

Severnbanks Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115746
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312051
Inspection dates	12–13 June 2008
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ken Hugill
Headteacher	Pam Howell
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Naas Lane Lydney GL15 5AU
Telephone number	01594 842789
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This medium-sized primary school serves an area of predominantly local authority housing on the edge of the Forest of Dean. A high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background is below average, and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is average. Most pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have speech and language difficulties or emotional problems. Attainment on entry is well below expectations. The school has had many changes of headteacher in recent years. The current headteacher took up post in January 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Severnbanks provides a satisfactory education for its pupils, because teaching, the curriculum and the care guidance and support that pupils receive are all satisfactory. Pupils' overall progress through the school is at the rate expected and they achieve satisfactorily, although they leave with standards that are exceptionally low. Nevertheless, standards are improving as pupils start to make better progress, especially in the Foundation Stage where progress is now good. Progress is slowest in writing and information and communication technology (ICT), because pupils are not given enough opportunities to write or use computers in subjects other than English. Teachers generally have high expectations of their classes, but these can sometimes be too high for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the great majority of whom are boys, who are not supported by a teaching assistant. In these instances, or when the topic does not interest them, the boys' attention can wander and they lose interest in the work. Overall, pupils' personal development, including their behaviour and attendance, is satisfactory. Parents have expressed concerns about behaviour in the past. The headteacher has had a crackdown this year and parents appreciate the improvement this has brought about. The many opportunities to exercise responsibility ensure pupils play a particularly good part in the community.

Pastoral care is good. The school makes good use of a very wide range of agencies to supplement the work of the school's welfare support worker and school nurse to support pupils with emotional difficulties and improve their social skills. Children joining the Foundation Stage with speech and language difficulties receive particularly good support from specialist teachers and support staff so that many no longer have such difficulties by the time they start Year 1. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils all know their targets, but are not sure of what they need to do to reach them.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. After several turbulent years, the school now has a settled senior leadership team and governors have a greater understanding of their role in ensuring that standards are improved. The school's leaders, under the direction of the new headteacher, demonstrate that they have the necessary skills to drive the school forward. They have accurately identified the main priorities for improvement and how to address them. The role of subject co-ordinators remains underdeveloped, particularly in checking the extent to which improvements are being implemented by all teachers. The most notable impact is in science where, in contrast to English and mathematics, achievement continues to fall, and in ICT where improvements are slow.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides children with a stimulating and exciting environment. Children join with levels of skills that are very low for their age. Many arrive with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly in speech and language. However, because of good teaching, high quality support from specialist agencies and an emphasis on improving speaking and listening skills, children become more confident communicators. They make good progress across all areas of learning and standards improve to below average. Many of those arriving with learning difficulties and/or disabilities no longer require intensive support by the time they start Year 1. The introduction of 'letters and sounds' is proving effective in raising standards of writing. There is a good balance between adult-led activities and those chosen by the children.

Assessments are accurate and used to plan appropriate activities, although sometimes tasks lack sufficient challenge. There are very good induction procedures that help children settle quickly into the Reception classes. Children's social skills are developing well; they are happy and enthusiastic about their learning. Not all children are confident enough to talk to unfamiliar adults, but they will chat more freely to each other. There is a lovely atmosphere within the classrooms and all adults have good relationships with the children. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed, with clear priorities and good quality plans to meet them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide pupils with more opportunities to develop and improve their writing and ICT skills.
- Ensure all pupils are given the guidance they need to meet their targets.
- Ensure that interesting tasks that are not too difficult are given to lower ability boys.
- Extend the role of subject coordinators in monitoring the impact of initiatives, and securing improvement in science and ICT.

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

Although standards are exceptionally low by the time pupils leave the school, this represents satisfactory achievement, as their skills are well below those expected when they join the Foundation Stage. In the past, standards have remained exceptionally low as pupils moved up through the school, but things are starting to change. Progress in the Foundation Stage is now good. The long-term underachievement and resulting decline in standards at the end of Year 2 has been reversed, with current standards still below average, but higher than they have been for many years. This is partly because this year group is a more able one and has far fewer pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than other years. However, they have made up the ground they have lost in the past and their achievement is now satisfactory. Progress has improved in Years 3 to 6. The underachievement in English has been successfully tackled, although progress remains slower in writing than in reading. Achievement in mathematics and science is satisfactory, but while it is improving in mathematics, it continues to fall in science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who receive support from extra adults or external agencies often make good progress. Progress of those without such specific intervention, mostly less able boys, is significantly slower.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils make satisfactory progress in the skills they will need for later life. Although below average, attendance had been improving until the school was hit by a virulent virus this year, followed by an outbreak of chickenpox. Most pupils enjoy school and have positive attitudes towards learning, especially when they are set practical activities. Some lower ability boys quickly become bored when the topic is of little interest to them, or if they are not 'doing' rather than listening. Behaviour is satisfactory, but parents say that it has improved and pupils say that there is now little disruption to lessons so they 'can get on with their work'. Pupils are quick to take advantage of the many opportunities to exercise responsibility. In particular, members of the school council are proud of their role and how they influence what happens

in their school. Older pupils are trained as peer mentors, which is helping to calm behaviour on the playground and ensure that others are equally aware of the need to play safely. There are many links within the local community, which are used well to improve pupils' skills in solving problems. Pupils have a good awareness of other cultures, especially different religions, because of the many visits they take part in and visitors they receive. Pupils talk confidently about healthy lifestyles, and put their knowledge into practice in taking part in physical activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Throughout the school, teachers get on well with their pupils. They know that some pupils find self-discipline difficult, so set clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour and always firmly and fairly enforce rules when a pupil goes a step too far. Most pupils enjoy their lessons. Some lower ability boys find some topics a bit boring, especially when they have to complete lots of worksheets rather than being allowed to think for themselves and write freely about a topic that fascinates them. Regular testing is now providing teachers with a much clearer idea of their pupils' capabilities. Consequently, the work given to pupils is now more demanding, but sometimes too difficult for lower ability pupils to achieve success when they do not receive support from a teaching assistant. This contrasts with the Foundation Stage where work can, on occasion, be a little too easy.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Important changes have been made to the curriculum this year, which have improved progress. The Foundation Stage is now taught as two classes, which has halved class size and allowed more time for teachers to work with individual children. Pupils now have time allocated to reading every day, so standards have improved considerably. Nevertheless, insufficient time is given to writing and developing ICT in other subjects because such opportunities are rarely planned for. The curriculum for personal and social development is particularly effective in helping those with emotional difficulties, as it teaches them how to deal with their feelings and control their behaviour. There is a good range of extra clubs and activities. Pupils are very keen to participate and enjoy the experiences. There is good liaison with other schools in the group, such as the involvement in writing and publishing a book about the area.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides its pupils with a safe and secure environment. Child protection, risk assessment and health and safety policies are in place and rigorously followed. Pupils feel safe in school and say their teachers know them well. They are confident they could talk to any adult in the school if they have a problem. The valuable input of the pastoral behaviour worker is having a positive impact on behaviour through supporting children with emotional problems. Because some pupils' attendance is low, there is close involvement with the outside agencies, supported by the pastoral behaviour worker, which has resulted in many of these pupils improving their attendance. Although pupils have targets in their books, it is not made clear to them when the targets have been met and there is little guidance from marking on how the work might be further improved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school is now showing clear signs of improvement under the leadership of the new headteacher. Senior managers have made good use of intensive support from the local authority and external consultants to help pinpoint exactly where improvements are needed and how they can most effectively be brought about. Targets are now suitably challenging and satisfactory progress is being made in raising standards. Good plans are now in place to address some of the most important areas for improvement. The best progress is in English and mathematics, where coordinators provide good role models and are starting to take the lead in driving up standards. However, their role in checking the quality of teaching is underdeveloped. In other subjects, notably science and ICT, improvements are far less secure because plans for improvement lack detail or are being implemented too slowly. Parents are pleased with the improvements, and feel more involved with the school as they are encouraged to join activities offered under the extended schools initiative.

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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?	2
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	4
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	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

14 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Severnbanks Primary School, Lydney GL15 5AU

Thank you for welcoming us into your school and helping with our inspection. Overall, we found that you are getting a satisfactory education, and it is getting better. The youngest children get off to a good start in Reception, and the rest of you do as well as we would usually expect to see. You now do much more reading, so you are getting to be better readers. You could still improve your writing and ICT skills more quickly, so we have asked the people who run the school to give you more chances to write in your exercise books, rather than on worksheets, and let you use the computers more. You told us how much you liked all the extra clubs and visits, and these are helping you to be very active and learn a lot about how other people live. You also told us that behaviour is getting better. Most of you behave well in lessons, but some boys tend to get a bit bored when they are not active or if the topic is not very interesting. This can also happen if the work is too hard for them. So we have asked the teachers to give you work that is just hard enough to make you think, and to find out what topics you find the most fascinating.

Most of you enjoy coming to school, although some of you need to try harder at making sure you come to school whenever you can. You feel safe at school, because you are well looked after by all the staff. Those of you who are easily upset are particularly well cared for. We were impressed by how well you know your targets, and have asked the teachers to make sure you know how to reach them.

Your school is steadily getting better, because the people who run it know the things most in need of improvement and are doing something about them. We have asked more of the teachers to help them by checking that everybody is doing all they can to provide you with the best education possible and to make sure that ICT and science get better as quickly as your maths.

With all best wishes for your futures

David Driscoll Lead Inspector



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