

Spire Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112661
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	310968
Inspection date	9 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Keith Edwards

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	133
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr James Long
Headteacher	Mrs Hilda Smith
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Jawbones Hill Derby Road Chesterfield Derbyshire S40 2EN
Telephone number	01246 234546
Fax number	01246 275053

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This urban junior school is smaller than average. Pupils come from a broad range of cultural backgrounds, although the majority are of White British heritage. Numbers have fallen since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Almost all of the pupils are drawn from the adjacent infant school. Attainment on entry to the school has been below or well below average but has recently been improving. The attainment of the present Year 3 on entry to the school was broadly average, although a significant minority has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A third of the teaching staff are recent appointments and are new to the profession.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It has improved significantly since the last inspection and has an excellent capacity to maintain this momentum. The key issues from the last inspection have been largely resolved, the quality of teaching is much improved and standards have risen markedly year-on-year. The pupils are very proud of their school and are keen participants in the exciting range of opportunities that the school provides. Furthermore, the quality of care and academic guidance gets better and better. One delighted parent, whose views are echoed by many others, commented, 'I feel that a lot of effort is put into the general well-being of the child as well as their academic abilities'. The school has the respect of the community that it serves and works very well with other schools.

Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science, and this represents outstanding progress from pupils' starting points. The national test results show that the Year 6 pupils in 2006 and 2007 made more rapid progress than pupils in most other schools. This remarkable success reflects the teamwork and dedication of the whole school community. The priority has been to develop pupils' skills in English and focus on securing pupils' understanding of letter sounds. Improving their comprehension has enabled them to become accomplished readers. The spotlight on encouraging speaking and listening has supported the improvement in writing, although boys do not do as well as girls. Standards in mathematics are above average because there is a strong emphasis on problem solving that enables pupils to grow in confidence in applying their skills. In science, pupils benefit from the exciting investigative approach to learning and an increasing proportion of pupils achieve the higher levels.

Pupils who find learning more difficult make outstanding progress because they are supported well by their teachers and a team of dedicated teaching assistants. The more academic pupils are challenged to reach their potential because they are encouraged to apply their skills to solve problems, particularly in mathematics and science. Pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve, thus their attitudes to learning are very positive and their achievement is outstanding.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are exemplary. They really enjoy coming to school and attendance rates have improved markedly since the last inspection. Their personal development is promoted most effectively because teachers make clear their expectations of good learning behaviour and encourage independent, group and team activities. Staff respect and value the pupils and consequently pupils develop very good self-confidence, self-esteem and self-discipline; their behaviour is exemplary. They know how to keep themselves safe and they respond very well to the many initiatives encouraging them to adopt healthy lifestyles. They work hard and play particularly well together, forming excellent relationships with one another and with adults in school. Pupils willingly take on extra responsibilities such as training to become 'mini leaders' for school playtime activities and school council work. Their spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding and their cultural development is good. However, the school's resources and displays do not fully reflect or celebrate the multicultural diversity of contemporary society.

Changes to staffing have maintained many of the school's strengths; teaching is currently good overall and some is outstanding. Therefore, pupils are progressing well and exceptionally well in some year groups, for example Year 6. Teachers' planning is very good in taking account of the different ways in which pupils like to learn and in presenting them with a wide range of

interesting activities and resources to bring topics to life. For example, valuable use is made of interactive whiteboards to illustrate aspects of data handling and to provide pupils with good practical opportunities for organising information. The newly qualified members of the teaching team are being nurtured well and staff are becoming increasingly skilled in asking open-ended questions to gauge the pupils' level of understanding. Pupils are keen to respond and they know that their answers will be valued. Teachers increasingly make effective use of accurate assessments so that tasks provide the right amount of challenge and pupils' motivation is high. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to learning by giving the right amount of support, particularly for those pupils who find learning more difficult.

The outstanding curriculum strongly supports the pupils' personal, academic and physical development. It is imaginative and links learning creatively across subjects, especially English, mathematics and information and communication technology. The curriculum is reviewed regularly to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met and is enriched by a wide range of additional activities including clubs, visits and visitors. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their enjoyment of these activities and of the opportunities to develop their sporting and musical interests.

Staff provide good support for pupils through close day-to-day supervision and a commitment to inclusion. An effective programme of intervention strategies is tailored to support pupils and enable them to thrive. Safeguarding arrangements are fully in line with national requirements. Academic guidance is much improved. There is a growing consistency in methods of assessment and involving pupils in understanding how well they are doing. The sharing of targets with pupils has had a beneficial effect on the raising of standards.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She has nurtured the ethos of high standards, and has motivated and developed her colleagues so that they settle for nothing but the best. Teamwork is at the heart of all of the school's success and every effort is made to ensure that all of the pupils achieve extremely well. The school has made the most of its involvement both with national and local initiatives to improve achievement and to boost attendance. The role of the governors has been carefully developed and they have grown in confidence in contributing to the strategic development of the school and holding it to account. The school's view of itself, although rather modest in part, is accurate because it checks its effectiveness rigorously, sustaining its success. The school clearly defines its strategy for further improvement, particularly in its continuing efforts to improve the standard and quality of boys' writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standard of boys' writing.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
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	1
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?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
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	1
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

10 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Spire Junior School, Chesterfield, S40 2EN

I really enjoyed my visit to your school this month because everybody was so helpful and friendly. I particularly enjoyed my discussions with you and hearing your views on Spire School. It was also delightful to be able to work with you in your classrooms, take part in your assembly, meet the school council and see you playing games outside. I can understand why you are proud of your school as there are many things that make your school special. Here are some of them.

- You clearly want to do your best to learn in lessons and are prepared to try hard.
- You do very well indeed with your work.
- The school is very mindful to keep you safe and happy.
- Everybody understands the school rules and your behaviour is good.
- Your teachers work hard to make your lessons interesting and fun.
- The school provides a wide range of activities and visits to keep you interested.
- Mrs Smith is very successful in making sure that your school gets better and better.

You are very fortunate to be able to attend Spire Junior School. Not many schools are as good as yours. This is because Mrs Smith and the staff really understand how to make learning fun and work very hard to help you. It is really important that you continue to work hard and make the most of the opportunities that the school provides. I know that you achieve very well indeed, but I am asking your teachers to keep on finding ways to help you to improve your writing, especially the boys.

I know that you can help the school to become even better.

Very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Edwards Lead inspector