

Swing Gate First School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117260
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379381
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2012
Lead inspector	Philip Mann HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Evans
Headteacher	Rosie Dunmur
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2009
School address	Swing Gate Lane Berkhamsted HP4 2LJ
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

Inspection team

Philip Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Goddard-Patel

Additional Inspector

Inspectors took account of any responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed six teachers teaching a total of 11 lessons, of which five were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition the inspection team made short visits to other lessons to look at pupils' work and to review the teaching of phonics, literacy and numeracy skills. They also listened to pupils of lower ability in Year 2 read. Meetings were held with members of the school council, senior staff, middle managers and members of the governing body. Several discussions took place between inspectors and parents and carers before school. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents including the school improvement plan, those related to self-evaluation, the monitoring of teaching, safeguarding and minutes of the governing body. They also analysed 118 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and others completed by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average sized first school and nursery that serves an area of mixed private and rented housing in the town of Berkhamsted. Most pupils are White British and the proportion from minority ethnic groups is below average. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below the national average as is the number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The number of pupils who leave or join the school at other than the usual times is less than that found nationally. A small proportion of pupils are known to be entitled to free school meals. The school holds a number of accreditations including Healthy School status, Investor in People, the Silver Eco Award and the full 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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is a good school where every pupil is treated as an individual within an extremely supportive climate for learning. The close monitoring of pupils' progress ensures support is targeted carefully to meet the needs of all pupils. The school is not outstanding because teaching is not yet ensuring that pupils make consistently outstanding gains in their learning in lessons or over time.
- Achievement is good. All pupils, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, make good progress because of good teaching. Attainment in English and mathematics at the end of Year 4 has steadily risen to levels that are well above national expectations for this age group. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make equally good progress. There are no significant differences in achievement for any group of pupils.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding as are pupils' attitudes to learning. Relationships between pupils and adults and pupils themselves are extremely positive. An outstanding curriculum ensures that pupils are excited about coming to school and attendance is above average. Provision supports good learning and achievement in lessons. Pupils and some parents and carers say that a small number of pupils find it difficult to always behave well, but say that any issues are dealt with quickly and with sensitivity. The safety of pupils is given a high priority and safeguarding requirements are robust. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and this is confirmed by their parents and carers.
- Good teaching exists in all classes. In some it is outstanding where the pace of learning is brisk and expectations are very high; such as in Year 4. Sometimes opportunities are missed in lessons to ensure that resources and learning experiences are used to best advantage to accelerate individuals' progress further. While marking and feedback is generally of a good standard there are some inconsistencies. As a result, not all pupils know exactly what they need to do next to improve.

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- Highly effective school leadership has tackled the issues from the previous inspection with determination. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved and is now outstanding and standards in mathematics have risen significantly as a result.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that pupils achieve outstandingly well by:
 - ensuring teachers make the most effective use of resources to support pupils' learning
 - providing more opportunities for the sharing of outstanding pupils' work in lessons
 - ensuring that all pupils know clearly what they need to do next to improve further.

Main report**Achievement of pupils**

Parents and carers are right in thinking that their children achieve well because teaching is effective. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills broadly in line with those expected for their age. They make good and sometimes rapid progress overall through both the Nursery and Reception classes. As a result, attainment is above national expectations when they start in Year 1. This good achievement is because of outstanding curriculum provision with a strong focus on learning through investigation and play. Early literacy skills, especially the teaching of the sounds and letters that children need to read, are taught particularly well. Parents and carers are very pleased with the provision in these classes with a typical comment being, 'My daughter is enjoying her time in Nursery and has really developed since starting in January in terms of communication, reading, writing, number work and social skills.' The outdoor area is used extremely well to support learning, including an extensive range of exciting activities such as making music with hand bells and the investigation of moving water through pipes in their own 'water factory'.

Pupils build on this strong foundation in learning across the school to reach well above expected levels by the end of Year 4 in English, including reading, and mathematics. Attainment in reading is also well above the national average by the end of Key Stage 1. Reading skills are highly developed by this age and even the weakest readers in Year 2 read at the expected level for this age group. This good progress is sustained in Key Stage 2 with over two thirds reading at the higher National Curriculum Level 4 by the end of Year 4. Past progress in writing has not been as rapid for these older pupils but it is now accelerating as a result of outstanding teaching in Year 4 and the implementation of strategies to improve boys'

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writing. As a result, boys say that they now love writing and are proud of their work. Their progress is accelerating and this is clearly evident in their books and lessons where many boys in Year 4 write complex sentences neatly and with accuracy. However, achievement in writing is not as high as that in mathematics. The high standards in mathematics in Year 4 are a direct result of vigorous and enthusiastic subject leadership and consistently good teaching of Key Stage 2 pupils in ability groups. This is a significant improvement on the findings of the previous inspection.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in response to effective adult support and targeted interventions, in class or in small group work. Those who speak English as an additional language make equally good progress as do those pupils in receipt of a free school meal.

All pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning. This is because real life investigations, such as those in science, capture the imagination of pupils and fully extend their problem-solving skills. This was demonstrated fully in a Year 3 lesson to investigate the properties of different types of paper to absorb water. These pupils observed each experiment very carefully noting down their results to test their predictions in a methodical and scientifically fair manner.

Quality of teaching

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and lesson plans provide a clear structure for learning for all groups of pupils. Planned activities match the needs of different abilities well and teaching assistants provide effective support to those who need extra help with their work. Lessons move along at a brisk pace and this ensures that pupils remain attentive and time is used wisely. Expectations are generally high and behaviour in class is managed very well with the few issues that sometimes arise dealt with quickly. Assessment is good and used well to track the progress of pupils and plan suitable work for them. Marking is generally good but there are occasions when feedback does not make explicit what must be improved. Where it is outstanding, such as that in Year 4, teacher comments set further challenges for pupils to try and pupils respond back through little written conversations to their teacher. Pupils say that this really helps them to improve quickly.

Good challenge is provided for more-able pupils through small group work and opportunities for them to show initiative. This was demonstrated well in an outstanding Year 2 literacy lesson when pupils explored the rhythm of words in a poem using musical instruments. The more-able pupils in each group quickly organised their respective group and many took responsibility for their group presentation at the end. Questions are often used well to check pupils' previous knowledge and move their learning on further. Resources are chosen with care and used effectively to support learning activities. On the very rare occasion when this is not so pupils become frustrated that they cannot complete the task as quickly as they want. Opportunities are taken to review pupils' learning during the lesson and at the end. However, not enough time is given to this activity to allow pupils to share their good and outstanding work with the class to advance learning and raise expectations further. The inspectors' views of teaching matched those of pupils,

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parents and carers, the vast majority of whom say that teaching is good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupil behaviour in lessons is outstanding and underpins good learning. Behaviour around the school and in the playground is typically outstanding. Parents, carers and pupils also think behaviour and safety are outstanding. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent and they are keen to succeed. Pupils play very happily together in the playground with small items of sports equipment and other play apparatus. Rules are clearly understood and new pupils to the school are made to feel very welcome by their classmates who take on the role of 'playground buddy' to help them. As a result, all pupils feel part of this harmonious community where everyone is very well cared for. Safeguarding is given a high priority and the site is very secure. This is confirmed by many pupils who say that they feel safe in school because if they have any concerns they know that staff will quickly deal with them. Discussions with many parents and carers during the inspection confirm that minor incidents, and any bullying if it occurs, are quickly and appropriately dealt with. Pupils are free from all kinds of bullying, including racism, cyber-bullying and other forms of harassment.

Many pupils say that they cannot wait to be in school because of all the fantastic things provided for them. Such views are mirrored in above average rates of attendance. One parent commented that, 'From day one at Swingate, my son has been happy and eager to go to school. He has made good progress and is doing really well.'

Leadership and management

Leaders demonstrate a drive and passion in tackling areas of weakness to improve the school further. Expectations are very high and there is an outstanding and inclusive climate for learning. The headteacher has established an excellent team of senior leaders who together have tackled the issues from the previous inspection with determination and success. Standards have risen to high levels. This is especially so in mathematics where significant improvement in pupils' achievement is now evident as a result of determined action by the subject leader. Outstanding leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage has eliminated the previous inconsistencies in provision. The school's capacity to improve further is strong. Performance management is outstanding. Teaching is managed and monitored extremely well. The effective induction of the three newly qualified teachers is rapidly developing their skills and their teaching expertise so that they can give of their best.

Excellent relationships throughout the school mean that every pupil is known by all adults to ensure high levels of care and support. The progress and development of all pupils is tracked in great detail to ensure that individual needs are fully met and all have equal opportunity to succeed. There is no evidence of discrimination of any kind. Members of the governing body and school leaders are fully involved in monitoring the well-being of pupils and safeguarding arrangements are robust.

The curriculum provides an outstanding range of exciting and imaginative learning experiences for pupils. Detailed cross-curricular planning ensures that it is broad,

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balanced and highly relevant to the pupils' needs. Activities such as the exploration of a 'pyramid' in the school hall by pupils in Year 2, to find hidden ancient Egyptian artefacts such as a sarcophagus fully stimulate pupils' curiosity. Such imaginative and worthwhile activities help to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively.

Self-evaluation is thorough and very accurate. Governors participate fully in this process and consequently they demonstrate an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The plan for school improvement is comprehensive. Areas of responsibility are clear identified against pupil outcomes to support the effective measurement of performance.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



4 May 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Swing Gate First School and Nursery, Berkhamsted, HP4 2LJ.

I would like to thank you all on behalf of the inspection team for making us feel so welcome. We really enjoyed visiting your school and were so impressed with your outstanding behaviour, excellent attitudes towards learning and how everyone really feels included in everything the school does.

Many of your parents and carers told us how much you enjoy being at school and how good it is. We agree with them. You go to a good school. It has some outstanding features. This is because the school is led extremely well and all the staff work hard as a team to make sure that you are very well looked after and helped to succeed. The teachers have worked hard to improve your writing and numeracy. This has been successful because you are all making good progress in these important skills.

The teachers plan many interesting things for you to do and their good teaching means that you all achieve well in lessons. The teachers generally mark your work well and keep a detailed record of how well you are doing in lessons. However, there are times when marking could better inform you about what must be improved. The staff always listen to your worries and provide excellent care and support for you all. Those of you in the Nursery and Reception classes get some great opportunities to learn in the outdoor area and classrooms. Many exciting things are planned for those of you in other classes and the teachers provide some good opportunities for you to work with your classmates. Sometimes, this is not always the case and in future teachers are going to try and make best use of activities and resources to increase the opportunities you have to be even more involved in your learning. In lessons we also want you to share good and outstanding work with each other so that you know what can be achieved. You can play your part by always behaving well and trying your best in all that you do at school.

I wish you all the very best for the future,

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

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