

St Monica Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116106
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	326332
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Thrusell

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	269
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	Mr Ian Knight
Headteacher	Mrs Chris Frith-Rogers
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bay Road Sholing Southampton SO19 8EZ
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Monica Infant is a larger than average, three-form-entry school. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average and includes pupils with speech, language and communication needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Monica Infant School is a satisfactory school. Until recently, improvement since the last inspection has been quite slow. The headteacher and other leaders, including governors, took decisive action following a decline in standards at the end of Year 2 in 2008. Assessments for the current Year 2 show that standards overall are average, but below average in writing, with the more able pupils, especially, not doing well enough. This represents satisfactory achievement, given their starting points in Reception.

The main thrust in the drive to raise standards is to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning. There are signs of improvement, but there is not yet enough good teaching to ensure that pupils consistently make good progress. In Year 1, good teaching has accelerated pupils' progress and enabled them to make up some lost ground in their learning. Generally, however, the pace of lessons is at times too slow, so that pupils lose concentration and a few start to misbehave. Some parents and pupils have commented on this. The school has taken steps to address this by providing additional support for these pupils, so that learning is not interrupted. Teachers are becoming more adept at using their assessments to identify the starting points for pupils' learning, an area for improvement that was highlighted at the last inspection. Nevertheless, in some lessons work is not planned well enough to involve all pupils fully and to cater for their different needs and abilities. Consequently, in these lessons, less able pupils sometimes find the work too hard, and more able pupils are not challenged sufficiently, so that progress slows.

Pupils enjoy their lunchtimes and the different activities provided. They are interested in the new topics, which are part of the revised curriculum, and enjoy working on them. Nevertheless, this enjoyment is less evident when they are not sufficiently engaged in lessons. Pupils are encouraged to take some responsibility for their learning. For example, the school has good systems for sharing with pupils what they are learning in lessons and for recording their own assessments. They also have curriculum targets to guide them. However, pupils do not always understand the purpose of these in helping them to improve their work.

Subject leaders are aware of the performance in their areas of responsibility and of where improvements are needed. Their action plans, along with the school improvement plan, set out appropriate strategies, which, although fairly recent, are starting to have a positive impact. However, some of these actions lack sufficient clarity for monitoring their effectiveness, particularly in relation to raising achievement and standards and to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Good links with other schools, outside agencies and parents support the good care and welfare of pupils and the learning opportunities provided for them. As one parent commented, 'The school works well with parents, always asking for opinions and building up teacher-parent relationships.' Given that the school has identified where it needs to improve and the recent impact of its actions, it has a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and improving. When children start in Reception, their knowledge and skills are broadly in line with what is typically expected for their age. Their language and communication skills, and their personal, social and emotional development, are areas of particular weakness. Staff consistently give a high priority to children's

personal, social and emotional development, and they make sound progress in developing these aspects. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Adults plan a wide range of activities across the six areas of learning and teaching assistants offer focused support to small groups of children. While some activities allow children to work and play together, too many restrict their choices to explore and develop their own ideas. This limits the opportunities available for children to explore and investigate.

Children's welfare is promoted well through the care that adults show for them, and safeguarding requirements are robust and consistently implemented. Adults help children to play safely and are well trained to respond to any accident that might arise. Home visits and meetings with new parents build positive relationships with the staff team and help to identify any children who have particular learning needs. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is new to the role but has made a very good start at improving the curriculum and developing assessment procedures. Monitoring of children's progress is carried out regularly, and is beginning to provide a good overview of their development. However, the system in place is new and not fully established. It shows that, when children leave Reception, the majority are working at levels expected for their age, but with writing skills, especially, being lower.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning by improving the pace of lessons and the involvement of all pupils at appropriate and challenging levels, especially the more able.
- Ensure that planned actions to raise achievement and standards and to improve the quality of teaching and learning are more clearly defined, fully implemented and evaluated to ensure their success.

A small proportion of the 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.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils achieve satisfactorily and standards by the end of Year 2 are broadly average, following a dip in 2008. However, progress between subjects and classes is inconsistent, which is linked to some variability in the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils with learning difficulties make similar progress. Subject leaders have looked closely to identify where improvements are required and have made writing a priority in the current year. New opportunities for writing across the curriculum are helping to improve its quality and content, particularly in Year 1, and especially for boys. A systematic way of teaching sounds and letters has recently been introduced throughout the school, which is having a positive impact on pupils' reading and writing skills. Teachers are beginning to make fuller use of assessment when planning activities, so that work in reading, writing and mathematics is becoming more closely matched to pupils' different abilities. A focus on showing pupils how they can improve their work is helping to raise achievement and standards, especially in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. Pupils say they like school because they feel safe and secure. Their behaviour is satisfactory but deteriorates a little when they are not fully engaged in lessons. Pupils are confident that any bullying or friendship problems will be resolved quickly and fairly by staff. Attendance is good and has improved noticeably since the last inspection. Pupils are rewarded for their good timekeeping through the 'Punctuality Polly' scheme and there are termly certificates for full attendance. Pupils know the importance of a healthy lifestyle and speak knowledgeably about the value of fruit and vegetables. Very large numbers participate in the many sporting activities during and after school. Pupils' experience of other cultures is broadened through links with another school in the city. They show awareness of their social responsibilities by helping around the school. They look forward to being chosen as class or lunchtime monitors. Children in Year 2 participate in Southampton's Civic Award scheme. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the wider community by supporting 'Scratch', the local food bank, and by raising funds for global schemes such as Comic Relief. Many visits and visitors extend pupils' understanding of the world of work and leisure. Pupils' broadly average level of basic skills means that they are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent and ranges from inadequate to good. A focus on improving this in the current year, with additional support provided for weaker teaching, is starting to make things better. Teaching assistants generally work well alongside class teachers, providing strong support for the groups they are working with and encouraging pupils to concentrate on what they are doing. Lesson planning clearly shows what pupils are expected to learn in lessons. In better lessons, this is shared well with pupils through questioning and discussion and provides a good tool for pupils to gauge how well they are doing. However, in some lessons, teachers' expectations of pupils do not provide sufficient challenge, especially for the more able; the work for less able pupils does not take enough account of the levels at which they should be working or the style of learning appropriate to them. Consequently, pupils start to lose interest and concentration, and their learning is reduced.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has recently gone through a period of renewal to make it more purposeful, relevant and exciting to pupils. The school is only part-way through this process but signs are encouraging. It has yet to be fully evaluated for its impact on achievement and standards. Through linking different subjects together in topics, the school has developed more cohesive learning experiences for pupils. These provide opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their different skills. Themes such as 'Amazing Animals' are clearly engaging pupils' interest and helping to stimulate their ideas for writing, especially for boys. In an effective assembly in Year 1, pupils considered, debated and developed appropriate rules for a forthcoming visit to Marwell Zoo. Effective homework tasks encourage parental involvement. Information and communication technology is used well to enrich learning in new topics such as 'The Titanic'.

Good use is made of the local area, which, together with a wide range of visits and visitors linked to the new themes, provides good first-hand learning experiences. A good range of extra-curricular activities effectively contributes to pupils' personal and social development. These include additional opportunities for physical activity, which are supported well through sporting links with a nearby school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are well cared for, and the staff provide good pastoral support. A typical comment from a parent is: 'I know my child is well looked after and cared for.' All staff pay full attention to health and safety. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are secure and well known and the school works effectively with other agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Strong systems for supporting pupils with speech and language difficulties are developing across the school, drawing on the support of a well-trained teaching assistant. Some reorganisation of the support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is starting to improve the provision for this group. Assessment procedures are starting to be used more fully to identify and support underachievement. The school is developing good systems for showing pupils how well they are doing and how they could improve their work. These include opportunities for pupils to evaluate their learning, personal literacy targets to aim for, and helpful comments in marking. However, they are not all used consistently and pupils do not always understand their purpose.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership team has identified the actions that need to be taken to secure further improvement. Nevertheless, these actions are, at times, too general and lack the detail against which their effectiveness can readily be measured. The school uses its information on pupils' progress to set end-of-year targets for teachers to plan for and pupils to work towards. These have recently become more challenging. Regular meetings with teachers, to discuss how well pupils are doing, now make them more accountable for the progress being made. Governors have a clear picture of the school's performance and are beginning to challenge the school on this. An area that has benefited from this direct challenge is the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is improving as a result. The school satisfactorily promotes pupils' understanding and respect of communities both locally and internationally. An evaluation has helped the school to identify where this provision could be extended further and has helped to shape its new curriculum.

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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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	3
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	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	3

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**

25 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Monica Infant School, Southampton, SO19 8EZ

Thank you for taking part in the inspection. We spoke with some of you during our visit and you were always interesting to talk to, polite and helpful. You spoke quite enthusiastically about enjoying school and all the activities you take part in. Based on our inspection we have judged that St Monica Infant is a satisfactory school.

We liked these things the most.

- The school makes sure that you are safe and well looked after.
- Your attendance has improved and is now good. 'Punctuality Polly' must have helped with this.
- You are enjoying the new topics, such as 'Amazing Animals' and 'The Titanic'.
- You are all keen to keep fit and eat the right things.
- You have lots of exciting events and a good range of school clubs.

We have asked the school to work on the following things now.

- The school looks carefully at how well you are doing in lessons. It must use this information more to plan work that is just right for each one of you, neither too easy nor too difficult. This will help you all to enjoy lessons more, work harder and make the best progress possible.
- The school has plans to help you all do even better in your learning. It must check that these plans are working, so that your lessons are both challenging and enjoyable, and you all do as well as you can during your time at school.

We did enjoy visiting your school and watching you learn.

Yours faithfully

Peter Thrussell

Lead Inspector