

Swing Gate First School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117260
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326558
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Martyn 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	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	167
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	Mrs Angela Sullivan and Mrs Soo Webster
Headteacher	Mrs Rosie Dunmur
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Swing Gate Lane Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 2LJ

Age group	3–9
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2009
Inspection number	326558

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average sized first school and nursery serves an area of mixed private and rented housing in the town of Berkhamsted. The majority of pupils are of White British background and fewer pupils than the national average are eligible for free school meals. A few pupils have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than the national average and there are currently no pupils with statements of special educational needs. The school has recently experienced a period of unsettled staffing. The school was awarded Healthy Schools status in 2006 and Investors in People status in 2008.

An independent organisation runs extended care sessions for children from Swing Gate nursery on the school premises and the report is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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, where pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress. Senior leaders and governors work well together to keep a clear focus on achievement, while ensuring that all pupils are well cared for and supported. Pastoral and academic guidance are equally strong, with pupils responding well to high expectations of both their behaviour and their approach to learning. The school works well in partnership with other agencies to support pupils with specific emotional or learning needs. The overwhelming majority of parents express confidence in the education and care provided. The following comment from a parent is typical of many received: 'The team at Swing Gate has created a supportive, warm environment where my child really enjoys learning.'

Children join the Nursery with skills that are broadly similar to those expected for their age and standards are above national expectations by the time they leave at the end of Year 4. This represents good progress from their starting points. The progress of pupils is good because they are taught well. Lessons are interesting and teachers are skilled at motivating pupils. A number of parents commented on the energy and enthusiasm of teaching staff and pupils spoke eagerly about interesting lessons. Overall, pupils make good progress. However, due to staffing instability the good progress children make in the Nursery has not been maintained in Reception in 2008. Also, while there is some good and outstanding teaching of mathematics in the school, teaching of this subject is not consistent and progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2 is satisfactory rather than good. Leaders know their school well and had already identified these areas as priorities for improvement.

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy school and consequently behave well during lessons and around the school, although behaviour at lunchtime is satisfactory, rather than good, due to the rough play of some older pupils. Pupils are well cared for and supported across the range of their different needs. The curriculum is good and having an increasingly positive impact on enjoyment and standards.

The good progress which pupils are now making reflects the hard work and clear vision of the headteacher and senior leadership team. Governors, too, are sharply focused on the need to further raise standards and they work effectively to challenge and support the school. Staff and resources are well deployed and the school gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall, although Nursery is stronger than Reception. Children settle quickly into the Nursery which provides a lively, well-planned curriculum. Within a short time they are enjoying playing and learning together. Children behave well and most sustain good levels of concentration when working. Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Good questioning helps the children to develop their ideas. The class teacher provides an exciting range of practical activities to cover all areas of learning. There is a good balance of activities that are led by adults and those that children initiate themselves. Children enjoy learning through play, both indoors and in the outdoor area. Recently acquired funding means that there are plans to further develop the outdoor area to increase the range of all-weather learning opportunities.

While progress throughout the two years of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall, the progress children make in the Nursery is good and this good progress continues in some areas in Reception. For example, a strong emphasis on children's personal development means they make good progress in this area in both the Nursery and Reception class. Children's work is regularly assessed, so that their progress can be carefully tracked. Staffing instability in the Reception class has had a negative impact on progress rates, leading to levels of knowledge and skills at the end of Reception being below the national expectations in 2008. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is bringing in new ideas and a more structured assessment scheme; this is already beginning to have a positive impact on children's learning as staff plan more carefully to meet individual needs. Leadership is satisfactory because it is too soon to accurately measure the impact of these new initiatives on standards. The school is currently without a permanent teacher for Reception and the headteacher and governors are addressing this issue as a matter of urgency.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2 by ensuring consistency of teaching in this subject.
- Ensure that the good rate of progress established in the Nursery is maintained in Reception.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. From broadly average starting points, they make good progress to reach standards that are above average by the end of Year 4. Pupils perform particularly well in English. Progress from Nursery to Year 4 is good overall, although not entirely consistent. Progress is particularly good in Key Stage 1, where standards have been steadily rising for the last three years. All groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although the pupils' understanding of Britain as a multicultural society is not fully developed. Pupils have good relationships with adults and with each other. The overwhelming majority behave well in lessons and in the playground, but a small minority of older pupils play roughly at lunchtime. Pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to stay healthy; they understand the importance of healthy eating and show enthusiasm for sporting activities. Pupils work well together in class, demonstrating positive attitudes to learning. They clearly enjoy school life, which helps explain why attendance is above average. School council members take their responsibilities very seriously and are proud of areas where pupil suggestions have been implemented. Pupils' above average literacy, science and information and communication technology skills, combined with the strong development of enterprise skills through the curriculum, provide a good basis for future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are well structured and teachers manage pupils well so that positive relationships are developed. In the most successful lessons, teachers provide pupils with a very high level of challenge and keep a sharp focus on making progress. This high level of practice is not yet consistent. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology to capture the interest of pupils and plan lots of variety into the presentation of lessons. Consequently, pupils are keen to learn and to do their best. Work is well-matched to meet the range of abilities within each classroom, including those pupils who are more able. Teaching assistants are well deployed to support the work of class teachers, providing clear and positive input to help children make progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and constantly evolving, providing a wide range of opportunities that make learning exciting. Teachers are committed to making good use of meaningful links between subjects to enhance learning. This is seen, for example, in the highly-motivating Year 2 project on 'The Forgotten Dinosaur' and the in-depth Year 4 exploration of the Second World War. Pupils and parents spoke of the enjoyment to be found in such projects, with one parent commenting, 'My children had a lot of fun writing to and receiving letters from a dinosaur!' The starting point for new activities is based on the careful assessment of pupils' current knowledge, ensuring good progress. This approach to linking subjects has already improved standards in English and science, but has yet to make the same impact on standards in mathematics. The school modifies its curriculum effectively for pupils who find learning more difficult, so that they make good progress alongside others. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, which are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils feel safe because they are well cared for. There are good systems for supporting all pupils, including those who are more vulnerable. All requirements for child protection are in place and suitable risk assessments are undertaken. Behaviour is well managed in lessons, although supervision at lunchtime is only satisfactory. Pupils express confidence that any incidents of misbehaviour or alleged bullying will be dealt with quickly and fairly. A good system of tracking pupil progress is in place. This information is used well to determine targets for pupils and to identify those who will need extra support. The result of this thorough approach is seen in the overall improvement in achievement and standards. The systems for monitoring pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, English as an additional language and gifted and talented pupils ensure they make similarly good progress to other pupils. Pupils are given clear guidance on how to improve their work and understand what is required to reach the next level. Parents are encouraged to take an active part in their children's learning, with the result that pupils enjoy sharing their projects at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher works well with her senior team to provide a clear sense of direction, setting challenging targets for pupil achievement. Self-evaluation systems are used well to determine the school's current effectiveness and in planning improvements. Teachers are held accountable for good pupil progress and helped to secure this through constructive feedback and training. Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding requirements are fully met. Governors are well informed and active, challenging and supporting the headteacher to raise standards. Leaders demonstrate a satisfactory commitment to community cohesion in terms of encouraging involvement and good relationships with the local community. However, pupils do not have many opportunities to mix with children from different ethnic backgrounds. Leaders are planning to improve this aspect. The majority of parents express confidence in the leadership and management of the school. Some parents expressed concerns about the recent turnover of staff, but this could not have been prevented by the school management. Leaders and managers are aware of the next steps that need to be taken to improve the school and have shown evidence of a good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	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?	2
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?	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	3
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	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**

9 March 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Swing Gate First School and Nursery, Berkhamsted, HP4 2LJ

Thank you very much for the way you helped us with the inspection of your school. You were very friendly and gave us a lot of ideas about what you like about school. We enjoyed meeting with the school council and finding out how you share your ideas to make your school even better. We also enjoyed meeting lots of you at lunchtime and hearing you talk enthusiastically about your lessons while eating your healthy lunches!

We agree with you that you are at a good school where you are being well looked after. Your headteacher and teachers are doing a good job in helping you make good progress and in introducing some new ideas to make your learning even more enjoyable. We like the way you link subjects together in your lessons and I particularly enjoyed hearing about Year 4's work on the Second World War in their class assembly. It was great to hear them sing 'There'll always be an England'!

So that your school can carry on getting better, we have asked your teachers to:

- help pupils in Key Stage 2 make better progress in mathematics, and
- help the children in Reception make as good progress as the children in the Nursery.

To help your teachers improve your school, please try hard in your work, especially in your mathematics in Key Stage 2. A few older pupils need to improve their behaviour at lunchtimes.

I wish you all a very happy future as you behave well and work hard.

Yours sincerely,

Martyn Skinner

Lead inspector