

Southwold County Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123089
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314490
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	365
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Clack
Headteacher	Ms Claire Critchley
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Holm Way Bicester OX26 3UU
Telephone number	01869 324061
Fax number	01869 322376

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much bigger than most primary schools. It has fewer pupils eligible for free school meals, of minority ethnic heritage or for whom English is an additional language than schools nationally. It has slightly fewer pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities than average, although the percentage in the current Years 5 and 6 is well above average. An average proportion of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Pupils' needs include moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, sensory impairment and autistic spectrum disorders. Attainment on entry is broadly average but some children enter the Foundation Stage with communication and social skills below expectations. The school has the Artsmark Silver award, Activemark, Healthy Schools status and the International Links Award. A new headteacher took up post at the beginning of this academic year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. Most parents are pleased with the way the school turns out 'whole, well-rounded children' and say that they find teachers approachable and supportive. Many praise the recent focus on raising standards in reading and appreciate the close partnership they have with the school.

The school has a positive ethos that is both calm and stimulating, with colourful displays of pupils' attractive art and carefully-presented written work. A well-planned and interesting curriculum contributes well to pupils' personal development, and pupils receive good care, guidance and support. They make good progress in their personal development and say that they enjoy school. They work and play well together and are learning to express themselves and to understand the feelings of others. They have outstanding opportunities to take responsibility and gain many important personal qualities through involvement in the arts, taking part in sport and through the school's international links.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. In recent years, there has been a decline in overall test results at Key Stage 1 and, in 2007, some pupils performed less well than they should have done at Key Stage 2 in mathematics. The new headteacher has been quick to identify reasons for this and is working very effectively to raise achievement. Teaching is satisfactory and improving. There is a fair amount of good teaching, with consistently good teaching at Key Stage 1 and in Year 6. Lessons in some other classes at times lack pace and challenge and assessment is not always used to match work to the next steps in learning for the most and least able pupils. Throughout the school, teaching assistants are deployed well and make an exceptionally good contribution to the progress of pupils with complex learning difficulties.

The new headteacher is providing outstanding direction to the school's work and is very clear about what needs to be done. A significant fall in roll over the last two to three years set alongside the high costs of employing some very experienced staff, has led to a deficit budget. Since taking up post at the beginning of this academic year, the headteacher has worked in close collaboration with the governing body in an effort to reduce the deficit and a four-year plan is in place to bring expenditure in line with income. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. A number of important changes have been made in recent months but it is too early for new developments to have had a measurable impact on standards. Leadership and management are therefore satisfactory overall but with significant strengths and the school is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The school makes satisfactory provision for children in the Foundation Stage. Those who completed the Reception Year in 2007 reached national expectations in some areas of learning but did less well than children nationally in communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and knowledge and understanding of the world. A newly introduced system for tracking children's progress means that staff now have clearer information about how well they are doing. There have been recent improvements in the way early reading and writing skills are taught, and children are making good progress in learning about numbers. Their overall progress is satisfactory in response to teaching that is satisfactory, and sometimes good, and a curriculum

that the school has rightly identified does not fully meet the needs of children of this age. The range of activities available within individual sessions is broadly satisfactory. There are too few opportunities, however, for children to engage in absorbing projects that promote their investigative and creative skills, enrich their language development and involve them as active learners. The school recognises that the outdoor area does not promote learning as well as it could.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, especially in mathematics, by ensuring that teachers consistently match work and teaching methods to the learning needs of different groups of pupils.
- Improve progress in the Foundation Stage by developing an indoor and outdoor curriculum that promotes investigative and creative skills, enriches language development and engages children as active learners.

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

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. The school's test results at Key Stage 1 were average overall in 2007 but below average in mathematics. Results at Key Stage 2 were average and have risen gradually in recent years. The school met its targets in 2007 and pupils made satisfactory progress overall at Key Stage 2 but they did less well than they should in mathematics. Pupils are now doing well at Key Stage 1 and in Year 6. Progress is satisfactory overall, however, because in some other classes work is not always matched closely enough to the needs of the most and least able. Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening, in art, music, information and communication technology (ICT) and in sport. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress and pupils with more complex needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders or sensory impairment, make exceptional progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school and attendance is good, reflecting their positive attitudes. Pupils show a good understanding of the importance of respect and tolerance and an appreciation of cultural diversity. They are aware of how to keep healthy, take an active part in a range of sporting activities and understand the importance of keeping safe. They enjoy school and speak enthusiastically about the wide range and variety of clubs and activities they can join. Their contribution to the life of the school is outstanding, for instance, taking an active part in the interview process for recruiting new members of staff and as helpers in the school office. Their skills in literacy and numeracy are developing satisfactorily in preparation for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and is beginning to improve. Classroom management is good and the atmosphere in lessons is both relaxed and productive. Staff have secure subject knowledge and interactive whiteboards are used effectively to support learning. Work is often matched well to pupils' prior attainment, with lively teaching, especially at Key Stage 1 and in Year 6. However, the match of tasks and methods is not always sufficiently refined to address the needs of all pupils. For example, though the setting arrangements in literacy and numeracy are working well, more able pupils occasionally spend too long doing the same work as the majority and work is at times too difficult for the least able. Introductions and explanations are also too lengthy at times which means the pace of learning slows.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A varied and stimulating curriculum offers a range of interesting activities. Links between subjects ensure that pupils' literacy skills are promoted well across the curriculum. Art and music have a high profile, demonstrated by the high quality artwork on display and the popularity of the orchestra. In its efforts to raise standards, the school is placing greater emphasis on building progressively on what pupils already know and providing more opportunities for pupils to learn through practical experiences. The curriculum is enriched well through the teaching of French and German, with Latin for gifted and talented pupils. There are links with European schools through the Comenius programme, and a wide variety of clubs and activities and visits by local artists and writers. Pupils are able to extend their learning by participating in gifted and talented days and sporting activities at a local secondary school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There are secure procedures for ensuring pupils are kept safe and protected. Individual education plans identify clearly the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and they are supported well. Pupils with complex needs receive outstanding, highly sensitive support from teaching assistants. A new system for tracking pupils' progress means that teachers and senior leaders are clear about what pupils can already do and what they should achieve. Individuals' progress has begun to be reviewed termly, so that any pupil slipping behind can be quickly identified. Pupils' work is marked regularly. Marking is variable but some provides very helpful comments. Many, but not all, pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 know their individual targets. Parents are very appreciative of the school's after-school care and the extended day provided for Foundation Stage children.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Self-evaluation is accurate and the headteacher has identified quickly what needs to be done to raise achievement. She is prioritising very well and taking clear action although it is too early for this to have made a measurable impact on pupils' achievement. Staff are committed to

making the school as good as possible and subject leaders are providing satisfactory support to the headteacher, with improved leadership now in mathematics. The senior leadership team is depleted at present, however, with three senior members of staff on maternity leave, so that the headteacher is supported at senior level only by an assistant headteacher and one other senior leader. They provide her with good support but financial constraints mean that senior leaders are obliged to spend a significant amount of their time teaching in an effort to keep costs down. Governors are closely involved in the school's work. They have a good understanding of what is working well and what needs to be improved, and provide good support and challenge. The school is proactive in gathering stakeholders' views and works in close partnership with other local schools.

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?	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	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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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?	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?	3
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	3
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**

14 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Southwold County Primary School, Bicester, OX26 3UU

We enjoyed our visit to your school very much. It was really interesting to see all the exciting things you do and lovely to hear how much you enjoy school. I am writing now to tell you what we found out about your school.

It is a satisfactory school that does some things well. These are some of the best things about your school:

- Everyone gets on well together and the school has a lovely atmosphere.
- Your teachers and the other people who help in the school all look after you well and care about you.
- The school gives you really good opportunities to take responsibility.
- Behaviour is good and most of you work hard and do your best.
- You say that you enjoy school and that learning is fun.
- You have done some lovely artwork and you do well in speaking and listening, ICT, music and sport.
- Those of you who find learning difficult receive good support and teaching assistants provide fantastic help for those of you who need someone working with you most of the time.

The school is already improving and the headteacher and the other teachers want to make it as good as it could possibly be for you. I have asked them to:

- Help you to reach higher standards, especially in numeracy, by making sure work is not too difficult and not too easy.
- Make learning in the Foundation Stage more interesting and exciting.

I hope you enjoy the rest of your time at Southwold and keep working hard.

Best wishes

Ms M J Goodchild

Lead Inspector