

# St Paul's Infant School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	118461
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	379623
<b>Inspection dates</b>	22–23 May 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Kevin Hodge

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	250
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Anne Watts
<b>Headteacher</b>	Julie Hyde
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 February 2009
<b>School address</b>	Hilary Road Maidstone Kent ME14 2BS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 753322
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<b>Age group</b>	4–7
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	22–23 May 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	379623



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Kevin Hodge

Additional Inspector

Joy Considine

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors spent nearly nine hours observing 17 lessons or part lessons taught by nine different teachers and support staff. Joint observations were carried out with the headteacher and special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors held informal discussions with pupils, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body and one other member. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at development planning, self-evaluation information showing learners' progress, teachers' planning and children's written and pictorial records of their learning. In addition, the inspectors analysed the questionnaire responses of 90 parents and carers along with those returned by 28 staff.

## Information about the school

This is an above average sized infant school. The proportion of pupils attending from minority ethnic groups is higher than the national average. Of these, most speak English as an additional language or are at an early stage of learning English. The largest proportion is of Nepalese heritage whose families are stationed at the nearby army barracks. The number of pupils who join or leave the school other than at the normal times is higher than usually found. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs, is higher than in similar schools. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught within three Reception classes. Two classes in Years 1 to 2 are currently being taught by temporary staff covering for a maternity leave and a long-term absence.

The school has a number of awards reflecting its commitment to promoting basic skills and healthy lifestyles.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. The school's effectiveness has been maintained since the last inspection. Although improving, not all teaching is at the level of the very best and pupils do not always write confidently or creatively, meaning the school is not yet outstanding.
- Pupils achieve well before moving on to their next school. They quickly settle in to their new routines. The secure start in the Reception classes helps them to develop good social and physical skills. All groups of pupils, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, learn and progress well. Those pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve particularly well during their time at the school.
- Teaching is typically good. Teachers make learning enjoyable, and relate topical events, for example the Olympics, to develop children's wider interests and understanding of others. There are still areas to improve. For example, occasionally opportunities are missed to stretch pupils' learning or to enhance their writing abilities further.
- Pupils behave well and are excited to take part in the range of activities on offer, from learning about the role of the Queen, to questioning visitors such as police or fire officers about their roles. Pupils say they feel happy, safe and told inspectors that typically the school was 'brilliant' and 'fantastic'. Not surprisingly, they enjoy attending.
- Senior leaders have succeeded in managing staff performance well to identify strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and to maintain pupils' achievement levels over time. The curriculum is good, as is the way it contributes to the pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. The governors' role has improved since the last inspection and their support is now more systematic and regular in gauging the progress of initiatives. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency and quality of writing across the school by:
  - giving pupils more examples of what good writing looks like to help shape or direct their own efforts
  - ensuring that pupils have even more exciting and relevant reasons to write
  - giving pupils more guidance about how to extend or refine their writing.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching through the school by:
  - making sure that higher attaining pupils sometimes have a more challenging starting point when commencing their work
  - ensuring that whole-class explanations are shorter so group activities, including those that are technology based, start more promptly
  - ensuring that staff help children in Reception classes gain the maximum learning opportunities from each activity they engage in.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

When children join the school, they have a wide range of skills that are usually below the levels expected for their age group. Their good start in Reception means they make up ground well and reach close to the levels expected when they start Year 1. They make very good gains in developing their social and physical skills, but are not always as confident in their calculating or writing skills. Children play cooperatively and share resources willingly, whether it is in the class's pretend garden centre or outside negotiating the obstacle course. Daily teaching of letters and sounds and combinations (phonics) helps children to develop early reading skills effectively. A wide range of outside activities and equipment develop children's willingness to learn. On occasions however, teachers do not always spot opportunities to extend children's learning when they are working independently. The arrival of newly hatched baby chicks during the inspection provided a fantastic stimulus for a variety of pictures, early writing and understanding the concept of new life.

In Years 1 and 2, pupils' good progress continues, particularly in developing their reading, mathematical, speaking and listening skills. All groups, including those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, achieve well. Pupils enjoy solving simple number problems, for example in a Year 1 lesson when they enthusiastically doubled various combinations of numbers, while in another lesson, pupils enjoyed working out from a graph which book character was the class favourite. Pupils' reading skills develop well, and they are accurate at reading unfamiliar words. They say they enjoy reading and winning the 'reading challenge

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cup'. Together with initiatives to promote reading at home, for example, a reading research project conducted by senior staff, pupils reach the expected levels of reading ability by the time they leave the school. This is also true of those children from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly those from Nepalese heritage, who learn well as there are supportive links with parents. Although pupils generally enjoy writing, which has improved since the last inspection, the quality is too variable between classes so that not all pupils are confident to write using a wide vocabulary or at length. Pupils develop a working knowledge in using computers and other technology, although they do not always practise these skills in their daily work. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve particularly well, as their needs are identified quickly and given skilful support, often in small groups or individually. The children's good achievement, noted by inspectors, is also recognised by parents and carers who are very appreciative of the progress made.

### Quality of teaching

There is a rising proportion of good teaching, with past examples of excellent teaching. However, there are still some areas to improve. Teaching in the Reception classes helps children raise their basic skill levels and is particularly adept at developing their social skills. Activities include role play, for example defending the class castle from imaginary attackers, counting, picture making and drawing. Occasionally, teaching does not always stretch children's natural curiosity to learn, by intervening when their interest in an activity starts to wane.

In Years 1 and 2, daily activities consolidate their basic skills in reading, number and spellings, although opportunities to use technology skills are sometimes missed. Past work reflects the consistent practice of skills in both number and writing. However, pupils do not benefit often enough from seeing examples of others' good writing as a stimulus for their own efforts, or by having compelling reasons to write. Topics planned around activities, for example the Olympics, mean pupils are already talking excitedly about the events, cultures and what it means to win or lose. They also explore the idea of team spirit. These aspects widen their knowledge and understanding of others and develop their multicultural and social understanding. Pupils enjoyed discussing the concept of roles and responsibilities connected to the forthcoming Queen's Jubilee, which aids their social and moral understanding. Class activities usually have practical 'hands on' elements, although on occasions, teachers' explanations are too lengthy, meaning that pupils have too little time to complete group activities. A wide range of effective support, for example small-group tuition outside classes and close one-to-one help in class, ensures disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve particularly well. Good links with parents and carers, and well-chosen activities in class, mean pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as classmates.

Teachers' good subject expertise helps pupils understand how to improve their work during lessons. Pupils like their target cards which help to direct their own pace of learning. Teachers' marking is regular, identifies improvements and praises pupils' efforts regularly. Pupils' good attitudes to learning enable teachers to plan activities

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that develop their independence and collaborative skills to good effect. Expectations of what pupils are capable of are usually high in this respect. Nevertheless, some higher attaining pupils are not always fully challenged in their thinking as they generally start activities at the same point as less-able pupils. Parents and carers are very positive about the emerging strengths in teaching, also noted by inspectors.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils' behaviour is, and has, remained good over time. Parents and carers are particularly praiseworthy of the school's efforts to create a happy, conducive atmosphere to learn. Attendance levels are now high. Children's good social and moral understanding in the Reception classes means they generally collaborate well, share resources willingly and happily show visitors their plants and class 'potting shed'. Pupils behave well at playtimes and lunchtimes and pupil helpers are valuable in distributing simple play equipment to make playtimes and lunchtimes active and enjoyable. Nearly all say they feel safe and know that name-calling, hitting others and bullying of any sort are not acceptable. Pupils, along with their parents and carers, say that their teachers help them to feel safe in this respect. There are harmonious relationships between pupils from differing backgrounds, as pupils understand and value differences between different members of the school community. The school council is valued by others in its efforts to improve the school, as are those who take part in the eco-council to boost environmental awareness. Pupils like after-school clubs such as gymnastics. The environment within the school is a safe place to be and pupils readily confirm this, although a small minority of parents or carers are concerned with difficulties at the start and end of day regarding parking and traffic. The school, aided by the views of pupils, has taken steps to investigate the problem with a view to reducing difficulties where possible.

### **Leadership and management**

Senior leaders, including governors, have effectively remedied weaknesses from the last inspection, including improving pupils' reading levels and developing the expertise of subject leaders. The improved role of governors, aided by guidance from senior staff, means they are more sharply focused on gauging the progress of initiatives, aiding the school's capacity to get even better. Monitoring of teaching is systematic and ensures that the quality of teaching, despite a number of disruptions to staffing over time, has remained typically good. Staff say they feel well supported, as the school caters for their performance management and resulting professional development effectively. School priorities are clear and valid, although some do not have a clear means of judging their successful completion. Members of the governing body, and senior leaders, implement safeguarding procedures, including staff vetting, thoroughly. The effective promotion of equal opportunities means differences between groups, such as those from different ethnic backgrounds or others who may be disabled or have special educational needs, are minimised. Senior leaders promote a strong sense of community, which pupils, parents and carers value, and leaders do not tolerate any form of discrimination.

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The curriculum provides a good variety of activities, which not only provide for pupils' basic skills, but also include themed topics, visitors to school, off-site visits and topical themes. These contribute well to pupils' social, moral and cultural understanding. Themed assemblies and class activities foster their spiritual awareness sensitively. Opportunities to develop pupils' technology based skills, while planned for in specific tasks, do not always permeate through sufficiently in day-to-day activities. Pupils' understanding of their local community is good, and simple studies of others in differing countries broaden their deeper understanding of others. The vast majority of parents and carers indicate they feel the school is well led and managed concurring with inspection evidence.



## 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](http://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.**

23 May 2012

Dear Pupils



**Inspection of St Paul's Infant, Maidstone ME14 2BS**

We enjoyed our visit to your school very much. Thank you for talking to us and showing us all the exciting things that you are able to do. Like you, we enjoyed watching your new chicks hatch and we feel sure you will look after them. Your parents and carers think that yours is a good school and is a safe place to be. You will be glad to hear we agree with them.

It was lovely to see you being so friendly with each other and I know some of you liked showing us about very much. We liked watching you take part in all your activities. You can do just about everything as well as other children of your age, although some of you are not as confident to write long stories or know how to make them more exciting. You all behave well when you are really enjoying your activities, but I know some of you sometimes find sitting for a long time more difficult, so we have asked the teachers to let you get on with your group work more quickly. We liked the range of activities that you have to do, such as your craftwork, listening to your teachers, working out which well-known book characters were most popular, or finding all about kings and queens in preparation for the Jubilee celebrations. Teachers normally plan fun activities for you, which we know you enjoy. The school is good at helping those of you who are disabled or need extra help with your work. Well done for behaving so well when we came in to see you!

We have asked the school to see if it can make sure that the teaching is even better in helping you to develop your writing, getting the most out of all the activities that you do and letting some of you who like harder work start with more difficult activities at times. The headteacher and governors make sure that you feel safe and that you have nice things to investigate and use, for example looking after your new chicks, having nice outside play equipment and taking part in after-school gymnastics. The governors are good at helping the staff; they have made sure your parents, and carers feel welcomed in the school.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge  
Lead inspector

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