

Sutton Oak CofE Primary School

Goodban Street, Sutton, St Helens, WA9 3QD

Inspection dates 5–6 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Pupils, parents, staff and governors are right in that much makes this is a 'great school'. In particular, the care and concern for individuals are outstanding. Staff go to great pains to ensure each pupil is happy.
- Pupils' achievement is good because of high quality teaching, especially in reading and writing. By the end of Year 6, often from a very low start in the Nursery, pupils do as well as or better than expected for their age.
- Additional funding from the government is spent wisely to meet pupils' personal and learning needs. Attendance has risen to just below average. Pupils catch up in learning, often at a rapid pace.
- The school is calm and an orderly place to learn. Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and around school. Pupils know what is expected of them and they are willing to learn and keen to help others. They say that they feel very safe and 'enjoy everything'.
- Staff share the headteacher's passion and determination for every pupil to do well.
- Senior leaders and governors are a strengthening force in bringing about improvement. In the last two years, new ways of working have been highly effective in narrowing the gaps in performance between different groups of pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Best practice in teaching is not consistent. In marking pupils' work in mathematics, for example, only some teachers give pupils clear points on how to improve. Teachers, more so at Key Stage 2, do not regularly provide enough opportunities for pupils to organise their own learning. This means also that more-able pupils are sometimes under-challenged.
- The focus on boosting basic skills has stifled some creativity in how topics and themes are explored.
- Although leaders are clear about the priorities for improvement this year, the lack of specific targets, especially regarding pupils' learning and the quality of teaching, makes it difficult to judge the impact of the actions taken.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 lessons. Three lessons were specific to the teaching of phonics (the links between letters and sounds), spelling, grammar and punctuation. Inspectors also observed sessions led by teachers and teaching assistants to boost learning or to enable pupils to catch up.
- Meetings were held with the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, the headteacher and other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the pastoral manager and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors met with pupils from Year 6 and heard three Year 1 pupils read.
- Inspectors visited the breakfast club and attended school assemblies.
- Two inspectors and the headteacher and deputy headteacher looked at the work from this term of a representative sample of pupils in Years 1, 4, and 6.
- An inspector and the deputy headteacher undertook a 'learning walk', which involved visiting all the classes.
- Inspectors took account of the seven responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the responses to the school's questionnaire for parents and carers issued in the summer term of 2012, and the responses to the questionnaire completed by 19 members of staff.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, data concerning children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils' progress at Key Stages 1 and 2, planning and monitoring documents, the minutes of the meetings of the governing body, and records relating to safeguarding, behaviour, and attendance.

Inspection team

Sonja Øyen, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter Marsh

Additional inspector

Sheila Kaye

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This voluntary controlled Church of England school is larger than most primaries. There are 337 pupils on roll, but, with spare places, pupils join classes at various times during the year. Last year, for example, four pupils joined Year 6, including one managed transfer from another school.
- The Nursery has places for 26 children in the morning and afternoon sessions. At the time of the inspection, 20 children attended in the morning and 15 in the afternoon.
- Other than in Reception, where there are two parallel classes, there is one class for each year group and also three mixed-age classes (Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6).
- One in five pupils is identified as having special educational needs, which is above average. One in twelve pupils is at school action plus, where the school links with outside agencies to provide support. A large proportion of pupils have speech and language needs.
- The school is in an area of high social deprivation. Just over half of pupils are eligible for additional funding from the government (pupil premium); this is double the national average.
- A small number of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. A few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The school runs a breakfast club on some mornings for a small number of potentially vulnerable pupils. There is a programme of lunchtime and after-school clubs.
- Since the last inspection in 2008, the deputy headteacher has been appointed to the post of substantive headteacher. Several new members of staff, including the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, have been appointed.
- At the time of the inspection, two newly qualified teachers were covering maternity leaves, a part-time teacher was taking a Year 3 class in the absence of the class teacher, and three teaching assistants were absent.
- In 2012, the school met the floor standards, the measures set by the government for the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 6 and for their progress during Key Stage 2.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality and consistency of teaching and accelerate pupils' learning further, especially that of the more-able pupils, by sharing best practice in:
 - marking pupils' work, most particularly in mathematics, to ensure pupils are clear about what they need to do next
 - ensuring pupils have time to respond to and act on teachers' comments
 - widening the range of learning experiences to foster pupils' skills in deciding for themselves how to tackle a task and in organising the resources they need
 - using themes and topics to provide motivating reasons for pupils to produce high-quality work in reading, writing, and problem solving in mathematics.
- Sharpen the skills of leaders in bringing about and judging improvement by:
 - specifying exactly, for each planned action, what will count as improvement in pupils' achievement and in the quality of teaching
 - looking more closely at how well pupils are learning and working with staff to heighten the teaching skills that lead to the best learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- In 2012, the school gained its best results for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and in tests and assessments for pupils in Years 2 and 6.
- Most children moved into Year 1 at the level expected for their age, having made good progress often from a very low start. This year, there is again a high number of Nursery children whose immature social skills and speech give cause for concern. The Nursery staff are quick to identify issues and to work with families and external agencies to provide support. Indoors and out, staff take every opportunity to talk with the children and to encourage them to talk to each other. Confidence grows; several children recited the refrain from the story of 'The Gingerbread Man' and talked about what happened to him. The Reception Year children show developing skills in cooperating with others and choosing an activity. While many are making good progress in phonics, others are slower to catch on. In writing, some struggle to hold a pencil and to form letters and numbers correctly.
- Evidence from recent assessments, following the introduction of a commercial programme to link reading, spelling and writing, suggests that progress is speeding up for many pupils. When reading to an inspector, Year 1 pupils used their phonic knowledge to work out new words and, with prompts, used details in the pictures to help them. In 2012, nearly all pupils moved into Year 3 at the level expected for their age in reading, writing and in mathematics although few did better. Current evidence suggests that this is set to rise. Several pupils in Years 1 and 2 are already proficient readers and writers.
- Booster and support work helped to ensure a significant hike in the proportion of Year 6 pupils who did better than expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. This lifted the school's overall results to above average. Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding did far better than similar pupils nationally. The performance gap between them and non-eligible pupils was also narrower than seen nationally. Pupils with special educational needs also achieved well and kept pace with their peers.
- Such improvement is the result of two particular strengths: a) the success in removing barriers to pupils' learning and b) the whole-school focus on developing basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics by plugging gaps in pupils' learning and ensuring secure basic skills from the Nursery onwards.
- Pupils are able to learn because staff are quick to recognise and resolve any problems, whether they are personal, social, behavioural, or a specific learning issue. The school also makes highly effective use of resources – space, staffing, time and finances, especially pupil premium funding – to enable pupils to catch up in learning or to boost their performance. Key mathematical knowledge, agreed for each year group, is reinforced in daily sessions in number facts and multiplication tables. Similarly, pupils benefit from daily sessions in aspects of spelling, handwriting, grammar, and punctuation. Homework often builds on this content.
- Pupils' work from this term shows mostly good progress in these basic skills although the quality of writing in other subjects does not always match that in English lessons. Some pupils have made rapid progress because of support in mathematics and reading. The data from last year show that parents are right to be pleased with their children's progress. All groups did well. Those Year 6 pupils who had been at the school for some years made very good progress. Nearly all gained Level 4, as expected for their age, in both English and mathematics. The evidence from this term also indicates good achievement.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Inspection evidence confirmed the school's and parents' view that teaching is good, most especially in the teaching of reading, writing and number. Teachers and well trained, skilled teaching assistants form a strong team of practitioners. However, there are some aspects of inconsistency which hold learning back a little at times and keep teaching good rather than

outstanding overall.

- The strongest teaching is in English. Staff have good subject knowledge and teaching assistants are equally able and confident in leading sessions on phonics, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. All staff prepare well for these sessions. Pupils have latched onto the repeated activities quickly: Reception Year children were totally engaged in identifying letters and having a go at writing them. Similarly, good questioning helped pupils in Years 3 and 4 to link reading with writing. Teachers remind pupils of their targets to punctuate correctly, to apply their spelling knowledge, and to present tidy work. Some teachers make effective use of criteria to help pupils judge for themselves how well they have done.
- In marking pupils' writing, most teachers identify clearly what pupils have done well and what they need to do next. This is not always the case in mathematics, where comments may relate only to what pupils have done. Nevertheless, the teaching of number is strong. Staff are currently working with pupils to ensure they know the 'number facts' typical for their age, including multiplication tables. While there is less emphasis for some pupils on using this knowledge to solve problems, others are challenged to think about what they know already and strategies they might use.
- There is some evidence to show that teaching Key Stage 1 pupils in groups based on their ability in mathematics is starting to pay off in better learning for all. Photographs and commentaries show how practical activities have boosted younger pupils' counting ability. Similarly, some pupils who have had one-to-one teaching from a specialist teacher have made rapid progress to catch up with others.
- Throughout the school, relationships between pupils and adults are warm and caring. The adults manage the pupils' behaviour very effectively. Classrooms are well organised: the Nursery and Reception Year children know where things are kept in the different areas inside and outdoors and the routines in selecting them, getting them out and putting them away. This independence is less evident elsewhere, especially at Key Stage 2, where often the adults arrange everything for pupils.
- Teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn. They, generally, pitch the work well and use a range of techniques to gauge how pupils are doing. Occasionally, the adults are too quick to give information, rather than probing pupils' understanding and ideas.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils, parents, staff, and governors agree that behaviour is good. In many respects, pupils' behaviour is exemplary – pupils show a high level of reverence and attentiveness in assemblies and play very well together outside. However, pupils are often supervised highly by adults and less able to show how well they can regulate their own behaviour and organise their own learning. This keeps behaviour good rather than outstanding.
- Pupils say they feel very safe in school and parents had no concerns over their children's safety. 'My kids can't wait to get in' was a typical comment. Given that the school is in two separate buildings with many nooks and crannies, pupils' friendliness and confidence are a strong testament to the successful discipline and Christian values of the school.
- Pupils are keen to gain 'house points'. They are proud to be 'star of the day', or to have been selected to hold posts of responsibility, such as head boy and head girl, monitor, and playleader. These pupils take their roles very seriously and show a good level of initiative and maturity. One playleader, for example, was seen arbitrating very sensibly between two Key Stage 1 boys and others.
- The caring support for pupils who have difficulty in managing their emotions and behaviour often leads to improvements, with a reduction in times out of the classroom to reflect on their behaviour or to cool their emotions in God's Garden. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour in lessons was mostly good, with only occasional restlessness and liveliness, usually from boys, when sessions were too long, or pupils were unsure of what to do.
- Pupils are interested learners. They thrive because of the good support to meet their needs. They sing with gusto in assemblies, listen attentively, and often become absorbed in activities.

Some parents commented how their children were now 'eager to go to school' and were no longer reluctant to read and write.

- Pupils know there is help from others if they need it and that, if they have any particular problem, they can go to any member of staff. Older pupils say that there is no bullying other than occasional name-calling, which is dealt with quickly. They know about different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and what they can do to keep themselves safe.

The leadership and management are good

- One governor referred to being 'more optimistic now than at any other time' about the direction for the school. Decisions by the headteacher, with the support of the governing body, to change the curriculum and to employ specialist staff have been effective in improving the quality of provision, boosting learning and raising standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The headteacher accepts that there is work to do in raising standards in other subjects and in ensuring all pupils have a rich experience across the curriculum. This is one reason why leadership and management are good rather than outstanding.
- The headteacher's passion for and commitment to getting the best for the pupils are reflected in the positive impact of organisational changes made last year. For example, the enlarging of the senior leadership team with clear pastoral, management and curriculum roles and responsibilities has led to staff working as one to raise standards. All 19 teaching and support staff who responded to the questionnaire were positive about all aspects of the school's work.
- The school has rightly identified improvement priorities linked to raising pupils' achievement further in reading, writing and mathematics. However, improvement plans do not identify specific targets for pupils' progress and attainment. This makes it difficult for governors and leaders to judge critically the impact of action taken, such as the use of particular programmes to boost learning.
- Senior leaders have successfully managed the introduction of new ways of working. Training for all teaching staff has ensured consistency in the delivery of a literacy programme. Leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching, tracking pupils' progress and working with staff to improve overall provision. They have sought specialist advice from others; for example, the Nursery staff have drawn on guidance from the local authority to enrich outdoor learning and to refine how they track children's progress.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher manage teachers' performance well. Targets for staff are linked to the new Teachers' Standards as well as to pupils' progress with added expectations for those at the top of the pay scale or who hold additional responsibilities. Leaders are broadly accurate in their judgements about the quality of teaching, although observations have not always focused enough on how well pupils learn in different subjects and what would improve it.
- The school uses funding from the pupil premium in many effective ways; for example, employing a pastoral care team has led to improved attendance rates, stronger ties with families in supporting their children and the effective managed transfer of pupils from other schools. Together with a range of support programmes, this has had a highly beneficial effect on raising the performance of pupils eligible for the funding.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well informed about the school's performance, the quality of teaching, and the basis for the current improvement plan. As frequent visitors to the school, several governors gain a first-hand view of the impact of leadership and teaching on pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Governors recognise the positive impact of the teamwork of the headteacher and deputy headteacher and the growing strength of the senior leadership team. The governing body manages finances effectively; it knows how pupil premium funding is being used and receives reports from senior leaders on the impact of support and initiatives, such as the introduction of sessions for pupils to write at length.

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	104791
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	402953

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	337
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mavis Hyland
Headteacher	Iwan Williams
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2008
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