

Spurcroft Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109937
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	310148
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Paula Protherough

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	332
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Seward
Headteacher	Mrs D Grimsey
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Spurcroft Road Thatcham RG19 3XX
Telephone number	01635 871541
Fax number	01635 871592

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2008
Inspection number	310148

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The pupils attending this larger than average urban school are predominantly from a White British background. A small number speak English as an additional language and their first languages include Polish, French and Urdu. The proportion of pupils with learning disabilities and difficulties, including those with statements of special educational needs, is lower than average. A new housing estate has led to an increase in the size of the school and the numbers of pupils arriving during the course of the school year. Throughout the school, pupils are taught in mixed-age classes spanning two National Curriculum year groups. A significant number of teachers are new to the school. The school has achieved the Artsmark, Sportsmark, Basic Skills Award and Investors in People.

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 education for pupils. The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors have a shared vision of 'inspiration, aspiration and excellence'. They provide a clear direction for the work of the school. Recent enhancements to provision for information and communication technology (ICT), a more creative curriculum and their positive impact on pupils' learning are further examples of the school's priorities for future improvement.

The school has accurately evaluated most aspects of its performance, although judgements on teaching and learning are generous because they are not focussed sufficiently on learning outcomes. Senior leaders have worked hard to develop consistent approaches to teaching so that changes of staff do not adversely affect pupils' learning. This has been partially successful; for example, all teachers share their learning intentions with the pupils, make good use of their interactive whiteboards and have a common structure to lessons. Teachers make thorough and regular assessments of the pupils but this information is not used consistently to inform subsequent planning. This means that, although in some lessons there is a good match between pupils' abilities and their work, this is not always the case. This limits the achievement of the more able pupils. Teachers' expectations about the quality and presentation of the pupils' work are not always high enough.

Although standards have risen since the last inspection, the inconsistencies in teaching and learning across the school mean that the pace of pupils' progress is not as rapid as it might be. Children entering the Foundation Stage classes currently arrive with knowledge and skills that are broadly in line with what is expected of three year olds. Their social skills are particularly well developed and they flourish and make good progress in a stimulating environment for learning. Between Years 1 and 6, pupils of all backgrounds and abilities achieve soundly and make steady progress. Taken overall, standards at the end of Year 6 are broadly average, but pupils' achievements in English have been better than in mathematics for some time. The school has correctly identified mathematics as a focus for improved teaching and learning. In English, new teaching initiatives such as talking partners and the use of drama to stimulate writing are successfully raising pupils' achievements across the school.

The school's curriculum successfully enriches pupils' learning. Thematic links between subjects often interest the pupils and motivate them to work harder. Relationships between pupils and adults are generally harmonious and there are many examples of pupils being kind to one another, working together and taking responsibility.

Although the majority of parents are pleased with the progress their children make, several wrote to the inspectors expressing concerns about bullying and the turnover of staff. Inspectors found there was no evidence of oppressive behaviour or bullying, and those pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they feel safe and enjoy school. The school is addressing the changes in staffing through clear systems of review and positive recruitment strategies.

The newly established group of subject and phase leaders are hard working and enthusiastic but some are new to their positions and have not yet had sufficient time or opportunity for their role to impact on pupils' achievement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in Nursery and Reception are taught together in a well-organised and attractive area that is well designed to meet their different needs. The team of teachers and support staff work well together. They plan a good range of engaging and exciting activities that motivate the children and successfully develop their knowledge and skills in all of the areas of learning. The successful reorganisation of the outdoor learning environment means that opportunities for physical and creative development have been significantly enhanced. The imaginative use of role-play, linked to other aspects of learning, is particularly successful in engaging children's imagination and developing their thinking. Children's attainment on entry has improved in recent years. Many now join Foundation 1 with knowledge and skills that are typical of three year olds. By the time they leave Foundation 2 most have made good progress and are achieving the goals expected of five year olds, a few exceeding these. The thorough teaching of early mathematical, reading and writing skills means that they are well prepared for Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise further the standards and achievement across the school, especially in mathematics.
- Accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring work in lessons is more closely matched to their needs and abilities, especially for the more able.
- Improve the role of middle managers and subject leaders so that they have fuller oversight of their areas of responsibility and greater impact on raising standards.

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

At the time of the previous inspection, standards at age eleven were below average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' achievements were judged inadequate. Over the past five years, the standards attained by Year 6 pupils in the national tests have improved and are now broadly average, although performance in mathematics has been weaker than that in English. A range of initiatives to promote reading and writing is having a positive impact on achievement in English across all age and abilities. The school is now turning its attention to raising standards in mathematics. It has correctly identified that higher attaining pupils do not always make the progress they should, especially in relation to applying mathematical thinking and skills to problem solving and other investigative work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils respond positively to every opportunity to take responsibility and develop their independence around school and in lessons. They behave well, especially when they find their work interesting; when they are not sufficiently engaged they do not concentrate on their work and achieve less. The youngest children make sensible choices about their work and play, and understand the importance of tidying up when they have finished. The role of playtime 'buddies' is well developed and the school council is very well organised by the Year 6 pupils. These pupils are articulate and take pride in their involvement in the decision making process and their

contribution to developments such as the climbing frame in the school grounds. Pupils understand the importance of leading healthy lives and are extremely active on the playground. They enjoy school and their attendance is above average. Assemblies successfully contribute to their spiritual and moral development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The profile of teaching and learning across the school is uneven but is overall satisfactory. Some good lessons were observed where teachers provided pupils with exciting tasks that interested them and engaged them in their learning. Drama and role-play were used well to deepen pupils' understanding when they considered what it must have been like to sail with Sir Francis Drake. They also act as a spur to pupils' imaginations when writing. ICT projects and research opportunities also motivate many pupils and contribute to improved achievement. Some lessons have a good balance of discussion, practical activities and recording. In others, however, pupils sit for far too long listening to discussion, which is either too difficult or covers work that they can already do. Although teachers assess pupils' work regularly, not all are incorporating this knowledge into their planning to ensure that work in lessons is always suitably challenging, especially for those who are more able.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A number of well-judged initiatives have had a positive impact on the quality of the school's curriculum. Thematic links between the subjects of the National Curriculum enhance learning, deepen pupils' understanding and are helpful in improving the motivation of some boys. Improvements in provision for ICT mean that pupils have well developed skills, for example in the creation of imaginative multimedia presentations about Tudor topics and class visits to the Kennet and Avon Canal. Imaginative and varied enrichment activities develop pupils' interests and aspirations. For instance, there is a high take up of the numerous opportunities provided for pupils in after school clubs such as rugby and Yu-Gi-Oh. Arts weeks on themes such as 'Africa' develop cultural awareness, as well as providing opportunities for creative work. Pupils' enjoyment and understanding of the curriculum is effectively enhanced by visits to local places of interest, visits and visitors, including a Year 6 outward bound residential trip to Wales.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares for its pupils well. Statutory requirements for safeguarding children are met and pupils are confident that there is a trusting adult to turn to if they have a problem. Good citizenship is actively promoted and pupils respond well to opportunities to take initiative. The senior leaders have developed a robust tracking system using assessment data to evaluate pupils' progress. This is helping the school to tackle underachievement and set challenging annual targets. It is also helping teachers identify those pupils at risk of underachievement. Many pupils have a clear understanding of the targets that are set for them and appreciate teachers' guidance about how to improve their work. However, this is not firmly established in all classes. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors know the strengths of their school and set a clear direction for its work and development. They have had some success, most notably in raising standards from the low levels recorded at the last inspection. Their improvement plan has a clear focus on challenging further the underachievement of different groups of pupils, especially the more able. However, the pace of change in addressing this issue is slower than it might be, because the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning lacks rigour. Current processes are often descriptive of what happens in classrooms, rather than sharply analytical of the impact of teaching upon pupils' learning. Improving teamwork means that there is a greater involvement of all staff in moving the school forward. For example, a working group has successfully developed a thematic curriculum. However, the appointment of several new middle managers and subject leaders means that many are at the early stage of developing proper oversight of their areas of responsibility. The new mathematics co-ordinator knows how to develop her subject and correctly identifies current weaknesses such as unclear age related expectations, and insufficiently challenging or motivating tasks in lessons, but it is too early to assess the impact of recent actions to address these. The potential of the highly motivated and determined headteacher and senior leadership team is evident and, with the developing role of middle leaders, the school is well placed to raise further the achievement of its pupils.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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
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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 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	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

15 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Spurcroft Primary School, Thatcham, RG19 3XX

As you know, we recently visited your school and were grateful for the help you gave us so that we could find out how well you are getting on. Our team found you well behaved and friendly and we enjoyed talking to you and seeing how well you learn.

Your school is satisfactory, because the adults who run it know how to help you learn and they look after you well. Your school council works hard on your behalf and is very well organised. You enjoy all of your subjects because the teachers plan to make your projects interesting. You talked with great enthusiasm about clubs and visits. Most of you enjoy coming to school so your attendance is good.

Your work is improving, particularly your reading, writing and ICT but we think that some of you could do even better, especially with your mathematics. Most of you work hard in lessons and are particularly good at working with each other in groups. You also showed us that when you have the chance to develop and plan your own work you make good progress. Sometimes you say that your work is either too easy or too hard and then you do not pay enough attention to making your work as good as it could be.

We have asked your teachers to do three things to make your school even better.

- Help you to do even better in your work (and especially in mathematics).
- Check more closely that you understand the work they give you in lessons and that it makes you think hard.
- Share what they know about your learning in every subject so that all of your lessons are exciting and challenging.

Good luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paula Protherough

Lead Inspector