

Stonegate Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114523
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	326029
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Carole Skinner

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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	107
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	Kevin Millington
Headteacher	Barbara Godden-Wood
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Stonegate Wadhurst TN5 7EN
Telephone number	01580 200415
Fax number	01580 201135

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is situated in a very small village in an area of socio-economic advantage. Less than half of the pupils come from the village itself while the rest travel from a wide area. Almost all of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. Early Years Foundation Stage children are taught in a separate class each morning and alongside Year 1 pupils on some afternoons. The school works in partnership with Uplands Technology College and is part of a Learning Network of rural schools. The school holds the Activemark and has recently gained Silver Healthy Schools Status and the Bronze Eco-Schools Award.

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. It gives pupils a well-rounded education and they achieve well and reach standards that are well above the national average. This good achievement starts from the earliest days in Reception and applies across a range of subjects, including music, physical education and computer skills. As a result, pupils are well prepared for secondary school and beyond. They thoroughly enjoy all aspects of school life and make the most of every opportunity. Parents speak highly of the school, praising its 'community spirit', 'warm and friendly environment' and 'the openness and approachability of the staff'. Pupils say they feel safe and that staff look after them very well. Pupils behave well and are keen to take responsibility for different tasks around the school. A particularly good feature is the way older pupils look after younger ones and help others to settle arguments sensibly. Effective partnerships with parents, other schools and external agencies provide pupils with a variety of additional opportunities and ensure that they are well supported in their learning.

Consistently good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching contributes effectively to pupils' enjoyment and achievement from Reception to Year 6. Lessons are well paced and interesting and teachers use a good variety of methods to engage and motivate pupils. The curriculum is planned well to ensure that all subjects are covered in depth. The school is beginning to adopt creative and innovative approaches to learning that incorporate a number of subjects within overall themes. New systems for assessing, recording and tracking pupils' progress have helped teachers to tailor work more accurately to pupils' different levels of attainment. The school sets challenging targets for each pupil to achieve in Years 2 and 6, based on their previous attainment. However, these are not broken down into annual targets for other year groups. Consequently, teachers cannot be certain that pupils are on track to reach their end of key stage targets.

The headteacher is successfully nurturing teachers' leadership skills so that the responsibility for driving improvements in the curriculum can be shared amongst all staff. Teachers and governors work closely together to check how well the school is performing and to evaluate the impact of actions taken. All are committed to providing a high quality education for the pupils but have not yet clearly identified what needs to be done to achieve excellence and to increase the momentum of improvement. Nevertheless, standards are rising again after a temporary decline, particularly in writing, as new initiatives take effect. The recent improvements in provision and standards demonstrate that the school should not be content with second best as it is well placed to strive for excellence in all areas.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Most children enter Reception with higher levels of knowledge and skills than is typical for their age, although there are some variations between cohorts. They make good progress and reach above average standards in all areas of learning by the time they enter Year 1. Structured teaching of sounds and letter formation gets children off to a flying start with reading and writing. The reorganisation of classrooms has greatly benefited Reception children. Although space is still limited, they now have access to an outdoor area which provides greater opportunities for independent learning. This is not yet fully exploited to encompass all areas of learning as an extension to the classroom. The well planned curriculum interweaves all aspects of learning around a central theme, such as 'The Shopping Basket'. For example, children made

purses to hold money, wrote menus and made placemats for the class 'restaurant', and used magnifiers to investigate bar codes. They thoroughly enjoyed their visit to a real pizza restaurant. Staff assess the children's progress continuously and ensure their individual needs are met. Effective leadership ensures strong links between pre-school, Reception and Year 1. This helps to ensure continuity in learning. Children thrive and grow in confidence in the safe and secure environment. They play a full role in the life of the school and are represented on the school council.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish a shared understanding of what constitutes outstanding practice in teaching and curricular provision in order to accelerate the pace of improvement.
- Set challenging targets for pupils to achieve in each year group, based on their past achievement and aspirational end-of-key-stage goals.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school has successfully reversed the downward trend in standards of the past couple of years. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 are on course to reach standards that are well above national averages in English, mathematics and science. Standards have improved in writing, where they were relatively weaker, in response to improvements in teaching. Nevertheless, there is still scope for improvement in some pupils' handwriting and spelling. The most able pupils achieve well, as do pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A few pupils in the middle band make good progress but could do even better. Pupils in Years 1, 3, 4 and 5 do not have individual end-of-year targets in reading, writing and mathematics. This makes it difficult to ensure that they are making sufficiently rapid progress in relation to their prior attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' eagerness to learn, and thorough enjoyment of school, are evident in their very high attendance levels and the excellent take-up of extra-curricular clubs and additional activities. For example, more than three quarters of the pupils in Years 2 to 6 sing in the choir. Daily early morning exercise and a very wide variety of sports clubs contribute to pupils' growing awareness of how to live healthy lifestyles. Older pupils set an excellent example of how to behave in class and around school, while some younger pupils are occasionally a little boisterous and do not listen to what others have to say in lessons. The school council represents the views of all pupils and contributes good ideas for improving aspects of the school. Year 6 pupils talk to the whole school and answer questions at 'Personality of the Week' assemblies, while pupils of all ages are confident to stand up and speak to the school about things that interest them. The school's strong Christian ethos and its close links with the church underpin the pupils' good spiritual and moral development. Their appreciation of the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society is not quite as highly developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good assessment procedures enable teachers to plan activities that meet pupils' different needs and challenge their thinking. Imaginative topics motivate pupils and stimulate the flow of ideas. This was evident when pupils in Years 3 and 4 excitedly discussed how they might create dangerous settings for a 'quest myth' such as chasms, volcanoes and 'deep dark caves'. Skilful questioning probes and extends pupils' understanding, as when Year 6 pupils were asked to explain the literary devices used in a persuasive text. Active, 'hands-on' learning brings abstract concepts to life, for example when Year 2 pupils went into the playground to measure the actual length of a dinosaur. Their amazement as they tried to take in the enormity of the creature they had seen in pictures was a joy to see. Teachers explain what pupils are going to learn at the start of each lesson but do not always involve them in assessing how well they have done at the end. Marking generally shows pupils how to improve their work, but pupils do not always respond to teachers' advice or return to work which needs correction.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is steadily improving as teachers become more confident to depart from subject-based planning in order to embrace a more creative approach. For example, a study of rivers in Years 5 and 6 incorporated opportunities for research, writing, work on coordinates and the use of computer technology. There is an extensive programme of curriculum enrichment activities that take place each Friday, but it is currently additional to, rather than fully integrated into, the core curriculum. Strong links with the local secondary school enrich opportunities for older pupils to learn a foreign language and extend their skills in mathematics, science and physical education. Participation in a 'learning network' of rural schools is supporting the school's attempts to explore innovative practice. Pupils have ready access to laptop computers. This mostly enhances their learning but occasionally programs do not offer enough scope to challenge the most able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All adults take good care of the pupils and value their individuality. Safeguarding requirements are met. The school's strong family ethos helps pupils to feel safe. Careful planning of additional support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that their needs are effectively met. The school has introduced new materials to support the most able mathematicians in Year 6 and enable them to excel in the subject. The recent introduction of a 'bank card' to promote greater respect and good manners and the award of 'gems' for achieving this are helping pupils to take greater responsibility for their own conduct. The systems for tracking pupils' progress from term to term and year to year are relatively new and only provide a complete picture for the younger pupils. They are used well to make regular checks on pupils' progress and to identify those who may need additional support. They do not incorporate yearly targets so that teachers can see whether pupils are making as much progress as they should be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has developed a collaborative approach to leadership, giving all staff greater accountability and responsibility for leading developments in the curriculum. Together, they have improved the provision for Reception children, agreed manageable systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress and raised standards in writing and mathematics. Staff and governors liaise closely when evaluating the school's performance and identify appropriate priorities for improvement, such as developing creative, thematic approaches to the curriculum. The school is actively seeking ways to enhance pupils' appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity in both national and global contexts. However, governors have not developed a clear plan to promote community cohesion. There is a strong commitment to ensuring pupils continue to receive a good all-round education and develop the personal qualities that will equip them successfully for future life. Strategic planning does not show clearly enough how the school intends to achieve excellence in the future.

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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?	2
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?	2
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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	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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

6 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stonegate CE Primary School, Wadhurst, TN5 7EN

I very much enjoyed meeting you and would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave me. I was very pleased to see how much you enjoy school and are keen to learn. You clearly love all the clubs and extra activities that the school provides and you do a lot to help the school run smoothly from day to day. The older ones amongst you set an excellent example to the younger children about how to behave in lessons and around the school. You all make good progress and reach standards that are well above those achieved in most schools. A few of you could do even better with a little help, especially in spelling and handwriting.

Your teachers make lessons really interesting for you and you have lots of opportunities to get involved and discuss your ideas. They often link subjects together in ways that make learning more meaningful for you. The school is now starting to look at ways to help you develop all the skills you need by incorporating lots of subjects into themes. Teachers keep a close check on how well you are doing each term and give you extra help if you need it. All of the adults take good care of you so that you feel safe and happy in school. They help you to grow into confident young people who are well equipped to move on to secondary school.

Stonegate is already a good school, and it has the potential to be an outstanding school. You have the ability to make not just good, but excellent, progress. We have asked the governors and teachers to work towards that. We have also asked them to set challenging targets for each of you to achieve every year and to keep a close eye on how close you are to meeting them.

You can help by always striving to do your very best. I would like to wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Carole Skinner

Lead inspector