

Sutton-at-Hone CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118850
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313118
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Orpin

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	287
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat De Winton
Headteacher	David Smith
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2004
School address	Church Road Sutton-at-Hone Dartford DA4 9EX
Telephone number	01322 862147
Fax number	01322 863592

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sutton-at-Hone is a large Church of England primary school. Pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There are fewer girls than boys. The school's roll has fallen in recent years, but has increased in the last two years. There has been a period of instability because of a large budget deficit, changing staff and some changes in the governing body.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Sutton-at-Hone CE Primary School provides its pupils with a satisfactory and improving standard of education. It has been through a difficult period of change from which it is now emerging and, in the last year, there have been some significant areas of improvement. Overall standards when pupils start school are similar to those normally expected. Achievement is satisfactory and, by the end of Years 2 and 6, standards are average. Mathematics is an area in which pupils' achievement has improved throughout the school because of better teaching in this subject.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Pupils are confident, caring and enjoy school. Attendance has improved significantly. It is now average because of the school's improved action to reduce absence. Pupils behave well, feel safe, know how to stay healthy and understand the importance of exercise. Pupils contribute well, both in school and in the wider community, through local events and fund raising. They undertake a good range of responsibilities around the school, but there are too few opportunities for them to demonstrate their initiative in lessons.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Adults offer encouragement, so pupils want to learn. Teachers manage their pupils' behaviour well and most lessons are interesting. However, sometimes the introductions to lessons are too long and the work for more able pupils too easy. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly, but the usefulness of their comments varies between classes. The curriculum is satisfactory and enriched well. The emphasis on literacy and numeracy has improved achievement and teachers are beginning to make links between subjects, but this is still at an early stage. The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. Pupils' safety and security are generally cared for soundly. Parents are supportive of the work of the school but some are concerned about the level of supervision at lunchtimes and playtimes, which the school has plans to improve. There are good support systems for pupils who are vulnerable. Academic guidance for pupils is satisfactory, although assessments do not always make it clear to pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The monitoring of teaching is detailed and accurate, but teaching has been slow to improve. Subject leaders do not all have a clear understanding of how to improve the consistency and quality of teaching in their subjects. Data showing pupils' progress are analysed carefully and the school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. School targets are adequately challenging and based on pupils' previous attainment. The governance of the school is satisfactory and governors are developing their role. They work closely with the headteacher and recognise that they sometimes need to ask more challenging questions in order to help the school to do its best for the pupils.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Adults' clear knowledge and understanding of the needs of this age group are evident in the well-planned curriculum, effective procedures to monitor and assess progress, and the stimulating learning environment, all of which are managed well. Children make good progress in all areas of learning from a starting point that is broadly similar to other children of their age. Nearly all children currently in Reception are on track to reach expected levels by the time they move into Year 1, with nearly a third working at levels above expectation. This represents

significant improvement on children's achievements in previous years. From their first days in school, children are given effective grounding in their personal development, providing a good foundation for their future years. Children benefit from good teaching and a range of interesting and purposeful activities across all areas of learning. Such tasks link well with early stages of the National Curriculum and provide a good balance between teacher-directed activities and those children choose themselves. The outdoor area is extensive, but staff do not always make the best use of it because it is not well enough equipped.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by improving the overall quality of teaching, ensuring that work is not too easy for all pupils.
- Strengthen leadership and management by developing the expertise of subject leaders and the ability of governors to provide more challenge to help make further gains in pupils' achievement.
- Give pupils clearer guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and more opportunities to use their initiative.

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.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards in both Years 2 and 6 are average and pupils are now making satisfactory progress throughout the school. This represents an improvement since 2007, when the achievement of Year 6 pupils was unsatisfactory. In Years 1 and 2, pupils are achieving above average standards and are making good progress in mathematics, but more able pupils are not achieving as well as they might in writing.

Pupils' progress in reading is consistent through the school, but in writing and mathematics, pupils' progress slows in Years 3 and 4, accelerating in Years 5 and 6, especially in mathematics. In the current Year 6, there is an increased proportion of more able pupils attaining higher standards. There is little difference in the achievement of boys and girls, representing the successful reversal of boys' underachievement in 2007. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils behave well, are confident and readily offer their opinions and ideas. Pupils value each other and have a good sense of right and wrong. They work and play together well, and bullying is extremely rare. Pupils have a good understanding of their own culture, but are less well prepared for life in a diverse society. Pupils know how to stay healthy and keep safe, as reflected in most of their lunchtime choices and their keen participation in physical education. Pupils really enjoy school. They readily undertake responsibilities and show initiative around the school, such as being members of the school council or playground buddies, and demonstrate their initiative, but they are less independent in lessons because they are given too few opportunities. Pupils' ability to work constructively with others and their satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy mean they are soundly prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Throughout the school, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and their encouragement helps to motivate pupils to want to learn. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to present new ideas to pupils, although they are not yet widely used interactively. Teachers generally make the purpose of the lesson clear to pupils and plan interesting tasks. Teaching assistants usually make a good contribution, although at times they are too passive during whole class teaching. At times, teachers' questions are too broad or directed at individual pupils, so they do not help all pupils learn. Generally, teachers are planning suitable activities for pupils' differing needs, especially in mathematics but, sometimes, their expectations for more able pupils are too low. Some teachers tend to talk for too long, especially when introducing the lesson, so there is reduced time for pupil activity. Homework is not set consistently in all classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra activities, trips and visitors. There is a clear emphasis on teaching literacy and numeracy that has led to improved achievement. However, in some subjects, such as science, too many worksheets are used, and this limits pupils' opportunities for extended writing and investigation. Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) has improved considerably, and is beginning to be used as a tool for learning in other subjects. Links between subjects are being developed but are still at an early stage. A comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE), supported by residential visits and work related to gaining 'Healthy School' status, contributes well to pupils' strong personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides a safe, supportive learning environment that effectively nurtures pupils' personal development and well-being. Pupils know who to go to if they have any worries and they are confident to do so. Procedures to ensure their safety are robust and regular safety checks are made. However, sometimes there are too few adults supervising the playground at lunchtime, which the school has plans to improve. There are good programmes of support for children joining the school and preparing Year 6 pupils for secondary education. The school has successfully improved attendance and links with external agencies are satisfactory, especially providing support for pupils with emotional or behavioural difficulties. For example, counselling is available to pupils if they have any confidential worries. Pupils' academic guidance is satisfactory. Their progress is regularly assessed, and this information is used well to provide additional help to pupils, but it does not always indicate how pupils can improve their work. Targets are not sufficiently specific and marking is not informative enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides good leadership and clear direction for the work of the school. He has reversed a deficit budget and has put the school on a firm financial basis. Improved systems are in place to monitor all aspects of the school's work, and there have been improvements in the teaching of mathematics, in pupils' overall achievement and in attendance. These show the school's satisfactory capacity to improve. The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement, although this is not fully understood by all teachers. The school development plan clearly identifies areas to be improved, but it does not focus sufficiently on raising standards.

Although the school takes into account the views of all stakeholders, a number of parents would like to see improved communications. Subject coordinators are beginning to undertake more responsibility but they are not all involved in driving improvements in their subjects. Led by the recently appointed, enthusiastic and knowledgeable chair, the governing body now plays an appropriate part in strategic and financial planning. They are now developing their role as 'critical friends' to provide greater challenge to school leaders and staff.

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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?	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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
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	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?	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sutton-at-Hone CE Primary School, Dartford DA4 9EX

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were very impressed by how friendly, polite and confident you are. Your school is giving you a satisfactory standard of education.

- These are some of the good points we found out about your school.
- You make satisfactory progress and sometimes you do better than this, especially in mathematics.
- You are confident and willingly answer questions.
- You enjoy school and feel safe.
- You know how to stay healthy.
- You behave well and care about each other.
- You contribute well to your school and the local community.
- You are taught in a satisfactory way and maths lessons are often best.
- The school is led in a satisfactory way; the headteacher knows what to do to make the right improvements.

- To help your school get even better, we have asked your teachers to:
 - Improve lessons by making sure the work is not too easy for you.
 - Make sure that subject leaders and governors help the headteacher improve the school so you can learn more.
 - Be clearer about how well you are doing and what you can do to improve, and give you more opportunities to use your own initiative.

Your attendance has improved and is now average, so you can help by making sure this improvement continues by not missing school unnecessarily.

Yours sincerely

Sue Orpin Lead inspector