

Stratford St Mary Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124675
Local Authority	SUFFOLK
Inspection number	293070
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Ruth Frith

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Emily Barrell
Headteacher	Mrs Carol Austin
Date of previous school inspection	24 June 2002
School address	Strickmere Stratford St Mary Colchester Essex CO7 6YG
Telephone number	01206 323236
Fax number	

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector over two days.

Description of the school

This is a small, three class school which serves the villages of Stratford St Mary, Higham, Raydon and Holton St Mary. Pupils come from families representing a range of socio-economic backgrounds and the percentage receiving free school meals is below average. Nearly all have White British heritage. Children's attainment on entry to school is frequently above that normally found for this age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is slightly below that usually seen. A higher than average percentage of pupils join or leave the school part way through their primary schooling.

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 standard of education within a very welcoming and friendly atmosphere where children enjoy their education. Parents are generally supportive of the school as indicated by the following comments, 'Stratford St Mary is a wonderful school ... We have always been very happy with the standard of teaching and care'.

Pupils achieve satisfactorily and by the time they leave reach standards that are broadly above average. They make a positive start in Reception and become happy learners. They make satisfactory progress so that by the time they enter Year 1 standards are usually above those expected nationally. Throughout the school, their overall progress is affected by weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics so that pupils in the current Year 6 are working at above average standards in English and science and only average standards in mathematics. In Year 2, current standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics and reflect the abilities of the year group. Although teaching is satisfactory overall, it sometimes fails to challenge the more capable pupils sufficiently, particularly in writing and mathematics. Apart from this, pupils' needs are usually accurately identified and appropriate work provided. Staff are successful at identifying those pupils who find learning difficult and provide effective support.

The good curriculum ensures that pupils' personal development is also good and lessons are interesting. Because pupils enjoy what they are doing, they behave well and develop good attitudes to learning. They play and work together well and show consideration for views and ways of living different from their own. Pupils feel safe and happy in school and make friends. They learn how to stay healthy and contribute well to the school and wider community. Pupils' care, guidance and support are also good. Consequently, the pupils develop into confident learners and are prepared for the next stage of education.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. They are successful in creating a good climate for learning and in developing pupils' personal and social skills. The headteacher and governors have been less effective in monitoring pupils' academic progress and the school's work to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can. They have introduced a new system to track pupils' progress but staff are not yet getting the full benefit of this. Information is sometimes difficult to retrieve and the rate of pupils' progress unclear. There are weaknesses in subject leadership so that the mathematics curriculum and teaching are not as good as they should be. Monitoring of the school's work is not always accurate and senior management's evaluations are more generous than those of the inspection. Satisfactory improvements have been made since the last inspection and the school has satisfactory capacity to improve further. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by improving pupils' investigative and problem-solving skills in mathematics and by providing greater challenge for more the able pupils in writing and mathematics.
- Use the monitoring system more effectively by making information more readily accessible to all and quickly identifying the rate of pupils' progress and the need for intervention.
- Give greater direction to subject leadership and school improvement by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of staff and giving support, when necessary.

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

From frequently above average starting points, pupils achieve satisfactorily. In the 2006 national assessments at Year 2, standards improved on the previous year and were above average in reading, high in writing and broadly average in mathematics. Mathematics standards were lower because no pupils gained the higher Level 3. The high levels in writing reflect the focus placed on improving standards in this subject over the last two years. Standards in the Year 6 assessments were similar to the previous year in English and mathematics but higher in science. They were above average in English and science but only average in mathematics. Here, too, a lower than average percentage gained the higher Level 5 in mathematics. The school exceeded its challenging targets in English and mathematics for the percentage of pupils gaining the level expected for their age but failed to meet its targets for the percentage gaining the higher level. Those with learning difficulties frequently achieve standards higher than those seen nationally for similar pupils. This is due to the good support from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and results in good behaviour, attitudes and relationships. Pupils respond well to the high expectations of staff who act as positive role models throughout the school day. Pupils enjoy school and make friends. Attendance is above the Suffolk average and improving. Pupils have good knowledge and understanding of how to live healthy lives and this is influencing what they do. Fitness levels are raised through their involvement in a good range of physical activities and through competing in events with other local schools. Pupils understand the need to eat a healthy diet and some parents are supporting the school through the provision of healthy packed lunches. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of how to stay safe. They recognise that bullying is wrong and know what to do if they see unacceptable behaviour. If they have a particular concern they use the 'I want to tell you something' box or talk to a member of staff.

Pupils work together well to solve problems in lessons or, for example, by organising football games. Older pupils act as formal play leaders at lunchtimes and support those younger. The school council is developing well and is now ready to be extended so that more pupils can take part. Current members are keen to have more meetings and 'get things done'. Activities such as these and pupils' above average standards in some subjects make a good contribution to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning remain only satisfactory because there are weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics and of the more able pupils in writing and mathematics. However, teachers show many good features in their lessons. Their confident use of ICT has improved the quality

of teaching and pupils say it makes learning more interesting. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together as a strong team to meet the varying needs of pupils in these mixed-age classes. Planning has improved so that pupils experience a good range of activities. Relationships are good so the atmosphere encourages pupils to tackle new work confidently and ask for support, when necessary. Staff regularly assess how pupils are doing and what they have achieved but the marking of their work is only satisfactory. Although it frequently praises pupils, they are unclear about their rate of progress and what they need to do next to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

One of the major strengths of the curriculum is shown in the way pupils find learning interesting and enjoy their time in school. They particularly like subjects such as art, ICT and physical education (PE). All but the older pupils are less keen on number work and this, to some extent, reflects the weaker mathematics curriculum. Significant improvements have been made in ICT since the last inspection in the quality and quantity of resources. Specialists are now teaching music and PE and French has been introduced to some pupils. The successful personal, social and health education programme ensures that pupils know how to keep safe and healthy and learn to get on with others. Curriculum planning has improved overall but there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their investigative and problem-solving skills in mathematics. Popular clubs and activities help pupils to develop new interests and extend skills. School visits and visitors add another dimension to pupils' learning especially when they are offered a more 'hands on' experience such as when older pupils take part in a residential visit.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Safeguarding pupils, child protection and health and safety procedures are securely in place. Staff have a good knowledge of their pupils and families. Parents appreciate the welcoming atmosphere and find staff approachable. This ensures that home and school work effectively together to enhance pupils' well-being. The provision for those with learning difficulties is good and helps to support the progress that these pupils make. Realistic individual targets are set and most pupils say that these help them to know how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Over the last year or two, strains have been put on the leadership and management of this small school due to frequent staffing changes. Consequently, subject leadership in particular has not been as strong as it should have been. The exception to this is literacy, where improvements can be seen in pupils' development of writing through focussed leadership and work with external specialists. The leadership of the headteacher has proved successful in creating a good school ethos where pupils enjoy learning. However, monitoring has not been fully effective so pupils' overall progress has remained satisfactory rather than being good. The school has worked with the local authority to identify appropriate areas for development through its self-evaluation process and generally staff and governors are clear about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors support the school satisfactorily through their visits and work in committees.

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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?	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	2
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	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	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	2

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?	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.

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

3 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Stratford St Mary Primary School Strickmere, Stratford St Mary, Colchester, Essex CO7 6YG

You may remember that I recently visited your school to find out about what you learn and what you do. Thank you for making me feel so welcome. I enjoyed talking to you and being in your lessons. I have written below some of the things I liked.

- Most of you enjoy school. You work well together and help each other with your learning.
- You know how to stay healthy by eating a good diet and having plenty of exercise.
- Most of you come to school regularly and on time. Well done!
- Members of the school council are keen to represent your views and improve the school.
- Your writing is improving because the teaching is better.
- You particularly enjoy using the laptop computers and think learning is more interesting when teachers use the interactive whiteboards.
- Staff look after you well so you feel safe. I was pleased to hear that you would go to a member of staff if you had any problems and understand what to do if any bullying took place.

I have spoken with Mrs Austin, the staff and governors and we have agreed that they need to help you to improve your mathematics by solving more problems. They also agreed to make the work more challenging, particularly for those of you who find learning easy. They will also try to ensure that you always make good progress by making better use of the information they have from checking your work. Mrs Austin is also going to make sure that each member of staff is given support to help them manage the subjects they are responsible for.

Thank you once again and I wish you all well in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Frith Lead Inspector