

Southwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110363
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	288647
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Christopher Parker

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr S Tucker
Headteacher	Mr B Schram
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001
School address	Bryony Place Conniburrow Milton Keynes MK14 7AR
Telephone number	01908 678366
Fax number	01908 242044

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Over a third of the pupils, in this average size school, are known to be eligible for free school meals. This is double the national average. The school serves a changing community. A sixth of the pupils are refugees and asylum seekers. The movement of pupils in and out of the school is high. Just over a third come from minority ethnic groups, the largest group being of Black African heritage. Most of these pupils speak English as an additional language; about half of them are at an early stage of learning English.

Three out of every ten pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities which is considerably higher than the national average. The school has a learning and achievement base (LAB).

The school changed from middle to junior and federated with the nearby infant school in September 2006.

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 is providing the pupils with a satisfactory education. There are some good aspects to the school's work but currently these are not coming together to ensure the pupils make good academic progress. However, the rich curriculum and effective care do result in the good personal development of the pupils.

Over recent years standards at the end of Year 6 have improved to be broadly similar to the national average. The pupils have reached these standards from generally low attainment when they enter the school. Their progress between the national tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 has been better than average. However, in 2007 the results of national tests fell, most notably in English where standards were low and progress was considerably weaker than in the past, particularly in writing. Pupils' progress in lessons and the work in their books indicate that this year they are achieving satisfactorily although writing remains a weakness.

The pupils learn in a calm and orderly atmosphere. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. The pupils respond very well to the many rewards and incentives the school offers them. They say they feel safe on the playground and enjoy learning. They speak thoughtfully about caring for the environment, know the importance of being fit and healthy and have strong and very positive relationships with adults in school, and each other. The pupils value the learning and achievement base, which does much to raise their self-esteem and provide support when they need it.

The teaching is satisfactory. Many lessons have positive features and the pupils say their teachers, 'are happy and make lessons fun'. Lessons are well prepared and teachers use a wide range of strategies to engage and motivate the pupils. The increasing demands of more pupils at the early stages of learning English along with a high proportion of pupils who need extra help mean that, in spite of the good aspects of many lessons, the needs of all groups are not met in full. For example, specialist support for those at an early stage of learning English while beneficial, is not sufficient to meet the growing number of pupils who need it.

The school is giving writing a high profile. The classroom walls are full of prompts. There are many interesting activities to motivate the pupils to write. For example, the visit of author Simon Murray, who talked about the character and settings for 'Icky Doo Dah', provided the pupils with a very lively and engaging stimulus for subsequent writing workshops. Opportunities to write in subjects, such as history and science, are increasing but are not always fully exploited. The pupils welcome the comments the teachers make on their work, respond to the targets they are set and value the incentives such as the 'Writer of the week' award.

The leadership team is involved in a range of interesting developments and has a strong commitment to raising standards. Until last year it had been successful in achieving many of its goals. However, the downturn in results has highlighted shortcomings in how the school checks that all groups of pupils are doing as well as they should and in how it evaluates the impact of its provision on the pupils' progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the support for the increasing number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English.
- Raise standards, particularly in English by improving both the content and presentation of the pupils' writing.

- Ensure the analysis of the pupils' and the school's performance is incisive and accurately informs all activities to improve standards.

A small proportion of 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

Attainment on entry is low. Over a number of years the school succeeded in raising standards and ensuring the pupils made good progress between national tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. The results in English, having risen to just below average in 2005 fell to be very low in 2007. Less than half of the pupils reached the expected level and only one in twenty reached the higher level. Although results in mathematics and science also fell, the downturn was not as marked. Rates of progress from the end of Year 2 to Year 6 and the value added by the school were better than average in 2005 and 2006 but in 2007 fell significantly. A stronger position was maintained in science.

The school has investigated why results have taken a downturn. Although the leadership team is taking steps to reverse the results many of the factors affecting the 2007 results were particular to the cohort. The number of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and generally troubled relationships within the year group, placed significant demands on teachers that often deflected from the planned learning.

The pupils work well together and are developing an appropriate range of skills that will help them in the future. Their current work in lessons and in their books shows that progress is generally satisfactory. The progress of those who need extra help is sporadic and dependent on the support they receive. This is also the case for those at an early stage of learning English who often rely on another pupil who is more fluent to support them. Progress in writing is weaker than in mathematics and science. Presentation and handwriting are poor with few older pupils developing a fluent and joined style.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most of the pupils behave well. Last year there were a number of exclusions of a few pupils. These pupils are no longer at the school. Behaviour in lessons and on the playground is good. Pupils show respect for adults and each other. Relationships throughout the school are now good. Pupils say they feel safe and have no fears of bullying. The learning and achievement base provides the pupils with a wide range of support, which they value highly. The pupils show considerable respect for the range of faiths and cultures represented in the school.

The school council is very effective in representing the views of the pupils and has recently been particularly successful in raising funds for charity. The pupils are aware of environmental issues and the basic principles of sustainability.

The pupils have positive attitudes to learning. As one commented, 'a little key opens a big door.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lessons are planned carefully and it is clear what pupils are expected to learn. The tasks the teachers set take account of the different ways in which the pupils learn. They use a wide range of strategies to engage and motivate the pupils and employ good behaviour management that they understand and respond to well. At the end of lessons the teachers involve the pupils in assessing their own progress.

Although lessons are planned to meet the needs of different groups, in practice this is not always successful. Where teaching assistants work with groups and individuals who need extra help the pupils make secure progress but when this support is not available their progress slows. The position is similar for those who are at an early stage of learning English. In some lessons where teachers do not have the support of a teaching assistant the high proportion of pupils who need additional help restricts the impact of the positive elements of many lessons. Consequently, the pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has a good curriculum that covers the subjects of the National Curriculum and is enhanced by a wide range of opportunities for trips and visits that extend learning. A recent visit by the Glyndebourne Opera proved a valuable stimulus to pupils' writing. The pupils look forward to the regular residential visits to the Isle of Wight. The wide range of school clubs and activities are appreciated by the pupils and add to their enjoyment of school. Many of the clubs support a healthy lifestyle and help the pupils stay fit. The school receives good support from local sporting organisations such as MK Dons and Milton Keynes Lions Basketball Club. It has an eco-committee and supports education for sustainable development. The many opportunities the school provides make a strong contribution to the pupils' personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, particularly that provided by the LAB is very effective in raising self-esteem and promoting good personal development. The allocation of an adult buddy to every child is highly valued by the pupils and is very effective in promoting pupils' personal development. The school strongly encourages good attendance and pupils want to be members of the 100% club.

Pupils have clear guidance through target setting and marking. Teachers refer to targets in lessons and pupils know what is expected of them. The school encourages parents to visit and find out about, for example, supporting their child's reading. Parents who visited lessons during the inspection said they found it very useful to gain a better insight into the literacy activities their children do at school.

When pupils with learning difficulties or at the early stage of learning English are working with adult support they do well but specialist support for the increasing number of pupils in these groups is spread too thinly to ensure they make good progress. Teaching assistants have not

received additional training to prepare them to help the pupils who come to the school with little knowledge of English.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school contributes to and benefits from a range of interesting activities. Many of these reflect the leadership team's commitment to raising the pupils' achievements and enhancing their personal development. The school is particularly successful in raising the pupils' self esteem and supporting those with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The headteacher's responsibility to lead this and another school has placed an additional load on the deputy headteacher who has a significant teaching commitment. This considerably restricts the time available to lead the school when the headteacher is working in the federated the infant school.

Monitoring of the school's performance, particularly through the analysis of pupils' progress is not sufficiently detailed to provide the leadership with a clear picture of which groups and individuals are doing well or need further support. Similarly, the monitoring of the quality of teaching, whilst providing a comprehensive overview of lessons, does not take sufficient account of the impact on learning and the progress the pupils make. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

7 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Southwood School, Milton Keynes, MK14 7AR

This letter is to tell you about the findings of the recent inspection and to thank you for taking the time to talk to the inspectors about your school and your work. The headteacher and teachers have created a caring school community where you enjoy learning and feel safe. You behave well in lessons and listen to your teachers. You are thoughtful, considerate and show respect to each other and the adults who work in the school.

At the moment, you are making satisfactory progress but are not doing as well in writing as in mathematics and science. Some of you need more help and support to make better progress. When you get additional help you do well. You enjoy and benefit from the wide range of opportunities the school provides in clubs, visits and visitors to school. You clearly enjoyed the visit of Simon Murray and the workshops on 'Icky Doo Dah'. You find the targets the teachers set are useful and they help you to know what you have to do to improve.

The headteacher is keen to keep improving the school. I have asked him to work with the teachers to raise standards in writing and to give those of you who need extra help as much support as possible. I have also asked him to look very carefully at all the information that is collected about the teaching and your progress so that he can use it to make sure you all reach the standards you should.

I hope that your school gets better and better so that you all achieve as well as you possibly can.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Parker

Lead inspector