



Seal Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118605
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280352
Inspection dates 25 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Eira Gill AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Zambra Way
School category	Voluntary aided		Seal
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Sevenoaks, Kent TN15 0DJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01732 762388
Number on roll	99	Fax number	01732 764249
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Avril Hunter
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2000	Headteacher	Miss Tracey Smith

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Seal is a smaller than average primary school where most pupils come from a White British background. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language. Standards on entry vary and the present Year 6 pupils entered school with average knowledge and skills but, in most other year groups, standards on entry are below average. The school serves an area where there are pockets of significant disadvantage and the number of vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have joined the school in Years 3 to 6 is above the national average as is the number of pupils who are entitled to a free school meal. A few Traveller children attend the school. The school has just received the Basic Skills Award. In the past, the school experienced substantial turbulence in teaching staff and leadership including three headteachers in the last six years. However, during the last two years, this has been completely resolved.

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 has emerged from a difficult time and now provides a satisfactory standard of education. Inspectors judge the school's effectiveness to be satisfactory whilst the school judges it to be good. Although all aspects are rapidly improving due to good leadership and management, there has been insufficient time yet for all the innovations to have had maximum impact and for the school to reach its full potential. Practically every parent expresses very positive views about the school, such as, 'has made immense strides', and 'a brilliant school'. Overall improvement since the last inspection is good and the school is well placed to improve further. It gives satisfactory value for money. Seal has several strengths and a few outstanding features including the leadership's determination to ensure pupils thrive by having responsibilities in school and the community. Enrichment of the curriculum is outstanding. The school's commitment to the care it gives vulnerable pupils, and to those with learning difficulties and disabilities is very strong. Lunchtime arrangements are exemplary. Pupils' personal development is very good and their spiritual, moral and social development is good, particularly the social aspect. Cultural development is satisfactory. The drop in standards prior to 2005 was mainly due to a high turnover of leaders and teaching staff. Last year, achievement improved and has made further strides this year, particularly in mathematics. Teaching and learning are now good overall although pace in a very few lessons could be sharper. Improved assessment is helping teachers to set challenging targets for pupils and the school is keen to improve these systems even further. Although pupils make good progress generally, the older pupils' progress is satisfactory due to a lack of stability earlier in their school life. There is effective provision for the children in the Foundation Stage enabling them to make good progress but the layout and shape of the outside learning environment imposes some restrictions on learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- continue to help those pupils, whose education was disrupted in their earlier years in the school to make up lost ground
- ensure that all teaching is consistently of a good pace so that learning is as good as it is in the best lessons
- improve the outside learning area for children in the Foundation Stage and opportunities for learning out of doors.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

A good basis is being provided for younger pupils to progress well throughout the school. Older pupils and those in Year 6 did not have such a good start owing to the unsettled period which the school went through including frequent changes of staff. Children entered the Foundation Stage last September with knowledge and skills that were lower than expected particularly in early language and communication. The last inspection report indicated that progress was unsatisfactory for the children in the Foundation Stage and it is now good. Their levels of communication, language and

literacy are marginally lower than those found nationally when they enter Year 1 but, in all other areas of learning, children make good progress and are likely to reach the goals expected for their age. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2, where half the pupils have learning difficulties, are below those expected nationally. However, all groups of pupils have made good progress overall from a low base particularly in mathematics, and their achievement is good. Standards in the Year 6 test results in 2005 were average and improved considerably from the previous two years when standards were below average. The school strongly exceeded its target in English and almost reached it in mathematics. Although achievement was satisfactory in mathematics and science, both subjects trailed behind English. In English, the school had used more effective strategies and systems to improve pupils' progress. The present Year 6 pupils entered school with average knowledge and skills overall. Standards are still average in English, mathematics and science and therefore achievement is satisfactory. The best progress has been made in mathematics where the school recognised that improvement was necessary. Despite the good teaching they now receive pupils are still catching up because of the slow progress made in earlier years. Taking into account that pupils are still making up lost ground, they are on course to reach the realistic targets set for the 2006 national tests.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good with some outstanding features. Pupils' attitudes to learning and enjoyment of school are good and say they 'love it!' and that 'learning is fun'. Behaviour is good because pupils now know exactly what is expected of them which is an improvement from the last inspection. Pupils report emphatically that rules are, 'absolutely clear'. The 'buddy system' gives older pupils opportunities to develop their personal skills by giving support to the youngest children as well as to partially sighted pupils both at Seal and at a local special school. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and they feel safe, secure and free from bullying. Pupils have very good social skills. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The school has worked effectively with other agencies and specific families to improve the attendance of a small number of pupils and, overall, attendance is satisfactory. The way that pupils are encouraged to contribute to school and community life is outstanding. Both class and full school council meetings allow them to have an exceptionally clear voice in their lives at school as shown in one class council meeting observed. They produce a school newspaper and are encouraged by leadership to express and develop their ideas. Pupils have a very good understanding of the importance of safety, regular exercise and healthy eating. The school's organisation of lunchtimes is exemplary and the take up of cooked meals is high. Improved learning in lessons is helping pupils to gather the necessary skills for their economic well-being and the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is currently good and the learning of a significant number of pupils in all groups is good overall in lessons, particularly in mathematics, where there has been a concentrated effort to improve achievement. Teaching is now good in the Foundation Stage and has improved from the last inspection when it was judged unsatisfactory. Teaching is usually challenging and well matched to pupils' needs. Management of behaviour is good and pupils behave well. Most teachers ensure a quick pace of learning but this aspect of teaching could be improved to ensure learning for all pupils is as good as it is in the best lessons. Effective arrangements in Years 2 to 6 for small teaching groups benefit learning, which is usually good. Resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), are used well by all teachers. The well trained teaching assistants make a significant contribution to learning and pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities and in all other groups usually make good progress in lessons and over time. The school's good assessment and tracking procedures identify very quickly those pupils who may not be making as much as progress as they should and this helps staff to plan very effectively for individuals and all groups of pupils. Teachers discuss the progress of individual and groups of pupils with the very effective assessment manager regularly. This good teamwork is enhancing learning. Although teachers are doing all that they can to help older pupils to make up lost ground the learning of some pupils is being held back because of too many changes of teachers in their earlier years.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and offers a wide range of learning opportunities including French to all groups of pupils. Good links are made between subjects and make learning more interesting as do themed weeks, such as, 'Poetry' and 'Creativity'. The school has gained an Arts award and profitably employs a specialist to teach music. The curriculum for the children in the Foundation Stage is good and has improved since the last inspection when it was judged unsatisfactory. However, the outside environment is an awkward shape and opportunities are reduced for learning. The school is keen to improve this aspect. Pupils' personal and social development is greatly enhanced by the outstanding quality of the enrichment activities organised. There is a very wide range of after school activities, educational visits and visitors as well as a residential visit. Very good links with other schools provide pupils with different opportunities such as swimming and sporting occasions. Homework clubs are well attended and aid pupils' progress. Very good provision is made to help the pupils lead safe and healthy lives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Provision is good and has improved. The welfare of the pupils is at the heart of the school's work and the focus is good on ensuring that every child matters. The very small number of Traveller pupils receives careful attention and the school's respect for their way of life is appreciated by their families. Similarly, the needs of small numbers who speak English as an additional language are recognised and they are also supported well. Child protection procedures and policies for dealing with bullying and racism are very effective. Pupils say they are happy to talk to adults as well as to a school counsellor about their problems. The 'buddy system' ensures that older pupils give support and care to the youngest children and to partially sighted pupils at a local special school. The breakfast club attracts approximately a third of the pupils and gives them a positive start to the day. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative of the care given to their children. Guidance and support for the pupils' personal development and academic progress in all groups is good and progress is now very carefully tracked, although as the school recognises it will take time to be fully embedded. Pupils are beginning to make judgements about their own work and understand the targets set for them. The system of awarding points to pupils for choosing healthy meals, culminating in the Friday 'special table' award, makes pupils think carefully about what they have been taught and the importance of looking after themselves.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and the school is moving forward at a rapid pace in raising achievement and supporting all groups of pupils. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Since that inspection, the school has experienced a turbulent period in leadership and teaching staff with a subsequent drop in pupils' achievement and this caused a dip in morale of governors and established staff. Parents were unhappy. The leadership team, in almost two years, has changed the culture of the school and used shrewd recruitment strategies to create an effective team of teachers. However, managers of subjects, other than English, mathematics and science need more training in monitoring to be fully effective. Governance is satisfactory and the enthusiastic chair of governors is systematically paving the way for governors to be better informed so that they can hold the school to account more effectively. Leadership and all staff are committed to providing a quality education where each and every pupil is valued. The leadership team is accurate in its judgement of standards and achievement in the school and, although not as accurate in its judgement of its overall effectiveness, is well on the way to achieving its objectives. It knows exactly what improvements are needed. Systems put into place for the frequent analysis of pupils' performance are proving successful in raising achievement but their full impact is yet to be realised. The school consults well with outside agencies, with pupils and parents. Relationships with parents have improved and are now good as parents see and acknowledge the progress being made.

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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	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?	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	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	1	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?	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	2	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	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

Dear Children Thank you for welcoming us into your school. We enjoyed meeting so many of you and joining you for lunch and in lessons. We also enjoyed meeting the members of the school council. This letter is to tell you about what we found out about your school. I have included some of the main points below.

- You told us how much you enjoy school and we agree. We noticed how well you behave, how polite you are and how much you appreciate all the interesting things that your teachers organise for you.
- We thought the arrangements for how you earn points for choosing a healthy lunch, and the Friday 'special table' reward are excellent.
- We think the class and school councils are taking a lot of responsibility and we believe that the way the school allows you to make decisions and to write newsletters is outstanding. We thought the way you organised the class council meeting we attended was excellent and just like local council meetings.
- We hope that your teachers carry on giving you good support to make sure you catch up from that time when you had lots of different teachers.
- We think the school should make sure that all your teachers organise their lessons so that no time is wasted.
- We have asked the school to see if it can improve the space outside the classroom for the youngest children so that they can have more freedom in their activities.

Finally, may we wish you all the best for your time at Seal and thank you again for making us feel so welcome. Yours sincerely Mrs Eira Gill (Lead Inspector) Mr Gavin Jones (Team Inspector)