

Stowford Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113330
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325795
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Alex Baxter

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	343
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Wycliffe-Jones
Headteacher	Helen Tipping
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Exeter Road Ivybridge PL21 0BG
Telephone number	01752 894163
Fax number	01752 893934

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two designated Reception classes. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The number of pupils who join or leave the school other than at the usual times is above that normally expected. The school is part of a Primary Specialism Pilot scheme, specialising in music. Independent providers run out-of-school and pre-school groups on the school site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Stowford Primary is a good school. It continues to improve and already has outstanding features. The pastoral care provided by the staff and the partnerships established with other schools, parents and the community represent high quality elements in safeguarding pupils' welfare. These partnerships also support an excellent range of clubs, visits and visitors that enrich pupils' learning. The headteacher's exemplary lead has established a shared commitment to continued improvement. Leaders and managers, including governors, work well together and have embraced the intentions underlying the school's participation in the Primary Specialism Pilot scheme and this is giving a significant boost to the pupils' education. Emphasising enjoyment and achievement have lifted expectations of pupils' achievements, secured good provision and sustained above average standards by Year 6. These standards represent good achievement in relation to pupils' broadly average, but varying, skills on entry to the school.

Many parents express their appreciation of these attributes, and typical comments include, 'A caring, well managed school that we are happy to send our children to' and 'We are very impressed with our child's progress and all aspects of his schooling.' However, some parents and pupils raise concerns about the behaviour of a few pupils. Inspectors saw the challenge presented by these pupils, but judge that increased adult support and well considered strategies are tackling this issue effectively. In addition, inspectors noted particularly the comments made by several parents in praise of the staff for their kindness and support during times of illness and bereavement.

In response to good teaching and learning, pupils make good progress. Children are taught well and make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Even though teaching and progress are good overall, there is a degree of variation in how well pupils move on. At times, this is because on occasions too much adult-led learning limits opportunities for pupils to set up and follow their own lines of enquiry, for example in science. This constrains pupils' ability to learn independently. The development of topics which link subjects and skills is beginning to correct this. Some inconsistency exists in the way teachers enable pupils to take responsibility for their learning such as in evaluating their work and setting their own targets. These methods are promoted very effectively in English to develop pupils' writing, but are not developed as successfully in other subjects. For these reasons, the school is good rather than outstanding. Nevertheless, by the end of Year 6, pupils have achieved well and standards are above average in all aspects of English, mathematics and science. Many pupils also have good skills in using information and communication technology (ICT), in sport and music, and in caring for the environment.

Care, guidance and support, and the curriculum, are good overall and promote the pupils' good personal development and well-being. This includes the pupils' good attendance, behaviour and enjoyment of school and their excellent adoption of healthy lifestyles. The latter reflects their wholehearted participation in the numerous expressive arts and sporting activities that are provided for them. Good leadership and management, guided by very clear educational direction, ensure that all the adults understand their roles and are focused on achieving the highest possible standards. Accurate tracking of pupils' progress is at the heart of raising standards and informs effective self-evaluation. The school is highly inclusive in the way it values all pupils and enables all groups to achieve equally well in relation to their capabilities. The significant improvement in pupils' writing skills, for example, shows the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good communication with pre-school settings and close links with parents help the children to settle quickly into the Reception classes. The skills of children on entry are typical for their age, but vary quite significantly at times, with an increasing number of children entering with lower levels of communication, language and emotional development. Friendly, supportive staff nurture and care for the children exceptionally well. As a result, pupils develop their self-confidence, relate well toward each other and feel happy and safe. Effective teaching and a well planned curriculum, which includes a good amount of practical activity, enable most children to make good progress. Good leadership and management ensure an effective balance of activities led by adults and chosen by the children themselves. At times, though, activities freely chosen by the children are not always supported by adults to best effect, for example through questioning to make sure that children build on previous learning. Most children reach the goals normally expected of children of this age by the time they enter Year 1. Many do particularly well in their social development and in their language, listening and calculation skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the consistency of good teaching and learning by providing more opportunities for independent, enquiry-based learning across the curriculum, especially in science.
- Increase the pupils' involvement in evaluating their own work and in setting targets across the range of subjects, and so bring them in line with the high quality evident in English.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average. Most pupils, across the range of abilities and including those transferring from other schools, achieve well in relation to their starting points. Standards and achievement are rising in response to good teaching and challenging targets. After a period of declining standards by the end of Year 2, and at times slower progress in Years 3 and 4, pupils' progress has been accelerated. The strengthened use of assessments to identify and tackle pupils' learning needs at an earlier stage has contributed to a significant rise in pupils' speaking and listening, reading, numeracy and particularly writing skills across the school. Children achieve well in Reception classes because of very supportive care and effective teaching. Increasingly good progress continues throughout Years 1 to 4 and accelerates in Years 5 and 6, where good and often better teaching successfully challenges these more mature pupils to meet high expectations of work and achievement. By Year 6, standards are above average in all aspects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Although pupils' skills continue to improve, good progress is not yet so consistent or successful in developing the pupils' independent and self-enquiry learning skills, particularly their practical investigative skills in science. Many pupils show high levels of skill in music, especially in choral singing, and when undertaking expressive arts and sporting activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils clearly enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Many pupils speak with real affection of the 'Spring Soirée' where their talents in music and dance are celebrated.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This was evident, for example, in the warmth of the greeting and respect shown to a group of students from Thailand who came to demonstrate and involve pupils in their 'Thai dancing'. The high level of commitment of every one of the nearly 90 pupils during their choral singing, for example, is a joy to behold. The pupils' energetic and safe participation in sports, their numerous trophies and sharp knowledge of healthy eating show their excellent adoption of healthy living. Behaviour is good overall. Most pupils behave extremely well. However, a few pupils need and receive additional support. Pupils undertake responsibility for each other willingly and contribute effectively to the school, as seen in the work of the 'Eco' and school councils. However, not all pupils' skills in taking responsibility for their learning are developed fully. By the time they leave, the pupils' good academic and personal achievements, which include informed participation in business and ecological studies, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, although they are variable. Typical strengths include the good use of interactive whiteboards to stimulate pupils' interest and clear learning objectives which are shared fully with the pupils to build on their previous learning. In addition, teaching assistants provide additional personal support of high quality for those with emotional needs or who find learning difficult. Increasingly, lessons generate pupils' enjoyment, for example in Year 4 when viewing animations and assuming the role of a story character in a 'hot seat' to answer other pupils' questions. At its best, teaching ensures that pupils are challenged to meet high expectations, such as answering 'quickfire' mathematical questions and explaining their strategies for solving problems. Other strengths include the way pupils are involved in English lessons in evaluating the quality of their writing and setting their own targets to bring about improvement. Where teaching is sometimes satisfactory rather than good or better, lesson introductions and whole-class sessions are too long and do not leave enough time for pupils to work independently, especially in following their own lines of enquiry. When this happens, some pupils lose interest and progress slows.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum already has a number of outstanding features, not least the excellent enrichment through the expressive arts and sports, which includes the school's specialism in music. These are also evident in the school's Eco-Schools Green Flag, Healthy Schools, Artsmark Gold, Activemark, Basic Skills, Youth Sports Trust and Quality Mark 2008 awards. The curriculum includes a wide range of clubs, visits and educational links which have a very positive influence on the pupils' personal development, particularly their enjoyment and their skills in the expressive arts and sports. As one member of the school choir stated, 'The choir has given me the confidence to sing on my own and I am a much more confident person now.' The curriculum is undergoing a process of revision as cross-curricular topics, which link subjects together and ensure progression in the development of pupils' skills, are established across the school. Currently, exemplars of good practice, such as a topic on 'The Rain Forest', are giving a beneficial boost to pupils' interest and, in particular, to their literacy and communication skills. In recent years, the school rightly acknowledges that at times its additional emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy has limited the development of the pupils' independent learning skills, especially

their practical investigative skills in science. The development of topic work is now beginning to correct this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Outstanding pastoral care is evident in the way that all staff are quick to support pupils according to their needs. Staff encourage and value the pupils' efforts and involve them as much as possible in the life of the school. This personal support is accompanied by equally effective rules and expectations of good manners, behaviour and effort. In response, pupils contribute well to their learning, as seen, for example, during 'Big Writing' sessions. In these lessons, pupils are supported by lighted candles and soothing music as they concentrate to good effect on improving their writing. Procedures for safeguarding pupils' well-being, including care for vulnerable pupils, are very secure. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met effectively. Pupils are generally given good oral guidance, and written guidance is also good in English, where pupils are involved productively in self-evaluation and setting their own targets. However, these strategies are not established with equal consistency and effectiveness in other subjects. This means that pupils do not always have a clear enough picture of how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides inspirational leadership. She has been well supported by senior colleagues and governors in steering the school successfully through an uncertain period during which the needs of pupils and stability of staff have undergone significant change. The good work of governors is particularly evident in their careful appointment of staff and the school's respected place in the community. Through working together as a team and developing excellent links with partner schools, community groups and with parents, staff are using the music specialism successfully as a catalyst to raise expectations and standards across the school. These approaches, together with the pupils' developing understanding of national and international communities, for example, Thailand, also promote community cohesion effectively. By combining good self-evaluation, improved use of assessment and the effective use of very challenging targets, leaders and managers have brought substantial improvement. In particular, standards in English, mathematics, music and sport have been raised significantly. However, leadership has not yet been as successful in all areas. As a result, other identified objectives, namely to develop consistently good teaching across the school, and involving pupils in evaluating their work and in 'target-setting and getting', as already established to good effect in English, remain 'work in progress'.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	2

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	1
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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

7 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stowford Primary School, Ivybridge, PL21 0BG

Thank you for the warmth and politeness that you showed towards us throughout the inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting and talking with many of you. I would like to thank those of you who took the time to talk to us, particularly members of the school and Eco councils and a group of Year 5 and 6 pupils. I would also like to thank those members of the choir who sang so beautifully for me. We agree with you, most of your parents and with your teachers that Stowford is a good and very caring school. These are the main things we found:

- The standards you reach in Year 6, including now in writing, are above average. They show that you are taught well and make good progress.
- You enjoy a good curriculum and participate very fully in an outstanding range of clubs.
- You develop an excellent understanding of how to live healthily, behave well, and make good contributions to your school and to the community.
- Your headteacher is a very talented leader who inspires and works very closely with staff and governors. Together, they lead and manage the school well and develop excellent links with other schools and with your parents to make sure that you are cared for in an exemplary manner.

To help the school to improve even further, we have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to do two things:

- Give you more opportunities to work independently and to learn practically by finding things out for yourselves, especially in science.
- As you already do in English, involve you more in evaluating your own work and in setting targets in the other subjects to help you to improve.

The headteacher, staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and plan well to do this. We believe that if you continue to work hard and give of your best then you too will have played your part in helping to make your school even better.

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you again for your kind assistance and best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Alex Baxter

Lead inspector