

St Stephen's Church of England Junior School, Soundwell

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109167
Local Authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	324916
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Marion Thompson

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	325
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joe Pollock
Headteacher	Bronwen Kucharski
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2005
School address	Lansdown Road Kingswood Bristol BS15 1XD
Telephone number	01454 867175
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large junior school where the great majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of children identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has gained the Eco Schools Award (bronze) and has also achieved Healthy School status.

Over recent years, there have been five changes of headteacher. Turnover of teaching staff, including senior leaders, has also been high. The current headteacher took up post in September 2007.

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 school. Improvements over the last year have begun to reverse the previous significant downward trend in standards and achievement that was caused by frequent changes in the staffing and leadership of the school and some inadequate teaching in the past. Staffing is now stable, and robust and carefully prioritised action has led to a rapid improvement in all aspects of provision. This, in turn, is leading to higher standards and better achievement for pupils, although the full impact has yet to be felt. Nevertheless, the school now provides a satisfactory education for its pupils, and some aspects of the school's work, such as the quality of care, support and guidance, are good.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and it is improving across the school. Standards on entry to the school are broadly average. In the current Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are well below average, reflecting previous underachievement. These pupils are currently making good progress in catching up because of good and occasionally outstanding teaching. Standards for younger pupils are generally closer to the national averages for their age, because there have been fewer disruptions to learning. However, for older pupils, there is still significant ground to be made up. In particular, more able pupils do not always make enough progress because occasionally teaching does not present them with sufficient challenge. Progress for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is sound because support is effectively targeted.

Pupils' personal development is good. Over the last year, there have been significant improvements in pupils' behaviour, which is now good. The school took a firm stand over how it expected pupils to behave, which initially resulted in a high number of exclusions. However, over recent months, there have been none, reflecting good progress in this area. Good systems are in place to support socially and emotionally vulnerable pupils and the school works well with outside agencies to safeguard their well-being. The school provides a calm, purposeful learning environment. Pupils feel safe, enjoy coming to school and attendance has risen to above average levels. In most lessons, pupils have enthusiastic and confident attitudes to their work. Pupils have a good awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle. Through the wide range of responsibilities they undertake, pupils make a good contribution to the school and a sound contribution to the wider community. Their good social skills and satisfactory progress in basic skills prepare them adequately for the future.

Leaders have introduced a new system to monitor pupils' progress. This provides an accurate and reliable basis for sound whole-school and subject self-evaluation and planning for improvement. The school is beginning to use challenging targets to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. Monitoring information has also been used to identify gaps in pupils' learning so that the school can help them to catch up. The recently reviewed curriculum is now sound and it already has some good features. It is becoming increasingly flexible in meeting pupils' needs and interests, but occasionally lacks challenge for the most able pupils.

Teaching is satisfactory and has improved rapidly because of well-targeted staff development. Lesson planning is now grounded in a clear view of how well pupils are performing. Assessment is improving rapidly. Teachers consistently provide good ongoing feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. Marking throughout the school is good. However, whilst an increasing proportion of teaching is good and a small proportion is outstanding, a small number of lessons are unsatisfactory. In these lessons, the pace of learning is too slow, pupils listen passively for

too long without being actively engaged in their learning and expectations are too low, especially for the most able pupils.

Leadership and management too have improved. The headteacher provides a strong and urgent sense of direction for the school, focused on raising achievement and improving pupils' personal development. She has the strong support of parents, governors and enthusiastic staff. Subject and year coordination is satisfactory and coordinators, many of whom are new to their roles, are rapidly extending their managerial skills and subject expertise through well-planned staff development. Leaders, including governors, have rightly identified that they now need to monitor closely the many recent initiatives in order to check that they are having the desired effect on learning across the school. Nevertheless, the school has already demonstrated in recent developments that it has a sound capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in English, mathematics and science so that pupils reach their challenging learning targets by ensuring that:

? the curriculum and teaching consistently present pupils, especially the most able, with a good level of challenge ? teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' work rate and conduct lessons at a good pace ? leaders at all levels monitor recent initiatives to check that they are having the desired effect on pupils' progress and their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards in English, mathematics and science in Year 6 are well below average, because pupils are still making up lost ground after a period when they have not done well enough. Younger pupils reach relatively higher standards. For example, the current Year 4 reached or exceeded all their challenging targets in Year 3, reaching at least average standards. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, and it is frequently good. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because recently reviewed arrangements ensure they are soundly supported. However, there is still considerable catching up to do, particularly for older pupils and especially for a number of boys in writing, girls in mathematics and in investigation in science. The most able pupils are not reaching the standards of which they are capable because, as well as catching up, in a small minority of lessons, work is not always sufficiently challenging.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are polite and keen to learn. As one pupil remarked, 'We enjoy most lessons, because our teachers make them fun.' They take their substantial responsibilities within the school seriously, acting, for example, as play leaders, and peer mediators.

Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Pupils' moral development is good and they know right from wrong. Their social skills also develop well, for example through fruitful collaboration in class. Spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory but pupils' understanding of living in a multicultural society is relatively limited. Pupils feel safe and act safely. Although there are occasionally some bullying and racist remarks, they know these issues are dealt with well. Pupils take regular exercise and have a good awareness of healthy lifestyles and the need for a balanced diet.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall and is improving rapidly. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching remains uneven and in a very small number of lessons is unsatisfactory. An increasingly large proportion of teaching is good or excellent, with teachers having high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. In these lessons, pupils respond with real enthusiasm, making rapid progress. Typically, teachers have good relationships with pupils, which motivate pupils to learn. They build soundly on previous learning, developing pupils' confidence, and use ongoing assessment very effectively to move their learning on. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils' learning. In less successful lessons, expectations are not high enough and work for the more able pupils occasionally lacks challenge. Pupils spend too much time listening passively, which occasionally leads to off-task behaviour, slowing the pace of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced and helps pupils to make satisfactory progress in developing basic skills. Effective analysis of pupils' progress has helped the school to focus on weaker areas, such as problem solving in mathematics and reading comprehension. Careful purchasing of resources has enabled better provision to be made for practical activities, especially in science, and this is beginning to have a positive effect on learning. The introduction of cross-curricular themes in the creative curriculum has been effective in motivating pupils to learn, although this still needs time to become embedded across the school. The curriculum is differentiated to meet the needs of most pupils, but there is not always sufficient challenge for the most able. Changes to the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensure that they have access to the whole curriculum, whilst still meeting their individual needs soundly. Provision for extra-curricular activities and enrichment is good and promotes pupils' interests well, especially in sport and music.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Over the last year, pastoral care has been given a high priority in the school and it is now good. Pupils say they feel well cared for and parents appreciate the support given to their children. Sensitive arrangements have been put in place for the support of vulnerable pupils, helping them to help build self-esteem and manage their emotions better. Policies and procedures to secure higher attendance, to promote good behaviour and to ensure pupils settle well have been followed rigorously and successfully. Arrangements to secure pupils' health, safety and well-being are robust.

Good academic guidance is a key factor in pupils' improved progress. However, the school recognises that a few staff do not always judge the level of pupils' work accurately. Teachers' informative comments when marking work consistently provide clear guidance, which is helping pupils to understand how they can improve. There are frequent opportunities for self- and peer assessment which extend pupils' understanding of what they are trying to achieve. The breakfast club makes good provision for the small number of pupils who attend.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has strongly led recent improvements, effectively supported by an enthusiastic and hardworking staff. Self-evaluation is accurate and is based on a thorough analysis of pupils' progress. Planning for improvement is prioritised sensibly. The school has successfully won the strong support and increasing involvement of parents. Governors provide good support, but their monitoring of the work of the school, whilst satisfactory and improving rapidly, is less effective.

The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion, but the pupils' understanding of the range of faiths and cultures within Britain, in this largely mono-cultural school, whilst satisfactory, is rather limited. Many improvements have been made to provision and this is beginning to have an impact on raising standards, but leaders know that there is much further to go. They are aware of the need to continue to check the impact of new initiatives to ensure that recent improvements are being sustained over time. There has been satisfactory improvement over the last year on the issues identified in the previous inspection report.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which 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	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 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?	2

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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Stephen's Church of England Junior School, Bristol BS15 1XD

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. Some of your parents replied to our questionnaire, so please thank them. As you know, there have been many changes in headteacher and other staff in the school over the last few years. Because of these frequent changes, some of you have not done as well as you should have in the past. The headteacher and staff are doing all they can to put this right as quickly as possible. Because of their efforts, the school now provides you with a satisfactory education, which is improving quickly.

Many of you have noticed improvements in behaviour recently, and these have also been noticed by your parents. You all work hard now, feel safe from bullying and enjoy your learning. Attendance is rising and is above average, so well done! All of this is helping you to make satisfactory and often better progress in your learning. You are beginning to catch up on the work you missed. However, you still have a long way to go, especially if you are one of the older pupils, so keep up the efforts! Teaching, the curriculum and the comments teachers make to you about how you are getting on are also getting better and helping you to improve your work faster.

The school takes good care of you, and you are developing a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle, taking regular exercise and eating sensibly when you are in school. You take your responsibilities, like acting as play leaders, seriously.

In order to improve things further we have asked the school to help you to reach your learning targets in English, mathematics and science by making sure that:

- your learning presents you with a good level of challenge, especially if you find work easy
- teachers always expect you to work hard
- all lessons interest you and provide you with opportunities to be actively involved, rather than listening to the teacher for a very long time
- staff check that all the new things the school has introduced are helping you to learn more quickly.

You can help your teachers by trying to work hard at all times.

Best wishes

Marion Thompson Lead Inspector