



Sonning Common Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123038
LEA Oxfordshire LEA
Inspection number 281388
Inspection dates 22 November 2005 to 23 November 2005
Reporting inspector Sean O'Toole AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Grove Road
School category	Community		Sonning Common
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Reading RG4 9RJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0118 972 2105
Number on roll	332	Fax number	0118 972 1019
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Alison Young
Date of previous inspection	16 October 2000	Headteacher	Mr Philip Marples

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Sonning Common is larger than most schools. The vast majority of pupils come from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds and very few are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and statements of special educational need is below average. Almost all pupils have White British heritage and very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. One Chinese speaker is at an early stage of learning English. The school's data indicates that attainment on admission has declined in recent years and is average. The school works closely with a special school on the same site.

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 provides a sound quality of education and satisfactory value for money. Following a decline, standards are now rising and there is renewed purpose and commitment to accelerating pupils' progress. Achievement is satisfactory. Children in the Foundation Stage benefit from sound provision and make satisfactory progress; they are on track to attain the expected goals for their age. Throughout the school, pupils make satisfactory progress. Achievement in English and science is good. By the end of Year 6 standards in English and science are well above average although attainment in mathematics is not as high as it should be. Staff and pupils work together well to create a happy and orderly community. Pupils respond well to the school's programme of 'values education'. Their behaviour and attitudes are good. They enthuse about the very good extra curricular activities. Parents speak highly of the positive ethos and pastoral care which stem from the sensitive lead of the headteacher. Several parents would like a clearer picture of how well their children are doing. The school's evaluation of itself as good is rather generous. Leadership and management are satisfactory, although strategic planning, the use of data to set targets and monitoring of teaching are not as sharp as they should be. The school has a supportive governing body. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and there are some good features in English lessons. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection and has the capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

* Accelerate pupils' progress and raise standards in mathematics by setting sharp targets for pupils, increasing the pace of lessons and linking mathematics to other subjects.* Improve some aspects of leadership, including strategic planning, target setting and the monitoring of teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall and good in English and science. Progress in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Test results and inspection evidence at the end of Year 2 show that boys and girls are good readers and attain average standards in other subjects. Until 2004, standards at the end of Year 6 were in decline and there was some underachievement. Standards in English, mathematics and science have improved since then. Inspectors found, and tests in 2005 indicate, that pupils attain well above average standards in English and science. Although progress in mathematics is now satisfactory, insufficient headway has been made in raising attainment in mathematics and standards are not high enough. Pupils lack competence in using mathematics in other subjects. Although the school sets realistic targets, and pupils meet them, there is room for further challenge, particularly in mathematics. There are few differences in the performance of different groups in the school. Girls are more successful in writing than boys. More able pupils do well in English and science although their

attainment in mathematics could be better. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress and benefit from well focused support. Pupils from minority ethnic groups and those at an early stage of learning English achieve as well as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good because they benefit from the school's high priority of promoting values. Attendance is good. Pupils have good self esteem and confidence. They behave well, listen carefully, contribute effectively in lessons and enjoy learning. Whilst investigating the area of compound shapes they rose to the challenges set by their teacher. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A lesson on keeping calm when feeling irritated illustrated very well the pupils' growing understanding of moral issues. There are strong cultural links with other schools both in England and Kenya which enhance pupils' good knowledge of other cultures. Pupils feel safe and know to turn to an adult if someone is being unkind. Parents say that instances of bullying are dealt with promptly. Pupils understand the importance of exercise and staying healthy through regular opportunities for sport and swimming. Year 6 pupils created posters to encourage others to look after their teeth. One recommends, 'Give your plaque a great big smack'. Pupils contribute well to the community and charities such as Comic Relief. Older pupils take on a range of responsibilities including playground mediation. Their future economic well being is fostered effectively through their improved achievements in English and their good use of information and communication technology (ICT).

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is often very good teaching of English in Year 6 which brings learning to life through imaginative and challenging ideas. In one lesson the teacher used classical art to stimulate discussion and to promote imaginative writing of high quality. Lessons are well prepared and in some instances staff make good use of resources although this is limited in mathematics. Support staff work effectively with those with learning difficulties and, through careful questioning, assess their understanding. Boys and girls respond enthusiastically to opportunities to investigate as in an ICT lesson when they explored design. In the Foundation Stage, children benefit from opportunities to learn practically and respond positively to sensitive guidance which helps them to improve. In Years 1 to 6 in mathematics, the staff sometimes follow guidelines too rigidly, leading to slow-paced lessons and limited time for the pupils to tackle problems. Teachers assess and mark pupils' work conscientiously and there are many good examples of helpful suggestions for improvement. One boy said, 'My handwriting has got better because my teacher showed me how to improve'. Pupils like the system of self-assessment. Teachers use

pupils' comments to identify where support is needed. Improvements in the teaching and progress in English have been achieved partly through the effective use of individual targets. Currently this good approach is not used in mathematics and pupils are unclear about how to build on their achievements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum which is enhanced by extensive extra-curricular activities. These range from golf to chess, and quizzes to choir. Parents value the many clubs available to the pupils. One parent wrote that these activities had, 'given much enjoyment' to her child. The curriculum is enlivened through a variety of visits in the local area and beyond and through visitors to the school. The opportunity to learn French enhances pupils' cultural awareness. The recent 'Africa Week' provided the pupils with many interesting opportunities to learn about cultures. Pupils' literacy and ICT skills are used successfully across the curriculum but numeracy skills are not. Opportunities for pupils to write in a wide range of contexts have proved particularly beneficial. The school successfully enables pupils with learning difficulties and the very small number who are learning English as an additional language to enjoy a full curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides pupils with a safe and supportive atmosphere in which to learn, and develop their personal qualities. Pupils have targets which promote their self esteem and confidence. Some are posted on their desks. One example reads, 'I will remember what I am good at and feel good about myself'. The school has a useful system for tracking pupils' progress, and identifying where they can improve. From this information teachers set appropriate individual targets. Consequently, standards in English have risen significantly. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported. They have individual plans with clear targets to aid their progress. The school has been successful in securing additional support for the small number of pupils who are learning to speak English.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher takes a very good lead in promoting pupils' well-being and personal development and is supported effectively by staff, parents and governors. Parents speak glowingly of the ways in which the staff provide support and guidance but some would like better information about their children's achievements. Although senior staff take good account of parents' and pupils' views they are not critical enough in evaluating the school's academic record. Consequently, strategic planning lacks crispness and improvement is difficult to measure. The school has improved several aspects of its work since the previous

inspection although more remains to be done to raise standards in mathematics. The recent and successful focus on improving standards in English provides a clear illustration of the school's capacity to improve. Monitoring of teaching is not incisive enough to establish consistency in the pace and challenge in lessons. The governors meet regularly and are proud of the school's success in promoting positive values through initiatives such as links with the nearby special school. They ensure that funds are spent wisely but do not measure the impact of spending on standards. Although they are aware of the shortcomings in mathematics they have few mechanisms to check on the school's success in raising standards.

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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	2	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	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	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?	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	2	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 the pleasant and thoughtful ways that you made us welcome when we came to visit your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and sharing lunch with you. You like coming to school and only miss lessons when you are poorly. Many of you said how much you enjoyed sport and swimming. We were very pleased to see that you understand the importance of working hard and behaving well in lessons and in the playgrounds. We were impressed by the mature attitudes of the mediators and the ways in which the school council acts on your ideas. Many of you said that you enjoyed the very good extra curricular activities, and we enjoyed listening to the orchestra practising. You contribute much to making the school a happy place.

You worked hard in most of the lessons we saw. When the teachers used projectors and computers to help to explain things you listened very well. Sometimes we thought that the teachers talked for too long and this meant that you did not have enough time to finish your work. You are doing well in English because your teachers give you good advice about how to improve. They are good at marking your work and setting you targets. We have asked your teachers to find ways of giving you much clearer advice and targets in mathematics lessons.

Your headteacher and the other staff care much about you and want you to succeed. You are taught very well to respect everyone and have many interesting opportunities to find out about people around the world. We have asked Mr Marples, the teachers and governors to find ways of checking on how well the school is doing.

Ms Davies, Mr Parker and I wish you every success in the future.

Sean O'Toole

Lead inspector