

Smarden Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118380
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312914
Inspection date	20 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Alison Cartlidge

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	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	G Saunders
Headteacher	Russell Andrew M Thorne
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
School address	Pluckley Road Smarden Ashford TN27 8ND
Telephone number	01233 770316
Fax number	01233 770316

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: • provision and pupils' progress in mathematics • pupils' involvement in assessment • impact of senior leaders and governors • the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. Evidence was gathered from discussions with pupils, members of staff and governors, observations of teaching and learning, views of parents, scrutiny of pupils' work and school documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Pupils come to this smaller-than-average-sized primary school from the village of Smarden and the surrounding area. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The school has a broadly average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Pupils thoroughly enjoy attending this satisfactory school because the good curriculum is varied and interesting. The school is particularly successful in encouraging pupils to become involved in activities beyond the school and consequently, pupils' contribution towards the community is outstanding. For example, the pupils made a professional presentation using ICT, helping the village to become Kent village of the year. In addition, pupils take an active part in environmental improvements, including recycling and the school travel plan.

Across the school, teaching is satisfactory with good features, enabling the vast majority of pupils to make at least satisfactory progress. Members of staff are caring and a calm and cheerful atmosphere helps Reception children settle into school life quickly and make a sound start to their education. On entry to the school, the large majority of children are working within the levels expected for this age group. Broadly average standards are maintained across the school, representing satisfactory achievement and preparing the pupils satisfactorily for the next stage of their education. By the end of Year 6, standards in English are higher than those in mathematics and science. This is because pupils make good progress in learning to read. All classes promote basic reading skills effectively and parents support younger children especially well.

In mathematics, teachers do not always match work closely enough to the diverse range of learning needs in each class. As a result, the pace of learning slows at times because the work is either too hard or too easy for some of the pupils. The school has started to take effective action to rectify this, and senior leaders are working to ensure that provision is consistent across the school. There are some missed opportunities in science lessons to extend pupils' non-fiction writing by writing independently about their findings and ideas.

Teachers are successful in making lessons interesting by providing a variety of purposeful, practical tasks. ICT is used especially well across the curriculum by teachers and by the pupils. For example, pupils used interesting computer programmes to improve their French in preparation for their forthcoming residential visit to France and used video conferencing to discuss their story writing with an author.

Good pastoral care and support enable pupils to make good progress in their personal development. They learn good manners and are keen to help one another. They have a good understanding about how to stay safe when using the computer and about how to avoid other dangers. Members of staff know pupils well and ensure that procedures for safeguarding them are fully in place. Pupils typically make comments such as 'everyone is polite and friendly' and 'teachers help us when we have concerns'. The school is working well with external agencies to help a few families with poor attendance and, as a result, whilst attendance is slightly below average, it is improving well.

Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in the way they respect others and the environment. For example, a child in the Reception class understood that a picture of a Hindu god was 'very special'. Pupils share the vegetables they have grown in their school gardens with senior citizens in the village and raise funds for children in a children's home in India. They behave well and feel safe at school. They describe behaviour as being 'mainly good' and cooperate with each other sensibly. Pupils appreciate the good opportunities for taking part in clubs and visits. They lead healthy lifestyles by taking part in many sporting activities and by eating fruit snacks.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Teachers frequently assess pupils' progress, but do not always ensure that pupils take notice of written comments. Consequently, some pupils are not clear enough about what they need to learn next so that they can improve their work quickly.

Satisfactory leadership and management ensure that the school continues to improve at a steady rate. Improved assessment systems in English and mathematics are having a positive impact on improving pupils' rate of progress across the school, demonstrating that the school has a sound capacity to improve further. Satisfactory systems for self-evaluation enable leaders to have a clear understanding of what works well and how the school needs to be improved. The school sets and achieves realistic targets for the end of Year 6. Senior members of staff and governors are aware of the need to set more challenging targets across the school and to monitor provision more closely so that it is more consistent.

Most parents are pleased with the work of the school. Two parents summed up the positive views of many others by describing the school as, 'a school with a big heart' and 'a happy and important centre of our rural community'. These comments exemplify what the school does particularly well.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children in the Reception class make satisfactory progress, and standards are broadly average when they start in Year 1. Children do especially well in learning letter sounds and how to read. Teaching is satisfactory with good features. Members of staff are caring and are good at managing behaviour. They provide a good curriculum with plenty of chances for children to work outside and to choose their own activities. There are some occasions when members of staff do not move children's learning forward quickly by asking challenging questions as they work. Children enjoy taking part in activities such as counting rhymes, although there are fewer free-choice mathematical activities than those to support language development. Children are happy and confident. They are keen to explore the interesting activities that support their good knowledge and understanding of the world such as working in the 'digging pits'. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior members of staff are aware that there is a need to fully evaluate information on how well children are doing to check their progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Meet pupils' differing learning needs more accurately in mathematics.
- Increase pupils' involvement in assessing and improving their learning, especially in providing clearer guidance on what they need to do to improve.
- Set more challenging targets across the school and monitor effectively to ensure consistent provision. 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.

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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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

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

21 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Smarden Primary School, Ashford TN27 8ND

Thank you for welcoming me to your school and for sharing your work with me. I am pleased that you thoroughly enjoy your time at school. I found that it is providing you with a satisfactory education.

- Here are some other points about your school:
 - you make satisfactory progress, although some of you could do better in mathematics
 - you behave sensibly and take responsibility well. I was particularly impressed with the way you helped Smarden to become Kent village of the year
 - teaching is satisfactory and your teachers help you to enjoy school by making lessons interesting
 - you study a good range of topics and I am pleased that you learn good ICT skills and how to speak French
 - all adults in school are kind and caring and look after you well
 - your headteacher, teachers and governors are putting things in place to make the school better
 - your parents and carers are pleased that you come to this school.
 - What I have asked your school to do now:
 - make sure that your work in mathematics is neither too hard, nor too easy
 - involve you more in checking how well you are doing and improving, especially in providing you with clear guidance on what you need to do to improve your work
 - set you challenging targets and check to make sure that you do well in all subjects and classes.
 - What you can do to help your teachers:
 - check your work for mistakes and take notice of advice from your teachers on how to improve.
- I thoroughly enjoyed talking with you about your work and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alison Cartlidge Lead Inspector

21 May 2008

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What you can do to help your teachers:

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Yours sincerely

Alison Cartlidge
Lead Inspector