INSPECTION REPORT

SILSOE CHURCH OF ENGLAND LOWER SCHOOL

Silsoe

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109605

Headteacher: Mr B Storey

Reporting inspector: Mrs L Woods 21079

Dates of inspection: 19-20 June 2000

Inspection number: 182329

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: First School

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 4-9

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: High Street

Silsoe

Bedfordshire

Postcode: MK45 4ES

Telephone number: 01525 860247

Fax number: 01525 862941

Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr P Travis

Date of previous inspection: 10 June 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
Mrs L Woods	Registered inspector	
Mrs C Webb	Lay inspector	
Mrs J Cutler	Team inspector	

The inspection contractor was:

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Silsoe Church of England Lower School is an integral and important part of the village community. It is a popular school with currently 127 boys and girls on roll between the ages of four and nine. The school is smaller than most primary schools, but has grown in size since the time of the last inspection. The majority of pupils live locally although a significant proportion, 25 per cent, travel from other villages and towns to attend the school. Almost all pupils come from professional homes, with three per cent being eligible for free school meals, which is low compared to the national picture. Seven per cent of pupils come from different ethnic backgrounds and all are fluent in English. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above average overall. Twelve per cent of pupils are identified as having special educational needs, which is below the national average. Six of these pupils are at Stage 3 and above of the Code of Practice for the identification of such pupils and three have statements of special educational need.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Silsoe is a good school. It provides a good education for its pupils within a full and varied curriculum and achieves very high standards particularly in English and mathematics. Teaching is good overall and all staff are fully committed to providing a rich range of experiences for the pupils within a warm and welcoming environment. The school is led effectively by the recently-appointed headteacher and he is fully supported by staff, governors and the vast majority of parents. The governing body is taking an increasingly active role in monitoring the work of the school and the standards attained. As a small school unit costs are inevitably high, but it makes good use of its resources and provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils really enjoy coming to school and develop impressive levels of maturity and responsibility.
- Good teaching and high expectations together with teachers' detailed knowledge of the needs of individual pupils leads to very high standards.
- The very good links made between different subjects of the curriculum lead to a rich range of
 experiences for the pupils, which are celebrated extensively in high quality displays around the
 school.
- The school is a valued, integral part of the community.

What could be improved

- The school needs to develop schemes of work in order to simplify planning and ensure that it takes greater account of the level of work to be provided within its topics and for children under five.
- Closer liaison is needed between teachers to ensure that pupils of the same age in different classes receive comparable experiences.
- The school needs to rationalise the wealth of information gained from assessment of pupils' work to a common format in order to provide a clear picture of the progress made by individual pupils in each area of the curriculum.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The inspection in June 1996 judged Silsoe to be a good school with many strengths. Current inspection findings show that this positive position has been maintained fully and the school has addressed the issues raised at that time satisfactorily. The governing body has many new members and is taking an increasingly active role in the planning and monitoring of the work of the school. All subjects apart from design and technology have recently revised policies and a regular review programme for these is firmly established. Opportunities for spiritual development are now clearly identified within planning and pupils' annual reports are detailed. Library accommodation and resources have been improved in principle, although at the time of the current inspection, with space at a premium, pupil numbers necessitated the library books being relocated to the entrance hall and the room being used again as a classroom.

¹ Code of Practice – this gives practical advice to schools and local education authorities about their responsibilities and tasks to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs receive the most appropriate help to further their learning and personal development. This is a statutory duty under the 1993 Education Act.

Stages of special educational needs range from Stage 1, when limited additional support is provided for pupils entirely from within the school, to Stage 5, which ensures that a pupil has a statement outlining his or her needs and shows what additional and specific support that pupil will receive. Stages 3, 4 and 5 involve external specialists as well as staff within the school.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7 year olds based on National Curriculum test results.

	compared with			
Performance in:		similar schools		
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Reading	A*	A*	A*	A*
Writing	A*	A*	A*	A*
Mathematics	A*	A*	А	А

Key	
very high well above average above average average below average well below average	A* A B C D E

The above table shows that the school's performance in the standard assessment tasks has consistently been in the top five per cent nationally and is equally high compared to schools with a similar intake of pupils. Results from the tests in 2000 are of an equally very high standard, although national comparisons are not yet available. All pupils reached the expected Level 2 and above in the three tested areas and in teachers' assessments of speaking and listening and science. Forty-six per cent of pupils achieved the higher Level 3 in the writing task and 62 per cent of pupils attained Level 3 in mathematics. In the reading test 69 per cent of pupils achieved the higher Level 3. The school is justifiably proud of its results, but works continually to improve performance and sets challenging targets for each year group to achieve, with notable success.

Inspection findings confirm these very high standards not only in the core subjects of English and mathematics but also across all aspects of the curriculum. A particular strength lies in the way subjects are interwoven in topics and in the use of literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects such as extended writing in science and history and graphical work in geography. Information technology is used extensively to support work in all areas of the curriculum, with some particularly effective artwork using a graphics program. Very high standards are maintained throughout the two years of Key Stage 2 and by the time they leave the school at the age of nine pupils' work is well above that expected for their age. Children under five in the reception class are working well within the first levels of the National Curriculum.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment	
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are proud of their school and very much appreciate the wide range of activities provided. They settle down to work quickly and enthusiastically and are keen to do their best. They enjoy sharing their efforts with each other, their teachers and visitors to the school.	
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils are attentive in lessons and assemblies and move quietly around the classrooms and the school. They enjoy each other's company and although play outside is exuberant, it is consistently good natured. No bullying was seen during the inspection.	
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are confident, articulate and show very high levels of maturity and responsibility. Warm relationships permeate the school and pupils respond very well to teachers' high expectations.	
Attendance	Very good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and almost all arrive promptly	

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aching of pupils: aged up to 5 years		Aged 7-9 years	
Lessons seen overall	satisfactory	good	Good	

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. It is never less than satisfactory, is good or better in 70 per cent of lessons and very good in five per cent. Teachers have a detailed knowledge of the needs of individuals in their classes and work hard to provide relevant activities which capture pupils' interest and imagination. Teaching of English and mathematics is consistently good. The structures from the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been successfully introduced and lessons move at a brisk and productive pace, resulting in a good quality of learning. In all lessons teachers involve pupils fully in lively and relevant discussion and debate. As a result pupils' confidence in speaking and listening and their level of understanding is impressively mature. The admission policy means that children under five who have just joined the school are taught together with pupils who have reached their fifth birthday and have been in school for two and a half terms. Whole-class teaching in this class is satisfactory overall, but does not always take full account of the needs of the very youngest children.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. All statutory requirements are met and the links made between different subjects within the topic framework are very effective. As a result the range of relevant and interesting learning experiences is very good. However, lack of liaison between some teachers means pupils of the same age in different classes do not always have similar experiences.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils needs are clearly identified and their progress towards targets in their individual education plans is regularly reviewed. Parents and external agencies are fully involved as appropriate. Pupils are sympathetically and effectively supported in class by their teachers, peers and by dedicated and well-informed support assistants.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Provision for pupils' personal and social development is very good and its effectiveness is clearly evident in pupils' mature and sensible attitudes. Provision for their spiritual, moral and cultural development is good through assemblies, class discussions and a wide range of visits and visitors.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The school has appropriate procedures in place to monitor pupils' health, safety and wellbeing and all staff know the individual pupils very well. Assessment is thorough, but the information gained is not always collated in a clear and simple format.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The recently-appointed headteacher has energy and vision and is fully supported by governors, staff and the vast majority of parents. All staff work as an effective team, with a shared commitment to maintaining and improving standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Sound. Governors take a close interest in the school and many visit regularly to see its work at first hand. Many of the newly-appointed governors bring a considerable degree of expertise to their roles and the governing body as a whole is taking an increasingly active part in monitoring the work and standards in the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school has a clear understanding of its strengths and where improvement could be made. Areas for improvement identified by the inspection are already highlighted in the comprehensive school development plan, which provides a clear framework to address these areas.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The budget is well managed and all specific grants are spent effectively. Day-to-day expenditure is carefully monitored and the principles of best value applied appropriately to spending decisions. Plans for improvement are fully costed and all implications considered in detail.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Fifty-four per cent of questionnaires were completed and 28 parents attended the meeting with the registered inspector.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved		
 Their children like coming to school, behaviour is good and children are mature and responsible. Teaching is good, the school has high expectations and children make good progress. The school is well led and managed and approachable when parents have questions and problems. 	 Some parents feel the school does not involve them sufficiently and they are not kept well informed about their children's progress. Some parents would like more activities outside lessons. 		

Inspectors fully support parents' positive views about the school. All staff already work very hard to provide a full and interesting range of extra-curricular activities. Reports on pupils' progress, including the interim report in the spring term, are detailed, but the school acknowledges the need to provide more explanation regarding the latter. The school provides regular information for parents, but is also aware that the details of forthcoming topics vary between teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils really enjoy coming to school and develop impressive levels of maturity and responsibility

- 1. Pupils really enjoy coming to school and almost all arrive promptly in the morning and settle quickly into the routine of the day. They very much appreciate the wide range of activities available, with the 'best things being art and mathematics' although some do not like getting up in the morning and find science 'boring'! Pupils throughout the school are confident and articulate. In class discussions they enter into the debate with enthusiasm and their understanding is clearly evident in the thoughtful and relevant contributions they make. At Key Stage 1, for example, pupils have decided opinions on whether pictures are easier to produce using pencils or a graphics program; 'pencil is easier because you go wobbly on the computer and it doesn't look so nice'; although they agree the writing looks neater when computer generated. Pupils at Key Stage 2 explain how they have created their 'fantasy islands' clearly and in great detail and they share their exciting future plans confidently and enthusiastically.
- 2. From youngest to oldest pupils show very highly developed levels of maturity and responsibility. They respond very well to teachers' high expectations, behaving well as they move around the rather cramped building quietly and sensibly. They are attentive in lessons and assemblies and take responsibility seriously from changing their own library books and finding out information to setting out and clearing up the hall for assemblies and lunch. They enjoy each other's company and warm relationships permeate the school between pupils and between adults and pupils. Provision for pupils' personal and social development is very good and its effectiveness is clearly evident in pupils' mature and sensible attitudes.
- 3. Pupils are proud to have their names displayed on the 'Congratulations Board' which celebrates their academic and personal success in a wide range of activities. These are changed weekly, enabling a large number of pupils to be congratulated over the course of the year and reinforcing their sense of pride in achievement. They are pleased for their friends and peers when they do well and recall past events such as sports day with pleasure, being pragmatic about certain individuals 'always winning the races'!

Good teaching and high expectations together with teachers' detailed knowledge of the needs of individual pupils leads to very high standards

- 4. Teachers plan and prepare lessons thoroughly and have a detailed knowledge of the needs of individuals in their classes. They work hard to provide relevant activities which capture pupils' interest and imagination. Teachers consistently involve pupils fully in lively and relevant discussion and debate as lessons progress. They carefully ensure pupils understand what is expected of them and high-quality questioning encourages pupils very effectively to think and reason in their answers. All teachers have high expectations both of hard work and concentration and of standards of work and presentation. Teaching of English and mathematics is consistently good. The literacy and numeracy hours have been successfully introduced and teachers appreciate the benefit of these in raising standards in the school. Introductory sessions are lively and lessons move at a brisk and productive pace.
- 5. As a result of this good teaching standards throughout the school are very high, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Pupils have a secure knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling and standards of handwriting and presentation are very good. They use these skills extensively in all areas of the curriculum, for example writing class

books in reception and postcards related to geography in Class 2. Pupils are confident at mental calculations and enjoy mental arithmetic sessions in the numeracy hour. They confidently tackle problems such as dividing with remainders in Class 3 and calculations involving decimals in Class 4 and their mathematical ability is well above expectations for their age by the time they leave the school. Pupils' level of understanding in all areas of the curriculum and their confidence in speaking and listening are impressively mature. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations and work hard at their assigned activities. Pupils' information technology skills are well developed and they confidently use computers to support work, for example in English, mathematics and art. They have a clear understanding of the value of technology in supporting work across the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in all activities and are sympathetically and effectively supported at all times by their teachers and peers and by dedicated and well-informed support assistants.

The very good links made between different subjects of the curriculum lead to a rich range of experiences for the pupils, which are celebrated extensively in high quality displays around the school

6. The links made between different subjects within the school's topic framework are a strength of the curriculum provision in the school. The resulting range of relevant and interesting learning experiences for the pupils is very good. In Class 2, for example, work on the legendary character Robin Hood effectively links English, information technology, history and art as pupils research information from a wide range of books and design front covers for their project using coloured pencils and a graphics program. In Class 4 work in the 'Our World' topic covers science and design and technology with the use of levers to 'make creatures fly', geography as they design and make 'fantasy islands' and art with lovely watercolour paintings of flowers in the style of different artists. Pupils enjoy their work and take great pride in seeing it displayed around the school. The quality of these displays is excellent and they celebrate the efforts of all pupils in the school and the wide range of activities they take part in. A recent visit to the canal is effectively recorded in photographs, writing and colourful 'castles and roses' artwork. Pupils' writing such as on the life of a coal miner in Class 3, their work in mathematics, for example graphs of favourite pets in Class 1, and their work in information technology such as displays of the school's web pages are all of a very high standard.

The school is a valued, integral part of the community

- 7. The school values the contribution the local community makes to its work and in turn is a valued part of village life. Members of the community are proud of the school and take an active part in caring for the grounds and its security. Parents and local residents, for example, have planned and planted the gardens and water these regularly. Others bring valuable expertise to the governing body. Visits to the local farm and study of village architecture make an important contribution to work in science, geography and history. Pupils organise their own collections for Blue Peter and undertake regular charity work with, for example, UNICEF, the British Legion and Marie Curie Cancer Foundation, raising substantial sums of money for these. Parents successfully gained a millennium grant for the 'Summer Fayre' to enhance provision at this successful event, which was enjoyed by the whole village. The fair, Christmas productions and pupils' participation in the Silsoe Jazz Festival with dancing, playing and performing contribute to valuable two-way communication and welcome members of the community into school on a regular basis.
- 8. School news is published in the parish magazine and the local vicar enjoys taking fortnightly assemblies. He has a good rapport with the pupils who in turn enjoy his lively presentations! The local policeman and community nurse regularly attend meetings for

new parents as well as providing valuable input into the curriculum. All these links make an important contribution to the family ethos of the school and pupils' awareness of their place in both the local and wider community.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The school needs to develop schemes of work in order to simplify planning and ensure that it takes greater account of the level of work to be provided within its topics and for children under five

- 9. The school works hard to provide an interesting and relevant curriculum for its pupils. Many topics are wide ranging and effectively link different subjects in a lively and stimulating way. Apart from English and mathematics, however, where the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies provide a sound framework for the development of pupils' skills, schemes of work have not been fully developed. As a result there is no guidance for teachers on the appropriate level of work to be provided within each topic and the school has no means of ensuring that all elements of each subject are covered fully. A science display, for example, showed work normally expected of pupils in Year 2 and of pupils in Year 6 within the same Key Stage 2 topic. This lack of understanding of the level of work appropriate to each age group means the progressive development of pupils' knowledge within each subject is not securely established.
- 10. The school's admission policy results in children under five who have just joined the school being taught together with pupils who have reached their fifth birthday and have been in school for two and a half terms. Whole-class teaching in this class does not always take full account of the curriculum requirements for the very youngest children set out in the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning². Whilst they cope well with the work provided, their basic understanding is not effectively catered for through close interaction with adults as they complete their tasks.

Closer liaison is needed between teachers to ensure that pupils of the same age in different classes receive comparable experiences

11. The size of the school and constraints within the available accommodation result in almost all classes having mixed year groups, some of which cross key stages. Teachers plan the work for their classes in detail within the school's topic framework. Planning, however, is done mainly independently and is most often based upon the requirements of the older age group in the class. This provides good challenge for the younger age group pupils in that particular class but leads to inequality in provision for pupils of the same age in different classes. Whilst some teachers with pupils of the same age consult closely to ensure they provide similar work, this is not a consistent practice. During the inspection, for example, pupils in Year 3 in different classes covered quite different areas in their mathematics lessons. When these pupils come together as Year 4 their experiences and their level of knowledge and understanding of mathematical principles will consequently vary. Because teachers plan independently and there is no consistent format for recording the work covered or the attainment of individual pupils these differences will be difficult to pinpoint for subsequent teachers to plan appropriate work.

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² Desirable learning outcomes – these are goals for learning for children by the time they enter compulsory education at the age of five. They mainly refer to literacy (speaking, listening, reading (recognising their own names and common words, enjoyment of stories, books and pictures) and writing, e.g. writing their names and recognising UPPER and lower case), numeracy (recognising the meaning of numbers, beginning to add and subtract small numbers, sorting and matching objects and numbers and recognising common shapes and patterns) and personal and social skills (showing confidence, self-respect, ability to work with other children and adults, concentrating, offering ideas, taking turns and sharing). These will be replaced with the Early Learning Goals in September 2000.

The school needs to rationalise the wealth of information gained from assessment of pupils' work to a common format in order to provide a clear picture of the progress made by individual pupils in each area of the curriculum

12. Teachers know the pupils in their classes very well and are adept at providing work which is well matched to their needs. This provides challenge for both more able pupils and those with special educational needs effectively and enables them to make good progress. Pupils' work is assessed regularly, both formally and informally and teachers use their assessment appropriately to decide the progress of future lessons. Some of this information is collated, for example results from the initial assessments done when children first start school and from national standardised tests. However, the school is still developing a useful, informative system for recording the progress of pupils across the curriculum and as a result information remains too dependent on individual teachers' knowledge. It is not easily accessible either to different teachers when pupils move class or to the school as a whole to establish what work individual pupils have covered, their attainment and progress and consequently the value added by the school.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 13. The governors, headteacher and staff should now:
- continue to develop schemes of work in all subjects in order to:
 - · simplify the planning process;
 - ensure that greater account is taken of the level of work to be provided within its topics and that children under five receive the curriculum appropriate to their age;
 - provide a clear framework for the progressive development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding;
- establish closer liaison between all teachers to ensure that pupils of the same age in different classes receive comparable experiences, particularly where these cross key stages;
- develop a manageable, common format for recording the wealth of information gained from assessment of pupils' work in order to provide a clear picture of the progress made by individual pupils in each area of the curriculum.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	20
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	21

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	5	65	30	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	127
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	15

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.4
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	1999	15	12	27

National Curriculum To	est/Task Results	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
	Boys	14	15	14
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Girls	12	12	12
	Total	26	27	26
Percentage of pupils	School	96	100	96
at NC level 2 or above	National	82	83	87

Teachers' Asse	essments	English	Mathematics	Science
	Boys	15	14	15
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Girls	12	12	12
	Total	27	26	27
Percentage of pupils	School	100	96	100
at NC level 2 or above	National	82	86	87

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	2
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	99
Any other minority ethnic group	3

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black - Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y R - Y 4

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	5.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22
Average class size	25.4

Education support staff: Y R - Y 4

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	87.75

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000	
	£	
Total income	241,158	
Total expenditure	234,923	
Expenditure per pupil	2,196	
Balance brought forward from previous year	0	
Balance carried forward to next year	6,235	

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	127
Number of questionnaires returned	69
Percentage returned	54

Percentage of responses in each category

My child likes school.

My child is making good progress in school.

Behaviour in the school is good.

My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.

The teaching is good.

I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.

I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.

The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.

The school works closely with parents.

The school is well led and managed.

The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
67	32	1	0	0
61	35	1	0	3
61	38	1	0	0
45	41	7	4	3
65	33	2	0	0
43	28	28	1	0
70	25	4	1	0
72	28	0	0	0
54	32	14	0	0
46	33	0	4	17
59	38	0	0	3
25	46	17	4	8