

Stone St Mary's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118596
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313006
Inspection dates	11–12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Gulshanbir Kayembe

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alaric Bonthron
Headteacher	Susan Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	14 September 2006
School address	Hayes Road Horns Cross Greenhithe DA9 9EF
Telephone number	01322 382292
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves a residential area of Greenhithe. Pupils start with a broad range of attainment but the overall attainment on entry is in line with national expectations. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly above average and the proportion with a statement of special educational need is below. About 21% of pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Most of the 9% of pupils who do not speak English as their first language are at the early stages of learning English. The school has been successful in achieving the Healthy School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory, and rapidly improving, education for its pupils. Learning and personal development are carefully nurtured and vibrant displays throughout the school inspire pupils' interest.

In accordance with section 13 of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement as identified in its previous inspection.

Standards are now in line with national averages by Year 6. This signals significant improvement in the short time since the last inspection when standards were very low. Children now meet national expectations at the end of the Foundation Stage. The improvements are down to good leadership and management. The headteacher, in particular, has been a key driving force for change. Her unstinting focus on raising standards has been very effective. She is well supported by members of the senior management team who also provide good leadership in their own areas of responsibility. Governors are well informed and actively involved in the work of the school, representing another significant improvement since the last inspection. The school's track record in improvement speaks for itself and, coupled with very well developed systems for checking the quality of its work, points to good capacity for continued improvement.

Achievement is satisfactory, including in the Foundation Stage and Years 3 to 6, where it was inadequate at the time of the last inspection. Many pupils in Years 5 and 6 now make good progress enabling them to make up for past underachievement. Similarly, many in Years 1 and 2 also make good progress. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties has dropped dramatically over the last year due to improved provision. Many of these pupils have made up for lost ground in literacy and numeracy and no longer need additional support. Standards in science are rising fast because pupils now have good opportunities for practical work. Pupils' writing is improving, although there are still weaknesses in the quality of written work especially for boys and pupils generally in Years 3 and 4. Many pupils find it difficult to express ideas in writing and to structure them coherently. Handwriting is also weak. The school has a number of new, and planned, initiatives to address the issues in pupils' writing but these are not yet fully established.

Teaching is satisfactory and has improved well over the last year. Many lessons are well taught especially in Years 5 and 6, and in Years 1 and 2. However, opportunities are missed at times to provide sufficiently challenging work for able pupils and the pace of learning in some lessons is slow. Many teachers ask good questions to stimulate discussion, but do not always probe enough. Whilst teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory, there are not enough opportunities for children to learn through well structured practical activities.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy school, becoming increasingly mature and responsible as they get older. Behaviour is good and pupils develop good social skills. They are well looked after and receive good quality support that enhances their personal development. Hence, pupils feel safe and grow in confidence. A sound curriculum has some good features that support pupils' personal development well.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision has improved well since the last inspection when it was inadequate and is now satisfactory. Planning is better and the curriculum is now satisfactory. Displays are vibrant and

interesting and teachers establish good relationships with children. Computers are readily available and children are encouraged to think carefully about activities they choose to do. Although activities now better match children's needs, practical work is not always structured carefully enough to ensure children get as much out of it as they could. Nor are practical activities, including in the outside area, always used enough to support learning. Nonetheless, good opportunities for personal development promote children's social skills well. Children learn to take turns, work with others, and share resources. Whilst progress is regularly assessed, records do not always identify sharply enough what the children have learned.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by ensuring the initiatives already begun are followed through and consistently applied across the school.
- Develop teaching further by making questioning more probing, and improving the challenge for more able pupils and the pace of lessons.
- Improve the quality and frequency of practical activities in the Foundation Stage.

A small proportion of 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

The results of national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2007 were below average. However, the trend of improvement in Year 6 results over the last three years is strong and standards have improved from very low in 2005 to average in the current Year 6. Results of national assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2007 were average in reading, writing and mathematics and show steady improvement on previous results. Current standards in Year 2, although still broadly within national averages, show further improvement and are edging towards being above average. Achievement is now satisfactory and beginning to accelerate, especially where teaching is good. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in each stage is steadily increasing. The achievement of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those with English as an additional language, and pupils with learning difficulties is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school greatly and are very positive about their learning. They are polite and courteous, including to one another. Pupils are safety conscious and confident that staff will support them should any problems arise. Attendance has improved. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and wider community, more so than at the time of the last inspection. They readily carry out responsibilities, such as school councillors and peer mediators, and the choir regularly represents the school in local community events.

Pupils have a clear understanding of how to live healthy lives. They participate enthusiastically in the good opportunities provided for exercise and sport. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good and well supported by the school's Christian ethos. Their understanding of the cultural diversity in society is less strong. Personal skills, such as self confidence, are well developed, although pupils have fewer opportunities to demonstrate initiative in their

work. Pupils' satisfactory academic progress is sound preparation for future life, representing good improvement since the last inspection.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

All teaching is now at least satisfactory. The amount of good teaching has increased since the last inspection, especially in some year groups, and some is outstanding. Teachers make pupils aware of what they are learning and why, and this contributes well towards the understanding of their work. Explanations are usually clear. Teachers often ask good questions, but pupils are not always given the opportunity to explain fully their understanding. At times, able pupils are not challenged enough. In most lessons, good use is made of pair work to help pupils clarify their ideas through discussion. Sometimes, introductions to lessons are too long or activities not stimulating enough, hence slowing the pace of learning. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning because they are usually well informed and usefully deployed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

A sound curriculum for literacy and numeracy is being enhanced by many new and worthwhile developments such as cross-curricular topics. These are proving popular with pupils adding to their enjoyment of learning. The school is in the process of adapting the curriculum to better cater for weaknesses in pupils' writing. Some strategies have been introduced already. Those planned include use of good examples of writing for pupils to learn from. The school acknowledges the need to create more opportunities for using computers in subjects to improve learning and is in the process of doing this.

The needs of pupils' with learning difficulties and disabilities are carefully analysed, and curricular provision adjusted to help them. Additional provision has enabled many pupils to address their learning difficulties successfully. The wide range of outings, residential visits and clubs makes a good contribution to pupils' confidence and personal growth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good pastoral support contributes to the strong sense of community enabling pupils to make good progress in most aspects of their personal development. Appropriate systems ensure pupils' health and safety. Risk assessments are thorough and child protection procedures secure. Good links with external agencies ensure pupils' needs are met especially those most vulnerable. The school's investment in a family liaison officer exemplifies its commitment to involving parents in their children's education. Parents are very supportive, 'I am very impressed with this school, and very happy with my child's academic, emotional and social development.'

Many new measures to guide pupils' learning have been effective in raising standards. Pupils now know their targets and how to achieve them. However, targets are not yet fully tailored to reflect the accelerating progress of individuals. Written comments in books identify clearly when pupils achieve key milestones, but are less consistent in guiding pupils on how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has established very clear goals for the future direction of the school. Having taken up her post a year before the previous inspection, the headteacher had started to address the school's weaknesses and to build its capacity to improve. Since then her tireless energy and determination have enabled the school to accelerate progress further, rightly focusing on raising standards. There is good teamwork amongst staff and a clear sense of direction. Staff are very willing to adopt new ideas and, indeed, make suggestions themselves for ways of improving pupils' progress. Senior staff are empowered to take the lead in their areas enabling the school to accelerate the pace of change. The quality of self-evaluation is good and there is good involvement of senior staff, including the literacy, numeracy and science coordinators, in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. The roles of other subject leaders are not yet as fully developed. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are mostly robust. Very effective use of information from monitoring has enabled the school to improve its work, including teaching. Governors are now much more actively involved in monitoring and evaluation than at the time of the last inspection.

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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	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	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	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?	3
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?	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	3
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

14 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stone St Mary's C of E Primary School, Greenhithe DA9 9EF

We enjoyed visiting your school and particularly enjoyed our visits to lessons and talking to you about your work and views of the school. Thank you for making us feel welcome. The school provides you with a sound education so you make satisfactory progress during your time here. It has improved considerably since the last inspection because it is well led and managed. Good provision for your personal development means you develop good personal and social skills. Teaching is satisfactory and improving. You are well cared for and looked after but could do with a bit more guidance on how to make your work better. We have listed below some of the good things we found.

- You behave well and enjoy taking an active part in all the school has to offer.
- The displays in all areas of the school are vibrant and colourful and make you want to learn.
- Many of you make good progress especially in Years 5 and 6 and in Years 1 and 2.
- You enjoy the good range of visits and visitors that you are provided with.
- Your headteacher and staff work well together on your behalf and standards are rising rapidly.
- The school has agreed to focus on the following things to help it improve:
 - developing your writing skills so that you are more confident about using a wide vocabulary and paragraphs to organise your ideas
 - making sure that you are asked more probing questions in lessons, that the pace of work is faster and that work is set at the right level for those of you who find learning quite easy
 - providing more practical work in the Foundation Stage.

You can help too by continuing to work hard, making sure you attend regularly, and by asking your teachers how you can make your work even better.

We wish you all well for the future. Yours sincerely

Gulshan Kayembe Lead Inspector

Annex B

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Gulshan Kayembe
Lead Inspector