



St Stephens Community Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111946
Local Authority Cornwall
Inspection number 289110
Inspection dates 16–17 October 2006
Reporting inspector Laurie Lewin

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Roydon Road
School category	Community		St Stephen's
Age range of pupils	4–11		Launceston PL15 8HL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01566 772170
Number on roll (school)	204	Fax number	01566 773872
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Pam Nicholson
		Headteacher	Phil Aldis
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Stephens is an average-sized school, with most pupils coming from the immediate locality. It has an attached area resource base (special unit) catering for 10 pupils with complex and severe learning difficulties. The school has a well above average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and a high proportion of pupils with statements of learning difficulty. The school serves an area that has a significant level of social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils leaving or joining the school other than at the usual times of admission or transfer is above average. Nearly all of the pupils are White British, with just a few coming from other cultural backgrounds. Five pupils speak English as an additional language and receive support because they are at the early stages of English language acquisition.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Stephens is a satisfactory school that is 'on the way up'. Outstanding leadership by the new headteacher has invigorated the school so that its rate of improvement is now rapid. Over the last 18 months, he has brought the staff together to work as an enthusiastic and highly committed team who are sharply focused on driving up standards and raising the quality of education. Considerable improvements to the interior of the building, major improvements to pupils' behaviour and lots of training for the staff have resulted in the school becoming a welcoming place where pupils enjoy learning. Those pupils spoken to say they like their school and the staff because ... 'everyone tries to make our lessons and work as interesting and as much fun as possible'. Teaching is now good across the school. High expectations set by the teachers and teaching assistants result in pupils showing motivated attitudes and trying their best with all tasks. Standards are below average but achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 6, and the good teaching is rapidly making inroads into improving this. For example, Foundation Stage children who start school attaining well below the expected levels achieve well, reaching below the expected levels by the start of Year 1 as a result of good quality provision. Also, pupils in Years 1 and 2 achieve well, reaching just below average levels by the end of Year 2. This good achievement is working its way up through the school, with, for example, average standards and good achievement now apparent in mathematics for the oldest pupils. The weakest progress is in writing, with boys in particular showing slow progress and with pupils generally tending to lack motivation in this subject. However, even here, the green shoots of improvement are very apparent as a result of exciting initiatives, such as getting the older pupils to work with a well-known author. This sparks lively responses from pupils and results in imaginative and interesting pieces of extended writing. The curriculum provision is satisfactory. Pupils benefit from a good programme of extra-curricular activities.

The school has good provision for promoting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, resulting in the individuals concerned achieving well. In particular, the school's special unit does an outstanding job of supporting pupils with complex and severe learning difficulties.

Good provision for care, support and guidance results in good personal development of the pupils. They behave well, concentrate well in lessons and are keen to take responsibility. They have a good knowledge and awareness about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Through their enthusiastic fundraising efforts, pupils gain strong social awareness. Although much good work has been done to put rigorous assessment procedures in place, the school rightly identifies the need for teachers to make better use of the information gained about pupils' performance to plan lessons and set targets that are more closely matched to their prior attainment. Good leadership and management ensure that the school is now skilled at evaluating its own performance accurately. The school's clear vision for development and the momentum created by current good quality initiatives give the school strong potential to continue its path of rapid improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve motivation for writing – particularly that of boys, in order to raise standards
- make better use of assessment information to plan lessons and set targets that are more closely matched to pupils' prior attainment.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children begin school reaching levels that are well below those expected, with very low attainment in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. Good work by the Foundation Stage staff helps children to progress well. This good progress continues in Years 1 and 2, by the end of which pupils attain standards that are just below average. Standards are still too low by the end of Year 6, especially in writing and particularly for the boys. However, there are clear signs that good teaching is starting to change this. This school is rightly very clear that improving pupils' achievement in writing is the key to improving standards across all of the subject areas. Strong support for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and for those who speak English as an additional language ensures they progress well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils spoken to say that they have seen big changes for the better in behaviour and this helps to ensure they feel safe and secure and learn better. Pupils show a caring attitude towards each other, with older pupils enjoying looking after younger ones at breaktimes and excellent integration of the pupils from the special unit into school activities wherever possible. Throughout the school there is a calm and purposeful working atmosphere. Through their comprehensive involvement in fundraising and good involvement with activities in the local town, pupils gain a good understanding of contributing to the community. Although good projects such as the team building initiatives help provide pupils with satisfactory skills to promote their future well-being, the school recognises that there is much scope for improving pupils' skills further in this area. Current attendance figures show that significant impact has been made in recent times on improving pupils' attendance to a satisfactory level.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Wide-ranging improvements have been made in areas such as the management of pupils' behaviour and the organisation of the teaching staff. These changes mean that good teaching is leading to good progress in learning becoming increasingly apparent across the school. Good teaching in the Foundation Stage helps pupils rapidly settle into school routines and acquire positive attitudes to learning. Throughout the school, staff give pupils a very clear understanding about what constitutes good listening and good behaviour. For example, in one lesson, a pupil commented ... 'I know I have to keep my hands still to help me to listen properly'. Lessons are well organised and teachers make especially good use of resources, such as their interactive whiteboards, to enliven presentations and explanations. High quality teaching in the school's special unit ensures that the pupils who attend have a very wide range of interesting practical experiences that engage and motivate them fully. Staff are acutely aware of the need to begin making better use of assessment information as a means of sharpening up their lesson planning and target setting even more. Teachers are currently very well focused on implementing new initiatives to make writing activities more interesting and purposeful, in order to increase pupils' motivation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has done much work to review and revitalise its curriculum provision, including developing clear links between subjects. However, this is still 'work in progress'. These new systems are not yet fully embedded within teachers' planning. Foundation Stage children have a good curriculum provision. The wide range of visits made and visitors to the school provide good enhancement to pupils' learning. The school makes good provision to support pupils' personal, social and health education

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Procedures to ensure the safety and security of pupils are fully in place. The school provides well for pupils' pastoral care and for supporting their personal and social development. It has outstanding links with support agencies to ensure that the needs of all of its pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are met, and teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in helping these pupils. The school has clear and improving systems for tracking pupils' progress. Whilst pupils are regularly set targets, older pupils spoken to were not clear about these targets and what they must do to progress from one level to the next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management are helping the school to improve rapidly. This is recognised by parents, who feel the school is doing a good job. Since his arrival 18 months ago, the headteacher has established a clear vision for the school's development. All staff and governors are fully involved in constructing effective action plans. Initiatives instigated by the headteacher, such as those to improve the design of the interior of the building, to improve pupils' behaviour and to create a clear staff management structure, have had a powerful impact upon helping to upgrade the quality of education. The resulting improved ethos means that pupils are now inspired to work hard and achieve as well as they can. Subject coordinators work well to support their colleagues, but do not always have enough opportunities to monitor work across the school. Governors carry out their roles satisfactorily, but are not yet sufficiently involved in the process of evaluating the school's performance.

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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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
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	2

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	3
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?	2
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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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	2
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

- I am writing to let you know how much we enjoyed coming to visit your school. Thank you for making us so welcome and helping us during the school's inspection. We especially enjoyed hearing about the activities you said you liked. We think the school is doing a satisfactory job, and is improving rapidly. Here are some of the things we noticed:
- you concentrate well in lessons and show interest in the tasks that you are given
- your school is a very friendly place and you behave well
- you like your teachers and teaching assistants and you told us 'they try hard to make the lessons interesting and fun'. We also think they do a good job
- you appreciate all of the extra activities that the school provides for you
- the school does a good job of taking care of you
- the school provides outstanding support for pupils attending the special unit
- your headteacher and staff work well together to make a calm and happy atmosphere in the school.

You make sound progress in lots of your work, and sometimes good progress. We think it is especially important for you to improve your standards of writing. We think your teachers are right in seeing that it is important to make writing tasks more interesting for you. We also think they need to make more use of the information they have about your progress to plan even better lessons and make even more precise targets to help you improve.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when we came to see you.