



Stonehill School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117345
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280053
Inspection dates 7 March 2006 to 8 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Ian Nelson LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Western Close
School category	Community		SG6 4SZ
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462 620262
Number on roll	197	Fax number	01462 620262
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs.Fiona Oldham
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Jane Luff

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Stonehill Junior and Infant School is smaller than average. It serves an area of mainly social housing on the edge of Letchworth. Children come from a wide range of social backgrounds and are mainly of White British heritage, with a small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is average. The number of children with learning difficulties is average. The school is part of a network of four other schools and also works closely with its partner secondary school. It has gained the Healthy School and Healthy Journey to School awards. Since the last inspection the school has experienced great difficulties in recruiting teaching staff.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory and it gives satisfactory value for money. The school's view of how well it is performing matches that of the inspectors. Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and mostly reach the goals expected of them when they enter Year 1. Pupils reach broadly average standards in the Year 6 national tests and make satisfactory progress overall. They do better in mathematics than in English. The school has identified the elements of pupils' writing that caused the dip in standards in the English tests at Year 6 and is taking steps to improve these. Standards overall are slightly lower at Year 6 than at the time of the last inspection because staffing difficulties since then have led to the school not improving as much as it could have done. However, greater stability in staffing has enabled the school to make improvements that are now helping pupils to make better progress. These improvements indicate that the school is satisfactorily placed to carry on improving. The school now has effective systems for checking how well pupils are doing in English and mathematics but does not use this information well enough yet to make sure work is set at an appropriate level for all ability groups. It has not yet developed secure enough systems to identify why learning is as it is and how to ensure that it is consistently good across the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- identify more clearly the elements of teaching that help or hinder learning and take steps to make it consistently good across the school - make more effective use of information on how well pupils are learning to ensure they all get work that is hard enough - continue to help pupils to improve the elements of writing that they find difficult.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory. Children start Nursery with skills and knowledge that are slightly below those expected of their age. They get a good start in Nursery, where teaching is good, and make satisfactory progress in Reception. By the time they enter Year 1 most have reached the expected standards. Standards at Year 2 and at Year 6 are broadly average. Staffing difficulties since the last inspection have led to standards falling at Year 6, particularly in English. The progress pupils make between the tests they take in Year 2 and those in Year 6 has however been satisfactory overall, although it was better in mathematics than in English. The school has identified elements of writing that pupils found difficult and is taking steps to help them to get better. The school's targets for the 2005 tests were not met in English but were exceeded in mathematics. Pupils who find learning difficult or have disabilities progress satisfactorily. There is no significant difference in the progress made by various groups of pupils. The systems the school has recently introduced to check how well pupils are learning show that in the last school term, progress was better than expected in all

year groups though there has not been enough time for this to be reflected in improved national test results at Year 6. The indications are that pupils are on track to achieve, and some to exceed, this year's targets though these are not as challenging as they could be.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy school. Attendance is satisfactory. They behave well in classrooms and around the school and play with consideration for the needs of others. Pupils say that there is no bullying and that all staff take good care of them. They have a good understanding of road safety because the school has developed a leaflet on safe journeys to school to encourage more of them to walk. Pupils know how to stay healthy and enjoy adequate physical education lessons and good after-school sports clubs. The school council helps pupils to take an active role in the school community, along with responsibilities around school for the older ones. There are good opportunities to get involved with the local community, for example, through singing in a local home for the elderly and involvement in charity events like distributing harvest parcels. The school gives pupils a good start in acquiring the skills they need for the next stage of schooling and later adult life by encouraging independence and team work and work shadowing at Year 6.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching in the Nursery class is good. Staff in the Reception and Nursery classes skilfully organise interesting activities so that children select their own purposeful play. This helps children to become more confident and independent learners. Teaching, learning and consequently pupils' progress, while at least satisfactory, vary across the rest of the school. In the best lessons, teachers use effective questioning skills to involve all pupils and encourage them to explain their answers. However, strategies to get all pupils to participate are not always used well. This results in some pupils losing concentration. Planning of literacy and numeracy lessons is generally thorough but pupils' work and achievement show that teachers do not always extend pupils' skills in all lessons as well as they could. Able teaching assistants ensure that pupils who find learning difficult or have disabilities are supported at least satisfactorily and make satisfactory progress. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give satisfactory comments to help them to improve it. Pupils' progress is analysed effectively in English, mathematics and science. Teachers now set clear targets for improving pupils' writing and mathematics. Although most pupils know their improvement targets, they have not been used long enough to have raised standards in national tests.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good range of learning activities that meet pupils' needs and statutory requirements. This is better than the school's own self-evaluation. Pupils' learning is enriched through special themed weeks, well attended club activities, individual music tuition and visits. The Nursery and Reception children choose from a well planned range of purposeful play and have satisfactory and often good guidance in adult-led activities. Reception class staff organise outside activities as often as possible but children do not have continuous access to an appropriate outside activity area. This limits the development of their skills. The school places a strong emphasis on the teaching of reading, writing and mathematical skills, with good use of these in other subjects. Information and communication technology (ICT) lessons have recently improved significantly. However, there are insufficient resources to allow pupils to use their ICT skills in all subject areas in the classroom.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall with some good elements. The school pays careful attention to health and safety issues. Child protection arrangements are thorough. Relationships are good and pupils say that there is someone to turn to if they have a problem. There are good procedures for introducing new children into the Nursery, Reception and other classes so that they settle quickly into school life. Pupils say that the management of behaviour is fair and they know what the sanctions are if they misbehave. Pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties are identified early and helped to progress towards their own targets and to achieve as well as their classmates. Pupils say that teachers' marking helps them to know how well they are doing. The recent development of relevant targets for writing and mathematics is beginning to help pupils to know how to improve their work. There is satisfactory support and guidance for pupils who find work difficult or have disabilities, so that they make similar progress to their peers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school experienced great difficulties in recruiting staff since the last inspection so that the progress pupils made in their learning suffered. In recent times staffing has stabilised and the school has developed a good view of how well it is doing and how to improve. It has now introduced more rigorous systems for checking how well pupils are learning and these indicate improving rates of progress. However, it has not yet refined systems for analysing why the learning is as it is and what elements of teaching are helping or hindering learning. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are very supportive and highly committed and fulfil all their required duties. Some now need the confidence to ask more challenging questions about the school's performance. The school has adequate systems for checking the

views of parents and pupils. Most parents have very positive views of the school. One wrote, 'Stonehill is a great school, my children enjoy going there'. However, several expressed concerns over recent staffing difficulties and how effectively the school seeks and responds to their views. The school works closely with other schools in a local network and has good links with the secondary schools to which pupils transfer at eleven. The school has satisfactory resources overall but there are too few computers in classrooms to enable pupils to practise skills learned in the computer suite in other lessons. Standards are a bit lower than at the time of the last inspection, and the unsettled staffing situation means that improvement since then has not been good enough. However, recent appointments of senior staff have enabled the school to make significant improvements in the way it checks how well pupils are doing, and the indications are that pupils' progress is getting better. The school is satisfactorily placed to build upon these recent improvements and get better still. It provides satisfactory value for money.

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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	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	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	3	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	3	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	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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 making us so welcome when we came to inspect your school recently. This letter is to tell you what we thought of your school. There are several good things about your school. You behave well and work hard in your lessons so that you make satisfactory progress in your learning. Your teachers, teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors look after you well so you always have someone to go to if you are worried or upset. You know how to stay safe and you say that there is no bullying. Your school council does a good job of telling the adults your ideas and raising money to provide the things you ask for. There are a few things your school could do better. We have asked the teachers to help you to improve your writing where you find it tricky. We have asked them to make sure you all get work that is hard enough so you make faster progress and do better in all your tests. We have also asked them to work out the ways you learn best and make more use of these.