

Sissinghurst Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118717
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313061
Inspection date	19 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Barron

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	141
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Rice
Headteacher	Mike Cooke
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	The Street Sissinghurst Cranbrook TN17 2JG
Telephone number	01580 713895
Fax number	01580 715707

Age group	4-11
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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:

- The achievement of pupils throughout the school.
- The effectiveness of the school's provision for more able pupils, especially in regards to improving their achievement in writing.
- The quality of pupils' personal development and well-being, especially in regards to boys' behaviour and pupils' understanding of multicultural issues.

The inspector gathered evidence from discussions with pupils, staff and representatives of the governing body, observations of teaching and of pupils at work and at play, scrutiny of school documentation and self-evaluation, samples of pupils' work and an analysis of parent questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not inspected 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

This is a smaller than average village primary school. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. Very few have a first language other than English. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, as is the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need. Children enter school at the age of four with skills which are usually above those expected for their age, although their social skills are often less well developed. The school is presently housed in accommodation judged as unsatisfactory by the previous inspection. Work is scheduled to begin on a replacement school building later in the year.

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 provides a good education for pupils and prepares them well for the next stage of their education. The accommodation is old and cramped and was judged to be a barrier to learning by the previous inspection. It is to the credit of the staff that they have been able to continue to provide a good quality of education for pupils in such unsatisfactory surroundings. Parents appreciate this and value the good level of care the school provides for pupils. They appreciate how much their children enjoy school. This was summed up by one of the many positive comments in parents' questionnaires: 'Sissinghurst Primary is a happy, caring school. It is always a pleasure to see the children waving and running enthusiastically into their classrooms every morning.'

The quality of leadership and management is good at all levels. The headteacher is an effective leader who works well with staff and governors to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met. This has enabled the school to identify and sustain existing good practice and to address inconsistencies, for example improving the achievement of more able pupils in writing. Good leadership and management have been a key factor in ensuring the school has maintained the high standards reported by the previous inspection.

Consistently good teaching, linked to an interesting and well-balanced curriculum, ensures that pupils make good progress from the day they enter the school. Achievement is good in all year groups and, by Year 6, pupils attain standards well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils list information and communication technology (ICT) and design and technology amongst their favourite subjects. Evidence from lessons, pupils' books and work on display confirms that pupils achieve high standards in both these and other subjects. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for the very small number at the early stages of English language acquisition, is good. It enables these groups of pupils to make the same good progress as others.

Pupils have good attitudes to learning because teachers ensure that lessons cater effectively for the needs of all pupils in the school's mixed-age classes and that learning tasks are well matched to different abilities. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to ensure that pupils receive the support they need to make good progress. Teachers use a variety of approaches to make learning interesting and to make sure pupils work hard. As one pupil put it, 'Lessons are fun and you learn quite a lot.' Pupils work well and display a real feeling of achievement when they complete tasks successfully. Lessons are well structured, although there are occasions when not all pupils are involved in class discussions and, when this happens, a few sometimes lose interest and drift off task.

The school provides a good level of care, guidance and support for pupils and this is the basis for their good personal development and well-being. Pupils' health and well-being are safeguarded securely and child protection procedures meet current requirements. Pupils describe their school as a friendly place where adults make them feel wanted and where they feel safe and well looked after. They are confident there is always someone to turn to if they have a problem. Pupils say they enjoy school, although this is not reflected in their average rates of attendance. Most are courteous and always help others should the need arise. They have the confidence to engage in conversations with adults. The vast majority work and play well together and have a high regard for the safety and well-being of others. However, whilst the quality of pupils' behaviour is good and often outstanding in lessons, a small minority of older boys find

behaving well in the playground quite challenging. Several pupils voiced their concerns about this during the inspection and the issue was raised by a significant minority of parents in questionnaire returns.

Members of the school council say they are proud they are able to have a say in school affairs and take their responsibilities very seriously. Pupils have a good understanding of the need to make sensible and healthy choices. They appreciate the school provides them with a wide range of out-of-hours activities and talk enthusiastically about their involvement in netball and tag-rugby clubs. Pupils play a full and active role in the community and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. A wide variety of visitors to school and visits to places of interest, including residential trips to Hayling Island, is used well to build up their knowledge of the wider world. However, whilst the quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, pupils do not have regular opportunities to broaden their appreciation or knowledge of the diversities of cultures found in Britain today. As a result, their understanding of the multicultural nature of modern British society is not as well developed as other aspects of their cultural education.

This is a school which knows itself very well and demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is outstanding and reflects the enthusiasm of the staff and their keenness to ensure that the needs of all pupils are catered for well. The headteacher and staff have been thorough in regularly analysing the school's performance and in implementing improvements where needed. They have been well supported in this by the governing body, which offers the school a good level of support and challenge and fulfils its statutory duties well. Staff and governors have built up good relationships with parents, who are very proud of the school and appreciate that their views are regularly sought and acted upon. Links with external agencies are good and used well to support pupils' learning, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, although the school has developed and implemented very good procedures to track pupils' progress and to set challenging targets for improvement, the quality of teachers' marking is variable and does not always provide pupils with ideas about how to improve their work.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children achieve well in the Foundation Stage because of good teaching, which is linked effectively to a well-planned curriculum. The temporary classroom that younger children share with Year 1 pupils is well past its prime but the Foundation Stage teacher has worked wonders to ensure it is a colourful, vibrant place where children feel happy and safe. As a result, children eagerly engage in learning, whether working independently or in small groups. The teacher and teaching assistants work well together to ensure that lessons effectively blend independent learning with adult-directed tasks. Children requiring extra help are provided with the support they need in order to make the progress they are capable of. This is a key factor in ensuring that many children exceed the goals they are expected to reach in all areas of learning by the time they enter Year 1. A secure outdoor area is used well to help children build up the skills associated with outdoor play when the weather is fine. However, there is no outdoor covered area and this severely limits opportunities for outdoor activities during inclement weather.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers' marking consistently helps pupils to understand how to improve their work.

- Increase pupils' awareness and understanding of the multicultural nature of modern British society.
- Improve the behaviour of a small minority of older boys at break times and lunchtimes.

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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	1
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	3
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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sissinghurst Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Sissinghurst, TN17 2JG

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. Everyone was really friendly and I soon realised why you like your school so much. I enjoyed talking to some of you about your favourite activities and seeing you all working in lessons. Unfortunately, although nearly all of you behave very well, you are all aware that a very small number of older boys are letting the school down because they find behaving acceptably in the playground at break times and lunchtimes quite difficult.

Here are some of the things I particularly like about your school:

- This is a good school which prepares you well for the next stage of your education.
- The standards of your work are much higher than those in most schools. This shows that you are taught well and that you make good progress.
- You enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning.
- Your personal development is good and you have a clear understanding of how to live healthily and safely.
- Your headteacher, teachers and governors lead and manage the school well.
- Teachers and the other adults who work in the school care for you well and make sure you are always safe and well looked after.

I believe your headteacher and teachers can do something to make your school better and I have asked them to:

- Make sure that teachers' marking always gives you a clear idea about what you have to do to improve your work.
- Help you to gain a better understanding about the customs and traditions of people living in this country who are from different cultural backgrounds.
- Improve the behaviour of a small minority of older boys at break times and lunchtimes.

You can help your school to get even better by attending school as often as you possible can and by continuing to work hard.

I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Barron Lead inspector

19 March 2008

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