

Strathmore Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117114
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312495
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Derek Watts

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Harris
Headteacher	Mrs Carol Arrowsmith
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2005
School address	Old Hale Way Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 1XR
Telephone number	01462 459558
Fax number	01462 459188

Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Strathmore Infant and Nursery is a smaller-than-average primary school. About two thirds of the pupils come from a White British background. The remainder come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. An above average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language and a few of these are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Children's attainment on entry to Nursery is generally below that expected for their age, mainly in language and social skills.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Strathmore Infant and Nursery is a good school with outstanding elements to its work. Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and a stimulating curriculum. Outstanding pastoral care and an extremely positive school atmosphere lead to pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. Parents hold very positive views about the school and are very pleased with both the care and education provided for their children. Typical parental comments include, 'Very pleased with my child's progress', 'Wonderful atmosphere' and 'Great community spirit'.

Good leadership and management are key factors contributing to the school's effectiveness and to the improvements made. The experienced headteacher provides strong leadership. She is well supported by senior staff. Responsibilities are effectively shared among the staff and leaders are well developed in their role. As a result, all leaders make a valuable contribution to the school's performance. Good self-evaluation means that the school has an accurate view of how well it is doing and it takes effective action to bring about any necessary improvements. After the last inspection, the school experienced staffing difficulties because of falling rolls. This led to inconsistencies in teaching and standards dipped from above average to average by the end of Year 2. Effective action has been taken to improve teaching in Years 1 and 2 and to improve the provision in Reception. Leaders are aware that there is still more to do to ensure that teaching is always consistently good. The school has demonstrated a good capacity to improve.

Excellent provision in the Nursery enables children to get off to an exceptionally good start. Teaching and learning are good in Years 1 and 2 and pupils make good progress. Pupils respond very positively to their teachers' clear instructions, explanations and questioning. Interesting activities and tasks are well matched to pupils' abilities and needs so they are challenged and make good gains in their learning. Occasionally in Years 1 and 2, there is an over use of worksheets which impedes pupils' ability to plan and organise their own work. The pace of learning can slow during overlong teacher introductions. The school is taking positive action to raise achievement and standards in writing by providing good opportunities to write in a variety of styles and for different purposes. Pupils' work and the school's thorough assessments indicate that standards are above average by Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. The curriculum is interesting with good links between subjects and a very good range of additional activities.

Good care, guidance and support contribute significantly to pupils' academic and personal development. Good assessment and tracking mean that the school has a clear overview of every pupil's attainment and progress. The headteacher, with her staff, has created an extremely positive and caring school climate, which is much appreciated by pupils and parents. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and this is reflected by their enthusiasm for learning and their good attendance. High expectations by all staff and outstanding relationships lead to exemplary behaviour. Pupils show an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. Those with learning difficulties and those at an early stage of learning English receive well-targeted support. Pupils readily take on additional responsibilities to help the school and the wider community.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Nursery with attainment that is below that expected for their age. A significant number of children have limited language and social skills. Outstanding leadership by an Advanced Skills Teacher, inspirational teaching and an exciting curriculum enable children to make exceptional progress in the Nursery. The Nursery is a model of excellent practice and the school is frequently visited by Foundation Stage staff from other schools. Provision for the children in Reception has improved since the last inspection and is now good. A wide range of interesting and stimulating activities is planned in both Nursery and Reception. Teachers and teaching assistants provide a highly effective blend of direct teaching and allowing children to explore, work independently and be creative. By the end of Reception, standards are usually in line with those expected for their age.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all lessons in Years 1 and 2 maintain a brisk pace.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to plan and organise their own work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good overall and standards are currently above average in Year 2. Not many pupils were attaining the higher levels in reading and writing. The school is taking positive steps to tackle this. This is already bearing fruit, particularly in writing. Effective teaching and a more stimulating curriculum are having a positive impact on pupils' learning and achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the well-targeted support they receive. Pupils at an early stage of learning English are also well-supported and provided for. They make good gains in acquiring English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are enthusiastic learners. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils show considerable care and respect for others. Through the stimulating curriculum, they appreciate the marvels of art and literature. Pupils are friendly, polite and extremely well behaved. Attendance has improved over the past two years and is now above average. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and possess an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy diets and taking regular exercise. They thrive on additional responsibilities. Those on the school council represent their fellow pupils well. The raising of funds for a variety of national and international charities contributes well to the wider community. At Strathmore, pupils are well-prepared for the future because they have well-developed personal and social skills. In addition to these, they make good progress in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good, with outstanding practice in the Nursery. Teachers have established high expectations of learning and behaviour and pupils respond extremely well to these. An attractive

learning environment has been created for the pupils. In corridors and classrooms there are vibrant displays which inspire the pupils and reflect the variety of work. For example, in Year 2, a role-play area, 'Harry Potter's Common Room' inspired pupils' to read and provided ideas for their writing. A parent commented, 'It is clear that a lot of effort is put into keeping the learning environment stimulating'. Interesting activities and tasks are well-tailored to pupils' ability and needs. As a result, pupils are challenged and motivated to make good progress. Teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils who need it. Occasionally, the pace of learning can slow when introductions are over-long. Using too many worksheets, particularly in science, can impede pupils' ability to plan and organise their own work. The marking of pupils' work is positive and constructive. Good work is praised and there are comments to help pupils to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A well-planned curriculum enables pupils to make good progress and makes a very good contribution to their personal development. Strong emphasis is placed on basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Raising achievement in writing is a current priority. In science, over directed worksheets can impede pupils' opportunities plan their own investigations and decide how they will record their results. School leaders have recently revised the curriculum to meet the interests and needs of the pupils more fully. There are good links between subjects, which add enjoyment and relevance to pupils' learning. For example, when pupils in Year 2 study the events of the Great Fire of London, art, drama, history and writing are all skilfully woven into the work. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support teaching and learning. Provision for art is a strong feature and there are impressive and varied displays of pupils' work across the school. Health and safety education receives good attention and contributes to pupils' well-developed skills in these areas. Popular clubs include French, gardening, ICT, recorders and technology.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Outstanding pastoral care and support contribute extremely well to pupils' personal development. There are very effective procedures to ensure pupils' protection and safety so pupils feel safe and secure at school. Staff know the pupils extremely well and have established very good relationships with them and their parents. One parent, echoing the view of many, wrote, 'All the staff are friendly and approachable' and another said, 'The staff are very dedicated, professional and caring'. The school, in partnership with external agencies, provides good care and support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English. As a result, these pupils thrive and make good progress. Systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress are good. Assessment information is used well to plan teaching. Effective marking and the sharing of learning intentions contribute well to the pupils' good progress. Most pupils have a good understanding of what they are working on to improve. This good assessment practice is not always consistently implemented by all staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management successfully ensure effective educational provision and care, which leads to favourable outcomes for pupils. The headteacher provides good leadership and educational direction. She is supported well by the senior leadership team. Responsibilities are shared effectively among the teaching force, who all make a good contribution to the school's success. Teamwork among the staff is strong and the expertise of individuals is used well. New teachers, particularly newly qualified, receive good professional development and support.

Good self-evaluation means that the school knows what it does well and takes effective action to bring about improvements. Leaders are aware that there is more to do to ensure that teaching is consistently good in all areas. The governors are committed and supportive but some are new to their role. The governing body has a good understanding of the school's performance. The school provides good value for money.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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?	2
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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

16 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Strathmore Infant and Nursery School, Hitchin, SG5 1XR

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school and showing us your work. We enjoyed our visit and would like to tell you what we found out. Strathmore Infant and Nursery is a good school. Some areas of your school are excellent.

These are strengths of the school.

- You clearly enjoy school and take part in activities with great enthusiasm.
- The school is a friendly and pleasant place to be.
- Children in Nursery get off to a great start.
- Teaching is good, which is why you are making good progress.
- Teachers provide an interesting range of learning activities for you.
- You are friendly and polite and get on well with other pupils and adults.
- Your behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school.
- You show an excellent understanding of how to be fit and healthy.
- The school is well led and managed by the headteacher and other senior staff.
- Staff know you very well; they take care of you and give you excellent support.
- Your parents are very pleased with the care and education provided.

There are two things the school has been asked to improve.

- Sometimes you could have more opportunities to plan and organise your own work.
- Teachers should ensure that the lesson and your learning always move on at a good pace.

Finally, thank you once again for all your help. We wish you all the best for the future.

With kind regards

Derek Watts Lead inspector