

Southcote Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109795
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	310100
Inspection dates	4–5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	John Collins

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	303
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Angela Burgoyne
Headteacher	Miss Lisa Green
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2002
School address	Silchester Road Southcote Reading RG30 3EJ
Telephone number	0118 901 5533
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The pupils from this larger than average sized primary school come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, the largest of which are white British, African and Caribbean. Pupils come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds and the proportion eligible for free-school meals is average. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is above average. The numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, is also above 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 good school continues to improve. The vast majority of parents and pupils see Southcote Primary School as a good school and the inspection team agrees. One parent echoed the thoughts of many when writing, 'Southcote School is a credit to Reading.' In a very short time, the outstanding leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders has raised standards significantly and improved achievement. Achievement is good and standards are above average by the time pupils leave the school. The school's current tracking and monitoring shows this trend is continuing. The school has vigorously tackled issues concerning behaviour, improved the overall quality of teaching, and put in place effective systems to monitor and track pupil's progress. They have been ably supported by a governing body that has, itself, gone through a significant turnover of members. The impact of this is that currently governors do not hold the school fully to account as critical friends. While some parents have concerns over the pace of change, the inspection team supports the views of the great majority of parents that the changes have been beneficial to pupils.

The rise in standards and achievement in 2007 provides good evidence of the successful impact of the changes the school has undergone in the past year. These have proved to be beneficial to both the academic and personal development of all groups of pupils. A better learning climate has been established through improvements in behaviour and teaching, and the new curriculum is more focused on meeting the needs of different groups within the school. At the same time, new systems of tracking pupils' progress throughout the school ensure that these improvements are being maintained. These are the main reasons why standards are now above average and achievement is good. The school has tackled issues concerning the unreliability of previous assessments at the end of Key Stage 1. More secure systems have enabled it, for example, to identify the need to raise the standards attained by more able pupils in mathematics. Similarly, now that provision in the Reception class has become securely established, the Foundation Stage leader has recognised the need to make better use of assessment data to track children's progress from their attainment on entry to the school.

The improved curriculum has contributed strongly to pupil's enjoyment of learning as well as to raising standards and achievement. Good support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities enables them to play a full part in lessons and achieve equally as well as others. This is also true for pupils whose first language is not English. They receive well-targeted and well-managed support that enables them to make equally good progress.

Academic and personal development is supported well by a good curriculum that is well planned to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. Spiritual development is outstanding, as was evident in the very effective school assembly, which celebrated the meaning of peace with references to different faiths and beliefs. Pupils respond well to the good safe and healthy lifestyles promoted by the school. As one parent said, 'It's nice to have my children wanting to go to school in a happy way every day.' Behaviour is good and pupils show good attitudes to learning. By the time they leave the school most pupils have developed good levels of skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). They are well prepared for their next stage of education.

The successful changes since the previous inspection, the improvements in standards and achievement, and in teaching and learning, provide ample evidence that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

In less than a year, the newly appointed Foundation Stage leader has re-organised the curriculum to cover all six areas of learning. The spacious indoor areas are well structured to offer a good range of themed and inter-linked activities. Outdoor areas, which the school is keen to develop further, are used effectively to promote learning. Children enjoy their tasks and relate well to adults and each other. Those with specific needs or at an early stage of learning English are encouraged to participate and given a good level of support. There is a good balance between tasks children choose for themselves and those directed by staff. This helps children develop initiative and independence. Teachers are skilled practitioners but the impact of their work is sometimes diminished by weaknesses in the assessment of how well children are doing. Current assessment systems do not enable teachers to build up a secure picture of children's progress and firmly plan activities based on children's previous learning. Teachers' observations show that children come to school with a wide range of abilities, but these are lower than expected in language and mathematics. The school is already strengthening links with parents and pre-school settings to help build a better picture of children's abilities on entry.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics for more able pupils in Key Stage 1.
- Improve the use of assessment in the Foundation Stage to build up a clearer picture of how well children make progress.
- Develop the role of the governing body as critical friends of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Results in national tests in 2007 were markedly better than in 2006. Progress improves as children move through the school so that by the end of Year 6, pupils are reaching well above average standards in English, and above average standards in mathematics and science. Current assessment data indicates that these standards are likely to be equally as good next year. The picture of improvement in Key Stage 1 in 2007 is unclear because of possible inaccuracies in some assessments, particularly in mathematics. These issues have been tackled successfully, and pupils in Year 2 are now on track to meet challenging targets. The good achievement is due to consistently good teaching, a good curriculum that meets the needs of pupils and the more effective use of tracking and assessment data.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good, with spiritual development being outstanding. A distinctive feature is the Values programme, helping even the youngest pupils to recognise and demonstrate important values. As one girl said, 'Values have taught us how we should behave'. There is good racial harmony and pupils respond well to the school's high expectations of their behaviour. They work well together and share ideas willingly. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance. Taking part in the choir and other performances raises self-esteem and allows talents to flourish. Members of the school council take their role very seriously, showing maturity in understanding financial restraints on some

of their proposals. Involvement in charity fund raising encourages pupils to consider the needs of others. Pupils say they feel safe and show a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has succeeded in its drive to improve teaching and learning, which are now consistently good. Lessons are well planned and managed. Teachers have high expectations and challenging work is well matched to pupils' needs. Good questioning skills ensure pupils are able to make effective contributions to class discussions. Consequently, pupils grow in self-esteem and confidence. Pupils enjoy their activities and this contributes significantly to their enthusiasm and enjoyment of learning. There are very good relationships between pupils and adults. Teachers' marking is helpful so pupils know what they have to do to improve. Pupils develop good thinking skills and problem-solving strategies. Teachers make good use of assessment to track how well pupils are doing and to plan tasks that build on what they have learned before, which ensures progress that is more consistent. In most lessons the pace of learning is good but this flags when teachers' introductions go on for too long.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The new planning guidance for literacy and mathematics has begun to be implemented to meet the needs of all groups of pupils including those who are gifted and talented. However, due to the high turnover of staff recently, it is not yet well established in all classes. Some inconsistencies in the planning of mathematics in Key Stage 1, for example, resulted in more able pupils not being well challenged. Physical education lessons, use of the school swimming pool and some sporting clubs make a good contribution to pupils taking exercise and being healthy. The curriculum is complemented through well-planned units that give good opportunities for pupils to use their literacy, numeracy and computer skills in other subjects. Arts and creativity are strengths of the school. These are particularly well developed through themed weeks, which enrich the curriculum and enable pupils to use and apply a wide range of skills. There is a good programme of residential trips and a wide range of activities and clubs, such as the very popular breakfast club. These contribute well to personal development. Pupils with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are identified quickly and their needs are successfully met through well-targeted support.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's motto 'Soaring to Success', chosen by pupils, reflects the school's drive for pupils to achieve their best. The newly launched behaviour policy, for example, clearly identifies what is acceptable and offers a range of sanctions and rewards understood by all. Relationships are very good, with staff and pupils both equally valued. Racial harmony is promoted well. Child protection, health and safety procedures, and risk assessments are robust. Teaching assistants provide a good level of support for pupils with specific needs. Well-established target setting in numeracy and literacy enables pupils to see how well they are doing. The school's rigorous tracking systems closely monitor pupils' progress and highlight where further support is appropriate. However, these systems have not yet been in place long enough to be fully

embedded in the work of the school and, for example, have not yet been extended to judge attainment on entry or progress in the Foundation Stage.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher and senior team has very successfully tackled the challenges during the recent period of high staff turnover. Subject leaders are now increasingly effective in developing their oversight of standards in their subject areas and making a progressively more successful impact on the work of the school. The governing body, after significant changes, is now fully involved in the management of the school, and governors' expertise in many aspects of school life enables them to give good support. They are fully behind the drive to raise standards and are clear in their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, their role as a critical friend in holding the school to account for its future development is less well developed. Parents are involved in the life of the school and overwhelmingly support the new leadership. They feel their children are making good progress and are 'coming on in leaps and bounds,' as one parent wrote. The school development plan provides a good strategy for raising standards and improving teaching still further.

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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	3
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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

18 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Southcote Primary School, Reading, RG30 3EJ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. We were pleased to see you working so hard and enjoying your time in school. Members of the school council and others told us how much you enjoy your lessons and that you like your teachers and the other adults who take care of you. We agree with you and your parents that you go to a good school.

Here are some of the things we think your school does well.

- By the time you leave at the end of Year 6, many of you are now reaching standards that are higher than average in reading, writing, mathematics and science.
- We agree with you that the school keeps you safe and takes good care of you.
- We think your teaching is good and teachers make your lessons exciting and enjoyable.
- Many of you told us how helpful your teachers are when you have problems.
- The headteacher, teachers and other staff, and governors are doing a good job in running the school.

Here are some of the things we have asked the school to do better.

- Improve standards in mathematics, particularly for more able pupils in Year 2.
- Help the governors to be more challenging about what the school is planning to do next.
- Find better ways to keep a check on how well children are doing in the Reception class.

You can help your teachers by continuing to work hard and enjoy your time at school. Remember to ask your teachers if you have a problem, they will help you to make even better progress than you are now.

Good luck in the future to you all.

John Collins

Lead inspector