

South Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117110
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312494
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andy Nayler
Headteacher	Mrs Carole Racher
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2004
School address	Heath Lane Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP1 1TT
Telephone number	01442 402127
Fax number	01442 402132

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is an average size primary school. Attainment on admission is below expectations. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is average and a below average proportion is eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are White British and none are at an early stage of learning English. The school has achieved the following awards; Investors in People, Healthy Schools, Active Mark Gold award and Geography Quality Mark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school has several important strengths but also some crucial areas where it is not functioning as well as it should. Overall, the school is currently providing a satisfactory standard of education and gives satisfactory value for money. The school considered its own effectiveness to be good. An important strength is the way in which the pastoral care of every pupil is at the heart of its work. Many parents appreciate this. One wrote, 'The school has an excellent, caring ethos where each child is nurtured and developed according to their need.' Pupils' personal development is promoted well and their behaviour and relationships in the school are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is exemplary. Careful thought has gone into providing a well-balanced and lively curriculum which is enhanced very well by visits, visitors and an excellent variety of extra-curricular clubs.

Though satisfactory overall, the teaching has a number of strengths. These include good use of questioning and the very positive way in which pupils are encouraged and managed. The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall and have some important strengths which parents acknowledge. The headteacher has successfully established a relatively new senior management team and has provided targeted support for the new subject leaders. The development plan shows clearly how the school is encouraging pupils' personal qualities as well as outlining priorities for literacy and numeracy. Standards across the school are broadly average but currently higher in Year 2. Most children make good progress in the Foundation Stage to achieve average standards. Standards in Year 2 improved to above average in 2006 and 2007 with particularly good progress in writing demonstrating the school's good capacity to improve. Standards in Year 6 have continued to be broadly average. They have not mirrored the improvements seen in Key Stage 1 yet and pupils' achievements and the progress that most make by the end of Year 6 are just satisfactory. There has not been sufficient focus on accelerating the progress that pupils make in Years 3 to 6 to match that from Reception to Year 2. Assessment data is not used well enough to set targets which show the pupils clearly the next steps in their learning. Governance is satisfactory. Governors support the school well but have not challenged the school sufficiently to accelerate the progress which pupils make.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision is good. Good leadership and effective teaching help children to make good progress. The rich and creative curriculum focuses strongly on children's personal development and they also make good progress with their language and communication skills. Children quickly become familiar with the day-to-day routines, behave well and enjoy their time at school. Staff constantly monitor children's progress and use this information when planning what they will do next. There is a good balance between giving children the freedom and confidence to choose what they want to do and adult-led activities. The outdoor play area is relatively small but is used well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement in Years 3 to 6 to ensure that they build successfully on the good start they get in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2.
- Improve teaching in Years 3 to 6 to ensure the more effective use of assessment data and target setting to improve pupils' progress.

- Improve leadership and management to ensure that the school's work is more clearly focused on raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress.

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

By the time they leave the school, pupils reach broadly average standards and achieve satisfactorily. Children enter with standards that are below those expected for their age, but most make good progress in the Foundation Stage to reach expected standards by the beginning of Year 1. Standards in Year 2 were above average in 2006 and 2007. In these years pupils made good progress, especially in their writing where standards were significantly better than those in most schools. Standards in Year 6 have been broadly average each year and pupils make satisfactory progress. They dipped in mathematics and science in 2006 but rose again in 2007 because of timely interventions by the staff. However, the recent sustained improvements in achievement and standards in Years 1 and 2 have not been matched by similar improvements in Years 3 to 6. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve similarly to their mainstream colleagues.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and their attendance levels are outstanding. Most behave well during lessons, listen carefully and respond to questions thoughtfully. They collaborate well and enjoy the regular opportunities to share ideas with their 'talking partners'. Pupils confirm that there is always someone they can ask for help if they need it and that their teachers deal firmly with any incidents of bullying. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils know how to lead a healthy and safe life and are keen to do so. Levels of participation in the wide range of additional activities are high. Pupils contribute well to school life through initiatives such as the school council, buddy and prefect systems and they raise significant sums of money for charity. Pupils' good personal qualities and satisfactory basic skills prepare them soundly for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with several good features. The school's work to improve the effectiveness of teachers' use of questioning has been successful. This aspect is now good. Teachers manage pupils well, encourage their good behaviour and establish very positive relationships. In the best lessons teachers are very enthusiastic, lessons proceed at a very rapid pace and pupils are fully involved in their work. These strengths have not yet ensured that pupils in Years 3 to 6 make the best possible progress in their learning but they did help to reverse the dip in standards in 2006. Marking across the school is variable and the use of assessment data to set challenging targets which help pupils to understand how to move their work to the next level, is not yet fully effective. There has been insufficient emphasis on the link between teaching and its impact on the quality of pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The carefully planned curriculum ensures that pupils have a wide range of learning experiences and the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills across different subject areas. Activities are interesting and encourage pupils' enjoyment and full commitment to school. The curriculum is enhanced effectively by relevant visits and visitors to the school and pupils in Years 3 to 6 learn Spanish. There is also an exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular clubs which support pupils' social and personal development well. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory and nearby secondary schools provide master classes in mathematics and drama. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

This school's supportive and caring ethos helps to ensure that pupils feel well cared for and helps them to concentrate and work hard. Health and safety and child protection procedures are in place. Close links with a wide range of professionals and external agencies ensure strong support for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties. This helps them to make satisfactory academic progress and effectively promotes their well-being and personal development. Parents are very pleased with this high standard of personal care and say that their children are happy at school and thoroughly enjoy attending. Assessment procedures are satisfactory overall. However, some of the targets which pupils are set are too general and do not show them clearly enough how to move to the next level in their learning. Pupils say that currently targets do not help them well enough to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall with some important strengths. The headteacher ensures that the school's caring ethos is at the heart of the school's work and the good work with parents has meant that most are supportive of the school and have confidence in its leadership. The work of the senior leaders is developing well but some are relatively new to their posts. Good processes to evaluate the school's work are in place and the school development plan contains important references to the development of pupils' personal qualities. Some self-evaluation processes have worked effectively. The very positive response to the drop in standards in mathematics and science in Year 6 in 2006 and the significant improvement in standards in 2007 is evidence of this. The school has also raised standards and improved achievement in Years 1 and 2 over the last two years although these successes have not been carried through to Years 3 to 6 yet. Governors support the school well but have not challenged the school sufficiently over the progress which pupils make.

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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	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	1
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?	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

16 October 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of South Hill Primary School, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 1TT

Thank you for making my colleague and I so welcome when we came to the school recently to see how well you were doing.

Here are the things that we think are best about your school.

- Those of you in the Reception class settle quickly and make a good start to your time at school.
- Those in Years 1 and 2 do particularly well in your writing.
- You all enjoy what the school provides and come to school willingly and regularly.
- The school arranges an exceptionally wide range of clubs for you to take part in.
- You behave well in school and work sensibly with others when required.

There are a few things that we thought could be better.

- Teachers need to ensure that your targets show you more clearly how to reach the next stage in your learning.
- School leaders need to focus more clearly on helping the older pupils in the school to make better progress in their learning.

Thank you again for your welcome.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Missin

Lead Inspector