

South Avenue Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118439
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312940
Inspection dates	21–22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Eileen Chadwick

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Watton
Headteacher	Lesley Murray
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	South Avenue Sittingbourne ME10 4SU
Telephone number	01795 472878
Fax number	01795 439218

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

South Avenue Infant School is of average size and serves a mixed area. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Their needs are wide ranging and include language, literacy, emotional and behavioural difficulties as well as physical disabilities. The school has gained the Healthy Schools, ActiveMark and Eco Schools awards. Since the previous inspection there has been a change of headteacher and an almost completely new governing body. The school shares its site with the junior school and a privately run nursery. On site, there are also privately run clubs for before and after school which provide wrap around care for pupils from the infant and junior schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It is improving and standards are rising. Pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. There are good opportunities for them to develop their sporting skills. High levels of care and nurturing result in pupils' good personal development and behaviour. Pupils enjoy school and grow in confidence as they go through school. Parents are very pleased with their children's progress and one expressed the views of many in saying, 'I am very pleased with the way my child has progressed at the school and staff are always there for my child's needs.' Central to the school's success is the very good leadership of the headteacher, who is ably supported by senior staff and governors.

Children make a good start in Reception, including in literacy and numeracy. Their excellent progress in developing their speaking skills prepares them well for entry to Year 1. Progress is good overall in Years 1 and 2 and, by the end of Year 2, standards are average overall, although they are above average in mathematics. This represents good achievement compared with pupils' starting points. New assessment arrangements and systems for improving teaching have played a significant part in raising standards and there are rigorous programmes for helping pupils who are in danger of falling behind to make up lost ground. Average and higher attaining pupils achieve particularly well but occasionally progress slows for lower attaining pupils when work does not fully build on their previous skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the effective support they are given. The school works closely with other agencies to provide specialist help and support where needed.

Teaching is lively and captures pupils' interest and much of it is good. However, there are still a few inconsistencies when work is not so well matched to the needs of lower attaining pupils. The curriculum is broad with a good balance between the direct teaching of skills and developing pupils' creativity. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including plenty of sport and art.

Provision for care, support and guidance is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is fostered through a well thought out programme of assemblies, visits and other events. Pupils come to appreciate how regular exercise and a healthy diet help their bodies grow strong. Close partnerships with other schools, the community and outside agencies underpin pupils' well-being and achievement.

Strong evaluation systems help the school to accurately identify its strengths and weaker areas. Demanding targets have been set for most pupils but, in Year 1, these targets do not always fully build on children's standards at the end of Reception. The school is already working to build greater continuity in children's learning across Reception and Year 1 by using assessment data better. However, it is aware that it has not yet done enough. The school's successful track record of improvement since the last inspection, allied to good self-evaluation and keen sense of purpose, means that it has a good capacity to continue to move forward.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school with abilities that are below the level expected, especially in their communication and personal skills: a significant minority have very limited skills in these areas. Staff provide high standards of care and have an excellent focus on developing children's language and personal skills and this enables children to make a good start. Children's literacy

and numeracy skills are well supported in the context of a broad, practical and interesting curriculum. Children make good progress in all areas of learning, and by the time they begin Year 1, most have reached the expected levels, including in literacy and numeracy. Few, however, achieve at higher levels so standards overall are still somewhat below average. The quality of teaching is good, although there is some variability. Some is excellent when children of all abilities learn rapidly but, occasionally, reading tasks are rather hard for lower attaining children and then their progress slows. A good balance is struck between the more formal, adult led activities and those children select for themselves. There are some excellent role-play opportunities for supporting creative and personal development. The Foundation Stage is very well led and the staff are a close-knit and effective team. Provision has been improved in recent years and standards on entry to Year 1 are rising. Good assessment and record keeping enable close monitoring of children's progress. The school has developed very good links with parents and pre-schools.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching and raise achievement for lower attaining pupils by making sure their literacy work always builds on their existing skills.
- Make sure that academic targets for Year 1 build securely on children's attainment at the end of Reception.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' overall achievement is good. Pupils enter school with skills that are below those usual for their age and leave having reached average standards overall and above average standards in mathematics. Children make good progress in Reception though standards are still rather below average on entry to Year 1, as there is little attainment at higher levels. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and, in these years, the school is particularly effective in raising the proportions reaching higher levels. Initiatives to improve writing are paying dividends and, by the time pupils leave, many write neatly and fluently for different purposes and spell well. However, in Reception and Years 1 and 2, progress occasionally slows for lower attaining pupils when their literacy tasks are too hard.

Standards for Year 2 steadily improved over the past few years but there was a dip last year. This cohort of pupils did not achieve so well when in Reception and joined Year 1 with weak attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy. Progress in Reception has been much improved so children now enter Year 1 better prepared for their future education. Much good teaching in Key Stage 1 and 'catch up' programmes are driving up standards so, where necessary, pupils make up lost ground.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Relationships at all levels are excellent and pupils feel valued and know that adults have their best interests at heart. Pupils understand what is expected of them, behave well and work cooperatively with others. They are enthusiastic about school and quickly become involved in their activities. They usually concentrate very well although, despite the strong support provided, a few occasionally find this difficult. Strategies to deal with this are consistently applied and minimize any disruption to the learning of others. Pupils eagerly join in with the rich opportunities for exercise in class and after school. They say they feel safe because they can

talk to adults in school should they have a problem. Pupils make a good contribution to the community. The school council is active and its views are valued. Pupils help to raise money for charities and their eco-awareness activities include litter patrols, recycling and energy conservation. The school rigorously promotes good attendance and this is mainly successful but, despite the school's strenuous efforts, a few families do not send their children to school regularly enough. Pupils are well prepared for their future because they make good progress in basic skills and develop their problem solving and decision making skills

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In the Foundation Stage, teachers provide a good balance between direct teaching by adults and allowing children to explore and work creatively and independently. Throughout the school, classrooms are attractive and positive learning environments. Lessons are interesting and teachers engage pupils well by their question and answer techniques. They explain lesson purposes clearly and pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Consequently, pupils enjoy learning and are pleased with their successes. Teachers have clear expectations of behaviour and pupils are usually keen and attentive. However, occasionally, work does not build well enough on the previous skills of lower attaining pupils, so the pace of their learning slows. Teachers' planning is good but at times they do not have enough regard for pupils' prior attainment. Teaching assistants are very well briefed, provide skilful support and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum for the youngest children is very well organised with lively learning activities both inside and outdoors. In Years 1 and 2, there is a strong focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills within the context of a broad and relevant curriculum. The comprehensive programme for promoting pupils' personal, social and emotional development contributes greatly to their achievement. Links between subjects are developing well and art and design is used to help pupils learn in other subjects. A very good range of enrichment activities through visits, visitors and after-school clubs enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment of school. There is good liaison with other schools, for example in sport, to develop pupils' skills. The school is beginning to improve the transition between Reception and Year 1 but realises that it has not yet done enough to secure consistently good progress in basic skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and well understood by staff. The school works very closely with outside agencies to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and to secure good attendance. There are very effective arrangements for helping those who join the school with speech, physical, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Good links with parents encourage pupils' achievement and well-being. Academic guidance is good. Assessment systems are thorough and school leaders use these rigorously for evaluating pupils' progress. Class teachers are also involved in analysing the impact of their provision on achievement. However, there is still some inconsistency in making sure assessments

at the end of Reception are used to plan the next steps in learning as children enter Year 1. Children's personal target setting is becoming established and children can usually say what they need to do to improve

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has skilfully established a strong team spirit across the whole staff and this has secured a very positive and cooperative working environment. She is very capably supported by the deputy headteacher and governors. Senior leaders work well together, undertaking monitoring, promoting good practice and providing good quality support. The senior team has been restructured and thorough management systems enable staff to take responsibilities for subjects and key aspects across the school. A few more recently appointed subject leaders are currently receiving training to enable them to play a fuller part in monitoring teaching. Procedures for tracking pupils' progress and evaluating assessments are rigorous. Target setting is demanding for most pupils. Governors are well led by a knowledgeable chair and they are active in both supporting and challenging the school. The school improvement plan focuses on the correct priorities and initiatives are properly evaluated.

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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	3
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?	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	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

23 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of South Avenue Infant School, Sittingbourne, ME10 4SU

Many of you will remember that Mr Wakeman and I visited your school a little while ago. We were very impressed by the welcome you gave us and by your politeness. You were all keen to share your work and ideas. This letter is to tell you what we found out about your school.

First, you need to know you go to a good school. Your headteacher leads you all very well and all the staff are working hard to make the school even better.

- Your hard work and good teaching are paying off and you do well in your reading, writing and science and particularly in mathematics.
- Those of you in Reception get off to a good start.
- Everyone in the school takes good care of each other and your good behaviour helps to make your school a happy one.
- You have interesting things planned for you in lessons and good opportunities for sport and you really enjoy all your after school clubs.
- Many of you work hard to help others, for example the lunchtime helpers and the school council.
- You are doing a really good job in your eco work, for example, when you do litter patrols and recycling.

We have asked your school to improve two things.

- For those of you who find reading and writing difficult, make sure your work is never too hard.
- Make sure your work at the beginning of Year 1 always builds on what you have learned in Reception.

I hope you will continue to work hard in all you do so you get better and better. I wish you every success in the future.

With very best wishes

Eileen Chadwick Lead inspector