



Stone Church of England Combined School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110420
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288667
Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006
Reporting inspector Sean O'Toole

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Oxford Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Stone
Age range of pupils	4–11		Aylesbury HP17 8PD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01296 748340
Number on roll (school)	183	Fax number	01296 748483
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Philip Smith
		Headteacher	Mr Simon Rose
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school attracts pupils from a wide area. The vast majority of pupils have White British backgrounds. Almost all of those who speak English as an additional language are bi-lingual. The proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and statements of special educational need are below average. Most children benefit from some pre-school educational provision. Attainment on admission is broadly average. Mobility is higher than in most schools. There has been substantial staff turnover in recent years and the headteacher was appointed 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 provides a satisfactory quality of education. Following a period of decline it is improving rapidly. The new headteacher has won the support of staff, governors, parents and pupils. He has embarked on a programme of improvement and is robustly tackling the legacy of underachievement and inconsistent teaching. As one parent said, 'I have been very impressed by the fantastic improvements since September'.

Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress and become confident learners. Progress in Years 1 to 6 has been uneven and led to some underachievement in the past. Standards have not been high enough. The rigorous monitoring of teaching, setting of challenging targets and staff changes have contributed much to improving this unsatisfactory situation. Achievement is now satisfactory. Evidence in pupils' work shows that standards are now broadly average and that the school is likely to meet its targets this year. Such improvements show the school's determination and satisfactory capacity to improve.

The pupils have strong views about how much the school has improved and how they now feel safe and free from worries about bullying. One said, 'This is a school where you make lovely friends'. Behaviour is good and pupils are polite and helpful. Pupils feel that they are involved in making decisions. They help each other and work together well. Their positive attitudes contribute to the improving picture of teaching and learning. Pupils said how much they value their teachers' comments. In most classes, marking is detailed and clearly guides pupils on how to meet their targets. There has been good improvement in the support for those with learning difficulties. However, in some instances teachers do not expect enough of the pupils, lessons are too slow and the work is undemanding.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The most important areas for improvement have been identified and appropriate action taken. There are tight deadlines and robust measures to check on how well priorities are met. The management of the curriculum is inadequate and much of the work done in subjects other than English and mathematics is not taxing and interesting enough. There is insufficient scope for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in a range of subjects and this hampers their progress. Governors are supportive but not rigorous enough in challenging the school about its curriculum. Although the school's effectiveness is satisfactory, its curriculum is inadequate. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying this weakness. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching, by increasing the pace of lessons, expecting more of pupils and providing greater challenge through well matched work.
- Improve the curriculum so that it includes better links between subjects and increased opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills.

- Sharpen the skills of leaders in curricular development and of governors in checking on how well the curriculum challenges and interests pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress and by the end of Year 1 most attain the goals expected for their age in all of the areas of learning. They have good personal, social and emotional skills. Progress in other parts of the school has been patchy but is now satisfactory due to the emphasis on improving several aspects of teaching. Those pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress as their work and support are now linked to well defined targets. Traditionally boys have performed less well than girls in national tests. The teaching in Year 6 now successfully ensures that boys' interests are incorporated into lessons. Pupils make good progress in Year 6 because of the strong teaching. Those at an early stage of learning English achieve as well as their peers.

In the past, too many pupils underachieved because of a weak curriculum, inconsistent teaching and lack of direction. As a result, standards slipped significantly. The school is back on track and attainment is now broadly average. Achievement is satisfactory. Evidence in pupils' books shows a marked improvement in English and mathematics and the school is likely to meet its challenging targets this year. Because of the improvements pupils are equipped satisfactorily for the next stage of their education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They are friendly and helpful and understand the need for rules. Pupils enjoy opportunities to share their ideas and feelings in lessons in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. They respond well to encouragement and feel that the teachers' marking and targets help them to improve. Some said, 'We like it when lessons are hard because we learn more'. Pupils say they enjoy school but some would like harder work. Several said, 'Maths lessons are too easy and boring'.

Pupils' personal development and well being are satisfactory. They respond enthusiastically when given responsibility such as participating in the school council. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe and talk competently about healthy lifestyles. Although there are incidents of bullying and rough play, pupils say they feel safe and that staff deal with any problems.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There has been a legacy of unsatisfactory teaching and high staff turnover which hampered the development of consistency and led to some underachievement. Teaching and learning are now satisfactory and there are some good features. Staff build good relationships with pupils and use praise effectively to motivate them. Lessons are planned satisfactorily although some teachers do not take sufficient account of the different abilities in the class. Pupils' work shows that this is especially the case in subjects other than English. For example, work in history, geography and religious education is often too simple and does not challenge pupils.

Staff show firmness and sensitivity in dealing with individuals. The focus on improving marking has been beneficial and most teachers add helpful comments to guide the pupils. Several pupils commented that, 'Our targets help us to improve'. In some lessons, insufficient thought is given to the pace of learning and to varying the work for pupils of different abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum is inadequate as it is not exciting, challenging and creative enough. It results in a bland diet for the pupils where there are insufficient opportunities for them to explore ideas and enhance their creative and personal development. Much remains to be done to bring learning to life in some subjects. The work set in many subjects is at a low level and contributes little to improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The recent increase in extra curricular activities is appreciated by pupils and their parents. Pupils would like more opportunities to develop independence. For example, when it is given, pupils complete homework on time. However, several parents and children rightly feel that homework is used inconsistently to support learning. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, support and guidance are satisfactory. The school makes good provision for pupils' pastoral care. All requirements regarding health and safety and risk assessment are in place. Procedures for child protection and to check staff are robust. Parents praise the staff in the Foundation Stage for their care. One wrote, 'My son has settled into school, thanks to the carefully planned routines'.

The school has introduced a useful system to track how well pupils make progress. However, in some classes the information is not used to pinpoint the next steps in learning. As a result, some work is too easy for the pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new leadership team has worked well with the local authority and other schools to raise the confidence and competence of staff at the school. The accurate appraisal of the school's performance and clear identification of its shortcomings have brought rapid improvement in several areas. Standards are rising and pupils now make satisfactory progress. The school takes account of the views of parents and pupils and in response has improved the provision for extra curricular activities, safety and pupils' behaviour. Leadership and management are in a secure position to build on these recent successes.

The headteacher guides the staff effectively. He has linked targets for teachers to the pupils' performance. Staff are now clear about their corporate responsibilities for raising standards. Initiatives have started but there are inconsistencies in how successfully they are carried out in each year group. Teachers have started to work as a team although their effectiveness as subject leaders is limited. This has resulted in an inadequate curriculum. Governors are supportive and knowledgeable of the school's strengths and weaknesses but they do not have sufficiently robust systems to check on the school's progress.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
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	No

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
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	3
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?	4
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.

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

Thank you for being friendly and helpful when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and were particularly pleased that you like coming to school. When we looked at your books and watched you in lessons it was clear that you want to do your best. It was good to hear that most of you think that behaviour at the school is good and we certainly saw that you care for each other.

For a few years the results of tests in English and mathematics have not been good enough. Your headteacher and teachers have started to do something about this and things are picking up. We saw that the pupils in Year 6 are working hard and are keen to learn. This year we think that their test results will be better. There have been lots of changes of staff in recent years and I know that this has worried some of you and your parents. Things are improving.

We have judged that your school is satisfactory. It has improved a lot recently although there are still some things it could do better. Most of your lessons are satisfactory but we have asked the staff to make sure that the work you are given is more challenging and interesting. We have asked your headteacher and the governors to give you more variety and to making learning about different subjects more fun. You can help with this by doing your own research at home. Some of your teachers are in charge of different subjects and we have asked them to find ways to help you find out much more about these subjects.

Mrs Willman and I hope that you will continue to do your best and wish you every success in the future.

Yours truly,

Sean O'Toole Lead Inspector