

South Marston Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126358
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	315516
Inspection date	5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Christine Huard

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	105
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Watch
Headteacher	Alison Lowe
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Old Vicarage Lane South Marston Swindon SN3 4SH
Telephone number	01793 823379
Fax number	01793 822291

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 procedures to track pupils' progress and their impact on raising standards in writing and boys' attainment; the school's management systems following the appointment of a new headteacher and the contribution of all staff in raising standards; and the extent of pupils' awareness of growing up in a multi-cultural society. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a popular small village school and around half the pupils attend from outside the immediate area. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. A below average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children's skills and experiences on entry into Reception are often above those expected for their age, although this does vary from year to year. A new headteacher took up her appointment in January 2008.

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 with some outstanding features. It provides a good education for its pupils in a lively and stimulating learning environment. Parents particularly appreciate the positive ethos and are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One comment reflected the opinions of many: 'The children enjoy school and thrive on the varied learning experiences'.

Standards are high and nearly all pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress and achieve well. Pupils have developed very good spelling, punctuation and grammar skills and the school's drive to improve English further, by increasing the opportunities for pupils to write at length, is entirely appropriate. Standards in mathematics and science are well above average and pupils' ability to solve problems and carry out experiments and investigations is high. This is because the investigations and tasks set for them are relevant and made exciting for them by the teachers. Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are particularly good and they make outstanding progress in this area. There are considerably more boys than girls in the school and the school's own assessment information shows that there is very little difference in the progress made by both groups. Despite this, the school goes out of its way to ensure that positive male role models are introduced, such as the visits by male prefects from a local secondary school to help with guided reading, in order to provide encouragement to the boys. Children in the Reception class get a satisfactory start to their schooling. However, activities are too teacher-directed, which inhibits the opportunities for children to make choices for themselves. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is checked carefully. This means there is speedy identification of any problems that may occur and swift action taken to remedy them. Pupils who are particularly gifted or talented achieve well because their progress is monitored carefully and care is taken to ensure they are appropriately challenged.

Pupils learn effectively because they are interested and motivated by the good activities provided by their teachers. There is a good emphasis on practical and investigative activities which stimulate pupils' imaginations. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 thoroughly enjoyed planning a holiday in Majorca, working out the various costs from travel brochures. As a result, this work was of a very high quality. Teachers are particularly successful at planning a wide range of tasks for pupils in these mixed-age classes. Activities are carefully devised to meet the learning needs of all pupils so that all are appropriately challenged or supported. Teachers use resources, such as interactive whiteboards, skilfully to make explanations clearer and lessons more exciting. Pupils enjoy good relationships with their teachers and their behaviour is exemplary. This means that teachers can successfully inject humour into lessons, knowing that this will not cause disruption. In addition, it enables them to plan a wide range of activities confident that all pupils will be purposefully employed even when not directly supervised. Pupils respond to questions thoughtfully and are encouraged to explore and share ideas with each other. Older pupils say that marking helps them to understand what they need to do to improve their work and that targets are especially useful in identifying their next steps in learning. However, for the youngest pupils in Year 1, teaching is only satisfactory. The school's own assessment information shows that they make slower progress than pupils in the other classes. This is because although pupils clearly enjoy their learning and relationships are strong, the pace is slower, questioning is not as clear and focused as it should be and the tasks provided are not as exciting and inspiring as those in the other classes.

Pupils are lively and responsive in class, and thoughtful and reflective in assemblies. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. They thoroughly enjoy school and this is reflected in their excellent attendance. They are considerate in their dealings with each other. The playground is a happy and harmonious area. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and are adamant that there is no bullying in the school. They have a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating. However, this knowledge is not always reflected in the contents of the lunchboxes of some of the older pupils! They recognise that they have a responsibility to others and proudly relate their involvement in cooking a meal at the local restaurant during their 'Indian Week', raising enough money to fund a goat and a toilet for a village in India. Year 6 pupils take on responsibilities such as operating the telephones at lunchtimes. They conscientiously monitor the playground and toilet areas to ensure good behaviour. Their very well developed skills in numeracy, literacy and ICT, together with their outstanding personal skills and excellent awareness of environmental concerns, provide an exceptional preparation for their future lives. It is evident from walking round the school that there is an interesting and lively curriculum. Attractive and appealing displays of pupils' work bring the school to life and are evidence of the way in which pupils' achievements are valued and celebrated. Learning themes embrace many disciplines and subjects and ensure very well that pupils understand they are growing up in a culturally diverse society. Enrichment weeks, as well as a wide range of visits and visitors, all serve to enliven pupils' learning. An excellent programme for the personal, social and health education of the pupils contributes effectively to their outstanding personal development. The pupils are extremely well nurtured, and the care and concern that is provided for them on a day-to-day basis is outstanding. Parents appreciate this, and one commented on the 'compassion, care and utmost professionalism' shown by the staff. Pupils' personal and academic developments are very carefully monitored from the time they enter the school. Progress meetings ensure that pupils experiencing difficulties are quickly identified and appropriate support provided. Pupils say there is always someone they can talk to about problems and that they are sorted out quickly.

The headteacher's leadership is strong and purposeful. She has clearly demonstrated the ability to identify areas that require improvement and to initiate effective actions to do so, although the focus on extended writing has not yet had time to fully bear fruit. All teachers make a good contribution and are fully involved in decision-making. There is a strong feeling of working together as a team, and a culture has evolved where teachers share good practice and support each other. Staff and governors know how well the school is doing, share a clear understanding of what the school needs to do to improve further and have a good capacity to bring these improvements about. The school uses data well to check its own performance and set challenging targets. A robust monitoring system is in place to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. The governors provide good support and challenge and have been fully involved in the strategic development of the school. The school development plan provides a good basis for ongoing improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children in the Reception class make satisfactory progress and the majority join Year 1 having reached or exceeded the standards appropriate for their age in most areas. However, a significant minority are still working towards the goals expected in their literacy and early writing skills. The school has identified this and there is an appropriate emphasis on the development of early reading and writing skills as a result. Teaching is satisfactory. Suitable activities are planned

based on the early years curriculum for children in this mixed-age class. However, the children have too few opportunities to choose activities for themselves which means that they lack the skills necessary to become independent. In addition, the range of activities provided is rather narrow and unexciting and there are limited opportunities to practise their developing skills. The children are well cared for and their progress is well monitored. The new headteacher has appropriately identified where there are shortcomings in provision, and plans are in hand to tackle them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the provision in the Foundation Stage to ensure that children have adequate opportunities to make choices, thus developing their independence more effectively.
- Improve the quality of teaching for the youngest pupils in Year 1 to enable them to learn effectively and make similar progress to those pupils in the other Year 1 class.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

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?	1

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	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

6 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of South Marston CE Primary School, Swindon SN3 4SH

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school. You certainly seem to be very happy and it was good to hear how you enjoy your work and about all the activities in which you are involved. I think your school gives you a good education and is working hard to make it even better.

- These are the things I liked best:
- You behave very well and are really keen and enthusiastic about your learning.
- You are all doing very well in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and also in ICT.
- You take very seriously the importance of taking physical exercise, although some of the older ones amongst you could take care to have healthier food in your lunchboxes!
- Teachers make learning fun for you, and help you to know how to improve your work using marking and target setting.
- You have a varied curriculum and your learning themes are really exciting and interesting. You obviously enjoyed cooking and eating the food at the local Indian restaurant.
- The teachers and staff take excellent care of you while you are in school.
- Your headteacher and governors lead the school well and are very keen to make it even better.
- I think that a very few things could be even better for some of the younger pupils:
- Children in Reception need to have more choice in the activities they are provided with to develop their new skills and independence.
- The activities provided for younger Year 1 pupils could be a little more exciting and inspiring to help them to make better progress.

I am glad you enjoy your school and hope you will continue to work hard.

Very best wishes

Mrs Christine Huard Lead Inspector

6 March 2008

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- The teachers and staff take excellent care of you while you are in school.
- Your headteacher and governors lead the school well and are very keen to make it even better.

I think that a very few things could be even better for some of the younger pupils:

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- The activities provided for younger Year 1 pupils could be a little more exciting and inspiring to help them to make better progress.

I am glad you enjoy your school and hope you will continue to work hard.

Very best wishes

Mrs Christine Huard
Lead Inspector