



St Stephen's (Tonbridge) Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118578
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 291177
Inspection dates 16–17 January 2007
Reporting inspector Sheila Browning

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Royal Rise
School category	Community		Tonbridge
Age range of pupils	4–11		TN9 2DQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01732 354143
Number on roll (school)	227	Fax number	01732 368703
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Nicki Cadell
		Headteacher	Damien Jordan
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Stephen's pupils are mostly White British but a wide range of minority ethnic groups are also represented in the school. Very few speak a first language other than English. Children start school with lower levels of skills than expected for their age, which reflects the fact that nearly half of the pupils have learning difficulties. The school has experienced significant staff changes, including those at senior management level. The school is part of a local authority intensive support programme and a local learning federation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This popular and rapidly improving school provides a satisfactory standard of education within a positive, caring learning environment. As one parent commented, 'St Stephen's has a caring and friendly atmosphere with approachable teachers.' Leadership and management are satisfactory, having got better under the good direction of the headteacher. His determination to provide the best for the children has led to many significant improvements. Attendance has improved considerably and, with pupils' behaviour, is now good. Recent changes to the management team have led to greater teamwork amongst staff and better focused action to improve the quality of education. The governing body plays a strong role in moving the school forward.

Teaching is currently satisfactory with many good features, such as the lesson planning and marking of work. But not all teaching is as good as it should be because in some lessons the pace of learning drops. The school is working hard to improve the weaker teaching and the inspection showed that there is much good practice on which to build. The curriculum is satisfactory and improving, with a good focus on literacy that is not yet matched by such good provision for numeracy. The pupils find much of the teaching and curriculum interesting which, together with the satisfactory care, guidance and support they receive, results in them having positive attitudes to learning and sound personal development. In this inclusive school pupils enjoy and are much involved in their activities. This includes the high number of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural learning difficulties, who receive good personal support and guidance. Catered for by a team of dedicated teaching assistants, who work in close co-operation with class teachers, they make good progress. Recently established assessment procedures in English and mathematics enable the school to monitor and track pupil progress accurately, and help to decide what is to be taught next and to set learning targets. The school is working to extend this good practice to other subjects.

Provision for children in Reception is satisfactory, and they make broadly satisfactory progress. By Year 2 pupils attain average standards in reading but lower standards in writing and mathematics. By Year 6, pupils attain broadly average standards in English and science, but well below average standards in mathematics. Given their low starting points on entry to the school, this represents satisfactory achievement. Standards have risen since the last inspection, because the school has rigorously addressed previous underachievement caused by weak monitoring and staffing difficulties. An improving quality of education based on higher expectations is ensuring that pupils are beginning to make better progress and make up lost ground. The school has planned for an appropriate range of initiatives to secure further improvement, which rightly include developing the management expertise of key stage and subject leaders.

What the school should do to improve further

- Focus on improving pupils' spelling and vocabulary to raise standards in writing by the end of Year 2.
- Use more practical approaches to the teaching of mathematical skills to help pupils' understanding of basic mathematical concepts.

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning, particularly by ensuring that all lessons move along at a good pace.
- Involve all key stage and subject leaders more fully in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children join Reception with levels of skills lower than expected for their age, particularly in mathematical development. The majority make adequate progress but fall a little short of their early learning goals by the start of Year 1. By Year 2 pupils achieve broadly average standards in reading but lower standards in writing and mathematics, reflecting their low starting points. By Year 6 pupils achieve satisfactorily to attain broadly average standards in English and science but have well below average standards in mathematics. The most recent results of national tests taken by Year 6 pupils when compared to their performance in Year 2 indicate satisfactory progress overall and good progress for those with learning difficulties. Test results have fluctuated year by year but with an improving trend that was particularly noticeable in 2005. The school's 2006 results slipped back and did not match the challenging targets that had been set but this can be explained by the year groups having more pupils with learning difficulties. The good news for the school was that both the more able pupils, and the high proportion with learning difficulties, exceeded their targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils much enjoy school and most have positive attitudes to learning. Attendance has improved and is now above average. Behaviour is good and pupils glow with pride when in assembly they receive their 'Five Star Awards' for behaviour and attitudes. Pupils say bullying is rare and that adults deal with inappropriate behaviour quickly and fairly. Satisfactory progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development helps learners to develop sensitivity to the needs of others and to appreciate their achievement.

Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the school and local communities. The school council makes a useful contribution to the day-to-day life of the school and ensures pupils' views are well represented. Raising money for charities gives pupils a good awareness of wider social and economic issues and an appreciation of those less fortunate. However, preparation of pupils for their future world of work is only satisfactory because of standards reached in English and mathematics by the time they leave the school. Work relating to the school's quest for 'Healthy School' status is giving pupils a satisfactory and growing understanding of the need for safety, exercise and healthy eating. The school is working well to heighten pupils' awareness and responsibility towards the environment through activities leading to the award of an 'Eco Green Flag'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school acknowledges that to further improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, it needs to eradicate the weaker teaching in the school, and firmly establish the aspects of good practice observed during the inspection. In mathematics, this means making greater use of practical resources to support understanding of fundamental concepts; in literacy in Key Stage 1, more attention to pupils' spelling and vocabulary is needed to improve their writing.

Planning for lessons is thorough, if not always well judged, and is mostly underpinned by teachers' suitably high expectations and secure subject knowledge. This enables tasks to be set that are mainly well matched to pupils' differing abilities. At the start of lessons, teachers make sure pupils understand what lessons are about and what they will be learning. Whilst lessons are usually delivered at a brisk pace, this is not always the case. In a small number of lessons, as the pace lessened, so did the quality of learning. The school's recently acquired whiteboards are used well to give an effective visual stimulus to learning. Teachers frequently make effective use of 'talk partners' in order to help pupils clarify their thinking and consider their responses. Such was the case in Year 3 where pupils worked together to consider descriptive sentences to include in character descriptions. Throughout the school, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, particularly with regard to the support given to the high number of pupils with learning, emotional and behavioural needs. Teachers' marking of pupils' work gives learners a clear understanding of what they should do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum focuses well on the development of basic skills. The emphasis on improving pupils' writing skills has successfully led to improvements in writing, although there is still some way to go in Key Stage 1. Specialist teaching in sport and music and the links made across subjects contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school. Organisational changes to single year groups and small sets in Year 6 have improved pupils' learning experiences and have recently accelerated their achievement. From Reception onwards a greater focus on pupils' mathematical understanding is needed to underpin the drive to improve provision in mathematics. Better lesson planning is taking closer account of pupils' differing learning needs. While information and communication technology (ICT) resources have greatly improved, the school recognises that pupils' progress in developing their skills is held back because there are not enough opportunities to practise them in their day-to-day work. The school is just developing a SEAL (social and emotional and aspects of learning) programme to further raise pupils' self-esteem and attitudes to learning. A broad range of clubs, including a popular breakfast and after-school care club, enrich the curriculum. These contribute well to pupils' personal development, and their safety and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Health, safety and child protection arrangements are robust. Strong links with specialists and external agencies benefit pupils' learning and behaviour. Early identification and work with the family liaison officer and school inclusion processes linked to Family Matters support (a community facility) are significantly contributing to pupils' well-being and improving parental links. Pupils' progress is tracked and monitored closely in literacy and numeracy and pupils are becoming involved in the target setting process. This good practice is not yet developed in other subjects, which restricts pupils' progress in them. The high numbers of pupils with learning difficulties receive good support through a wide range of intervention programmes for co-ordination, speech, language and behaviour; this is why they achieve so well. Support groups provide good focused support for identified pupils and help meet their emotional, social and behavioural needs effectively. The school is rightly proud of its achievements in this area. Work with schools through sporting, music and operatic opportunities contributes well to pupils' personal development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are improving rapidly. The recently appointed headteacher gives strong leadership. Despite a period of staffing difficulties, he has, with good support from senior colleagues, established sound systems for monitoring school performance. In addition to establishing a supportive and caring learning environment, gains have been made in pupils' attendance and behaviour, and curriculum provision and resources. Such developments, together with initiatives targeted towards Year 6, have resulted in better achievement in English and science. The school recognises that mathematics remains a particular weakness.

The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. This is shown well in its self-evaluation and improvement plans. The latter, which take into account the views of all stakeholders, are a useful tool to move the school forward. The quality of teaching and learning is checked regularly by the headteacher, deputy and assistant headteacher. Although the school is currently developing the management expertise of the recently established key stage and subject leaders, they are not yet all involved fully in monitoring their colleagues' work, thus preventing them from fully discharging their management responsibilities. However, teachers' increasingly secure knowledge of pupils' progress, stemming largely from improved assessment and tracking procedures in English and mathematics, enables challenging targets to be set.

The role of governors has developed significantly. They now play a full part in strategic and financial management, and are purposeful in their role as 'critical friends'. Given the determination and clear vision of the headteacher, supported by an increasingly effective leadership team, the school has clear capacity to improve.

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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?	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	2

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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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?	3
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	2
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 helping us when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed talking and listening to you and seeing your work. Your school is satisfactory and rapidly improving. Teaching at the school is satisfactory.

- These are some important things we found out about your school:
- Your headteacher and the other staff and governors are working hard together to make the school better and they are making a real difference.
- We were impressed with your behaviour and you told us how much you enjoyed all that the school offers.
- You are making steady progress with your work and those of you who find learning hard are making especially good progress.
- Teachers keep a good check on how well you are learning in English and mathematics.
- The school looks after you well.
- Your teaching assistants give you lots of help, especially those of you who find learning hard.
- You know how to stay safe, fit and healthy and this will help you in the future.

This is what we have asked the school to do to make it even better:

- To help those of you in Years 1 and 2 to improve your skills in English.
- To support all of you to do better in mathematics.
- To ensure that teaching is always at least good.
- For all teachers with key stage and subject responsibilities to make sure you are helped to do your very best.