

Stondon Lower School

Hillside Road, Lower Stondon, Henlow, Bedfordshire, SG16 6LQ

Inspection dates 25–26 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in learning to read, write, form letters and find out about numbers.
- Pupils in Years 1 to 4 make good progress in English and mathematics and produce work that is above expectations for their age.
- Teaching is good and topics are matched well to pupils' interests so that they find learning motivating.
- Pupils behave well and say that they feel very safe in school.
- The school uses its involvement in 'Values Education' exceptionally well and this makes an excellent contribution to pupils' personal development.
- The school works very well in partnership with parents and carers, and they speak highly of its warm and welcoming atmosphere.
- The school has improved well since its last inspection. Senior leaders and the governing body have successfully raised pupils' achievement and improved the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always use all that they know about pupils' previous learning when planning lessons. Occasionally, they do not share information with pupils about what they are meant to learn, and do not make clear how they should behave.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have limited opportunities to learn through in-depth projects that develop their creativity and skills of exploring and problem solving.

Information about this inspection

- All the teachers were observed teaching. Of the 12 lessons seen, six were joint observations with the headteacher. Pupils were observed reading in class and two read their books to the inspector. A celebration assembly involving parents and carers was observed.
- The inspector sampled pupils' exercise books in Years 1 to 4 and children's work and individual profiles in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Meetings were held with two members of the governing body. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority. Meetings were held with the headteacher and staff. A group of pupils met with the inspector and there were several informal discussions with pupils about their work.
- The inspector took account of the 33 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and talked informally with parents and carers during the inspection. Questionnaires from 12 members of staff were analysed.
- Documents scrutinised during the inspection included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, performance data and tracking, and details of staff training.
- The inspector also looked at records relating to aspects of behaviour, teachers' planning, the systems used for assessment, and partnership with parents in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Stondon Lower is smaller than the average primary school although the number on roll has increased significantly since the last inspection.
- Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funds allocated by the government) is below average.
- The proportions of pupils who are supported at school action, at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs, are below average.
- Pupils in Years 2, 3 and 4 are organised into two separate mixed-age classes.
- The school has a breakfast and after-school club which are managed by the governing body.
- There have been a number of staff changes over the last three years and at the time of the inspection the work of a teacher on maternity leave was covered by a long-term supply teacher.
- Following the previous full Ofsted inspection in 2009 when the school was judged to be satisfactory, a monitoring visit in 2011 found that it had made good improvement and was well placed to improve further.
- The school has had its application for academy status, together with a group of other local schools, accepted and expects this to be finalised in the Spring term 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement and increase the amount of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers always use their knowledge of pupils' previous learning to plan work that provides exactly the right amount of challenge for all abilities
 - consistently sharing with pupils information about what they are meant to learn and what they need to do to succeed with a task
 - communicating high expectations for pupils' behaviour at all times and encouraging the development of their self-discipline
 - focusing the checking of teachers' work and staff training specifically on these points.
- Build on the good progress and teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage by increasing opportunities for children to take part in in-depth projects that develop their ability to:
 - choose and combine materials independently to express their creative ideas in two and three dimensions
 - explore the world around them and solve problems for themselves.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join the school with skills that are in line with expectations for their age. They achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage and by the time they move up to Year 1, their attainment is above average in most areas of learning.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills, especially when adults lead activities and when they work on challenging activities at their tables first thing in the morning.
- The garden area, complete with chickens, provides children with a magical learning environment. There are times, however, when activities children choose for themselves provide limited opportunities for learning and they have too little scope to develop their individual creativity.
- Pupils' achievement in Years 1 to 4 has risen from satisfactory to good since the last inspection. Six-year-olds who took the recent phonics test gained better results than pupils nationally. At the end of Year 2, standards have been significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics in recent years.
- By the end of Year 4, attainment has been above national expectations overall and well above in some years. The school is working effectively to reduce any variation in performance from year to year, through carefully tracking pupils' progress against ambitious targets.
- All groups of pupils make good progress from their starting points, including pupils of minority ethnic heritage and those who speak English as an additional language. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their basic skills, for instance, in literacy and information and communication technology, within topics that span a number of subjects.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates. They receive good support in class and through programmes that the school provides to help them to catch up with any learning that they have found difficult. This has helped to narrow gaps in attainment for individual pupils.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium make good progress because the school is using its funding to pay for extra teaching assistant time to support their learning and tailoring its spending to their individual needs.
- Pupils' achievement is good rather than outstanding because there are occasions when teachers do not match work closely enough to the next steps in learning for different groups of pupils or do not make the class sufficiently aware of what to do to meet with the greatest success.

The quality of teaching is good

- Inspection findings, records of pupils' progress and the school's own checks show that the quality of teaching has improved from satisfactory to good since the last inspection.
- Teachers provide activities for pupils that often relate to real-life situations and this helps to hold pupils' interest. Pupils in Year 1 found it exciting conducting a survey about people's favourite

pets as part of their work on collecting data. A visit to Mountfitchet Castle for pupils in Years 2 and 3 built on previous work where they had made models of castles, then led into further writing on the topic. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 enjoyed designing a theme park as part of a mathematics project and writing a job description for an astronaut as part of the topic on 'space'.

- Teachers have well-developed questioning skills and usually probe pupils' thinking effectively during whole class teaching. They provide good opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas with their 'talking partners' and check their understanding by getting pupils to write the answer on their individual boards.
- The teaching of communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills is good throughout the school. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the sounds that letters make are taught precisely so that children are clear about them and make a good start in learning to blend sounds. In a phonics session for more-able pupils in Years 2 and 3, the teaching assistant's clear explanation about word endings enabled pupils to grasp quickly why 'strawberry' is made plural by the use of '-ies' whereas 'chimneys' simply has an 's' on the end.
- Teachers keep careful records of pupils' attainment and are closely involved in checking the progress of pupils in their class. Teachers generally make clear to pupils in their marking how well they are doing and how to improve, and set helpful targets in English and mathematics.
- In the best lessons, tasks are matched exceptionally well to the learning needs of different groups of pupils. In an outstanding mathematics lesson in Years 2 and 3, the teacher gave pupils very different tasks on 'measurement' based on the next steps in their learning. More-able pupils were challenged to estimate and measure the length of the contents of a tube of toothpaste before calculating how long it would take two people to use a particular amount. Average-ability pupils and the less able were asked to estimate and measure the length of different objects up to different maximum lengths.
- When planning their lessons, teachers do not always make good use of information about what individuals can already do and what they need to learn next. Where different tasks are set for groups of pupils, they are not always different enough to provide exactly the right level of challenge for everyone. As a result, more-able pupils do not always make as much progress as they could while less-able pupils meet with some success only because of the good support of teaching assistants.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' good behaviour contributes to their achievement. Pupils are polite and considerate and have very positive attitudes to learning. They are very happy at Stondon Lower and say, 'It's a lovely school – every day you learn new things and make new friends'.
- Pupils apply themselves well and are eager to contribute their ideas in class. They are enthusiastic learners who readily become absorbed in classroom and whole-school activities. This is evident in the attendance rate, which is consistently above average.
- Teachers ensure that pupils learn in a positive atmosphere and provide excellent guidance by reminding them about the values or personal qualities they will need for a particular activity. This deepens pupils' awareness very well. One pupil said, 'When you leave the school, you have to be kind and still show the values'.

- Pupils are quick to respond to their teachers' instructions. At times, though, teachers' expectations for behaviour could be higher or communicated more clearly. This sometimes leads to undue noisiness, for instance when pupils discuss ideas with their partners or move from one activity to another, and temporarily reduces the focus on learning.
- The school has effective systems for promoting good behaviour. Records show that significant behavioural incidents are rare and effectively dealt with. Minor day-to-day incidents are not recorded as systematically as they could be, however, and this is a missed opportunity to raise pupils' awareness of how to adjust their behaviour to make it outstanding.
- Pupils would clearly welcome sharper direction because, as one said, 'There's nothing to be scared about being corrected because it's just learning. You learn by your mistakes.' A Year 1 pupil added to this by saying, 'God invented you to show the values, not to be bad'.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe in school and parents and carers agree that their children are kept safe. Pupils have a good awareness of how to protect themselves, for example, from cyber-bullying or 'stranger danger'. They say that bullying is extremely rare in school and quickly dealt with.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders and the governing body are ambitious for the school, and the headteacher has been very effective in driving improvement in the face of a number of staff changes since the last inspection. The school is well placed to improve further, teamwork is strong and staff morale is high.
- The school's view of its own effectiveness is correct. The headteacher's judgements about the quality of teaching are accurate, as evidenced in joint observations with the inspector, and she provides valuable feedback to teachers on how to improve.
- Performance management is rigorous and linked well to pupils' progress and to teachers' salary progression. Staff have good opportunities to develop their skills through training. Half-termly meetings between the headteacher and class teachers mean that they are held to account now for pupils' progress. This also helps ensure that all groups have equal opportunities to achieve well.
- Despite several changes in staff, subject leaders have continued to develop their skills and three teachers have completed a course in leadership. This has enabled them to contribute more fully to whole school improvement and to supporting the headteacher in raising standards.
- The introduction of an improved curriculum means that subjects and topics are matched well to pupils' learning needs and interests. Pupils of all ages learn French and there are good opportunities to develop basic skills through topics that span a number of subjects. Learning from day to day is enriched by a wide range of educational visits, special events and residential trips, and by close liaison with the local community and other schools. The 'Values Education' programme makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school has a very strong partnership with parents and carers. Communication with parents and carers is well developed. All pupils have a home-school diary and these are used particularly well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They provide an excellent opportunity for parents and carers to contribute to their children's development.

- The local authority has provided valuable support to the school in helping it to raise achievement, improve the quality of teaching and develop subject leadership. It has recently reduced its level of support in recognition of the school's improvement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is closely involved in the life of the school. Governors regularly visit to gather information for themselves, which contributes to their good knowledge about the quality of teaching. They are suitably informed about performance management and most have been trained in analysing data in order to challenge leaders about pupils' progress, including the progress of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding. The governing body provides good support to senior leaders and works with them as active partners in future planning. Governors keep a careful control on the school's finances and have recently been closely involved in developing a vision for the way academy status could benefit the pupils. The governing body ensures that the school meets national requirements for the way pupils are kept safe, and that the before and after-school clubs provide pupils with a positive beginning and end to the day.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109469
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	401057

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	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Kitney
Headteacher	Mrs Jill Davies
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2009
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