



St Paul's Infant School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118461
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280321
Inspection dates 2 May 2006 to 3 May 2006
Reporting inspector Carole Skinner AI

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Hillary Road
School category	Community		Maidstone
Age range of pupils	4 to 7		Kent ME14 2BS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01622 753322
Number on roll	183	Fax number	01622 691385
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr David Hinks
Date of previous inspection	30 October 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Jenny Jones

Age group 4 to 7	Inspection dates 2 May 2006 - 3 May 2006	Inspection number 280321
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Paul's is a large infant school on the outskirts of Maidstone. Its pupils come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Approximately two thirds are White British, while just over a fifth are Nepali pupils whose families are stationed at the nearby army barracks. Many of these children take extended family leave to return to Nepal during their time in school. Altogether, 30% of the pupils speak English as an additional language, with approximately half of these at an early stage of language acquisition. This is much higher than in most schools, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (43%). The school has had a very high turnover of teachers during the past two years. The turnover of pupils is also very high, running at around 42% in the previous school year. Attainment on entry to the school is well below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that is improving at a rapid pace because of strong leadership and a committed staff team with high expectations for the pupils. Rigorous and systematic evaluation of the school's effectiveness has led senior managers to form a more modest view of how well the school is doing. Parents are very happy with their children's education and pupils say they really enjoy coming to school.

There has been significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in the past 12 months and this has led to rising standards, which are now close to national averages in Year 2, having dipped significantly in 2005. Pupils achieve well and are making good progress towards challenging targets. Although standards are below average by the end of Reception, children achieve well as a result of good teaching and an exceptionally well-planned curriculum. Innovative approaches to teaching and curriculum planning throughout the school are making learning more interesting, meaningful and enjoyable for the pupils. However, occasionally, the activities planned for the more able pupils are not sufficiently well structured to ensure they make good progress when working independently.

High standards of care and support for all pupils contribute greatly to their good personal development and well-being. Attendance is improving but remains below average despite the school's strenuous efforts to improve it. Although the school is working in challenging circumstances, staff and governors are passionate about achieving the very best for their pupils and have the capacity to make further improvements. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further by ensuring that the all pupils particularly the more able pupils are given well-structured activities that promote independent learning.
- Persist with initiatives to improve pupils' attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in Year 2 are close to the national average in English and mathematics which represents good achievement given the pupils' low starting points. Following a dip in standards in the 2005 Year national tests for Year 2 pupils in reading, writing and mathematics, the school is now seeing the benefit of the many improvements in teaching, learning and the curriculum, as standards are significantly higher than they were a year ago. However, the proportion of pupils reaching above-average standards is lower than in most schools as the school is still overcoming a legacy of underachievement. Teachers set challenging targets for all pupils which most are on course to reach. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have risen since the last inspection and are now in line with national expectations as a result of improvements in teaching and the curriculum. Children make good progress in the

Reception classes, especially in developing early reading, writing and number skills. However, many do not reach the goals expected of five-year-olds because they start school with limited language and social skills.

Pupils with learning difficulties and those who are learning English as an additional language make good progress because they are supported well. Having identified that some Asian boys were not making as much progress as they should, the school took prompt action to adapt teaching to meet their needs more effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy learning and behave well in lessons and around the school. Attendance is below average but improving. Most pupils attend regularly and arrive punctually, but overall attendance is affected adversely when families take extended holidays and by a few persistent absentees. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school is particularly good at celebrating cultural diversity and encouraging pupils to respect different faiths and beliefs.

Initiatives such as providing fruit daily and the exciting range of lunchtime play apparatus help pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. Pupils feel safe in school and learn how to stay safe outside school. 'Buddy' schemes and the Friendship Club encourage pupils to help and support each other. A wide variety of rewards and incentives successfully builds pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The recently introduced school council is beginning to give pupils a greater say in what happens in school. Pupils take part in a wide range of activities within the school and wider communities, including raising money for charities. Projects such as 'Our Space, Our Place' involve pupils in making decisions and help to prepare them well for future life. Pupils enjoy having the 'responsibility boards' in the classroom and taking turns to carry out daily tasks and routines.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Improvements in teaching are having a marked impact on the quality of pupils' learning, which is now good, following a period of instability and inconsistency which the school has worked hard to overcome. Good teaching is now the norm, although occasional lapses occur when the usually good lesson planning fails to take sufficient account of the needs of all groups of pupils equally well. For example, on a few occasions, the activities planned for the most able pupils are not structured well enough to enable them to learn at a good pace when working independently. Nevertheless, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and how they should behave. Initiatives to improve the teaching of writing skills have been particularly successful.

Teachers use a good range of strategies to suit pupils' widely differing styles of learning, with a strong emphasis on visual and practical activities. Every class has a 'Learning Wall' that involves pupils constructively in helping to plan their own learning. 'Thinking Hats' encourage pupils to use different strategies for solving problems or deciding how to tackle a task. Teachers plan their lessons well and set challenging targets for pupils based on their good knowledge of what pupils know and can do.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum which is enriched by an interesting variety of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities. The recent revision of curriculum planning has resulted in a renewed emphasis on making learning enjoyable, while its structure allows teachers freedom to meet the specific needs of their class. Most of the changes are fairly recent and teachers are constantly reviewing and tweaking planning to meet pupils' needs. ICT is used effectively as a tool for learning across the curriculum.

The exceptionally well-organised provision in the reception classes combines direct teaching and learning through play in a way which maximizes the use of both classrooms and the excellent outdoor areas. Specialist programmes effectively meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and those who are learning English for the first time.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for pupils are good. One pupil wrote, "I like it here because they care about me." This neatly sums up the school's ethos. Teachers know the pupils well and monitor their academic and personal development carefully, though the systems for tracking pupils' progress are still being refined. 'Playground buddies' are popular and help new pupils to settle into school and to work and play amicably together. This is particularly helpful for pupils who join the school during the course of the year. Good support for pupils who are persistently absent or late is helping to improve attendance. Health and safety and child protection procedures are very effective. The school works very efficiently with a wide range of outside agencies to make sure children and their families get the right type of support. Vulnerable pupils are quickly identified and supported effectively. The language support teaching assistant is leading an innovative project which supplies 'learning sacks' to Nepali families at the barracks. Close links with the Ghurkha Padre and Family Liaison Officer at the barracks ensure strong support for pupils and their families.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good, with some outstanding features. The headteacher has successfully built a very strong team of leaders who are driving improvement and setting a fine example for less experienced colleagues to follow. Together they set very clear direction for the school and have taken prompt and incisive

action to raise standards and improve teaching and learning. They provide exceptionally good leadership in key subjects, in the Foundation Stage and in leading the provision for pupils with a variety of additional and often complex needs. The impact of the actions they have instigated can be seen in rising standards across the school.

The headteacher has been uncompromising in tackling inadequate teaching through rigorous monitoring and support, including high quality professional development for all staff. Staff and governors are all involved in evaluating how well the school is doing, but there is an acknowledgement that less experienced colleagues are not yet fully effective in this aspect of their role. The views of parents and pupils are valued and acted upon when determining the priorities for the school improvement plan. Regular reviews of the progress made towards achieving these objectives help to sustain the momentum of improvement throughout the year.

Significant changes in the school's intake since the last inspection have demanded equally far-reaching changes in teaching, the curriculum and the way the school is run. The leadership team has met these challenges head on and has the vision and capabilities to achieve its ultimate goal of creating an outstanding school.

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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?	2	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	2	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	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	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?	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

We very much enjoyed meeting you and coming to see some of your lessons when we visited your school. Thank you for telling us about your school and letting us see your work.

Here are some of the things we thought were good:

When you start school your teachers help you to settle in very well so that you can quickly start to learn new things.

The teachers help you to do your best by giving you interesting work. They also check your work carefully and often to make sure that you understand what you are doing.

Those of you who are learning to speak English learn it quickly because the teachers give you lots of help and teach you well.

You all enjoy coming to school and work hard in lessons. You behave well in classrooms and in the playground. The teachers make sure that you can take different responsibilities around the school like playground buddies and the friendship club.

All of the adults take good care of you and make sure you feel happy and safe.

Mrs Jones and all the teachers work very hard to find ways to make your school even better.

There are two things we have asked your school to make even better:

Make sure that those of you who are capable of reaching high standards are given work that helps you to make good progress without needing too much help from an adult.

Help those of you who don't come to school as often as you should to attend more regularly.

We think that your school is a good school and we hope that you all enjoy your time there before you go on to junior school.