

Stondon Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109469
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	288386
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Best

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	76
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Russell Bragg
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	15 April 2002
School address	Hillside Road Lower Stondon Henlow Bedfordshire SG16 6LQ
Telephone number	01462850288
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This village school is smaller than most primary schools. A higher than average proportion of pupils have joined the school other than at the usual time. The prosperity of the area is good. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The numbers and proportions of boys and girls in each year group vary from year to year. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.

The school has identified nearly 40 per cent of pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is well above the national average. This is much higher than at the time of the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils with statements outlining their needs is similar to the national average. Pupils have a broad range of learning and emotional and behavioural difficulties. When they start in the Foundation Stage at the start of the term in which they have their fifth birthday, children's skills and knowledge are generally below those typical of their age.

The school has experienced high staff turnover and absence through ill-health in the last two years. It has faced considerable difficulties in recruiting teaching staff. The headteacher, who was due to retire in August 2006, has postponed her retirement for a year. A new headteacher takes over in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Strengths in the quality of care, guidance and support successfully promote pupils' good personal development and well-being. In their latest self-evaluation report, the school's leaders rightly identify areas where they know it needs to improve and develop further. The school has faced considerable challenges arising from the turnover of staff and long-term teacher absences. The headteacher has acted decisively to support pupils' development and progress during this period of uncertainty. Effective systems for checking the school's performance and monitoring progress towards challenging targets have helped in the making of these decisions. Teaching and support staff share the headteacher's clear vision for the school's development. They have blended successfully as a team and work well together. Initial work in developing the role of subject leaders in monitoring pupils' performance and the quality of teaching and learning provides a firm foundation for the future but is not yet embedded.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The standards and quality of education in the Foundation Stage are satisfactory. Children in Reception enjoy a good balance of adult-led and child-chosen activities and make satisfactory progress. Overall standards by the end of Year 2 are below average and below those expected for pupils of this age by the end of Year 4. Taking into account the higher than average proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, pupils make satisfactory progress. Teachers' analysis of pupils' performance in assessments has correctly identified writing and the use and application of mathematics to solve problems, as priorities for improvement. Teaching and learning across the school are satisfactory. Relationships are good and pupils well-managed. Pupils enjoy interesting lessons and most know what they need to do to improve their work. Teaching assistants give pupils good support. However, in some lessons, pupils' learning goals are too wide-ranging and teachers sometimes give pupils too much time to complete their work, which causes the pace of learning to slow.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their enjoyment of school is good and their attendance is above average. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons and around the school. They work well individually and in groups. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living and participate in regular physical activity. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school provides pupils with a varied range of activities in lessons and after-school clubs to help them learn.

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff know and support pupils well. There are good systems for checking how well pupils are doing in English, mathematics and science. Staff use this information to set pupils challenging targets, matched to their ages and abilities, and to identify where they require extra help. The school has good links with outside agencies and other providers. The large majority of parents are pleased with what the school provides but a significant minority are concerned about the staffing situation. Leaders have taken effective action to address the issues from the last inspection and demonstrate the capacity to improve further. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement in writing and in problem-solving in mathematics.
- Raise the quality of teaching by improving the pace of lessons and ensuring that learning goals are specific in each lesson.

- Develop the role of subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision and pupils' standards and progress.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory over time. Across the school, significantly more boys than girls are identified as having learning difficulties; the proportion in each group ranges from 35 to 55 per cent of pupils. Overall, girls reach higher standards than boys but, taking into account pupils' starting points, the differences in achievement between them are not significant. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress, as do more able pupils.

Children joining the Reception class soon settle into school routines. When they enter Year 1, many are still working towards the early learning goals. In the 2006 assessments at the end of Year 2, standards were above average in reading and mathematics, and average in writing. These results were higher than in the previous two years. From their starting points, pupils made good progress in reading and mathematics, and satisfactory progress in writing. Results in the optional national tests in 2006 at the end of Year 4 were below national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Overall, pupils made satisfactory progress from when they were assessed at the end of Year 2.

Teachers' tracking information indicates that most pupils currently in Year 2 are on course to meet their targets. Although standards are below average, progress from the end of Reception is satisfactory. At the end of Year 4, where there are twice as many boys as girls, optional test results indicate that standards are broadly similar to those expected of pupils in reading, and below expectations in writing and mathematics. Given their results at the end of Year 2, pupils have made good progress in reading and satisfactory progress in writing and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. The school has rightly identified that some pupils' awareness of other cultures is not so well developed. Pupils get on well with adults and each other. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Those with emotional and behavioural difficulties respond well to the school's expectations and support. In discussion, pupils say they enjoy coming to school and their above average attendance confirms this. They especially like using the laptop computers to help them learn. Pupils have a good understanding of keeping safe and say that staff promptly address any incidents that occur. Pupils follow healthy lifestyles and keenly explain how daily timetabled exercise sessions help to keep them fit and alert. Through the school council, they play an active part in decision-making, such as the development of the playground, and charity fund-raising. Pupils take part in a range of local events and national competitions, such as the 'Crystal Challenge' in which they are currently East of England champions. Pupils' preparation for the world of work is satisfactory. Whilst they work well with each other and have good information and communication technology skills, their problem-solving and writing skills are less secure.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school correctly evaluates teaching and learning as satisfactory. Teachers' planning takes good account of pupils' wide-ranging needs and support staff are well involved in providing help and challenge for individuals and groups. Pupils are keen to learn and they adapt well to working in different ways, taking good responsibility for their learning from an early age. Effective use of questions helps pupils to recall their earlier learning and to assess their current progress. Teachers and pupils make good use of the interactive whiteboards and laptop computers to support learning.

Teachers explain what pupils will learn at the start of lessons but learning goals do not always focus on small enough 'chunks' of learning and lesson introductions can be over-long. Although pupils quickly settle down to work, they sometimes have too much time to complete this. As a result, the pace of learning slows and this dilutes the challenge for pupils, particularly the more able. The quality of marking is satisfactory overall. Teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation of their work are inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum which takes account of mixed-age classes. Teachers take appropriate account of national guidelines for the Foundation Stage, literacy and numeracy. Their good provision for pupils' personal, social and health education and citizenship is reflected in pupils' good personal development. Visits and visitors enrich pupils' knowledge and understanding. The significant increase in the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has prompted the staff to explore different approaches to teaching and learning, with a greater emphasis on systematically developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. These initiatives are starting to show through in pupils' progress but are not yet fully established. Pupils enjoy a satisfactory range of extra-curricular sporting and other activities. They regularly participate in activities with other schools and in local events. The school's work in developing healthy lifestyles has been recognised by a 'Healthy Schools' award.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of the school's care, guidance and support is good. Pupils say they have no hesitation in seeking the help of an adult in resolving any problem they may have. Pupils who join the school other than at the usual times find that the 'buddy' system helps them to settle in quickly. Staff provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All staff are familiar with child protection matters and the school carries out suitable checks on all adults working with pupils. The school undertakes regular risk assessments of its activities and visits. Pupils are aware of their targets for reading, writing and numeracy but teachers do not always refer to these when marking pupils' work. The school's tracking systems are good and this has helped to provide continuity during a period of staffing difficulties.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has ensured that, during a period of change, well-established routines have continued so that the school runs smoothly. The school improvement plan focuses on raising standards and its priorities provide a good basis for taking the school forward. The school makes effective use of its facilities and learning resources. Teaching and support staff benefit from good opportunities for professional development. Subject leaders' responsibilities are in transition. The headteacher has worked alongside staff in analysing pupils' attainment and progress, and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. This has helped staff, some of whom are temporary, to identify what needs to be improved. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities. Governors are aware of the school's strengths and shortcomings and are developing links with subject leaders to help them better evaluate its work.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stondon Lower School, Lower Stondon, Henlow, SG16 6LP

Thank you very much for making me welcome when I visited your school last week. I enjoyed looking at your work in lessons and hearing about all the other interesting things you do in school. I am impressed by your good behaviour and the way in which you get on well with each other and the staff. I am delighted that you enjoy coming to school and congratulate you on your good attendance. I am pleased to see that you keep yourselves fit and alert through your daily exercise sessions. The staff know you well and take good care of you. Most of you know what you have to do to improve your work and your teachers make sure that you have extra help when you need it. A number of you have difficulties with learning but you try hard and are making progress. Teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboards to make your lessons interesting and I am pleased to see that you are making good use of the new laptop computers to help you with your work.

There have been many changes in staff in the last two years and some teachers have been away because they are unwell. Mrs Thompson has worked hard to make sure that your new teachers know what you need to learn to meet your targets and she has kept a close eye on how you are getting on. I am suggesting three things that I think it is important for the school to do now. First, many of you could do better in writing and in using what you already know in mathematics to solve problems. Second, I am asking your teachers to make sure that the learning objectives they share with you focus on what you are going to do in that lesson and that they do not give you more time than you need to finish your work. Third, teachers are taking on new responsibilities for subjects such as English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). They need to get to know how well you are doing in these subjects and what you need to do to improve further.

Every one of you has an important part to play in helping the school to improve. Keep working hard and enjoying school.

Yours truly

Mike Best

Lead Inspector