

Smallthorne Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123987
Local authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	380769
Inspection dates	29–30 May 2012
Lead inspector	Sue Hall

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Grigson
Headteacher (Acting)	Alison Hibbert
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Sue Hall
Terry Bond

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed eight teachers in 16 lessons. This included activities featuring the teaching of letters and the sounds they make. Inspectors also heard a sample of 12 pupils of mixed abilities from Years 2 and 6 read individually. The inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, with senior leaders and with members of the governing body. Inspectors looked at data about achievement across the school and examined samples of pupils' recent work. They scrutinised documents, including self-evaluation information, the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings and a sample of whole-school policies. They examined evidence regarding the safeguarding of pupils. Inspectors analysed 43 questionnaires received from parents and carers, 29 from members of staff and 98 from pupils.

Information about the school

This is an average sized primary school. A large majority of pupils are of White British background and a small number speaks English as an additional language. The percentage known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average, as is the proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school meets the current floor standard, the minimum expectations set by the government for attainment and progress. The breakfast club is managed by the school and included within this report. After-school care is managed by an outside provider and inspected separately. Since the previous inspection, the substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher have retired. There is currently an acting headteacher in post and temporary teaching arrangements in two classes. The school holds an Eco 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	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because the quality of teaching and the monitoring of the school's work are not consistent. Although the school is in a transitional period with temporary leadership and teaching arrangements, good leadership and management is ensuring pupils achieve well. The staff are working well together to help the school move forward.
- The achievement of pupils is good. By Year 6, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average. A strength is that pupils read particularly well. The school has placed a recent emphasis on improving writing, especially for the boys, which is reflected in recent work.
- The quality of teaching is good. Staff offer pupils lots of praise to build their self-esteem. Occasionally, not enough use is made of assessment information to set challenging work, especially for the higher attainers. At times, pupils do not have enough opportunity to take part in practical activities or discuss their ideas. The marking of pupils' work does not always indicate their targets or areas to improve.
- The behaviour and safety of the pupils are good and most have positive attitudes to learning. They understand how to keep themselves and others safe and there is little evidence of bullying in any form.
- The acting headteacher is providing a strong and effective steer to the school during this period of change. There is a clear focus on improving teaching and raising standards through the management of performance. The procedures to monitor the work of the school are not always rigorous enough at subject leader level. Members of the governing body are supportive, but have not established a programme of focused visits to ensure they are well informed at first-hand of school priorities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - making full use of assessment information to set tasks that challenge all groups of pupils and particularly those capable of higher attainment
 - planning more opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in their learning including discussing their ideas with others
 - improving the marking of work and setting of targets so that pupils know what they have to do to improve their work.

- Increase the effectiveness of monitoring of the work of the school by:
 - making sure that the checks on teaching and pupils' work are regular and rigorous and further involve subject leaders
 - developing a programme of focused visits by members of the governing body to enable them to have a secure understanding of areas for further improvement.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and understanding that is below the expectations for their age, particularly in their communication skills. A high priority is, therefore, placed on developing children's speaking and listening skills. This is seen in the effective organisation of 'today's helpers', where children are allocated roles that encourage them to take on appropriate responsibilities and in enthusiastic discussions about the school's Jubilee celebrations. Children of all abilities make good progress, especially in the nursery. When they enter Year 1, most meet the levels expected for their age. They enjoy using the outdoor learning areas, which have been considerably improved since the previous inspection.

Data indicate that standards in Key Stage 1 have risen slightly in the last few years and that progress in Key Stage 2 is good. By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment is above average overall. A long standing strength is the good quality of pupils' reading. Most read confidently for their age and are well supported by practising their skills in school and at home. Attainment in reading by the end of Key Stage 1 and when pupils leave school in Year 6 is above average. In Year 1, pupils make good progress in understanding more about letters and the sounds they make, because staff ensure they repeat these carefully and accurately. Staff recognise that boys have often not done as well as girls in their writing. Therefore, a recent whole school focus has been on writing and while this is still at a relatively early stage, pupils' work indicates a positive impact on the quality and quantity of work produced. Pupils' calculation skills are often good, although some are not always confident in using what they already know to solve problems.

The achievement of pupils of all abilities is good. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive well targeted support which is relevant to their

individual needs, enabling them to make similar progress to other groups. The small number of pupils speaking English as an additional language makes similar progress to their classmates as do the pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.

During the inspection, the best progress was made in Year 5. This was evident when pupils improved their poems by using interesting adjectives. They looked carefully at examples of poems using a similar format, then worked assiduously to think of more interesting alternatives to their first ideas. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire believe their children make good progress. Inspection evidence confirms this.

Quality of teaching

A strength in teaching across the school is the warm and supportive working relationships between adults and pupils, many of whom say they really like the staff because they encourage them to 'have a go'. Questions are used particularly well to challenge the thinking of pupils of all abilities. The management of pupils' behaviour is consistently good, which has a positive impact on learning especially for the small number with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Pupils are provided with lots of encouragement and support, which is helpful for those with autistic spectrum disorders who find the changes of routine for school celebrations stressful. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to provide continuity of approach. Teaching assistants are often skilled and ensure that the good pace of improving pupils' work is maintained through constant questioning to check understanding and ideas. Where teaching is most effective time is used well to provide information and explanations coupled with practical learning activities.

The level of challenge in many lessons is good but this is not consistent. Staff plan activities conscientiously but do not always ensure that tasks are sufficiently different and challenging for all groups of pupils. This particularly impacts on the progress of some higher attaining pupils. Teachers explain things very carefully and often make use of interactive whiteboards or 'visualisers' to provide information or examples of different texts, rhyming words or shapes. At times, though, explanations are too lengthy. This leads to some pupils becoming passive and impacts on their learning and their social development and leaves less time for pupils to discuss their ideas. The marking of pupils' work is very variable. That in writing is often detailed and effective, but in other subjects, including mathematics, it is cursory and does not make targets clear to pupils, or specify what they need to do to improve. Parents and carers believe that the quality of teaching is good and the needs of their children are met well. Inspection evidence confirms this overall.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The typical behaviour of pupils is good. Most get on very happily together in class and around the school. Boys and girls work and play well together and benefit from opportunities for the oldest to support the younger ones at lunchtime. Pupils are confident that they can readily turn to teachers and teaching assistants if they have a concern, but are less sure that mid-day staff always help. Most pupils join in lessons and offer their ideas in discussions when given the opportunity. A minority are more passive learners and reluctant to express their views.

Discussions indicate pupils recognise what bullying is and have few concerns in school, because they know bullying is not acceptable. Pupils recognise different types of bullying and know they cannot access inappropriate internet materials in school. They also understand issues of cyber-bullying. Most have a good understanding of right and wrong, and their moral development is supported well by the school's rewards and sanctions. They understand that their behaviour impacts on the safety of others. While a small number of parents and carers, pupils and support staff believe behaviour is not always good, little evidence of this was observed or noted in discussion with groups of pupils. Records show that the school takes a firm stance on the very small number of inappropriate incidents and does much to enable pupils to develop as caring and thoughtful young citizens. The breakfast club provides a satisfactory start to the school day but is somewhat bland and unimaginative. Attendance has recently improved and is now average. The school is working to reduce the number of holidays in term time by stressing to families the impact on learning. Parents and carers are right to be confident that their children are safe.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher is providing strong and effective leadership through the current period of change. Her calm but quietly determined focus on keeping the school moving forward has ensured a good emphasis on improving writing through effective professional development opportunities. The management of performance is good. The acting headteacher's evaluations of current teaching and learning are accurate, and recognise when things are working well and where further improvement is still required. The outcomes are used to identify clear priorities for improvement and provide professional development and support to facilitate these. The staff operate well together and there is a clear sense of a team working their way through a period of uncertainty. Teachers are committed to the school and, for example, provide cover for one another during temporary absences.

The school has a good capacity to sustain improvement. Since the previous inspection, the outdoor areas have been improved. These are extensive and attractive and support learning well across the school, particularly in Eco awareness. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is strong and effective, and has ensured good developments in the curriculum.

The school collects an appropriate range of information to assess each pupil's progress, but the use of this to inform planning varies in its effectiveness. This is in part because there are not sufficient checks to ensure that this data is used to provide the best level of challenge for pupils of different abilities. The acting headteacher has helped develop a programme of classroom observations and the sampling of pupils' work, but activities lack evaluative rigour. Core subject leaders have not had sufficient opportunity to influence practice in the classroom.

The curriculum provides a good range of activities that meet the needs of pupils well and enrichment activities that provide some fun. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils are enjoying the current focus on Jubilee celebrations especially dressing in red, white and blue. They look forward to performing a range of songs for their families, including the National

Anthem. There is less focus on pupils' understanding of cultures other than their own and this is recognised as an area for improvement by the school.

Governance of the school is satisfactory. Members of the governing body are supportive of the school but have no formal programme of focused visits to ensure sufficient first hand knowledge of school priorities. The governing body has not always checked well enough that all policies and procedures are regularly reviewed, signed and dated, and is dependent on staff for information. Nevertheless, day-to-day arrangements for safeguarding meet current government requirements, and administrative staff are scrupulous in their management of information. The school promotes equality of opportunity and helps tackle discrimination effectively, particularly through an increased focus on the achievement of different groups of pupils. Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire are happy with what the school provides.

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.



31 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Smallthorne Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 1PR

Thank you very much for making my colleague and me feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed listening to your ideas, hearing readers and looking at your questionnaires. We both enjoyed seeing the good progress Year 5 made in their literacy and numeracy work. I also liked seeing how carefully those in Year 1 pronounced the letters and sounds they were practising and watching the children in the nursery learn more about shapes. I enjoyed dressing in red, white and blue too so that I could join in your Jubilee celebrations.

The school provides you with a good education. These are the things which helped us to make this judgement.

- The standards you reach when you leave the school are above average and you make good progress as you move through the school.
- Your acting headteacher is making a really good job of leading the school forward while you wait for your new headteacher to arrive.
- You behave well, get on happily together and know how to keep safe.
- The quality of teaching is good and teachers and support staff work well together to help you learn and make progress.

These are the things we have asked your school to do to make it even better:

- make sure that teachers provide work that is neither too hard nor too easy and is interesting for you, and that they mark your work regularly
- making sure that staff and governors (the people who help to run the school) check what is happening more carefully so that they know what needs to be improved.

You can help by always trying to join in discussions and try your hardest.

Yours sincerely

Sue Hall
Lead inspector

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