

Sylvan First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113692
Local Authority	Poole
Inspection number	311339
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–8
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	268
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	85
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Price
Headteacher	Sarah Lee
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Livingstone Road Parkstone Poole BH12 3DT
Telephone number	01202 743064
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Age group	4–8
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a bigger than average school. Pupils enter the school with skills and experiences that are lower than typical for their age. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provides for four- and five-year-old children, taught in three Reception classes. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and includes pupils with a range of need including hearing impairment, autism and behavioural difficulties. There are a small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as a small number who are at the earlier stage of learning English. The school has awards reflecting its commitment to healthy lifestyles.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sylvan is a good school. The caring ethos promoted by staff and pupils is a strong feature which enables pupils to feel confident and secure. Pupils make a good start to school and, as they move up through the classes, they make up ground quickly in their learning. Typically, parents are particularly pleased with the 'warm, friendly, professional and caring approach' fostered by the school.

Pupils make good progress in the EYFS so that they reach average levels in most areas of their development when they start Year 1. By the time they reach Year 2, pupils reach average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Given their starting points, achievement is good. The school has successfully focused on improving all pupils' writing skills, although their mathematical skills develop more slowly. In science, their investigative skills are good. Pupils make good progress in information and communication technology (ICT) and increasingly use their skills well to learn other subjects. Good achievement is maintained in Year 3 and pupils reach the nationally expected levels when they transfer to middle school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress due to the school's prompt response to their needs. The effective help that pupils who are at an early stage of learning English receive means their spoken and written vocabulary develop well.

Pupils' personal development is good. It is not surprising that they really care for each other and have a good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. Their good awareness of right and wrong means that the vast majority behave well most of the time. Pupils readily undertake responsibilities and the school council is keen to suggest improvements. Teaching is typically good but there are some variations between classes in Years 1 to 3 so pupils' progress is not consistent. The teaching of writing is particularly good and enables pupils to be confident writers. In a few lessons, mathematical activities are not sufficiently stimulating and, occasionally, teachers' explanations are too long. The curriculum is made relevant and enjoyable through themes and projects, although outside activities in the EYFS are not planned as well as those provided within classes. Good levels of academic guidance underpin pupils' desire to learn. Their pastoral care is good and, as one parent said, 'She (my daughter) is happy....and can't wait to get to school.' The headteacher has a good understanding of how to improve standards further and this is reflected in recent improvements. Regular monitoring of teaching is leading to steady improvements, although the monitoring role of subject leaders is not fully effective in raising the quality more quickly. Governors are supportive and well informed.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the EYFS is good. Children make good progress from their lower than expected starting points. By the time they start in Year 1, most achieve average standards. Children quickly settle in their classes because of the well thought out routines that provide a very secure learning environment and provide well for their welfare needs. As a result, children are happy, confident and benefit from trusting and positive relationships with adults. They play together cooperatively as they know how to look after themselves because their personal development is good. They enjoy looking after their own 'trug' that contains equipment for use at playtime. Well organised, challenging and carefully planned activities ensure children achieve well. Role-play opportunities are regularly promoted. For example, serving in the 'Toy Shop' promotes their language, number skills and 'real life' skills. Good teaching of basic letter sounds develops

children's early reading and writing skills effectively. The outdoor learning area, although improved by the provision of covered areas, lacks a good range and quality of outdoor resources, which hampers their physical and creative skills. Checks on children's progress are effective as they identify the next steps needed to ensure successful learning. Good leadership which encourages teamwork ensures that the children's needs are met effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils in Years 1 to 3 more 'real life' and problem solving activities in mathematics to help raise their attainment further.
- Ensure that subject leaders monitor their subjects more effectively so that teaching is consistently good in Years 1 to 3.
- Improve the range and scope of outdoor activities for pupils in the EYFS so their physical and creative skills develop more quickly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in the EYFS. This means that by the end of the Reception year they reach average standards. They make particularly good progress in their communication, language and literacy skills. Although pupils' progress is slightly uneven between classes in Years 1 to 3, pupils reach average levels by the time they reach the end of Year 2 and achieve well. Pupils' problem solving skills in mathematics do not develop at the same rate as they do not have enough opportunities to apply their accurate number skills. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well due to the close support they receive. In ICT, pupils develop the expected level of skills in their work. Those pupils just starting to learn English learn new vocabulary quickly due to good small group support. By the time all pupils leave in Year 3, they reach the expected levels in their work and their achievement is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and, as a result, they acquire an effective understanding of different faiths, cultures and lifestyles. The pupils are kind and considerate which contributes to the school's friendly ethos. Behaviour is usually good, both in lessons and around the school. Their good social skills, combined with rising levels of their academic skills, ensure pupils are prepared satisfactorily for their next schools. Pupils attend regularly, but a small number find it hard to get to school on time. Members of the school council take their roles and responsibilities seriously, such as asking that free fruit is made available for Year 3. Links with local organisations and taking part in fundraising events develop their desire to help people who are less fortunate than themselves in their community. Their knowledge of people much further away is helped by extended class studies on other areas and countries, although their knowledge is not complemented by first-hand links with those having differing cultural backgrounds.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have secure subject knowledge and so explain new ideas in a confident way. They give pupils opportunities to discuss their ideas in pairs and small groups, although sometimes explanations are too long, which slows the pace of lessons. In mathematics, basic number skills are taught effectively, but few activities allow pupils to apply these skills to solving 'real life' problems. Pupils at the early stages of learning English benefit from close support to help extend their vocabulary. Teachers plan lessons carefully and pupils' writing skills are developed well through speaking and drama activities. Pupils respond well in most lessons and are keen to learn. They collaborate well and are willing to help others when they come across difficulties. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for all pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has reviewed and changed the way it plans activities to enhance pupils' learning. This has resulted in more creative lessons, particularly in developing pupils' written and topic-based work. In mathematics, while basic number activities are planned for systematically, problem solving and investigative work are not planned for regularly enough. Planning for outside activities for the EYFS children is difficult as the area is not well resourced. After-school sports clubs, visits and visitors to school help broaden pupils' knowledge and aid their activity levels. Pupils in both Year 3 classes benefit from learning French. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have well planned activities so they keep up with classmates. Displays of pupils' written, art and design technology models, including their cultural knowledge of other countries, reflect the broad nature of the curriculum. Pupils at the early stages of learning English benefit from simple, but effective, approaches to help widen their vocabulary.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's caring ethos ensures that adults are vigilant about pupils' welfare. Children have a smooth start in the Reception classes. Older pupils feel confident about their move to their next schools as close links are developed. Health and safety routines and child protection procedures are effective. Through good levels of contact with professionals beyond the school and high levels of internal support, pupils with learning difficulties and or/disabilities are provided for effectively. The 'Bubble Room' and 'Sparkles' group prove especially valuable for vulnerable pupils when they need extra support. Those pupils at the early stages of learning English have the support that they need. The school identifies pupils with the highest levels of ability and in some lessons teachers plan activities to meet their needs, although this is not yet well established across all lessons. Pupils enjoy working for their 'star and a wish' and like evaluating their own progress with a 'thumbs up or down', which helps them guide their own learning effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The clear direction of headteacher, supported by senior leaders, has contributed to the improvements made since the last inspection. They analyse the school's results and monitor teaching to see where it is most effective. However, subject leaders are not as skilful at pinpointing where changes will bring about quicker improvement. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's overall strengths and weaknesses. They have identified the need to develop pupils' learning further in writing and now in mathematics. Pupils' good personal development and well-being, along with their care and academic guidance, are strengths and well promoted. Swift action has been taken to help improve pupils' behaviour and increase their willingness to learn, supported by specialist staff within the school. Links with the wider community are well established and extended studies on other cultures and the wider world help develop pupils' sense of community differences and similarities beyond their door step. Governors give a good balance between perceptive support and challenge to senior leaders. Recent improvements indicate that the school has good capacity to improve 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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sylvan First School, Poole, BH12 3DT

I am writing to let you know about the findings from the inspection that our team carried out recently. We really enjoyed looking around. We think that yours is a good school. All of your parents and carers agree with us that your school looks after you well.

Here are some of the things we found out:

- You make good progress in your work and you reach average standards by the end of Year 2 and when you leave in Year 3.
- The children in the Reception classes have a good start to school, although their outside activity area could be much better.
- All of you work hard, behave well and get on with each other, particularly in the playground.
- You said the staff make sure that you feel very safe and really look after you. We agree.
- Outside helpers give the school good support.
- The teachers make most lessons interesting and fun, but some mathematics lessons could be more interesting and teachers' introductions to lessons could be shorter!
- The headteacher, staff and governors are working together well to make your new school a good place to be and for it to get even better.

We have asked the school to look at three things to improve:

- To ask the staff to plan more fun and meaningful activities in mathematics lessons.
- To give the teachers in Years 1 to 3 more ideas about how to make all lessons as good as they can be.
- Develop the outside areas for the Reception classes so they can have lots more activities to really stretch their thinking and activity levels.

You can help by working really hard and helping the school to improve more.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Hodge Lead inspector