

St Helen's Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110888
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	310454
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2008
Reporting inspector	David Wynford-Jones

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	263
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gary James
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Harknett
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Colne Road Bluntisham Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE28 3NY
Telephone number	01487 841468
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is slightly larger than most primary schools. The vast majority of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small proportion of pupils is entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities is similar to the national average. The school holds the Investors in People and the Intermediate International Schools awards.

The school is going through a period of difficulty because of a long-term financial deficit. The situation is further complicated by several changes to the senior management team and within the governing body. At the time of the inspection, temporary staff covered four of the nine teaching posts.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. It provides pupils with a sound education and enables them to make progress broadly similar to pupils nationally. Pupils with disabilities are welcomed and fully integrated into the life of the school.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Children enter the school with skills and knowledge slightly above those expected. They make a good start in the Foundation Stage because the provision is well organised. Children make good progress and enter Year 1 with higher standards than are typical of children nationally. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress, but it is variable from class to class because of inconsistencies in teaching. By the end of Year 6, standards are usually above average. However, this was not the case in 2007 when standards in English, mathematics and science were broadly average. Nevertheless, these pupils made satisfactory progress because the majority of them entered Year 1 with lower levels of attainment than are usual. Pupils with learning difficulties received sound support and made satisfactory progress. However, the more able pupils did not attain as well as they should in English, mathematics and science because of teachers' limited expectations. Standards in the current Year 6 are in line with expectations. School records show that these pupils have made sound progress.

The relationships between teachers and pupils are good. As a result, pupils behave well, feel safe and know who to ask for help if they are upset. Overall, pupils' personal development, the level of care, support and academic guidance and the quality of teaching are satisfactory. Whilst there is some good teaching, it is not sufficiently consistent to ensure that pupils make rapid progress. Some lessons lack challenge. There is a satisfactory ongoing training schedule for all staff in place. This is leading to improvements, especially in the guidance offered to pupils and in the clearer identification of learning objectives.

The school provides a sound curriculum that supports pupils' personal development. It is enhanced by a limited number of extra-curricular activities and visits to places of interest, but overall the curriculum lacks excitement and inspiration. As a result, several pupils commented that they 'did not enjoy school'. Links with some outside agencies, particularly to support pupils who find learning difficult are good, but links with parents are an area for improvement. During the inspection, a large number of parents expressed concern regarding the leadership of the school. Many stated they would like to be better informed about the difficulties the school is facing and would be willing to help if asked. In contrast, others praised the work of the school.

Leadership at all levels is satisfactory. Two of the four senior leaders plus the chair of governors are recent appointments. They are developing their roles satisfactorily, but there is work to do to ensure that leaders at all levels have the necessary skills to ensure that the school makes more rapid progress. The headteacher is aware that the significant staffing changes and budget difficulties have led to a decline in the school's performance since the last inspection. She has taken steps to bring about improvements by seeking support from an external consultant and the local authority. This is improving provision and outcomes.

The school has sound capacity for improvement. The school is on track to resolve its financial deficit by 2010 and provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle quickly and adopt a positive attitude to learning because induction procedures are good and staff build good relationships with them. Children feel safe and enjoy learning. They make good progress because the curriculum is well planned to meet their needs and staff work well together to encourage learning. Good use is made of the parent volunteers who provide the children with individual support in developing their literacy and mathematical skills. Assessment procedures are thorough and used effectively to plan future work. There is a suitable balance of activities led by staff and those chosen by children. The recently constructed outdoor area is used well to support learning. Good use is made of the grassed area to promote physical development, but at times the skills the children are expected to learn are not always made explicit. The coordinator acknowledges that the outdoor area needs to be further developed as an extension of the classroom to promote all areas of children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that learning experiences capture the interest and enjoyment of pupils, and are well planned to provide challenges that match pupils' ages and abilities.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in bringing about school improvement.
- Improve working relationships and the quality of communication with parents.

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

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Year 2 are typically above average in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2006, they were exceptionally high. Standards in reading are often slightly higher than those in writing and mathematics. Current standards, although not as high as last year, are above national expectations.

In Years 3 to 5, overall standards in English, mathematics and science are above expectations, although in Year 6 they are not quite as high. Standards in English and mathematics are higher than in science. Nevertheless, the standards pupils reach reflect satisfactory progress from the end of Year 2. The support provided for pupils who find learning difficult enables them to make sound progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' attendance is above average; most enjoy school and they behave well. Very occasionally, some pupils lose interest and become involved in low-level disruption. This occurs when teaching is less interesting for pupils. Pupils have a good understanding of staying safe and are cautious when leaving the premises. Pupils are developing a satisfactory understanding of healthy living. They are keen to take part in after school sports clubs and know the importance of taking part in physical activities, drinking water and eating healthily. They are keen to take responsibility and contribute to the school community through initiatives such as the school council. Pupils'

cultural development is promoted satisfactorily through their work in art and music. They are gaining a reasonable understanding of other cultures. Overall, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils' basic skills and ability to work with others are developing satisfactorily. As a result, they are adequately prepared for their next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The working relationships in most classes are good. Pupils want to please their teachers, work hard and do well. However, they rarely show much excitement because too many lessons lack challenge and interest. This is because some teachers do not have high enough expectations of the pupils. In contrast, in other lessons teachers have a clear focus, maintain a good pace and pose challenging questions. They give constructive feedback and pupils know what they need to do to improve. Teachers are developing their skills in using the electronic whiteboards, but most do not make sufficient use of them to enhance learning. Teaching assistants provide good support during independent work but are not always used effectively during the introductory part of the lesson. The use of ongoing assessment to plan subsequent lessons is variable. As a result, the work is not consistently well matched to the pupils' needs and abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum enables pupils to develop satisfactory skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology and provides adequate support for pupils' personal development. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use and consolidate their basic skills in other subjects. National developments in the teaching of English and mathematics have begun to be implemented, but have yet to impact on pupils' progress. The school recognises the need to develop greater links between all the subjects to enhance pupils' enjoyment and motivation. There are some examples of high standards of artwork across the school. A programme of activities suitably challenges pupils particularly talented in this area. Links with a nearby mosque and the work to gain the Intermediate International Award contribute satisfactorily to the development of pupils' cultural awareness. A small number of well-attended extra-curricular activities and visits to places of interest enhance the curriculum and contribute appropriately to pupils' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure the safety and health of the pupils. The school meets the safeguarding requirements satisfactorily. Progress tracking procedures highlight pupils who are not making expected progress. The inclusion coordinator takes great care to match the support to vulnerable pupils' individual needs. A good range of strategies is used to support these pupils, including the use of conscientious teaching assistants. As a result, the pupils progress at a similar rate to their peers. Pupils know their learning targets and if they are achieving them. However, not all teachers set new targets as soon as the old ones have been achieved. Marking is generally helpful in identifying what pupils have done well and how to improve, but the quality and frequency of marking varies. Parents and pupils are rightly

concerned that not all homework is marked. A significant number of parents commented that the communication between home and school is not good enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The significant changes in the leadership team, staffing difficulties and the budget constraints have hindered the school's progress. A new leadership team is in place, but much still needs to be done to equip all members of the team with the necessary skills to ensure that the school makes more rapid progress. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school are in place but the outcomes are not always compared sufficiently rigorously with the performance of other schools. Nevertheless, the leadership team has accurately identified the key priorities and is taking action to bring about improvements. Governors provide reasonable support, but they do not provide a sufficiently robust challenge about the standards pupils reach. However, they have taken some difficult decisions to help resolve the school's financial problems.

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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?	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	3

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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.

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	3
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	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

21 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Helen's Primary, Huntingdon, PE28 3NY

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit and talking to you. We were very pleased to find your attendance is above average and to hear that many of you are happy at school. We were sad to learn that a few of you did not enjoy school. We thought you were polite, behaved well and were keen to take responsibility.

The school provides you with a satisfactory education. You get off to a good start in the Reception class and by the time you start in Year 1, most of you are already working at levels higher than many children of your age. Most of you make satisfactory progress as you move through the school. In some lessons you make good progress. Consequently, we have asked your headteacher to ensure that teachers help you all make good progress by planning their lessons to make them more exciting and by providing you with greater challenges.

We know that you have had a lot of staffing changes and this makes things more difficult. These are being sorted out and the leadership team is working together to make things better. We have also suggested that the school keeps your parents better informed.

Once again, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable.

Good luck for the future.

Best wishes

David Wynford Jones

Lead inspector