

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Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who returned the Ofsted questionnaire are happy with their children's experiences of the school. A few parents and carers expressed the view that 'the pupils look happy'. A small number of parents and carers raised some concerns regarding the communication and safety of children at the end of the school day. The inspection team examined policies and risk assessments and found the school has satisfactory safeguarding arrangements in place.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Southlands Lower 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 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 275 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	68	27	31	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	61	70	25	29	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	32	37	51	59	4	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	39	48	55	2	2	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	37	43	44	51	3	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	34	39	45	52	7	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	48	41	47	3	3	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)	28	32	45	52	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	32	37	50	57	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	30	51	59	3	3	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	31	50	57	6	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	48	55	36	41	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	49	56	35	40	3	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.



7 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Southlands Lower School, Biggleswade SG18 8NX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you at work and play. We greatly valued the discussions we had with you and were particularly pleased to see you have maintained your good attendance since the previous inspection.

You go to a satisfactory school. You, your parents and carers, told us that Southlands is a caring and happy place where you feel safe. Many of you told us how you feel supported and that you get on well together.

All staff are determined to help you succeed and to give you the best education possible. We have asked them to make a few changes.

- Improve the way children in the Early Years Foundation Stage learn their letters and sounds to help them improve their reading and writing.
- Plan work that will challenge and engage you actively in your learning, by developing your writing skills.
- Give you clearer advice on how to improve your work so that you can achieve your very best.
- Ask questions that develop your understanding and thinking skills.
- Use information about your levels of attainment and share in all subjects how you can make improvements.
- Ensure that the teachers receive advice and development in order to make your lessons the very best they can be to accelerate your learning.

You too can all play your part in improving the school by working hard to reach your targets. Once again, it was very nice to meet you all and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Emma Aylesbury
Lead inspector

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