

St Swithun's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123177
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314525
Inspection dates	5–6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Christopher Parker

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T Pullen
Headteacher	Mrs J Evans
Date of previous school inspection	29 March 2004
School address	Grundy Crescent Kennington Oxford OX1 5PS
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school. Very few pupils are entitled to free school meals. Fewer pupils than usual have learning difficulties. A small number of pupils do not speak English as a first language. The school works in partnership with a special school that has a classroom base on the site. Although on the same site, the school is housed in two buildings separated by a playing field.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to achievement in English, particularly that of boys and the more able pupils.

The school's performance has been through a slump since the last inspection and it has yet to address all of the areas for improvement highlighted in the last report. Although it has managed to maintain broadly average standards by the end of Year 6, pupils have not achieved well enough for the last few years. The setting up of a local authority task group, changes in teaching staff and stronger leadership of Key Stage 2 have resulted in recent improvements in behaviour, the quality of teaching and the curriculum. However the leadership team recognises there is much still to do,. Although pupils are now making satisfactory progress in most lessons the rate of improvement is not fast enough to ensure all pupils attain the standards of which they are capable and eradicate the legacy of underachievement. Consequently, progress and achievement, in the longer term, are inadequate.

The leadership team and the staff are working earnestly to recover lost ground. They have introduced a number of strategies to improve performance but weaknesses remain. The school has begun to make some improvements in the standard of pupils' writing but some boys are still underperforming because they are not fully engaged in lessons. Similarly, more able pupils are not consistently challenged to work at a more advanced level or a faster pace. Although lessons are planned for the needs of different ability groups, the plans often lack the precision to accelerate the rate of progress. The leadership team checks these plans after, rather than before, lessons. Consequently, it is then too late to influence the challenge and demands of lessons. A more creative curriculum is beginning to provide appropriate contexts for boys to write, but the monitoring of lessons is not focused sharply enough on why some boys are not absorbed in the tasks set for them. Whilst the leadership team is checking that the building blocks for recovery are in place, it is not monitoring incisively enough to generate the rapid pace of change that is needed to bring the necessary acceleration in achievement.

The teachers have created classroom displays that contain useful prompts to support pupils when they are writing. Pupils are now aware of their targets and appreciate detailed marking that shows how they can improve their work. However, these developments are recent and their implementation is not consistent. Most of the pupils behave and respond well in lessons but a few older boys are unsettled and do not concentrate on the work they are set.

The leadership team has been slow to take steps to ensure all groups of pupils make the progress they should. Under the guidance of the local authority task group, the leadership team and governors now have a clear plan to build on recent improvements. However, this plan does not set out a strategy for improving the conditions for learning. In particular, some classrooms are untidy and other areas are poorly presented. Pupils' work is not displayed in a manner that sets an expectation of high quality or celebrates success. Parents are working to improve the decoration of classrooms but some areas of the school are uninviting and do little to stimulate the pupils' interest or generate pride in achieving highly.

While recent developments demonstrate the school's capacity to improve, the current rate of progress is not fast enough to ensure all groups of pupils reach the standards they should.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Most children enter school with a good range of the skills expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress through a good range of indoor and outdoor activities. The resources available to the nursery and reception children are worn and some are no longer attractive or inviting. Nevertheless, the adults use these resources successfully to encourage independence. Their interactions with the children are purposeful and satisfactorily promote language and literacy skills through speaking and their teaching of letters and sounds. By the end of the Foundation Stage the proportion of children working within the goals set for their age is a little higher than average.

The school's efforts to improve the links between the end of the Foundation Stage curriculum and Year 1 have brought a smoother transition for the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by accelerating the progress and achievement of boys and more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that all boys are motivated and more able pupils are consistently challenged.
- Ensure the monitoring and evaluation carried out by the leadership team is sharply focused on those groups that are underachieving.
- Improve the conditions for learning so that they reflect high expectations, stimulate interest and celebrate success.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Overall standards at the end of Year 2 have been above average for the last five years. However, there has been a decline during this period in reading and, more notably, in writing standards. In the 2007 writing tests girls did far better than boys.

At the end of Year 6, standards have hovered around the average for the last four years. The pupils have not built successfully on the standards they attained at the end of Year 2. As a result, they have underachieved. In the national tests in 2007, results in English fell to below average and the rate of progress was in the lowest 5% of schools because too few pupils reached the higher level. Closer analysis shows that besides the more able not reaching high standards, progress was weak among boys who did well in tests at the end of end of Year 2.

The school's, now termly, tracking allows checks to be made on all pupils' progress. It shows that many pupils made satisfactory gains during the autumn term. However, this is not sufficient to enable all groups of pupils to catch up and eradicate the legacy of underachievement. Those pupils with learning difficulties respond well to the additional support they receive. Too many of those pupils with the potential to reach high standards are still some way from their targets. Pupils' progress, although improving, is inadequate because a significant number of boys and more able pupils are not yet on course to reach the standards they should.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most pupils behave well and respond positively in lessons. A small group of older boys are not engaged by the tasks they are set and can become unsettled. The pupils say that behaviour has improved 'a lot', and they feel that the 'zero tolerance' of poor behaviour has paid dividends. When new steps to improve behaviour were introduced at the start of the school year privileges were temporarily withdrawn from many pupils but behaviour has improved and very few now lose privileges.

Many pupils attend the good range of sports clubs on offer. They know the importance of staying healthy although recognise that they could do more to eat a healthy diet. The pupils work well together and make visits to the local secondary school to prepare for the next stage in their education. Attendance is above average and the pupils arrive at school on time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school's self-evaluation shows that teaching has improved. However, there are not enough good lessons to accelerate progress and eradicate the legacy of underachievement. In the few good lessons seen, for example in Year 4, the teacher injected pace and the lively teaching style moved learning along at a faster rate. In other lessons, the pace is not as rapid and the urgency to make up for lost time is not as acute. Occasionally, tasks lack sufficient purpose and valuable time is lost.

Some lessons get off to a lively and interesting start but fail to maintain the pace and lose some boys' interests. Although the teachers manage these boys quite well, this takes time away from other pupils and the more able pupils are left to get on with their work without adult intervention or support. As a result, they are not challenged and do not make as much progress as they should. The support for less able pupils is more successful and those with learning difficulties are making secure progress.

The teachers' assessment of the pupils' work is increasingly becoming accurate because of the training they have undertaken. However, many of the activities for the more able pupils are not planned precisely enough to build on what they already know. As a result, although lessons are planned for different groups, the degree of challenge for the more able is not sufficiently demanding.

The learning environment does not project an expectation of high standards or high quality. Displays designed to encourage pupils' writing sit alongside untidy piles of dusty resources.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school now has a 'creative curriculum' which the teachers develop around a common theme. This is proving popular and is generating more opportunities for pupils to write in different contexts. There are now good links between subjects, for example, when pupils were writing instructions for mummification in history. Some of the content is designed to generate interest among boys but it is not yet entirely successful in this respect. The curriculum contains good opportunities to learn French and some children are learning Mandarin in preparation for the

Beijing Olympic Games. There is a good range of well-attended clubs, visits to places of interest such as an archaeological dig, Hands-On Science museum, circus skills workshop and two residential visits for the older pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school takes appropriate steps to ensure that pupils are safe and cared for well. New arrangements for managing behaviour have brought considerable improvement because pupils know the possible sanctions and rewards. However, the school does little to reward and celebrate high standards of work.

Pupils with learning difficulties receive satisfactory support. Academic guidance is much improved and, although not yet consistently implemented, it is a key factor in the recent improvements in the pupils' progress. The pupils say they find the targets set by their teachers useful and the older pupils now know what they have to do to achieve the expected and higher levels in the national tests at the end of Year 6.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The governors recognise that they and the leadership team were slow to respond to the downturn in the school's performance. The work of the local authority task group has given the school much clearer direction to tackle weaknesses and strengthened the leadership team's capacity to improve. Collectively they have made changes in key areas that have resulted in recent improvements. For example, with new teaching staff in place the headteacher has established higher expectations of behaviour. However, some aspects of her work are not robust enough to ensure that whole school approaches are implemented consistently in order to ensure pupils make rapid progress, reach challenging targets and eradicate the legacy of underachievement. The leadership team is not incisive enough in its monitoring of teaching to highlight where and why boys are not doing as well as they should. Similarly, it is not rigorously pursuing the challenge for more able pupils through its monitoring.

The appointment of a new leader for Key Stage 2 has resulted in greater coherence and an understanding of the importance of ensuring pupils make good progress in every year group. His appointment has also strengthened the leadership team and added to the clarity of direction.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Swithun's CofE Primary School, Oxford, OX1 5PS

This letter is to tell you about the findings of the recent inspection and to thank you for taking the time to talk to the inspectors about your school. We visited lessons, looked at test results and talked to teachers to find out how well the school is doing. We came to the conclusion that, although there have been some recent improvements, it could do more to help you to achieve as well as possible.

The headteacher and teachers have given you targets and they mark your writing so that you know what you need to do improve. This is helping you to make better progress but some of you could make even more progress if you were given work that challenges you more. Some boys lose interest in lessons so they are not doing as well as they could. We have asked the headteacher and teachers to do all they can to improve standards in writing by making sure all of the boys enjoy their work and all tasks have the right amount of challenge for you all. To make sure this happens, I have asked the leaders of your school to visit lessons and check these things very carefully.

Some of the classrooms and corridors are untidy. They do not encourage you to take a pride in everything you do. There are few examples of high quality work on display to set the standard to work towards. Some of you drop things on the floor and do not pick them up or leave the things you have been using strewn across tables. It is important that the places in which you work make you want to do well. I have asked the school to create spaces where you will really enjoy working and where your very best work can be celebrated.

The headteacher and teachers have appropriate plans to make further improvements. We want the school to improve very quickly so inspectors will visit again, later this year, to see how much progress has been made. I hope that in the very near future the school is successful in helping you to do as well as you possibly can.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Parker

Lead Inspector