

St Stephen's Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118538
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312980
Inspection date	11 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Sudworth

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	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Gilbey
Headteacher	Gill Mansfield
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2004
School address	Hales Drive St Stephens Canterbury CT2 7AB
Telephone number	01227 769204
Fax number	01227 787493

Age group	4-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school with a particular focus on: the quality of assessment systems and their use; inclusion and the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and pupils' progress in mathematics and science compared to that in reading and writing. Other aspects of the school were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's assessments given in its self-evaluation were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, the vice-chair of the governing body, various staff and pupils. Parents' questionnaires were analysed. Visits were made to lessons. Work samples and a range of documents and data were examined.

Description of the school

Most pupils at this three form entry infant school are of White British background, but approximately one in eight is from a different ethnic background. The number of pupils who speak a language other than English as their first language has been increasing. Just over 10% are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around the national average. The number of pupils who join or leave the school at times other than the usual ones is higher than that normally found. Most pupils have attended some form of pre-school provision before entry at age four. The school has gained several local and national awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Stephen's Infant School is a good school with several outstanding features, including the excellent provision in the Foundation Stage. It has made very good progress since the last inspection under the excellent leadership of its headteacher. She commands a very high level of respect from parents, staff and pupils. Parents are united in their high opinion of the school. Pupils make good progress overall in this happy and very well run school, especially in mathematics. The children find learning fun. As one parent says, 'My children always have something to look forward to, to be excited about and something to be involved in. It is an exciting place to be a child and to learn.'

The headteacher has very high expectations. She has built a committed team of staff who work diligently and imaginatively in the pupils' interests. Staff are warm and approachable. They provide a welcoming environment for children and their parents. Their care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. As a result, pupils feel secure and develop a lot of self-confidence. Reception children, for example, quickly acquire independence in learning. Care arrangements also extend to parents who really appreciate the family liaison officer's well organised 'drop in' sessions which provide them with friendly advice and support during times of difficulty. Links with other professional agencies are excellent. Child protection procedures are very secure. The school has developed very good systems to track pupils' progress across the school. Consequently, staff know the pupils' capabilities very well. Record keeping is thorough. Staff use it very well to plan for pupils' individual needs.

Pupils' attainment when they start school is below expectations, particularly in language and literacy. Achievement by Year 2 in mathematics is a real strength. For several years, pupils have reached an above average standard in the subject. A number of factors account for this. Pupils present their work neatly. There is a good range of mathematical activities, including interesting ones involving the use of data. Work is challenging and matched well to pupils' capabilities. The subject is very well led. Parents borrow mathematical games from the school to play with their children at home, which consolidates their children's learning. Teachers exemplify how homework is to be tackled so that there is clarity about which calculation method is to be used and so homework helps to reinforce what pupils have learnt in mathematics lessons.

Pupils' attainment in reading and writing has not shown the same degree of consistency as in mathematics over time and has been broadly average, but represents good progress given their attainment on entry. Results in national assessments rose in 2007. Overall, they were above average, but below average in writing and about average in reading. They remained strong in mathematics and staff's focus on science led to big improvements in the standard reached. The school is focusing closely throughout its work on improving pupils' progress in reading and writing. For example, parents of Reception children really appreciated the recent workshops that dealt with the school's approach to these aspects of learning when children first enter.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those with English as an additional language is well organised. These pupils usually make good progress, although their progress in reading and writing, as with other pupils, is not as strong as in mathematics. Intervention programmes, which were mainly focused on pupils in Year 2, have now been brought in earlier for pupils in Year 1 and are beginning to pay dividends in pupils' better progress in reading and writing.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The pupils develop into concerned and considerate individuals. They set their own class and school rules. For their age, they have an outstanding awareness of global citizenship because of the school's enthusiasm in this area. Pupils discuss issues, such as Fairtrade, with a good understanding. They are very environmentally aware, practising recycling techniques and keeping their environment free from litter. Pupils use organic approaches when they tend the school garden plots. They have a well developed appreciation of the needs of others and raise money for a wide range of charities, such as Guide Dogs for the Blind. Members of the school council are involved in interviewing arrangements for new staff. The school arranges for clothes to be sent to India and has sent recycled furniture to a school in Ghana. Pupils are keenly involved in the local community. For example, they use the flowers they have grown to produce displays for Canterbury in Bloom. Attendance is broadly average but adversely affected by some parents who take holidays during term time.

Teaching is often fun and challenging. Pupils throughout the school contribute readily to lessons because they know that their efforts are valued. Their behaviour is exemplary and pupils show a real zest for learning. Very positive relationships between staff and pupils ensure that time is used well and lessons proceed smoothly. The commitment of staff is evident in the wide range of extra activities which the pupils really appreciate, tennis being a strong feature of this provision. Pupils have a clear appreciation of safe living and know the importance of eating fruit and vegetables and taking exercise for a healthy lifestyle. In each class, short daily meditation sessions and 'brain gym' activities and exercises help them to put this understanding into practice. The staff provide colourful and attractive learning environments but reading corners in some classes do not attract pupils to books sufficiently well.

The school has made good progress in developing the curriculum by getting pupils to learn some of their English skills whilst studying history or geography. Teachers recognise that there is still more to do in trialling this approach to developing pupils' writing and reading skills. Visitors to the school and visits to places of interest, such as to the local environmental centre, add richness to the curriculum. Pupils in Year 1 dressed up in medieval costume on a visit to Leeds Castle as part of their history studies. Staff are gaining in expertise and becoming more aware of the possibilities of modern technology, such as interactive whiteboards, which have been installed in their classrooms. Specialist music teaching adds a good dimension to pupils' experiences, with some pupils attending 'World Music' as an after school activity.

Leadership and management are good. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities well. Some governors visit regularly and gain a good understanding of the school's strengths and its areas for development. Subject leaders have good systems for monitoring progress and standards through sampling work. The school's self-evaluation is extremely accurate and recognises the further improvements that can be made in reading and writing. The school has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

There is a wide range of ability among children entering the Foundation Stage, but attainment is generally below expectations overall. The children make excellent progress in the Foundation Stage. Attainment levels rose in 2007 under the excellent guidance of the Foundation Stage leader. Most children reached, or came close to, the expectations for the end of the Reception year. Several children exceeded them. High quality teaching engages the children fully in their learning. In one lesson, the children received a letter to ask them to compose a potion for a fairy which had shrunk. With support, children worked eagerly to write or discuss their potion.

The fairy, in the guise of the teacher, appeared at the end of the lesson to ask the children what had been happening to her. The approach brought out the children's expressive language skills very effectively and clearly promoted their eagerness to write. Children experience a careful balance of self-chosen tasks and those guided by the teachers. Assessment arrangements are very thorough and used most effectively to match work to individual needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rate of progress in reading and writing to equal that made in mathematics.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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	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?	1

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	1
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

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

Thank you for your friendliness when I visited your school. I found you to be very polite and your behaviour was excellent. I was most interested to see your work and to visit you in lessons. I enjoyed talking to you and learning about what you do in your school. You make good progress in your work overall, but you do better in mathematics than in reading and writing. I have asked the school to help you progress as quickly in reading and writing as you do in mathematics. I know that the teachers are already working hard to help you do this.

Your parents think that you attend a good school and I agree with them. Some things in the school are outstanding. Your development as young people is excellent. I was most impressed with your understanding of Fairtrade and organic gardening and your concern for the environment. You are extremely well cared for and the staff value each one of you. You enjoy your lessons very much and look forward to school. Your headteacher is doing a really good job. She is well supported by the staff and they work well as a team. They make your lessons really enjoyable and your classrooms colourful and interesting. The school governors take much interest in the school to support the staff.

Thank you once again for your friendly welcome and help. I wish you all well for the rest of your time in the infants and on into the juniors. I hope that you will continue to work hard and enjoy school. I am sure that you will.



11 December 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of St Stephen's Infant School, Canterbury, CT2 7AB

Thank you for your friendliness when I visited your school. I found you to be very polite and your behaviour was excellent. I was most interested to see your work and to visit you in lessons. I enjoyed talking to you and learning about what you do in your school. You make good progress in your work overall, but you do better in mathematics than in reading and writing. I have asked the school to help you progress as quickly in reading and writing as you do in mathematics. I know that the teachers are already working hard to help you do this.

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Thank you once again for your friendly welcome and help. I wish you all well for the rest of your time in the infants and on into the juniors. I hope that you will continue to work hard and enjoy school. I am sure that you will.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sudworth
Lead inspector