

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **STAPLECROSS METHODIST PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Robertsbridge, Nr Hastings

LEA area: East Sussex

Unique reference number: 114531

Headteacher: Mr Chris Davey

Reporting inspector: Mr George Crowther  
18814

Dates of inspection: 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> June 2002

Inspection number: 196763

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant and junior  
School category: Voluntary controlled  
Age range of pupils: 4 to 11  
Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Bodiam Road  
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East Sussex  
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Appropriate authority: Governing body  
Name of chair of governors: Mr David Young  
Date of previous inspection: June 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Staplecross is a small, voluntary controlled primary school for boys and girls who are 4-11 years old. It has 66 pupils organised in three classes, each covering a wide age and ability range. It is one of very few schools nationally with a Methodist foundation. The school is situated in a village about ten miles north of Hastings, with which it has strong links. Most pupils live in the village but some travel from further a field. The school serves families whose social circumstances are generally more favourable than the national picture, and very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. Overall, pupils' attainment when they start school is above average, though there is a range of ability within each age group that varies from year to year. Across the school, 11 pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, for a variety of learning and behavioural difficulties, but all are at an early stage of support, and none has a statement. The proportion of pupils needing additional support is below average. Almost all pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds; two have English as an additional language but both are fluent and so no additional support is required.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Staplecross is an effective school that provides a good standard of education. Pupils' achievements are good and the results of national tests at the end of Year 6 have been well above the national average and much better than those gained by pupils in similar schools. The school promotes positive values very well, based on its Christian foundation and the 'family atmosphere' created by the staff. As a result, pupils exhibit impressive attitudes to learning, excellent behaviour and a clear respect for others. The quality of teaching is good overall, though there are weaknesses in a few lessons that slow the pace of pupils' learning. The curriculum is well matched to the needs and interests of the pupils. The new headteacher is continuing the good leadership and management provided by his predecessor. The school provides good value for the money it receives.

#### **What the school does well**

- Pupils' achievements are good and, by Year 6, they reach standards that are much better than those expected for their age.
- The headteacher and staff create an environment in which pupils' outstanding attitudes and behaviour contribute significantly to the progress they make.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.
- The curriculum has a rich variety of experiences that encourage pupils' learning.
- The school fosters very positive and productive links with parents, which make a very effective contribution to children's learning.

#### **What could be improved**

- In a few of the lessons seen, and evident in pupils' past work, there were weaknesses in the quality of teaching.
- The organisation of the school day does not make the best use of the available time for teaching and learning.
- In some subjects, there are too few opportunities for pupils to investigate and experiment so that they can extend their knowledge and understanding.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION**

When it was last inspected, in June 1997, Staplecross was judged to have a strong ethos of care, and a firm commitment to both pupils' social development and their academic success. Since then, the school has sustained these positive features and made good, further improvement, particularly in pupils' academic achievements. The results of national tests at the end of Year 6 have improved considerably. The school has also made good progress in addressing the action points from the last inspection report. The quality of teaching is more consistent across the school, though there are still weaknesses in some lessons. All subjects now have a scheme of work that provides good guidance for teachers when they are planning lessons. The school is making better use of assessment data to match work to pupils' learning needs and to identify relative weaknesses in pupils' attainment. Higher-attaining pupils are generally better challenged and reach the higher levels in national tests. Although the governing body is more involved in school improvement matters, it has scope to gather even more information about the effectiveness of the school so that it can play a greater part in planning the way forward. The safety of pupils in relation to the main road at the school entrance has improved, owing to traffic calming measures and better security fencing. The school is continuing to improve, and has a good capacity to raise standards further.

## STANDARDS

*(Note – In most inspection reports, a table is included showing the pupils' results in national tests at the end of Year 6. In this case, however, the number of pupils taking the tests is too small to make the grades meaningful in any one subject, so the table is omitted.)*

When children start school, their overall attainment is normally above average, though some year groups have lower attainment, for example the current Year 6. During the Foundation Stage (reception), children's achievements are good and, by the time they enter Year 1, attainment is above average in all areas of learning. Children make particularly good progress in developing their skills in literacy and numeracy.

Throughout the rest of the school, pupils' achievements are good overall. Results of the national assessments for pupils at the end of Year 2 have been well above average overall. Results of national tests at the end of Year 6 were very strong in 2001, and the school gained an Achievement Award to recognise this success. Variations in previous years are to be expected when only a small number of pupils is tested, but the trend of improvement during the past five years is better than the national picture. Schools set targets for the proportion of Year 6 pupils expected to reach the national average, Level 4. In 2001, the school exceeded its targets for English and mathematics.

Pupils' work shows that attainment in the current Year 6 is above national expectations in English, mathematics and science. This is lower than the usual standard because a significant proportion of this year group joined the school in the juniors, and there are fewer higher-attaining pupils. Nonetheless, these pupils' achievements have been good compared with their initial attainment. Overall, pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are above average throughout the school, with a particular strength in reading. In mathematics and science, whilst pupils have good knowledge and understanding, their skills in using and applying their knowledge in investigations and experiments is weaker.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils are very keen to come to school, show a high level of interest in their work, and enjoy their learning. They concentrate very well in lessons and offer their ideas readily. This provides a first rate basis for progress.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Outstanding. Pupils are very polite and friendly. They behave impressively in lessons and around the school. This supports their learning

	very effectively. There have been no exclusions in the past year.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Very positive relationships between pupils and with adults are a strength of the school. Pupils work and play well together. They respond very maturely when given opportunities to take on responsibility.
Attendance	Very good. Much better than the national average.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	good	good	good

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

The quality of teaching is good overall, and particularly strong for the oldest pupils. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and, in six of the ten lessons observed, teaching was good, occasionally very good. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. In the great majority of lessons seen, careful planning, teachers' very good relationships with pupils, the good organisation of activities, and the use of a good range of teaching methods were strong features. As a result, pupils enjoyed their lessons, worked hard and make good gains in learning. Where teaching was very good, the teacher injected pace and challenge into the activities, which ensured that the pupils made rapid progress. The pupils responded very well to the high expectations of what they were capable of achieving. In the few lessons where there were weaknesses, the pace of learning was slower and tasks did not fully challenge the pupils, particularly the more able. Pupils were over directed and not encouraged to think for themselves. Where pupils were required to take the initiative, they responded very well. The good skills of classroom assistants were not best used in some of the lessons seen. Teaching of literacy and numeracy is good. Teaching generally meets the needs of all pupils successfully, including those with special needs.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, which is well planned. There are particular strengths in the work based on history and geography themes. In subjects such as mathematics and science, however, there is too little emphasis on pupils extending their knowledge and understanding through investigation and experiment. Educational visits and visitors add breadth and interest to the curriculum, such as the residential trip for the oldest pupils. The organisation of the school day does not make the best use of the time available for teaching and learning. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The needs of these pupils are identified clearly and they all have targets for improvement. They are given work that is well matched to their needs and have effective support in lessons so they make good progress. The co-ordinator organises provision effectively.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Staff know individual pupils very well, so strong support for their personal development is part and parcel of everything that happens in the school. A good range of activities in lessons and out of school encourages pupils to become confident, mature and responsible. Provision for pupils' social and moral development is very good, and there is good provision for

	spiritual and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides very good care and support for its pupils, through a range of effective procedures.
Assessment	Satisfactory. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are well established, particularly in English, mathematics and science. As yet, however, assessment information is not used consistently to monitor improvements in pupils' learning and to set learning targets.
<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school has very close and positive links with parents. It encourages them to be very well involved in school activities, to take an active interest in their children's work and to support learning at home. Parents think that the school is doing a very good job.

### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The recently-appointed headteacher is continuing the good leadership of his predecessor, which enabled the school to improve considerably since the last inspection. All the teachers have management responsibilities, which they carry out effectively. Management is based on a strong, team approach that is entirely appropriate for this small school. The current school improvement plan lacks a longer-term view of the school's development and is not always clear enough about the specific action needed to secure improvement.
How well the governing body fulfils its responsibilities	Good. Governors are supportive, well organised, and they know the school well because most are parents of pupils or have had a long association with the school. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Governors visit school regularly and have a useful link with a subject of the curriculum. They play their part in deciding plans for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The school has systems in place for monitoring pupils' attainment and the quality of teaching and learning. As yet, the gathering of information is not systematic enough to ensure that weaknesses are identified precisely or that planned action for improvement is monitored rigorously.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning and management are good. The school makes good use of its funding to raise standards, and plans ahead methodically. It pays due regard to the principles of best value.
The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources	The school is well staffed, including a specialist teacher for music. Teachers, classroom assistants and other staff are a committed, hard working team. The building and grounds provide good facilities for learning. Resources for learning are good for most subjects.

### PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see</b>
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	<b>improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Their children enjoy going to school and make good progress.</li> <li>▪ Teaching is good.</li> <li>▪ The school works closely with parents and is very approachable if they have concerns.</li> <li>▪ The school expects children to work hard, achieve their best, and helps them to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>▪ Behaviour in the school is good.</li> <li>▪ The school is well led and managed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some parents think that the pattern of homework for the oldest children is inconsistent.</li> <li>▪ Some parents would like to see more activities for children outside lessons.</li> </ul>

Just under half of the parents returned the questionnaire, and seven attended the meeting. The great majority of these parents are pleased with all aspects of the school's work, and inspectors' judgements support parents' very positive views. Inspectors think that the school provides a good range of activities outside lessons, including clubs and educational visits. Arrangements for homework are good; teachers of the oldest children set rather different types of homework but this is intentional and the children say they enjoy the tasks.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

#### **Pupils' achievements are good and, by Year 6, they reach standards that are much better than those expected for their age**

*(Pupils' **attainment** is what they know, understand and can do at a particular point in time e.g. at the end of Year 2. Pupils' **achievements** are the progress they make in relation to their initial attainment. Therefore, a child starting school with low attainment may achieve well but still not reach the nationally expected standard of attainment.)*

1. Children who join the reception year have a range of skills and experiences but, overall, their attainment is normally above average compared with what is expected nationally. This varies from year to year, however, and the current Year 2 is an example of a group of pupils who started school with average attainment overall.
2. At the time of the inspection, there were only six children in the Foundation Stage (reception), and all were achieving well alongside the Year 1 pupils. The teacher plans a sensible curriculum for the youngest children that pays due attention to the recommended areas of learning for the Foundation Stage, whilst introducing work from the early stages of the National Curriculum. This is particularly appropriate for the more able children. As a result, all the children are making good progress in developing their early skills in literacy and numeracy. Good teaching and a good range of learning experiences ensure that, by the time children join Year 1, almost all reach and many exceed the standards expected nationally.
3. The results of national assessments for pupils at the end of Year 2 have been well above average. Inspection evidence, however, shows that, while attainment in the current Year 2 is above national expectations in English, mathematics and science, it is not as high as last year. For example, although almost all of the pupils are reading at the expected level, only a few read very fluently, and one or two are slightly below the expected standard. The year group contains fewer high-attaining pupils than last year, but overall attainment is still above average because there are no pupils with significant special educational needs. Year 2 pupils' work shows that they are making satisfactory progress, but have not improved as rapidly as pupils in Year 6. The work is not as well matched to their needs as it is later in the school, and they do not complete the amount and quality of work that might be expected, particularly the higher attainers. For example, in English, there is too little emphasis on improving the content, presentation, punctuation and spelling in pupils' writing.
4. The very good results in the 2001 national tests for pupils at the end of Year 6 were recognised by a national Achievement Award. The results represented good achievement for that group of pupils

during their time in the juniors. Over the past five years, though there have been fluctuations, there has been a steady improvement in the school's results, at a rate better than the national trend.

5. Evidence from pupils' work shows that attainment in the current Year 6 is above national expectations in English, mathematics and science. This year group is not as strong as last year, and fewer pupils are working above the expected level. However, the amount and quality of work the pupils have completed, in all subjects, is impressive and shows that expectations of hard work and neat presentation are high. Pupils' achievements are good during Years 4 to 6, and very good in some aspects of their work, because the quality of teaching is particularly strong. There are relative weaknesses. For example, there is too little emphasis placed on pupils using and applying their skills in mathematics, and not enough experimental and investigative work in science. While lack of experience in these aspects of the subjects does not prevent pupils from doing well in national tests, a better understanding would help them reach the higher level. The few pupils identified as having special educational needs achieve equally as well as others. Overall, attainment is much higher than reported at the last inspection.

6. An important reason for pupils' good achievements is the way in which the school places great emphasis on meeting the needs of individuals so that all are fully involved in lessons and learning. For example, boys and girls do equally well in national tests, and it is noticeable in lessons that they are expected to work well together. In the lessons observed, the needs of groups of pupils of varying ability were generally met well. In a few lessons seen, the work for higher attaining pupils was not challenging enough and, whilst their progress was satisfactory, it was not as good as it could have been.

7. Pupils achieve well because the quality of teaching is good in most lessons. The excellent way in which pupils respond to the teaching, and the very mature attitudes to learning of the oldest pupils in particular, are key factors in supporting progress. Teachers know individual pupils well and have a good understanding of their existing knowledge, skills and understanding. Parents support pupils' learning and want them to succeed. Since the previous inspection, pupils' achievements have improved because the school has been more focused on strengthening academic attainment, without losing its great strength as a caring, family school.

### **The headteacher and staff create an environment in which pupils' outstanding attitudes and behaviour contribute significantly to the progress they make**

8. Pupils at Staplecross like coming to school; they say so, as do their parents. A Year 6 pupil, writing about the things he was looking forward to during the year said that the only thing he was not looking forward to was leaving the school. This is hardly surprising, given the very positive environment created by the staff and the wide range of interesting activities provided for the pupils. When questioned, the oldest pupils said that they particularly like the topic work that they complete, such as the current work about ancient Greece. They also enjoy out of school activities, such as the recent trip to the south of France during which pupils took part in several outdoor adventurous activities.

9. Staplecross is a very pleasant place to work and learn. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are very positive, and this was seen in lessons and around the school. For example, in all the lessons observed, when pupils were asked to work individually, supportive relationships between them meant that they helped each other and commented positively on the quality of each others' work. At break times, pupils play happily with each other, with all ages mixing naturally. Year 6 pupils act as 'playground friends', organising play equipment and keeping a watchful eye for any children who may

be left out. High expectations of good relationships make a very good contribution to pupils' social and moral development.

10. As a result of the very positive environment created by the school, pupils show high levels of motivation, interest and application to their work. They are generally eager to participate in discussions. For example, when the youngest children were discussing the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk', most of them made a contribution to the session, often at some length, showing their very confident speaking skills. In a mental mathematics session, the oldest pupils were very keen to explain their methods for finding the answer, and they listened attentively to other pupils' views. Pupils listen actively to what their teachers have to say and try hard to complete their best work. They make the transition from a whole-class session to individual work very quickly, rarely wasting any time, and they concentrate very well on the task in hand. The result of these positive attitudes to learning is seen in the work of the Year 6 pupils, in particular. They have completed far more work than is normally seen, and the high quality of presentation across all their work shows their pride in a job well done.

11. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are friendly, polite and show consideration for others. Typical of this behaviour was the child who asked his teacher, "Please Mrs X, can I pull my chair round so that I can see the board more easily". Pupils are very co-operative, and even the youngest children do as they are asked quickly and happily. Around the school, no incidents of misbehaviour were observed, even when the pupils knew that they were unsupervised. Pupils were eager to have conversations with inspectors, to hold doors for adults, and to share their work. Any help offered by adults was accepted gratefully. Parents say that behaviour is very good in school and on the many trips and visits.

12. All these strengths in pupils' attitudes, behaviour and relationships support their learning very well. They are very significant factors in pupils' good achievements. The last inspection identified this aspect as a strength of the school, but pupils' attainment was not as high then. The school has now harnessed pupils' excellent approach to school so that it stimulates their progress and is reflected in the quality of their work.

### **The quality of teaching and learning is good overall**

13. The quality of teaching is good overall, and particularly strong for the oldest pupils. Of the 10 lessons observed, teaching was very good in two, good in four and satisfactory in four. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. This is a marked improvement since the last inspection when about a fifth of the lessons seen were judged unsatisfactory, largely in the class for Years 2 and 3. In most of the lessons seen, careful planning, teachers' good relationships with pupils, the good organisation of activities, and the use of a good range of teaching methods were strong features.

14. Only three lessons were observed in the Foundation Stage (reception) in which the quality of teaching was good overall. A range of well-planned activities interests the children and provides many opportunities to enrich their experience. For example, children were planting and growing seeds and they were very interested in looking at them closely and discussing what they needed to grow. This linked well with work in literacy about the story of 'Jack and the beanstalk'. The live rabbits and chicks brought in by parents were also a source of considerable conversation and interest. The staff support the children's learning effectively, often working with individuals on particular tasks. The whole class literacy session observed was too long for the youngest children, who maintained their concentration well but gradually became restless.

15. In the lessons seen throughout the school, teachers usually had a confident knowledge of the subject. For example, in a science lesson for Year 6 about healthy eating, the teacher's very good

grasp of the topic enabled her to ask a range of open-ended questions about the ingredients of various foods. She brought the pupils' attention to the nutrients the foods contain and encouraged them to draw conclusions about the ones that were best as part of a balanced diet. As a result, the pupils made very good gains in their understanding.

16. Basic skills are well taught throughout the school. Standards in reading are particularly high because reading is taught methodically, and pupils read regularly to an adult both in school and at home. Handwriting is taught well so that, by Year 6, all the pupils have a neat, fluent style and their work is very well presented. Although teachers pay due attention to the sounds of letters, to support both reading and spelling, too little attention is given to targeting the words that pupils commonly misspell in their own writing. In mathematics, counting and calculating skills are taught effectively. For example, the oldest children carried out a string of calculations to reach a given target number, showing that they are confident in linking a variety of multiplication, addition and subtraction processes.

17. Teachers plan lessons carefully. They identify clear learning intentions and, in the best lessons, these are shared with pupils, so that they know exactly what they are trying to achieve. Plans are particularly detailed for literacy and numeracy, and outline separate, matched tasks for groups of pupils of varying prior attainment. In most lessons, teachers have high but appropriate expectations of what pupils can achieve. For example, the oldest pupils used an excerpt from 'Danny the champion of the world' to explore inferences in the author's writing about why Danny acted in the way he did. Extension work required pupils to explain how Danny and his father were feeling at particular points in the story. This demanding comprehension work really made the pupils think hard, but they tackled it very well and made very good gains in the understanding.

18. Lessons are well organised and teachers use a good range of methods and strategies to promote learning. For example, the youngest children learnt a lot about seeds and how they grow. The activities were varied and practical, such as looking carefully at fruit and the seeds they contain, planting seeds, and discussing whether they would grow better in the light or in the dark. When they are given the opportunity, pupils respond well to open-ended, investigative activities because most have the initiative and independence to find their own solutions to tasks.

19. Teachers manage pupils' learning and behaviour effectively. They have very positive, productive relationships with the children. They praise good work and behaviour. Because teachers are positive, in most lessons pupils respond by listening attentively, concentrating on their work and behaving well. A strong feature of the very good teaching seen was the rapid pace of learning. Lessons for the oldest children had very good pace, which kept the pupils on their toes and encouraged them to work quickly but carefully. Classroom assistants make a good contribution to most lessons when they are working with a group of pupils or an individual.

20. Teachers have good strategies to assess pupils' understanding. For example, they usually begin the lesson with a review of previous learning to check what pupils know. They target pupils of different ages and abilities to check their understanding. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is satisfactory overall, though much of it is restricted to ticks and occasional praise. Only in a few cases had teachers posed questions, noted the level of pupils' attainment, or suggested ways in which work might be improved. Some parents expressed concern about arrangements for homework for the oldest children, feeling that there were inconsistencies in the amount and type of work set by the two teachers who take the class. The work is different, but this is intentional because the teachers have responsibility for different subjects. The children say that they enjoy the homework they are given and feel that it is about the right amount. Overall, arrangements for homework are good and this makes a valuable contribution to pupils' learning at school.

*(Note – This section is about the strengths of teaching and learning, but some relative weaknesses are explained later.)*

### **The curriculum has a rich variety of experiences that encourage pupils' learning**

21. The school provides a broad, rich and generally balanced curriculum that captures pupils' interest and stimulates their learning. It is well planned, using guidance from the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, as well as nationally recommended guidance for other subjects. Work in history and geography is strong, particularly for the oldest children, and is planned so that it includes aspects of other areas of the curriculum. Attractive and often stimulating displays of pupils' work show the good standard they achieve in most subjects.

22. In the class for reception and Year 1 pupils, the breadth of the curriculum is shown by displays that reflect the variety of work currently being undertaken. For example, the teacher uses 'Barnaby Bear' as a fictional character who visits different places around the world. At present, he is visiting Antarctica, and children have been learning about the climate there and the different animals that live there, particularly penguins. A very interesting display about Antarctica, including many items made by the children, reinforces their learning. Children have learnt about symmetry, linking activities in art, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). They have produced images using a simple graphics' program, as well as by drawing and painting to strengthen their understanding of the concept. Current work on seeds and growth capitalises on good links between practical science activities and a well-known story, 'Jack and the beanstalk'. The children are full of excitement planting seeds and wondering which ones will grow the best. Visits to places of interest are also an integral part of the curriculum, such as to the nearby Bodiam Castle or a hop farm.

23. In the Year 2 and 3 class, geography work looking at the fictional Scottish island of Struay shows how different life is for its inhabitants compared with those of Staplecross. The pupils have made a very detailed, large map to show the main features of the island, and another map of the actual island on which the author of the Katie Morag books based Struay. This geography work has been extended into art, with attractive montage, and poetry typical of the Scottish heritage. Currently, the history topic is about the Romans, and an impressive legionnaire dominates the display. The pupils have learnt about how the Romans lived and particularly about the aspects of their culture that they brought to Britain. Science work about electricity has been enlivened by a visit to Ninfield Museum where the pupils have first-hand opportunities to understand how electricity works and how important it is to our society. Currently, the class is establishing an internet link with a school in Australia, which will encourage pupils' skills in ICT, English and geography.

24. Much of the work of pupils in the Year 4-6 class is of very high quality. For example, their work on settlements, in geography, focuses on the nearby town of Battle, with map work, factual writing, art work, the use of ICT, and historical connections all combining to produce a magnificent display in the entrance hall. This is an outstanding example of making links between many areas of the curriculum to enrich pupils' work and their understanding. Current work about the ancient Greeks draws on their culture, art and literature. For example, pupils have written their own versions of stories such as 'The wooden horse of Troy' and, during the inspection, were composing poems about the many beasts that Heracles faced during his labours. A good example of a purposeful activity is the pupils' involvement in helping a local doctor to raise money to help families in Patagonia. After his visit explaining the purpose of the appeal, pupils raised money by baking and selling cakes and holding a non-uniform day. Their letter writing, associated with the appeal, has strengthened skills in both English and ICT. Pupils visit a range of places to stimulate their interest and, shortly before the inspection, almost all the oldest pupils has been on a residential visit to the south of France where they took part in a range of outdoor

adventurous activities. Pupils had enjoyed these immensely and learned a lot from this enriching experience.

25. The school also provides a good range of other extra-curricular activities with a variety of sporting clubs and inter-school matches. Musical activities include productions in which all the pupils take part. The richness of the curriculum, and the interesting ways in which teachers make connections between different subjects, result in pupils producing work that is above the standard expected for their ages.

### **The school fosters very positive and productive links with parents, which make a very effective contribution to children's learning**

26. The school capitalises very effectively on its strength of being a small school, with a close-knit community of families, to ensure that relationships with parents are both very positive and very productive. At the beginning and end of each school day, parents and staff mingle on the playground as children arrive or leave, and this creates the ideal opportunity to share a few words, either socially or concerning children's successes. This daily routine is the basis for very good relationships between parents and staff from which other advantages flow. The school says that it aims to, "develop and encourage good relationships between home and school and to recognise parents as partners in learning"; it is very successful in fulfilling this aim.

27. The school keeps parents well informed through the daily notice board, regular newsletters and the prospectus. At their meeting, parents said that they felt well informed about developments in school, and that the daily contact most of them have with staff is very helpful. The school holds two open evenings and an open afternoon during the year to keep parents informed about their children's progress, and these are very well attended. It also provides a good-quality report at the end of the year. As a result, the great majority of parents feel that they are well informed about how their children are doing at school. There is also a good deal of informal exchange of information, with teachers taking time to chat with parents at the end of the school day.

28. Parents are encouraged to support their children's learning at home. From the time children start school, parents are asked to read with them, and most do. Pupils' reading diaries show that most parents provide very good support. As pupils move through the school, they are expected to complete other tasks at home, largely in English and mathematics with some topic work and research for the oldest children. At their meeting, parents said that there is a very clear pattern of homework, though tasks for the oldest pupils vary between the two teachers taking the class. Nonetheless, both parents and children are generally happy with the homework given. As a result, parental support for their children's learning at home makes a significant contribution to learning at school.

29. Parents are also involved in the work of the school in a range of other activities. Some parents help in school regularly with activities such as art work and reading, or assist in running sporting clubs. Some share particular interests or expertise to support work in school, such as the chicks that had been brought into Class 1. Many parents accompany children on trips and visits, whether local or further a field. The parent-teacher and friends' association (PTFA) is very active and raises significant amounts of money to improve school resources. Parents attend a range of special occasions in school, from Harvest Festival to musical productions. At their meeting parents said that, if they wanted to be involved in school, there were plenty of opportunities for them to do so.

30. As a result of the very good links forged with them, parents express strong satisfaction with the work of the school. The questionnaires showed that the great majority of parents are very pleased with

almost all aspects of the school. In particular, parents believe that the school has high expectations of what pupils can achieve, teaches them well, and ensures that they make good progress. Inspectors agree with parents' very positive assessment of the school.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

*(Even in schools where pupils' achievements are good overall, and there are many strengths, inspectors are encouraged to identify areas that can be further improved so that pupils' learning is enhanced.)*

### **In a few of the lessons seen, and evident in pupils' past work, there were weaknesses in the quality of teaching**

31. Although the quality of teaching is good overall, there were some weaker aspects in the lessons that were judge to be satisfactory, and some weaker practice revealed through the scrutiny of pupils' work. The following weaknesses slow pupils' learning:

- The pace of some lessons or some parts of lessons is too slow. In some cases this is because the amount of time allowed for a particular activity is too long, so the pace slows to fill the time available. (This is related to the second area for improvement explained below). In some cases the pace of the teaching is too laboured, so introductions last too long, and explanation continues even when pupils have clearly grasped a point. In both cases, pupils are generally very patient and attentive because of their very good attitudes and behaviour, but they do not make the progress of which they are capable. Where teaching was very good, the pace of working was much more urgent and the teacher set time targets to encourage pupils to complete tasks quickly.
- In a few lessons, the work provided for pupils was not challenging enough, particularly for the higher attainers. In one mathematics lesson the work was simply too easy for the higher-attaining pupils because they were largely able to work out in their head the calculations they had been asked to complete in writing. In other cases, also seen in pupils' recorded work, it was the type of activity that limited the challenge. Instead of being given some freedom to explore and investigate, pupils were asked to complete a worksheet in English, or a list of calculations in mathematics. In these activities, pupils had no opportunity to show what they were capable of achieving because the task was too closed. (This is related to the third area for improvement explained below)



- There is a tendency for teachers to direct pupils' learning too rigidly. When given the opportunity, the older pupils were quite capable of showing initiative and deciding what to do next. They worked well both independently and co-operatively. In some lessons, pupils are having too little opportunity make their own decisions, organise their own work and develop the skills of working independently.
- In most lessons, classroom assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' good progress, often working with individuals or groups of pupils. In whole-class sessions, however, they tend to watch the teacher and not enough use is made of their time and skills.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work varies considerably in quality. In the best practice seen, teachers take the opportunity to comment on the quality of the work, to assess the standard, and to suggest how pupils might improve further. Whilst it is not reasonable to expect this for every piece of work, in some books marking consists only of ticks and occasional praise. The marking of pupils' extended writing, in particular, suggested no whole-school approach to improving content and correcting spelling and punctuation. In one class, very little of pupils' work is dated, which makes tracking progress very difficult.

### **The organisation of the school day does not make the best use of the available time for teaching and learning**

32. The pattern of the school day at Staplecross has evolved over a number of years. For example, when there were new national recommendations for the minimum amount of teaching time in primary schools, adjustments had to be made. The situation is further complicated by having a class that straddles two key stages (Key Stage 1 is Years 1 and 2; Key Stage 2 is Years 3 – 6) because the recommendations for each key stage are different. The introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, with lessons intended to last one hour (45 minutes for numeracy in Key Stage 1), has placed another constraint on the use of time. Nonetheless, the current pattern of the school day does not make best use of the time available, and inspectors noted the following:

- The first session in the morning is 90 minutes and this is largely used for either literacy or numeracy. In most cases, this usually means that the pupils have an overlong lesson. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were designed in hour lessons to inject pace into the teaching and learning. Whilst it is entirely possible that a teacher might sustain a good pace over 90 minutes, this happened in only one of the lessons observed at Staplecross. A further point is that the extra 30 minutes used in this way is not available for learning in other subjects. The second session of the morning is 75 minutes, and creates a similar dilemma when used for literacy or numeracy.
- The Year 3 pupils in the Year 2 and Year 3 class return from lunchtime 15 minutes early because, as they are part of Key Stage 2, the recommended minimum teaching time for them is greater than Key Stage 1. The Year 2 pupils have a further 15 minutes break. The teacher makes the most he can of this short session for learning and, during the inspection, some valuable ICT work was seen being completed. However, the learning is dictated by the time available, and is not the best use of 75 minutes weekly, or just over two school weeks annually.

- It is unusual for all primary school pupils to have a swimming lesson each week. Whilst this is very good provision for an aspect of one subject of the curriculum, the proportion of learning time taken is questionable, particularly as many of the pupils already swim competently, to the level expected by the National Curriculum by the end of Year 6. For the reception and Year 1 class, swimming takes about two hours of learning time, which is almost half the recommended weekly teaching time for literacy or numeracy.
- Assembly takes place following lunchtime. This means that Key Stage 2 pupils return from their lunchtime at 1.00 pm and then have 15-20 minutes whilst the Key Stage 1 pupils finish their lunchtime and get ready for assembly. Whilst this period is used satisfactorily for pupils to read, teachers cannot start afternoon lessons immediately, making full use of the extra teaching time for Key Stage 2. Reading, then assembly fragment the beginning of the afternoon so that lessons do not begin until 1.45 pm.

33. Although there are clear inefficiencies in the current use of time for teaching and learning, it should be borne in mind that this is an effective school where pupils make good progress and reach standards that are above average. Better use of time has the potential to help the school to raise standards still further.

**In some subjects, there are too few opportunities for pupils to investigate and experiment so that they can extend their knowledge and understanding**

34. A scrutiny of pupils' work in Year 2 and Year 6 showed that:

- In mathematics, there are too few activities where pupils use and apply their skills. The National Curriculum calls this Attainment Target 1 and it involves pupils in problem solving, looking for patterns in shapes and numbers, using their mathematical skills in real situations, and organising their work logically. In pupils' current work, there are too few activities that are posed in an open-ended way that would require them to use and develop these skills. More often, the work concentrates on developing the skills themselves. For example, in number work, pupils should know how to multiply and divide to find specific answers, but Attainment Target 1 requires them to develop the ability to use these skills in a range of situations, such as finding patterns of square numbers or the square roots of numbers. Such activities are particularly necessary to encourage higher-attaining mathematicians, who often show their capabilities when asked to investigate.
- In science, there is too little emphasis on experiment and investigation. The school teaches the content of science well, so pupils reach good standards of attainment in their knowledge and understanding of the subject. However, the skills of planning and carrying out a scientific experiment are not taught methodically. As a result, pupils questioned in Year 6 are not able to plan an experiment for themselves. Their past work shows that they have not been introduced systematically to: posing a scientific question precisely; predicting the answer; planning and carrying out an experiment; collecting and analysing the results; and drawing conclusions. This pattern of scientific experiment is not present in their work. Once again, it is often the higher-attaining pupils who particularly benefit from this type of work.

35. It should be borne in mind that these skills are not much tested in the current Standard Assessment Tests at either the end of Year 2 or the end of Year 6. It is quite possible, therefore, for pupils to do well in the tests without having had much experience of investigative or experimental work. However, they are an important part of the required curriculum and necessary for the depth of understanding associated with work at higher levels.

### WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to further improve the work of the school, the headteacher, staff and governors should now:

- ◆ Improve consistency in the quality of teaching, by:
  - ensuring that lessons move at a good pace so pupils' learning is maximised;
  - planning activities that provide sufficient challenge for all pupils, particularly the more able;
  - allowing pupils to have more independence in managing their own work and learning;
  - making best use of the good skills of classroom assistants in whole-class sessions;
  - improving the quality of teachers' marking of pupils' work.

*(paragraph 13-20, 31)*

- ◆ Review the organisation of the school day so that the best use is made of the available time for teaching and learning.

*(paragraphs 32-33)*

- ◆ Increase the opportunities for pupils to investigate and experiment, particularly in mathematics and science.

*(paragraphs 34-35)*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed

10
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Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

8
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### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	2	4	4	0	0	0
Percentage	0	20	40	40	0	0	0

*The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents 10 percentage point].*

### *Information about the school's pupils*

#### **Pupils on the school's roll**

YR – Y6
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Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	66
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Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	2
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*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

<b>Special educational needs</b>	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	11

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

### ***Attendance***

#### **Authorised absence**

	%
School data	4.6
National comparative data	5.6

#### **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.*

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	65
Any other minority ethnic group	0

*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***

### ***Financial information***

**Qualified teachers and classes: YR– Y6**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	4.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16
Average class size	22

**Education support staff: YR– Y6**

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	55

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	225,220
Total expenditure	221,634
Expenditure per pupil	3,260
Balance brought forward from previous year	21,035
Balance carried forward to next year	24,621

**Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	1.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Results of the survey of parents and carers****Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	57
Number of questionnaires returned	26

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	62	27	8	0	4
My child is making good progress in school.	54	46	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	50	50	0	0	0

My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	42	15	8	0
The teaching is good.	58	38	4	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	50	35	12	4	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	35	4	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	73	23	4	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	31	65	0	4	0
The school is well led and managed.	48	44	0	0	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	54	4	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	52	28	20	0	0

Only seven parents attended the meeting but they were largely positive about all aspects of the school's work. They were all happy with the progress their children are making, and one or two parents commented on very rapid progress. They said they are kept well informed about events in school and their children's progress. Staff are friendly and approachable if parents have any concerns, and any difficulties are sorted out quickly. Parents said they are pleased with the value and morals promoted by the school, and they commented on the excellent behaviour of the children. A number of parents help in school, and the parent/teacher association supports the school well. In common with some of the parents who returned the questionnaire, those at the meeting said they had some concerns about the consistency of homework expectations for the oldest children. Overall, parents said that they think Staplecross is a good school that has improved over the last few years.