



Swing Gate First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117260
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280027
Inspection dates 12 December 2005 to 13 December 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs. Jackie Cousins LI

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

Type of school	First	School address	Swing Gate Lane
School category	Community		HP4 2LJ
Age range of pupils	3 to 9		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 863913
Number on roll	173	Fax number	01442 870951
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Judith Limbert
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs. Rosie Dunmur

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average sized first and nursery school is in the town centre of Berkhamsted. Most year groups contain approximately thirty pupils. Many of the pupils live in rented homes and some live in privately owned houses. The number of pupils taking free school meals is below average. When the youngest pupils start school their levels of knowledge and understanding are in line with those expected for three-year-olds. Overall the school has an average proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Nine out of 10 pupils are from White British families. A few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and a few pupils speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Swing Gate First School and Nursery is a satisfactory and improving school. The inspection confirms the judgements of the school. Although the headteacher's and deputy headteacher's leadership is good, leadership and management are sound overall. Subject coordinators do not always monitor pupils' standards in their subjects effectively. Governors keep a watchful eye on spending and the chairman of the governors is an effective manager. Teaching is satisfactory and has some strengths. Teachers and teaching assistants are dedicated and care effectively for pupils. The partnership with parents is effective. One parent says, 'I think Swing Gate is a wonderful school. The teachers are enthusiastic and supportive.' The children are given a sound start in nursery and reception because of the satisfactory teaching and leadership these classes. Standards by the start of Year 1 are average. Overall, pupils' achievement and standards are sound. However, standards in writing are below average by Years 2 and 4. Pupils behave well and concentrate effectively on their work. Interesting activities are planned and pupils enjoy special events, for example, Christmas concerts for children in the nursery and reception and in Years 1 to 4. Pupils' progress is tracked effectively in reading, writing, mathematics and science, except in the nursery and reception classes. Assessment activities are used satisfactorily but the consistent use of specific comments to tell pupils what they need to do to learn could be further developed in teachers' marking. The school offers satisfactory value for money. The inspection confirms the school's judgement that the improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. For example, standards in science in Year 2 are higher than was found at the last inspection. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 2 and 4 meet expectations because of the good use of laptops, interactive whiteboards and teachers' expertise. The school is in a good position to improve in the future because of the effective school development plan and strong leadership of the headteacher.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of writing throughout the school. - Continue to develop the use specific targets in teachers' marking so that the pupils are even clearer about what they need to do to improve their work. - Track children's progress more effectively in nursery and reception classes. - Continue to develop the role of coordinators so that they have a more effective understanding of pupils' standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' standards and achievement are satisfactory. Overall most pupils achieve satisfactorily while at the school and attain average standards by Year 4. When children enter the school their levels of knowledge and understanding are average overall, except in writing skills which are below average. They get off to a satisfactory start in the nursery and reception classes and attain average standards by the beginning of

Year 1 in most areas of learning. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 to 4. Standards in 2005 in reading, mathematics and science were average in Years 2 and 4. The school met its challenging targets for its Year 2 pupils. However, standards in writing were below average in Years 2 and 4. The school has identified the need to improve pupils' standards in writing and has recently started to use whole class targets to develop these skills. However, a significant proportion of pupils still do not consistently use imaginative vocabulary in their writing. Many do not use a fluent and accurately formed style of handwriting by Year 4. This is partly because not all members of staff are clear about the school's ways to teach handwriting and presentation skills. Standards for boys and girls are similar. School data demonstrates that pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve satisfactorily and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress. Standards in ICT meet expectations in Years 2 and 4. For instance, many Year 4 pupils use computers effectively to create newspaper articles and add images effectively. Some more able pupils create amazing pictures which look like dreams using computer effects well. The majority of pupils with special educational needs make good progress with regard to their specific targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are effective. This a friendly school where relationships between pupils are good. The pupils know they are treated fairly and that adults will listen if they have a problem. Good behaviour and an enthusiasm for learning help pupils enjoy school. Attendance is above average and most pupils arrive at school on time. Pupils understand how to lead safe and healthy lives because of a good programme of study for personal, social and health education. For example, displays in the hall show pupils about healthy meals and snacks and physical activities to do in water. A strong emphasis on the teaching of reading, mathematics and ICT contributes satisfactorily to pupils' future economic well-being. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their successes are recognised and this raises their self-esteem. They know why rules are necessary and are clear about school rules. Working together in pairs and small groups helps them to mix happily together. Pupils discuss their views with representatives who take their ideas to the school council. For example, all pupils were consulted through this council on how a new area would be developed. They chose an adventure and exercise play area. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community when they raise money and collect items for various charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and attitudes. They have good relationships

with pupils and manage their classes effectively. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and make satisfactory progress. In many lessons teachers have good subject knowledge. The pace of teaching is lively and they use resources well to capture pupils' interest. For example, in a good English lesson in Year 2, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard effectively to explain and demonstrate very clearly what she wanted pupils to achieve. This enabled pupils to settle quickly and work productively together because they knew what they had to do. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive a good level of support from knowledgeable teaching assistants. Teachers sometimes provide constructive feedback which gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. However, this good practice is not established in all classes. Some teachers do not use the time at the end of lessons to involve pupils in understanding how well they are doing and in knowing what they need to do to improve further. Occasionally, more able pupils are not fully challenged in all lessons. The school is aware of this and is working to develop teachers' questioning skills to address this weakness. Assessment activities are good and are used satisfactorily. Pupils' achievement is tracked effectively in reading, writing, mathematics and science from Years 1 to 4. However, teachers' marking is not consistently used to explain to pupils what they have done well and need to do to improve. This means that pupils are not as clear as they could be about how to attain higher levels of knowledge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's curriculum is satisfactory. The work pupils do is varied with a satisfactory amount of time given to all subjects. The pupils achieve satisfactorily in literacy, numeracy, science and ICT. Furthermore, the school works well to ensure that pupils' days are varied. For instance, creative sessions allows pupils to write Japanese poems which appreciate the natural world. Effective provision for the arts includes units of work on famous artists where pupils create effective pictures in the style of Henri Rousseau. A good range of after-school and lunchtime clubs is enjoyed by pupils. There are some opportunities to sing and perform within the school in musical productions and activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support for pupils is good. Pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities are identified early and supported well. The school works closely with external agencies to ensure the needs of these pupils are met. For example, some pupils received support from the occupational therapist to help them develop their handwriting skills. Procedures for child protection, health and safety and first aid are comprehensive. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and say that they feel well looked after. The provision of this high quality support and care ensures that pupils remain enthusiastic about coming to school and are keen to learn. The school has not established procedures for tracking children's progress in nursery and reception.

This means that staff do not have a clear understanding of how much progress individual children make during their time in these classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher leads the school well and is supported by a knowledgeable deputy headteacher. They promote a caring and supportive atmosphere in which pupils feel safe and enjoy their learning. Pupils from all backgrounds are effectively involved in school activities. There is a good team spirit among the staff and governors who are well motivated and want to do their best by the school and its pupils. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, including improved standards in science and ICT and attendance is now above the national average. The senior leadership team and the governors have correctly identified what needs to improve. They know that pupils could do better in their writing and problem solving. The quality of self-evaluation is now effective. The school development plan is detailed and focused on driving up standards. The plan is specific and this helps the senior leadership team and governors to measure how well they are meeting their targets. Views of the parents are sought and their ideas are incorporated into the school's development plan. Most parents show strong support for the school. The team is developing its ability to use data to track and improve the performance of individual pupils. An accurate evaluation of teaching has taken place. However, not all subject coordinators have the opportunity to carry out lesson observations, analyse pupils' work and carry out discussion with pupils to enable them to evaluate standards accurately. The school budget has a higher than average under-spend. This is due to a number of experienced teachers leaving during the past year and teachers were taken on who were paid less because they have fewer years of teaching experience. The unspent money from last year's budget has been used well on improving the outside playground area and purchasing new ICT equipment. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are well informed about the school's performance and are very supportive of the senior leadership team. The strength in the leadership and management gives the school good potential for future improvement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for helping us find out about your school. We enjoyed watching you in lessons and talking to you. It was interesting to talk to your teachers and watch one assembly. Good things about your school include: - you work hard in lessons and behaviour is good - teachers and teaching assistants care for you well and help you to do good work - your headteacher and deputy headteacher have good ideas about ways to improve the school - you are encouraged effectively to lead healthy and safe lives - lunchtime and after school clubs are good - computers and interactive whiteboards are helping you to improve your ICT work. We have asked your school to look at how they can make things even better. We hope that you will help teachers by listening to them carefully. The most important things are: - improving your writing skills so that you write interesting and neatly written pieces of work - following your progress more closely in the nursery and reception classes - continuing to improve teachers' marking which will help you get better at improving your work - asking the teachers to keep a track of your progress more carefully in some subjects so that they know more about how you are doing. Keep up the super work at Swing Gate First School and Nursery.