

# Stonehill School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117345
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326584
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sarah McDermott

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	179
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr R Knowles
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Michelle Dent
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 March 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Western Close Letchworth Hertfordshire SG6 4SZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 620262
<b>Fax number</b>	01462 620262

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Stonehill Primary is a small school situated on a housing estate on the edge of Letchworth. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few speak languages other than English at home. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that of other primary schools. These pupils learn more slowly or find concentrating difficult. The school is part of a network of four other schools and works closely with its partner secondary school. It has gained the Healthy Schools Award and the Healthy Journeys to School Gold Award. The Nursery and Reception children learn together in the mornings as a single Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) class.

An independent playgroup on site called Little Stones is inspected separately.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Stonehill Primary is a satisfactory school. The headteacher is working very determinedly to improve the quality of teaching and learning. One parent commented, 'The headteacher has breathed new life into the school with her fresh ideas, enthusiasm and drive.' She has taken some difficult decisions on staffing in a calm and professional manner. The senior leadership team is newly formed and enthusiastic to follow her lead. It is starting to give her practical and professional support to help move the school forward. Although there are exciting and innovative plans in the pipeline, the senior leaders do not yet make teachers sufficiently accountable for standards and achievement. Consequently, the leadership and management, and the school's capacity to improve, are no more than satisfactory.

Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school. They achieve as expected in English, mathematics and science and leave in Year 6 with standards in line with national averages. Pupils achieve well in reading, but writing standards are not as high as they should be. They enjoy coming to school and most behave well. On occasion, silly behaviour interrupts learning, particularly when activities do not sufficiently engage them. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They follow instructions well, but sometimes lack a sparkle to their learning. When given the chance, they work positively together in pairs and groups.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Currently there is not enough consistently good teaching to ensure that the pupils make any more than satisfactory progress. Teachers have a good rapport with the pupils, so all are confident to learn. They are starting to be more effective in knowing how each pupil is progressing and what they want them to learn. However, teachers do not accurately identify the most appropriate way for pupils to learn that is best suited to each learner's needs. Pupils are clear about what they are intended to learn during lessons, but do not always know how to use their literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school is aware that some pupils are not sufficiently captivated by their lessons, so it is introducing a wider variety of opportunities to stimulate the pupils' learning. For example, the daily 'talk for writing' sessions are already having a positive effect on improving written skills. The pastoral care of pupils is good. Although some parents have had concerns over the disruption caused by staff changes, the majority are fully behind the headteacher. One wrote, 'The new approach has made the school a much more positive environment and the children seem more smiley.'

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 3

The EYFS teachers and headteacher have worked closely together to evaluate how well Nursery and Reception children are learning. The very recent organisation of Nursery and Reception into an Early Years Unit makes it easier for adults to work more effectively as a team to plan a curriculum that is relevant for young learners. Reception children benefit from a larger space, a wider range of resources and easy access to the outdoor learning areas. At this stage, the new leadership team is having a satisfactory impact on children's progress. Children start Nursery with experiences and skills typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress through Nursery and Reception to reach average standards by the start of Year 1.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Adults take effective charge of organising specific activities, but this sometimes limits the opportunity for them to perform their key-worker

role in supporting assigned pupils' learning. Children often make good progress when they choose activities for themselves because they can extend their learning in different ways. Progress is no more than satisfactory when children work in groups because adults tend to over-direct and hamper children's creative streak. Adults take careful notes about what children know and can do and use the information to plan appropriate follow-up activities that build on the children's ideas. They make sure all are safe and well cared for, providing good levels of support to help all learners gain confidence and settle quickly into Nursery and eventually into Year 1. Relationships are positive and staff are sensitive to every child's personal needs.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Implement a whole-school curriculum that engages pupils in purposeful learning and enables them to use key skills, especially writing, in other subjects.
- Ensure teachers use assessment information more effectively to agree next-step learning targets that help pupils to improve their work independently.
- Develop the rigour with which the senior leadership team hold teachers to account for pupils' progress.

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**

Achievement in 2007 was satisfactory in English and science and good in mathematics. In the 2007 national tests, standards were just below national averages for reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and fewer pupils than average attained the higher Level 3. At the end of Year 6, test results were in line with the national average in English and science, but exceptionally high in mathematics. In 2008, standards for pupils in Key Stage 1 picked up to be in line with the national average. In particular, reading levels improved to be above the national average, with nearly half of pupils attaining the higher Level 3. Unvalidated 2008 national test results for Key Stage 2 indicate that standards are in line with national averages in all three subjects and achievement is satisfactory. Reading levels are higher than the national picture, but only half of pupils attained the expected Level 4 in writing.

Pupils enter Year 1 attaining average standards. Currently, they are making satisfactory progress throughout the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily. The few pupils who do not speak English at home or who are from minority ethnic backgrounds make equally satisfactory progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils enjoy coming to school because they look forward to seeing their friends and meeting their teachers. Pupils report very little bullying. They say they feel safe in school and know to whom to turn if they have worries. Most pupils listen attentively and follow instructions carefully in lessons but a few pupils easily resort to fidgeting or chatting if the activities do not capture their attention. Behaviour is not always as good as it should be. Pupils show patience and understanding with the few of their classmates who misbehave because of particular learning needs.

Pupils participate enthusiastically in after-school clubs and sporting competitions. They know how to eat healthily and many walk to school. Pupils take on a good range of responsibilities around the school and in the neighbourhood, such as running fund-raising cake sales and inviting the elderly to their carol concerts. School councillors are starting to take a more important role in running their own meetings. Several pupils were particularly proud to tell visitors about the local history of Letchworth. Pupils know the basic facts about different faiths, but do not have a greater understanding of how people from different backgrounds lead their lives. Their competency in literacy and numeracy is preparing them satisfactorily for life beyond school. They appreciate the chance to experience different jobs through the work-shadowing project. Attendance rates are in line with the national average.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teachers have good relationships with pupils and their parents. Many of the latter commented on how easy it is to approach teachers and find out how their children are progressing. Most teachers encourage pupils to evaluate their own learning by discussing their work and answering questions. This is particularly effective when pupils work in pairs or groups to spark debate. On occasion, teachers talk too much without involving the pupils enough, so the pace of learning slows and pupils start to daydream. In some lessons, learning goes well because pupils have plenty of chance to have 'hands-on' experience. For example, in a good Year 2 mathematics lesson, pupils enthusiastically copied their teacher by folding their pieces of paper to follow lines of symmetry. Some teachers are starting to use the interactive white-boards effectively to vary the ways in which they teach, but others are not making sufficient use of their scope to bring colour and stimulus to learning. Teachers are improving their skills to track the pupils' progress accurately. However, they are not consistently making use of assessment information to match work precisely to each individual's needs, or to ensure learning targets are meaningful to each pupil.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum currently follows a series of subject-based schemes for each year group that ensure that pupils satisfactorily gain knowledge and understanding. Nevertheless, the way the curriculum is organised does not always make learning relevant enough to pupils' needs and interests to engage them fully. Too few opportunities exist for pupils to use and develop their skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology in different subjects and projects. As a result, some pupils do not concentrate as well as they should in lessons. A different approach to the curriculum, in the form of the recent introduction of short ten-minute slots of creative and physical activities, is starting to show a positive effect on pupils' behaviour and concentration. Now, every pupil starts the day in a positive frame of mind following 'art start'. A varied range of extra-curricular sporting activities, including 'active 10' in the middle of lessons, makes a strong contribution to pupils' enjoyment and health and fitness.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

The school has very good procedures for ensuring pupils' care, safety and personal well-being. All safeguarding requirements are met. There is satisfactory support and guidance for pupils' personal development and academic achievement. Support is inconsistent for a small group of pupils who need additional help to ensure good behaviour. Consequently, a few do not make the progress of which they are capable, especially in writing. Nevertheless, these pupils are starting to benefit from the protective-behaviours strategy that teaches them how to cope calmly and effectively with their frustrations. There are examples of classes where marking focuses very clearly on what pupils have achieved in the lesson and gives additional challenges or tips on how to improve learning. In other classes, teachers check the work, but give little guidance on how pupils can improve.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The headteacher's very clear vision and decisive leadership are resulting in immediate improvements. She has involved the deputy headteacher, staff and the governing body in making an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development. As a result, everyone shares the headteacher's vision of improving achievement and the quality of education. Together they have already implemented several small, but effective curricular initiatives to increase pupils' enjoyment of learning. Regular tracking of pupils' progress is helping to raise achievement. Everyone has higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Consequently, the school is starting to be more effective in moving pupils effectively towards challenging targets. The deputy headteacher and subject leaders now hold teachers more to account for pupils' progress. However, this aspect of their work is still in its infancy, so the full impact of the new strategies has yet to be realised. Governors are better informed on the performance of the school, enabling them to challenge decisions effectively. The school is an inclusive community where discrimination is not tolerated. It is an active member of the local neighbourhood, but is not yet fully effective in helping pupils to value cultural diversity, or to use wider-world communities to effectively engage and inform their learning.

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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?	3
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 <sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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**

30th January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stonehill Primary School, Letchworth SG6 4SZ

Thank you very much for helping us on the inspection by talking to us and showing us what you can do. Your parents believe you are happy and in safe hands. We definitely agree.

You go to a satisfactory school. Standards in English, mathematics and science are similar to those in other schools, and you are making satisfactory progress because teaching is satisfactory. We think you do not have enough opportunities to write in subjects other than English to improve your standards in writing. Mrs Dent and her team of senior teachers lead the school satisfactorily. They are already thinking of ways to make learning more interesting and fun.

You told us that you like coming to school and we are not surprised. You get on well with your teachers and friends. Behaviour is no more than satisfactory because some of you need to be more aware of how your silly behaviour can spoil learning and enjoyment for others. We are pleased that you know how to lead healthy and safe lives. We especially like the way you are developing as responsible young people and starting to run your own council meetings. It is not every day that we see pupils keenly taking part in 'art start' to help freshen up brains for the learning day ahead!

To make your education better, I have asked your school to do three things:

- find activities that make learning fun and help you to enjoy different sorts of writing
- make sure teachers explain clearly how you can improve your own work for yourselves
- make sure that senior teachers help to improve teaching.

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your school. We know that your teachers make your school a special place for you. You can do your bit by continuing to be positive and by making the most of your time at Stonehill School.

Yours faithfully

Sarah McDermott

Lead inspector