

Sowerby Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121341
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	313957
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Robinson

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kerry Morgan
Headteacher	Mrs Jean Yendall
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2004
School address	Topcliffe Road Thirsk North Yorkshire YO7 1RX
Telephone number	01845 523037
Fax number	01845 526876

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average, as is the number of those with statements to support their special educational needs. Most pupils are White British. Eligibility for free school meals is below average. The school serves an area of relative social and economic advantage. The headteacher took up her appointment in September 2005 following several changes of headship at the school in a short period of time. The school has gained the Activemark, Basic Skills and Healthy School Awards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Sowerby Community Primary School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is good. They appreciate the many opportunities to keep healthy and report that they feel safe in school. Pupils are welcoming and courteous. They act responsibly about the school, though occasionally, in lessons which do not capture their interest a minority lose concentration and can cause minor disturbances to the learning of others. Pupils are eager to take on responsibilities, such as school councillors and playground friends. Their sound grasp of basic skills prepares them appropriately for future learning.

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards by the end of Year 6 are broadly average, though standards in writing fall short of those in reading. The quality of teaching, although on balance satisfactory, is too variable to enable pupils to make good progress. Activities often do not inspire pupils to work at a brisk pace. The pastoral care of pupils is a positive feature within lessons and about the school. Relationships between pupils and with staff are cordial. Teachers have detailed information about pupils' prior attainment, though this information is not used well enough to speed up learning.

Much has been done by the headteacher to move the school forward at a faster pace, and to involve others in its leadership. Her vision for the school is supported by the governors who have quickly gathered a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. The roles and responsibilities of the senior management team, including subject coordinators and the deputy headteacher, have been extended. There is now a greater emphasis on the need for them to take responsibility for improving teaching and learning. At this point in time their effectiveness in fulfilling their roles is limited. The school knows what it must do to continue to improve. Recent positive initiatives have not yet had sufficient time to impact significantly on standards. Parents speak highly of the school and are very supportive of the leadership. A typical parental comment reflects their positive views, 'The school has become a place where children, parents and the wider community are consulted, involved and take pride in belonging to the school.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage (Reception) is good. Children have a great start to school in an attractive, well resourced learning area. Intensive help from the headteacher and the local authority have effectively improved provision over the past two years. The Foundation Stage leader is providing a strong steer to this area, in developing both the quality of teaching and management systems. Children's progress is good. From broadly typical levels of attainment on entry to Reception, children are on course to exceed expected standards by the time they start Year 1. This is an improvement on previous years' results. Good developments in recording and tracking children's progress are helping teachers to plan work in greater detail for individuals and groups. However, this information is not used to set targets for pupils in Year 1. The recently enhanced curriculum has a strong emphasis on developing basic skills in literacy and numeracy as well as children's personal, social and emotional development. Work indoors is linked well with that outdoors in all areas of learning. The good start children have in Reception prepares them well for future learning. Parents praise the good and improving provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in writing.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently at least good, particularly in relation to the effective use of assessment data.
- Develop the roles of middle managers, including the deputy headteacher, in raising standards in their areas of responsibilities.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

On entry to Year 1, standards are broadly at expected levels. Progress from Year 1 to Year 6 is satisfactory. In most years since the last inspection standards by the end of Year 2 have been broadly average, but dipped to below average in 2007. This was mainly because of low standards in writing. Current standards in Year 2 are average, and writing standards have moved closer to those in reading and mathematics. This is because of a greater focus on developing pupils' writing skills.

Standards at the end of Year 6 in the 2007 national tests were broadly average and showed a significant improvement on the previous year's results. Present standards in Year 6 are broadly average and past underachievement has been redressed. Pupils' progress, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory. This is because of the senior managers' rigorous tracking of pupils' progress, and efforts to raise the quality of teaching and learning over the past two years. Targets set for the end of Year 6 in English and mathematics are on course to be reached at the level expected nationally, with a larger than average proportion of pupils expected to reach the higher levels. However, writing standards remain much lower than those in reading.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Through personal, social, health and citizenship education, pupils express their feelings in discussions and gain a secure understanding of healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. They enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Behaviour is variable in some lessons where teaching lacks challenge and interest. On these occasions pupils are complacent and lose concentration, and a few resort to minor disruptive tactics. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue. Any minor difficulties are dealt with firmly. Pupils are confident that they can approach any adults in school and discuss any worries. They particularly appreciate the role of the learning mentor in listening and helping to maintain good relationships. The school council is an active elected body and has played an important part in developing the school grounds. Other opportunities to take on responsibilities at the school are limited, though some pupils provide good support for others in their roles as playtime friends.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Variation in the quality of teaching results in uneven progress through the school. In Years 1 to 6, too few lessons are good or better. In all lessons relationships between pupils, and between pupils and adults are harmonious. Teachers' planning of lessons is developing, with a stronger emphasis on clearly identifying what different groups are to learn. In practice, however, questioning is often not geared sufficiently to individuals' levels of attainment, particularly lower and higher-attainers. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively, but some pupils lose concentration when members of staff spend too much time instructing, or tasks set do not interest pupils. At these times, there is a lack of clarity of what pupils are to learn. In the better lessons, the pace of learning is brisk. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully included because of well organised support from teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils are encouraged to work with a partner to consolidate and extend their learning. Activities are enjoyable and well thought out to speed up learning for pupils at all levels.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and currently being reviewed to provide purposeful links between subjects. This adds interest to learning and provides further opportunities to practise and extend literacy skills in other subjects. Already, this approach is beginning to help to raise standards in writing in Years 1 and 2. In Years 3 to 6, opportunities are missed to develop writing in different styles in most subjects. Nevertheless, some work in personal, social, health and citizenship education develops reflective writing well. Displays across the school do not sufficiently celebrate pupils' writing, though artwork is well represented, for example, in a study of the Victorians. Activities, such as a multicultural week, assist pupils' cultural understanding, though these opportunities are infrequent. Visitors, such as music specialists and senior citizens, add interest to learning. A range of visits linked to educational themes, and a residential visit extend pupils' learning. Out-of-school activities are enthusiastically attended, for example, sporting events and a gardening club. An introduction to French and German is now firmly in place and links to work in the local secondary school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Government safeguarding requirements are met and child protection procedures are in place. The school's leadership is strongly committed to promoting a safe environment for pupils; health and safety and risk assessment arrangements are in place. Good pastoral care of pupils, including vulnerable pupils, pervades the school. Parents consider their children are looked after well. The school has a wealth of information about pupils' attainments but this information is not used well enough to push on pupils' learning at a faster and more consistent pace. The marking of pupils' work is variable and often does not clearly identify what they must do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The governors and the headteacher have a good understanding of what the school should do to improve further. Since the headteacher has been in post, she has identified clear priorities to move the school forward. Increasingly, governors are developing their roles and responsibilities in holding the school to account. Already, initiatives such as tackling underachievement in Years 1 to 6 are being successfully dealt with. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator knows how to assist lower-attaining pupils more effectively. A revised middle management team has been established but their skills in monitoring and improving teaching and learning are currently underdeveloped. There has been insufficient time for the work of some leaders to have a significant impact upon pupils' standards. Nevertheless, recent improvements, together with an ongoing commitment to development, indicate that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Sowerby Community Primary School, Thirsk, YO7 1RX

Thank you for welcoming the team to your school and being so polite and friendly. We enjoyed our inspection and we want to share with you what we thought about your school.

You are provided with a satisfactory education. Standards by the end of Year 6 are broadly average, but standards in writing are not high enough. We want the school to help you to improve the standards of your work, but especially your writing. To improve your progress, we would like all lessons in school to be as good as the very best ones. In the Reception, children make good progress and reach above expected standards. In the rest of the school progress is satisfactory, and we have suggested that the staff make really good use of all the information they have about your progress to plan your work and help you move on. This will help speed up your learning.

Your headteacher knows what must be done to improve your school. She has the support of the governors. Your parents are proud of the school and appreciative of the education it provides for you. Other leaders are beginning to take more responsibility for improving teaching and learning. This is an area we have asked the school to develop in order to raise standards further.

You told us you enjoy school and we were pleased that your attendance is above average. You have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and have been successful in gaining Activemark and Healthy School Awards. Your behaviour is generally satisfactory, though sometimes, a few of you lose concentration in lessons and become a little restless. We appreciated talking to you about your work and watching you learn. We trust you will help the headteacher and staff to continue to improve the school. We wish you well for the future.