

Shears Green Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118436
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291134
Inspection dates	7–8 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	483
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Glen Handley
Headteacher	Chris Guy
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2002
School address	White Avenue Northfleet Gravesend DA11 7JB
Telephone number	01474 567359
Fax number	01474 334459

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In this very large school, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is a little above average. Pupils join Year 3 having attained generally average scores in their Year 2 national assessments.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Shears Green provides a sound education for its pupils. Pupils underachieved in English, mathematics and science in 2006, and standards were not high enough in English in previous years. School leaders recognised this and took effective action this year to reverse the decline. As a result, standards are now broadly average and this represents satisfactory achievement. Parents have noticed the difference. As one, typically, commented, 'I am pleased with the progress this year'. Although pupils with learning difficulties make steady and, in some cases, good progress because of the good support they receive, more-able pupils do not all do as well as they should because they are not always set challenging enough work. Too often, in lessons, work is not matched to ability and pupils all do the same. Though teachers generally prepare 'extension tasks', these turn out, in practice, to be extra work for early finishers rather than activities to extend the more able. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but there is much good teaching. Teachers are especially effective at keeping every pupil involved in the lesson through, for example, directing questions rather than just taking answers from those who put up their hands to volunteer.

Parents express very positive views about the school. They particularly appreciate the very strong pastoral care that helps pupils to settle in and to mature as sensible young people. Several voiced praise for the way their children had 'progressed emotionally to become confident and well motivated'. Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave well and get on very well with each other. They feel exceptionally secure in school. This is due to the outstanding support arrangements for children with any worries or concerns. A parent commented that 'for children who need that extra bit of help, there is an amazing support network'. Care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory rather than better, however, because academic guidance is not as good as it should be. Not all pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.

Pupils benefit from a good curriculum that is made relevant and interesting. What particularly stands out in this school is the sheer range of extra-curricular clubs, from cross stitch to sudoku. This is a school where staff go out of their way to provide something extra for everyone, and it is no surprise that the take-up from pupils is high. The exceptional array of after-school clubs also contributes to pupils' personal development. Pupils playing kwik cricket, for example, had worked hard to practise and improve their overarm bowling and had a real sense of achievement as they showed off their new skills to the headteacher, who was acting as coach and umpire.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has been effective in building a staff team with a shared commitment to pupils' welfare and to making this school a happy and enjoyable place for children to be. School leaders are viewed as approachable and responsive. Parents commented that they had 'total confidence in the headteacher and staff because any issues are dealt with immediately and amicably'. School leaders accept, however, that they have not concentrated enough on pupils' academic progress. Sometimes monitoring of teaching, for example, has been more focused on scoring the features of good teaching rather than on the progress that pupils make in their learning. It is this that has contributed to school leaders having an overly favourable view of how well the school is doing. Nevertheless, the improvements over the past year show that the school has a sound capacity to move forward.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set work in lessons that offers appropriate challenge for pupils of all abilities, especially the more able.
- Ensure that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Focus monitoring of lessons more closely on the progress that pupils are making in their learning. 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

Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. This is an improvement on 2006, when there was significant underachievement. Results last year came as a shock to school leaders, who, in retrospect, realised that they had 'taken their eye off the ball' with staff out of class too much because they were involved in meetings and activities for the local schools' cluster. Standards have risen with the scaling back of these commitments. Initiatives to change the way in which English is taught and, in particular, to boost boys' reading, have been effective in reversing what had previously been a decline in standards in English.

Pupils with learning difficulties achieve at least as well as others because they benefit from well-targeted support in lessons. A number of these pupils make very good progress. More-able pupils do not do as well as they should because, as a parent recognised, they are 'not being stretched enough'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy coming to Shears Green. All say they are happy here and 'lessons are fun'. Pupils are extremely confident that adults will keep them safe and sort out any problems. As a result, pupils are in a good frame of mind to learn. They behave well and have no concerns about bullying. As a parent put it, 'On the rare occasions that there has been a bit of tension among the children, it has been dealt with quickly and without fuss'. The school describes itself as inclusive and this is borne out by the rarity of exclusions. Attendance is satisfactory.

Pupils are acutely aware of the benefits of adopting healthy lifestyles, eat only fruit at breaktimes and enthuse about the healthier lunches. They also thoroughly understand the need to exercise and appreciate the opportunity to do this through the wide range of after-school sports activities. The school council plays an active role in the school community. It has achieved improvements to the outdoor environment, although its demand for improvements to the rather unsavoury toilets has yet to be met. Year 5 pupils act as 'buddies' to the Year 2 children in the neighbouring infant school. As pupils themselves point out, 'It is really good to have a buddy to help you settle into school'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils show high regard for others but, beyond what is covered in religious education, they do not have as much understanding as they should of the different cultures that make up modern Britain. Pupils' key skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) prepare them satisfactorily for future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Whilst lesson planning is satisfactory, some of it is not detailed enough to meet the individual needs of pupils. For example, more-able pupils do not all make as much progress as they should because the work is not always challenging enough. However, in a guided reading lesson in Year 6, challenging texts were used well to support the development of reading skills of pupils of all abilities.

Teachers have good questioning skills, ensuring involvement of all pupils, not just those who put up their hands to answer. Relationships are universally positive, resulting in pupils behaving well and showing good attitudes to their work. Teaching assistants are deployed well and provide good support, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties or who need extra help.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy a good, broad curriculum and pupils say lessons are fun. The school has this year focused on improving literacy skills and all classes have regular guided reading sessions and additional drama lessons, which have been successful in reversing the past decline in standards. All pupils have the opportunity to learn French and this is enhanced by a residential visit to France for Year 6 pupils. Following recent support, teachers now make good use of ICT in order to enliven teaching, but there are relatively few opportunities for pupils to use ICT in lessons.

An outstanding range of additional clubs and activities is made available to pupils. This does much to enhance pupils' personal development and their enjoyment of school. For example, pupils can choose from lunchtime knitting club to after-school dance, gymnastics and chess clubs, amongst numerous others.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral care and support that pupils receive is exceptional and is indicative of the inclusive nature of the school. It is also a key factor in pupils' good personal development as the support instils a sense of self-worth and achievement in all pupils. Any pupils with problems are extremely well supported through specific help, tailored to their needs and drawing well on outside assistance when required. This has a very strong impact not only on pupils' behaviour but also on meeting their social and emotional needs. As one girl explained, 'There is always someone to go to when you are sad'. The school carries out all the necessary steps to safeguard pupils in its care. The academic guidance that pupils receive is adequate but not all pupils are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve. Marking varies widely in quality. Some gives good guidance to pupils on how to do better but some marking offers only overly fulsome praise.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and his senior team have taken decisions to successfully counter recent falls in standards and achievement, especially among boys. Improvements are already evident. For example, difficulties that some teachers had in using ICT were addressed through training and ICT is now used effectively.

Systems for monitoring and self-evaluation are being revised and updated. This is appropriate as some of the school's evaluations are somewhat generous. The monitoring of teaching has helped teachers improve, although school leaders have not placed enough emphasis on gauging the impact of teaching on learning. The inclusion of all learners is central to the school's vision and is translated very well into practice: behaviour is good throughout the school and the care shown by the headteacher and his team is excellent.

The school has sensible plans for using its budget surplus in the near future, including for refurbishment of the toilets – which will be good news for the school council. Governors are committed to the school and are very supportive. However, they are overly reliant on the headteacher for their knowledge of what is going on in school and so do not offer enough independent challenge.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	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	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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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 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 Shears Green Junior School, Gravesend, Kent DA11 7JB

Thank you all for making us so welcome and helping us when we visited your school. We were pleased to see how happy you were in school and were impressed by how much you know about how to keep healthy and safe. You and your parents particularly appreciate the way that staff work so hard to offer you such an exceptional range of clubs. I was impressed with how hard some of you had worked to improve your overarm bowling. When you saw me with my notepad, some of you asked if I was the talent scout for a cricket club. If I had been, I'd certainly have picked some of you for my team.

Pupils have not done always done as well as they should in the past, but your school is now giving you a sound education. The teaching is satisfactory overall, but there is quite a lot of good teaching. We think the teaching would be better if teachers matched work more closely to what each of you can do. We know that for some of you, the work is too easy. You and your parents find the headteacher and staff very approachable and school leaders have been particularly successful in making the school a place where you are helped to grow in confidence. We don't think school leaders have checked carefully enough that everyone has made the progress they should, and we have suggested that staff look especially closely at this when they come in to observe each other's lessons.

One of the things that stands out about the school is the way in which you are looked after. It is this that helps you feel so safe in school. Those of you who need extra help are well supported. We were disappointed to find, however, that many of you do not know what you need to do to improve your work, and so we have asked the school to make better use of marking and targets for each of you.

You can all help too by continuing to work hard and do your best and by asking how you can make your work even better.

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

Yours faithfully Selwyn Ward Lead Inspector