

Southill Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109481
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310001
Inspection dates	2–3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Alison Hubbard
Headteacher	Mrs Valerie Cholerton
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2005
School address	School Lane Southill Biggleswade Bedfordshire SG18 9JA
Telephone number	01462813312
Fax number	01462813312

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school is much smaller than average. It serves the village of Southill and the surrounding district and many of the children travel to school by bus. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and a well below average proportion of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The overall proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, but high in some year groups. There is an above average number of pupils with a statement of special need. The size of the school makes year on year comparisons unreliable but attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It helps the pupils to learn well and prepares them effectively for the next stage in their education. It provides good value for money. Pupils' enjoyment of school is outstanding and they have excellent attitudes towards learning. This helps the teachers to create a positive learning environment and supports the good progress made throughout the school. Parents are very pleased with the school and the progress their children make. One said, 'I have total confidence in the leadership, management, and teaching, in addition to the children's full needs being taken into account'.

The good education provided by the school results in above average standards and good achievement. In the Foundation Stage, children have a good start to their school lives. They make good progress and achieve well. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and by the end of Year 2 results are consistently above average. The good progress continues in reading and writing through Years 3 and 4. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory but pupils' calculation skills are weaker. By the end of Year 4 standards remain above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards are also good in science and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils' keen attitudes are reflected in the care they take over making their work tidy and well presented.

The high standards are the result of the strong and successful leadership demonstrated by the headteacher, with the good support of the teachers and other adults in the school. In addition, school governance is much improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Well led by a dynamic and knowledgeable Chair, the governors have developed an original and effective structure, which helps them hold the school to account. Subject leadership is improving and the school has good systems for monitoring the success of its work.

The teaching and learning are good, well planned and well resourced. They are strengthened by good relationships between teachers, pupils and parents. Pupils and parents find staff approachable and helpful. The curriculum planning has begun to make good links between subjects and to provide more opportunities for pupils to take part in creative activities.

Pupils' personal development is good. Their enjoyment of school is based largely on the interesting and often challenging activities provided for them. Pupils show a good understanding of how to make healthy choices when eating, and of the benefits of exercise. They say that there is no bullying. This is evident in and out of lessons where behaviour is good. They make a good contribution to the community in school and locally. Their future economic well-being is well supported by their good basic skills and the good opportunities for showing independence and working together. The level of care offered to pupils is good. The provision for those with learning difficulties and disabilities is very effective. Assessment systems are robust and the information is used well to track pupils' academic and personal progress. However, the setting of useful individual or group curriculum targets is not always effective in helping pupils understand what they need to do to improve. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection. Its very good knowledge of itself, together with the positive and forward thinking ethos created by the governors and headteacher, shows that the school has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality and provision for the Foundation Stage is good. Attainment on entry is average overall, although children's social and emotional development, language skills, early calculation skills and creative development have been below average recently. This is evident from the assessments made soon after they have started school. The good teaching, planning and resourcing help children to make good progress during their time in this class so that by the end of the Reception year most are working comfortably within the expected learning goals. The teacher and the nursery nurse use a good range of activities to extend children's learning, particularly using ICT well to involve and interest the boys. Access to a good outdoor area is limited and the school is currently seeking to improve this provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by improving pupils' calculation skills.
- Improve the setting of individual and group targets so that pupils are more aware of what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good because pupils reach above average standards at the end of Year 2 and 4, and this represents good progress from their attainment levels when they start school. The above average standards are reached consistently and this is particularly good given the small size of many cohorts. Progress is consistently good in reading and writing, but more inconsistent in mathematics. Recent efforts to raise standards in writing and problem solving in mathematics have been successful, and this is evident in the latest test results. However, the school has identified that pupils' calculation skills are less good and teachers have begun to address this. Standards in science and in ICT are also above average. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, especially those with statements of special need achieve well given their capabilities. There is a wider than normal gap between the standards achieved by boys and girls, but the school works hard to ensure the provision reflects boys' interests adequately.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils speak very strongly about how much they enjoy school and this is reflected in their above average attendance and by their excellent attitudes towards learning. They behave well and this helps teachers to teach them more effectively. The school has worked hard since the last inspection to provide good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to demonstrate independence. This includes the school council which takes its role very seriously, and is having a clear impact on school life. In addition, the pupils involved are responding to the responsibility given them very positively and with growing maturity. The school is working towards accreditation as a healthy school and pupils have good understanding of the issues involved. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils showed real wonder when observing a hamster. They also have good opportunities to learn about the wider world through topics on other countries.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The amount of specialist teaching is an unusual feature for a school of this type but the standards achieved reflect its success. The school is making effective use of teachers' and other adults' expertise and interests, especially in literacy, numeracy, science, religious education and ICT. Lessons are well planned and appropriate for the mixed age classes. A particular strength is the deployment and quality of the teaching assistants who offer teachers a very effective level of support and expertise. Their work is successful in supporting pupils' learning. The learning activities are varied but teachers do not always make it clear what is expected of the pupils or what they are expected to learn in a lesson. The lessons do not always contain a good opportunity for teachers to summarise the learning that has taken place. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and this encourages pupils to take a full part in lessons and other activities. Teachers' use of ICT has improved since the last inspection, and the use of interactive whiteboards is effective in helping pupils to learn successfully.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides pupils with a well-planned curriculum that is helping pupils to make good progress and achieve well. The planning ensures the mixed age classes cover the curriculum fully over a two-year cycle. Teachers work hard to provide interesting and appropriate activities and a good level of enrichment through visits and visitors. There is a good range of lunchtime clubs. The school has developed more links between subjects, which helps pupils understand how the skills they learn in one subject can be used to support learning in a different one. In one excellent example, following work on the story of 'The Iron Man', pupils designed and made very good models from plastic cartons, and are writing a story about their 'Plastic Man'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a very caring school where teachers and other adults know all of the pupils and their families well. Its caring nature is reflected by pupils who demonstrate a high degree of support and concern for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The arrangements for checking on adults' suitability for working with children, and other child protection matters, are in line with the guidance. The governors ensure health and safety issues and risk assessments are completed correctly. Teaching assistants work well with younger children, those with learning difficulties and disabilities, or with the use of computers. Pupils' academic and personal progress are well tracked but the school does not yet set effective individual or group curriculum targets to help them understand how they can improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong leadership and has given the school clear educational direction since the last inspection. This has led to the school evaluating its strengths and weaknesses very successfully, and accurately identifying areas for improvement. Subject leadership is

improving and the staff monitor each other's work well through the scrutiny of pupils' work. The headteacher monitors the delivery of the curriculum although subject leaders have less opportunity to observe each other, partly because of the amount of specialist teaching. The school is good at bringing in outside expertise to support the teachers, especially in subjects such as music and sport. All available resources and accommodation are used well. The governing body offers the school an outstanding level of challenge and support. This is due to an original and effective structure for its work, which helps the governors to have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school offers an outstanding equality of opportunity for all pupils, and the inclusion of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, alongside provision for those with specific gifts and talents, is good.

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Annex A

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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	2
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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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	1
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

4 October 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Southill Lower School, Southill, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, SG18 9JA

I want to thank you very much for making me welcome when I visited your school recently. I had a very enjoyable two days with you. I enjoyed seeing you at work and in the playground. I particularly like your new shelter. I also want to thank those of you I talked to during the inspection, especially the school council who told me a lot about the things you like about your school.

You are right to like being here as much as you do because it is a good school. Mrs Cholerton, the teachers and your excellent governors, work very hard to give you a good education. They provide interesting things for you to do and help you learn well. Because of this, you reach good standards in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as doing some good work in science and ICT.

You help the teachers by being well behaved in lessons and by being very friendly and supportive towards each other. I saw some of you being especially kind to those who find learning more difficult. That was super to see. The adults in the school are very good at checking their work and deciding what they need to improve.

There are two things the school can do to help you make even better progress. These are:

- to help you to improve at mathematics, especially working with numbers to add, subtract, divide and multiply, and
- to set each of you targets that will tell you what you have to do to make progress in your work.

Thank you once again for the help you gave me. Enjoy your time at Southill and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms

Lead Inspector