

# South Malling CofE Primary School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	114509
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	326024
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Patricia Davies

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Horton
Headteacher	Joanna O'Donoghue
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 May 2006
School address	Church Lane Lewes East Sussex BN7 2HS
Telephone number	01273 473016
Fax number	01273 473016
Email address	head@southmallings.e-sussex.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, and held meetings with staff, governors and a representative group of pupils. Inspectors also talked with pupils during lessons. They observed the school's work, and looked at school documentation, including: assessment, curriculum, monitoring and attendance information, and the school's development planning. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work and 60 questionnaires from parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which higher expectations of academic performance, improved assessment and planning are tackling variations in academic performance and raising achievement, particularly in writing in Reception and at Key Stage 1, and for more able pupils
- how successfully the school promotes pupils' understanding of how to stay safe and healthy beyond school; and pupils' appreciation of cultures and faiths other than their own in this country and beyond
- the impact of pastoral support for those pupils and families who are harder to reach and engage, especially in relation to raising attendance
- how far the new senior leadership team, and the governing body, are influencing the school's direction and performance.

## Information about the school

Pupils enter South Malling into one of two Reception classes. Local authority arrangements have changed so that there are now two points of arrival into the Early Years Foundation Stage – in September and January – instead of three. Thereafter, most pupils are in classes of more than one age group, while Year 6 is taught as a discrete group. Most pupils come from White British families, while others are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few pupils are learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than it was at the time of the school's last inspection, and above average. There have also been some recent changes to staff. The headteacher joined the school in an acting capacity in October 2007, and took up the role permanently in January 2008.

A private nursery is accommodated on the school's site. This is run as a registered charitable trust and has children from two and a half to five years of age. The same trust also runs breakfast and after-school clubs in the nursery building.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

## Main findings

Staff and governors at South Malling are working with energy and determination to gain the very best provision and outcomes for their pupils and families and resolve inconsistencies in academic outcomes. Their hard work is now paying off in the growing signs of improvement to pupils' progress and achievement. Learning in lessons is gaining pace and enables pupils to leave the school at Year 6 with broadly average attainment. Clear-sighted leadership and robust assessment are key factors behind the school's increasing effectiveness. Parents recognise a real difference in the school, and many commented on this change in their questionnaires. For example, one wrote to say that 'high expectations have raised the game in the school in terms of quality of teaching (and) learning goals'.

Parents also recognise and value the school's strong pastoral care and guidance. Well organised and sensitive support in this area ensures pupils feel safe and secure at school, nurtured by warm relationships between staff and pupils. There is focused intervention for pupils with learning needs and/or disabilities, for instance, or those in danger of missing too much time at school. The value of this work results in some notable examples of improved achievement and is to be seen also in the substantially reduced proportion of low attendance. As a result, attendance has risen and is now broadly average. Such successful support for pupils vulnerable to underachievement provides an important step towards tackling the variable achievement at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in recent years.

The school knows that the quality of teaching and learning is at the heart of moving forward. New planning, to inject interest and imagination into the everyday curriculum, and adjustments to classroom practice are gradually making their mark on everyday practice. Consequently, pupils are increasingly progressing well, especially those in Reception where progress is consistently good. However, initiatives are still relatively new and not yet fully influential. Most importantly, teaching and learning are still too variable for pupils' progress and achievement to be more than satisfactory. In particular, not enough is always demanded of pupils, especially the more able, during lessons and through consistent comment on how to improve their work.

Pupils' personal outcomes are strong. In particular, their good behaviour, interest and engagement provide a fertile ground for learning. Clubs, themed days and performance' activities – like art and music - are popular. Nevertheless, the school is

aware that opportunities are missed to capitalise on the pupils' ready eagerness to take an active part in lessons.

While it is clear that the school's very keen sense of purpose emanates directly from the headteacher, the same vision and commitment are shared by all. Governors, too, provide a strong strategic approach to evaluating the school's success and supporting its way forward. An accurate view of strengths, weaknesses and priorities comes through close scrutiny of data, bringing with it a strong understanding of the needs of the community itself and those of groups within it. Action taken so far has driven improvements to the Early Years Foundation Stage, for example, to writing and quickened progress across the school, demonstrating good capacity for moving forward. New members of the senior leadership team are already playing a valuable part in the school's improvement, but acknowledge that they have further to go in monitoring teaching and learning in their subjects and spreading good practice across the school.

A small proportion of 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.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress of all pupils, particularly by increasing the level of challenge in lessons, especially for the more able.
- Establish consistently good teaching and learning at Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
  - increasing pupils' active involvement during lessons
  - sharing and spreading good practice across the school
  - always providing comment about how pupils can improve their work.
- Strengthen subject leadership to include close monitoring of teaching and learning, so that all leaders take a full role in bringing about improvements to provision and outcomes in their curriculum area.

## How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3
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Inconsistencies in attainment and progress have been the school's major concern and focus. National test results have fluctuated from year to year at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, and within individual subjects. Although there are few marked trends over time in performance between different groups of pupils, the limited proportions of pupils reaching the higher Levels 3 and 5 have been a consistent feature. Writing, too, has been a particular area of weakness at Key Stage 1, reflecting the low attainment in this subject when children enter the Reception Year.

While progress still remains variable, there are clear signs that the school's concerted efforts are starting to make a difference. For example, pupils' interest, enthusiasm and good attention are marked features of almost every lesson and plainly illustrate

the quickening rate of learning across the school. Sometimes, pupils take conspicuous care over their work, as did pupils in Years 1 and 2 with their handwriting, forming and joining letters correctly. The school's assessment information shows that, while achievement is satisfactory, more pupils are making good, and sometimes better, progress than they did before. These accelerations are now beginning to influence standards. Predictions for the current Year 2, for instance, indicate a lift from below average to broadly average standards in reading, mathematics and writing. Standards at Year 6 have now steadied at a broadly average level. During lessons, all groups of pupils tend to make similar rates of learning, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, while there is evidence to indicate a lift at Level 3 in Year 2, the school is well aware that the achievement of more able pupils remains an issue that has not yet been fully resolved.

Pupils are sensible and responsible and willingly exchange thoughtful views about deeper matters, such as preserving the planet. Relationships are happy and friendly, and good behaviour is evident everywhere. Pupils' involvement in deciding policy and practice about its management gives them a clear understanding of how they should behave with others, and what constitutes bullying. Indeed, pupils are well aware of dangers in and out of school - from water, for example, and the internet – and of how to keep safe. A high take-up of physical activity is recognised in a national award and reflects pupils' good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

## The quality of the school's work

A wide range of improvements to provision have been initiated in the last 18 months or so, and these are increasingly becoming more routine. This transitional stage is particularly evident in lessons. Teaching is often good, but its quality varies too frequently for pupils to progress consistently well over time. Typically, topics capture

<sup>1</sup> Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

pupils' interest and hold their attention. Consequently, pupils are eager to do well. They are responsive to questioning and enjoy talking to a partner about their ideas. Where teaching is most successful, discussion is easy and relaxed, involving many pupils and covering a lot of valuable ground. Sometimes, pupils even get the opportunity to 'teach' each other, and this approach elevates learning to another level. In others, though, pupils do not participate to the same degree because discussion is overly directed by adults. The level of challenge also varies particularly, but not exclusively, affecting the more able. Sometimes, tasks are open-ended and demanding - in mathematics for example - requiring careful thought and working through. Pupils enjoy these activities, but such investigative work is still too limited in mathematics and science. In addition, the new marking system is not operating fully, so that pupils are not always receiving enough information about how to improve.

Imaginative curriculum planning is gradually becoming more influential in the school's everyday work. For example, familiar and much loved stories, like '*Cinderella*', provide stimulating starting points for pupils' writing at Key Stage 1. A range of subjects are popular with pupils, from science to art; singing is hugely enjoyed and reaches a high standard. Cross-curricular links are promoted through the wider use of information and communication technology. They are already strong within themed events and extra-curricular activities and becoming more explicit in lessons. Involvement in a local group considering the development of the disused railway line, and fair trade projects, which give writing a 'real' context, are widening pupils' experience in readiness for their future life. Nevertheless, while the school enriches its curriculum through the celebration of festivals from other faiths, and is already developing links within Africa and Japan, it is aware that it needs to do more to extend pupils' cultural awareness beyond their own.

The school is very conscious of the particular needs of its immediate community in school and locally. Individualised programmes of support are drawn up for its vulnerable pupils, covering a wide range of personal, learning and medical needs, and including the very few pupils learning to speak English for the first time. Individual achievement is also tackled through rigorous tracking of attainment and progress. This scrutiny leads to focused intervention in and out of lessons, either individually or in small groups. In these sessions, skilful reinforcement of word sounds, accurate reading and understanding of text, build more confident literacy skills. Expectations of the rate of progress have been raised and translated into challenging targets for attainment and learning.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	3
Support, guidance and care	2

## How effective are leadership and management?

Good leadership and management are key factors driving the school's improvement. Already, focused work on writing, particularly lower down the school, is having an impact, while increased expectations of progress are accelerating achievement across the school, especially in the Reception Year. Development has been widespread, but not all initiatives have been in place long enough to be tested out. However, where something is not working as effectively as expected, senior leaders have not been afraid to look again. This approach has sharpened the school's analysis of its performance in relation to different groups of pupils. For example, staff have highlighted the possibility that confidence and self-esteem are influential factors affecting achievement more widely than first thought. Consequently, they are now considering how they can tailor the way they work to meet these needs more successfully.

At the very top, senior leadership is highly reflective and committed to excellence for all. Other key and new senior leaders share the same aspirations and forward thinking as the headteacher. While already proving influential, they readily recognise that the next stage of development is to expand the influence of subject leadership to spreading good teaching more widely. Currently, it plays a limited role in supporting the very senior staff members in their rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning.

Governors share their expertise willingly and act as an invaluable sounding board for planning and challenging the effectiveness of new and current developments. Their strategic involvement is strong, particularly through the small strategy group of committee leaders. Well organised structures and administration ensure that policies are systematically reviewed, money targeted at educational need and safeguarding requirements are strong. Work to promote community cohesion is already well developed in school and locally, and expanding internationally. Local services are used well to promote the well-being of vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and there is a close partnership with private providers on site. Parents are recognised as important stakeholders, and great care was taken to inform them about the move to mixed-age teaching. The school's work with individual pupils and families to increase attendance has strengthened this partnership further. Parents also benefit from a weekly letter about topics being covered in school, so that they are informed about their children's education. While the use of new technology is enabling the school to increase its links more widely within Britain, it knows this area is ripe for further development.

### *These are the grades for leadership and management*

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision making about matters relating to learning and	2



well-being	
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Good liaison with home and local playgroups before children start school ensures a smooth and well informed entry to Reception. These arrangements create productive partnerships with parents and illustrate the strong level of support for children's welfare and well-being. This area of the school's work has moved on a good deal since the school's last inspection, when Reception-aged children were found to make satisfactory progress. Children now make good progress. Attainment when joining Reception varies, but is now below the expected level and low in relation to language and literacy skills. By the time children reach Year 1, standards in most areas of learning are broadly average. Standards remain below average in literacy skills, especially writing. Nevertheless, children have made good progress in language and literacy given their low starting points, promoted in part by a strong focus on sounds and letters.

The greatest progress is in children's personal and social skills. Lively teaching and a stimulating, well planned curriculum, with lots of role play and chat in 'real life' situations, makes for confident, independent and articulate children. For example, children enthusiastically filled in incident sheets in the classroom's 'crime centre', practising their early writing skills; acting as firefighters outside, they rescued people from the garden house. During such activities, they work together very cooperatively, even helping each other off with their Wellington boots! Teaching assistants are effectively deployed to work with small groups and join teachers in making observational assessments of children's achievements. The outside area promotes good levels of physical development generally, although the hard surfaced area is relatively small, therefore restricting the scope of some activities, including the use of wheeled toys.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	2
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2

## Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parent questionnaires were positive, and most of the many written comments expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. There was strong praise for the impact of the headteacher and recent improvements, and

for the care provided for children. Just 10% of parents who returned questionnaires raised any concerns. Where these comments were relevant to the school as a whole, one or two parents expressed some remaining anxiety about the effect of mixing ages within classes, especially on parting friends of the same age. Bullying was raised in the questionnaires by a very few parents, and some concern was also expressed about the cleanliness of toilets. Inspection evidence showed no adverse effects on friendships of the current class organisation, and while pupils report a little bit of bullying, they are confident the school is, as one reported, 'on top of it'. Toilets were found to be suitably clean.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007/8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007/8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007/8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007/8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

6 March 2009

Dear Pupils



Inspection of South Malling Primary School, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2HS

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We very much enjoyed our visit, talking with you, your staff and governors and looking at lots of the things you do at school. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found out. Yours is a satisfactory school, and an improving one. All the staff and governors are working very hard to make your school the very best it can be, and your interest, enthusiasm and good attention in lessons is playing an important part. Your parents recognise that there have been many improvements made to your school and quite a few wrote to tell us about them. We were pleased to hear that you enjoy so many activities, and were impressed by your wonderful singing! Importantly, most of you are making satisfactory progress and some of you make good progress in your work.

Here are some other important things about you and your school:

- You behave well, and feel the school deals with some occasional bullying successfully.
- You have a good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy in and out of school.
- Imaginative activities, balanced with careful teaching of important things like sounds and letters, means that children make a good start in Reception.
- The school takes good care of you all, including those who do not come to school as regularly as they should – as a result, attendance is higher than it was.
- Your progress is carefully tracked so that staff know where they need to give you extra help.

This is what your school has been asked to do to make things even better:

- Ensure you all make good progress by always challenging you to do your very best in lessons, especially those of you who find your work quite easy.
- Make sure you have lots of opportunities to join in with discussion during lessons and receive plenty of feedback on how you can improve your work.
- Ensure that those staff who look after different subjects look closely at teaching and learning so that they can play a full part in bringing about improvement.

With our very best wishes for the future

Yours faithfully

Patricia Davies  
Lead inspector

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