

Sylvan Infant School

Livingstone Road, Parkstone, Poole, BH12 3DT

Inspection dates

3–4 December 2013

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.

- Pupils achieve well and their good progress ensures that attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above average by the time they leave.
- Reception children get off to an excellent start. The very large majority reach the levels expected for this age and an increasing number exceed them.
- Pupils are well taught. Lesson activities are practical and fun so pupils enjoy learning.
- Behaviour is good and pupils work and play well together and feel safe at school. In lessons these strengths effectively support their learning.
- The headteacher is a very skilled leader who expects teaching to be good and is very effective at helping staff to achieve this. Other leaders support the school well.
- The analysis of pupils' progress is very good and, together with comprehensive monitoring of teaching, ensures weaker areas are speedily and successfully addressed. The school is well placed to improve further.
- Governors provide good support and challenge. They are well informed about pupils' progress and teaching quality, including through their own monitoring visits.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Attainment in reading has varied over the past three years. The proportion of lower-attaining pupils reaching average levels has risen more slowly in reading than in writing and mathematics.
- Teaching and learning in Years 1 and 2 are not yet outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons or parts of lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition the inspection team made a number of other short visits to support groups of pupils at risk of underachieving, observed extra-curricular activities, including those for physical education and sport, heard a sample of pupils read and scrutinised a sample of pupils' written work.
- Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body, staff, including senior and middle managers, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 32 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke to a small number of parents and carers bringing their children to school.
- Responses from the 31 staff questionnaires were analysed.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a number of documents including the school's records on current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Documents relating to planning and monitoring and safeguarding were also looked at.

Inspection team

Diane Wilkinson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Robert Arnold

Additional Inspector

Michael Barron

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Sylvan is a larger than average size infant school with up to five classes in each year group. It changed to an infant school in September 2013 when it no longer admitted pupils to Year 3.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs supported by school action is low, although the proportion supported by school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, including those who speak English as an additional language, is below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides funding for children in local authority care, children from service families and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is above average.
- The school provides a breakfast club and some after-school activities run by private providers, which were not inspected by this inspection team.
- The headteacher and senior leaders provide support to other local schools and a teacher training provider.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and ensure that:
 - more lower-attaining pupils reach the levels expected for their age in reading, by increasing opportunities to help them understand the text and explain it well to adults
 - learning activities are consistently adapted throughout lessons so that pupils who have learnt quickly do the very best they can
 - pupils have more opportunities for using their literacy and numeracy skills in different situations
 - teachers always focus their marking on what pupils have learnt and indicate how they can improve further, with reference to pupils' personal improvement targets where appropriate.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most children enter Reception with skills below the levels expected and almost none above the levels expected for this age. The majority are well below the expected levels in reading and writing. Their outstanding progress ensures most reach average levels by the end of the year, with an increasing proportion exceeding them.
- Children's enthusiasm for reading and writing is exceptionally well promoted by staff so, by Year 1, children are no longer behind their peers nationally in these aspects. This provides an excellent platform for staff in Years 1 and 2 to build on.
- Good progress in other year groups has raised attainment well since the previous inspection. It is above average in reading, writing and mathematics by the time pupils leave the school.
- Due to the excellent start in Reception and the effective curriculum and teaching, attainment in writing has risen exceptionally well. Pupils currently in Year 2 are about two terms ahead of where Year 2 pupils were three years ago.
- Year 2 pupils write effectively in styles such as newspaper reports or instructions. Use of varying sentence starters and connectives, and exciting words make their work very interesting to read. Pupils' descriptions of a 'gruffalo', for example, were very individual and clearly not copied from the author's work.
- Attainment in reading has varied over the past three years. Previously improving strongly, it declined last year, but inspection evidence shows that the attainment of current Year 2 pupils is already above the level expected.
- Results in the Year 1 phonics screening check (on the sounds letters make in words) exceeded national figures in 2012. In 2013, whilst in line with the national average, there was a slight decline. The school's very swift and successful response has already improved progress in phonics.
- Current pupils, including the lower attainers, easily build up new words from the sounds although some lower-attaining pupils do not really understand what they are reading about. This prevents them from reaching the reading levels expected for their age, whereas they increasingly reach the expected levels in writing and mathematics.
- Attainment in mathematics has risen well since the last inspection and is well placed to rise further. Pupils' number skills are very secure, with the large majority of Year 2 pupils already tackling some number work usually covered in Year 3. They use these skills well when working with shape, measures or data, but only have limited opportunities for carrying out mathematical investigations independently.
- The school's strong commitment to equality of opportunity is evident in the effective support for pupils at risk of underachieving and the higher level of challenge for the more-able pupils.
 - Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress, with more now reaching expected levels, especially in writing and mathematics.
 - Once pupils who speak English as an additional language can understand their lessons they achieve well, especially in mathematics, because of the way staff make learning in this subject accessible to them.
 - Pupil premium funding very effectively supports pupils who receive it. They achieve well, have closed the gap on their peers nationally in reading and mathematics and are only a term behind in writing.
 - Since the last inspection the number of pupils exceeding the levels expected in national assessments has risen well because of the more able pupils' good achievement.

The quality of teaching is good

- The proportion of good teaching has risen well since the previous inspection, with most now being at least good. Pupils, parents, carers and staff agree that teaching helps pupils to do well.
- Activities are relevant and interesting and much has been done to develop activities that engage both boys and girls. Pupils say they enjoy activities where they can investigate things for themselves, for example identifying different three-dimensional shapes around the school.
- Effective teaching has ensured pupils develop a good understanding about what they are learning and this helps them to do well. However, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in a range of activities.
- Both teachers and classroom assistants exhibit good subject knowledge, explaining and demonstrating new learning well to help pupils easily gain new skills and knowledge.
- Lessons are effectively planned to ensure that pupils working at different ability levels achieve well. Most adults monitor pupils' progress effectively, but only in the Reception classes do staff consistently adapt the activities as a result, and inspire pupils to make even better progress.
- Reception staff are highly skilled practitioners who have an excellent understanding of how children learn. Activities are always challenging and great fun; for example, a group of boys looking for mini-beasts in 'Buggingham Palace' recorded their findings exceptionally well.
- Special activities to support pupils at risk of falling behind help them catch up well with their peers. The activities to improve the poor concentration levels of some pupils are excellent.
- Pupils' good focus on learning is effectively supported by very good behaviour management in most classes, although a few pupils occasionally find it difficult to sustain concentration.
- Pupils' work is well marked, with evidence of how well they have completed an activity although it is not always clear exactly what pupils have learnt nor whether they have achieved their personal improvement target. Not all teachers indicate how to improve further.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The excellent provision for children's personal development in Reception has a marked effect on pupils' learning behaviour as they move on to Years 1 and 2. Reception children develop an outstanding capacity for working in a group or alone. Pupils work very well together in paired or group work in the older classes although they have only limited opportunities for extending their independent learning skills.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good because staff plan motivating activities that promote a strong commitment to doing well. The success of this is evident in the rising attainment and attendance levels since the previous inspection.
- Behaviour is consistently good both in lessons and around the school. Inspection evidence and the school's own monitoring and external monitoring records indicate there is little low-level disruption in lessons. The behaviour of those pupils who find it difficult to follow the school rules improves well over time.
- Pupils and their parents and carers know that behaviour and safety are good and are very proud of the school. Staff are well liked and pupils respond positively in lessons. Relationships throughout the school are very good with pupils accepting this as the norm.
- The strong discouragement of discrimination ensures pupils respect those from different faiths, cultures or backgrounds. Bullying or racial incidents are rare and always dealt with speedily and successfully.
- Due to the strong commitment to safeguarding, pupils feel very safe in school and are well aware of how to look out for themselves and others.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a strong capacity for getting the best out of staff. The effective team of

senior and middle leaders has, for example, developed very effective procedures for checking pupils' progress and enhanced the support programmes for pupils at risk of underachieving.

- Senior leaders have improved teaching quality well since the previous inspection through very regular monitoring and good opportunities for professional development. The result of this is seen, for example, in the good teaching of newly qualified staff.
- Very regular and rigorous checks on pupils' progress and teaching quality allow emerging weaknesses to be swiftly identified and addressed, for example in the rapid improvement since the dip in reading attainment last year. The school is well aware of where further improvement is still needed; for example in responding to pupils' work by giving them more advice on how to improve, and has begun to address them.
- The effective curriculum supports pupils' needs and interests well although there are fewer opportunities for pupils to find things out for themselves in the older classes. Activities for reception children and for all pupils' personal and social development are especially good. Special programmes for pupils who need extra help or for more-able pupils ensure they achieve well.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well, enhancing pupils' ability to reflect on their learning and their moral and social awareness. Pupils are effectively informed about cultural diversity, which fosters good relationships. These strengths prepare pupils well for the future.
- Safeguarding is given high priority and the procedures for child protection and the vetting of staff are followed rigorously. The strong commitment to pupils' emotional and physical well-being is evident in the allocation of sports funding to physical activities which motivate pupils to take part, although there has been too little time to see the full effect of this.
- The school welcomes parents' and carers' involvement in their children's education, most notably in their contributions to the excellent records, or 'learning journals', of reception children's progress. Parents and carers are highly appreciative of the school, but not all support homework, such as hearing reading.
- The school welcomes the opportunity to work with other partners to help improve its work, for example in joint validation of assessments of pupils' progress. Partners also benefit from Sylvan staff supporting their work, both at leadership level and in supporting trainee teachers.
- The local authority team has supported the school well in its determination to become good. Although it is now a 'light touch' school, leaders and governors are very keen to continue using the good opportunities on offer for professional development and external monitoring and challenge.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have worked well with staff since the previous inspection to help Sylvan become a good school. As real 'critical friends' they are supportive as well as asking searching questions to help the school prove that its strategies are helping pupils to achieve well. There is a strong determination to help the school become even better. Governors understand data well, due to good training provided by senior staff, and this, together with its own first-hand monitoring, provides the governing body with an accurate picture of the impact teaching has on pupils' achievement. This underpins the excellent skills and strategies in place for formal performance management processes where governors are exceptionally well placed to only agree salary increases for good performance. Very wise decisions regarding the allocating of pupil premium funding to extra staffing and resources for eligible pupils have ensured they are closing the gap well on their peers.

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	113692
Local authority	Poole
Inspection number	426748

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	342
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Quenten Walker
Headteacher	Sarah Lee
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 February 2012
Telephone number	01202 743064
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