

St Helen's Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118169
Local Authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	326775
Inspection date	27 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Coussins

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	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	51
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 Gweneth Mitchell
Headteacher	Miss Jane Loader
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Broomlands Close St Helens Ryde PO33 1XH
Telephone number	01983 872442
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- how well children are achieving in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- the extent to which the developments in the curriculum are having a positive impact on pupils' standards, achievement and personal development
- how well the school is improving the standard of pupils' writing.

Evidence was gathered from performance data, school information and records, and pupils' work. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with pupils, staff and governors also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

St Helen's is a very small primary school. Almost all the pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which relate mainly to speech, language and communication difficulties and autism. The school has the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Activemark awards. There are six children in the Early Years Foundation Stage who are grouped into one Reception class.

As part of the local authority's reorganisation of the education system, the school was notified in January 2008 that it would close in July 2010. Since January 2008, some staff and many pupils have left to secure places elsewhere and the intake in the Reception class is around half of that in previous years. The strength of feeling in the community against the closure has prompted an independent review panel to consider the possibility of forming a federation with a local school. This decision is due to be made during the week after the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Helen's Primary is a good school. One of its main strengths is its standing in the local community and the way in which it works well with and for the community. One parent expressed the view of many with the comment, 'Our school truly sits at the heart of the community and we have fought hard to keep it so.' The highly effective leadership of the headteacher has ensured that, despite the uncertainty over its future, the school has maintained what parents and children describe as 'a real family feel in a loving and caring environment'.

Excellent care, guidance and support make a considerable impact on pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils thrive at the school and become very well-rounded individuals who are extremely confident and happy. Parents are very pleased with what the school offers their children. One parent wrote, 'It is a safe environment in which to learn, my children really respond to their teachers and gain a lot of self-worth by going there.' Pupils say they think their school is very good and that they enjoy coming to school. As a reflection of pupils' extremely positive views, attendance is above average. The headteacher's relentless drive to ensure that pupils are offered the same breadth of experience and opportunities as pupils in larger schools has led to excellent partnerships with other schools and organizations. For example, there are opportunities for Year 4 pupils to participate in a residential trip with pupils from another school and for French lessons from a teacher at a local high school. Pupils and their parents appreciate the wide range of clubs and extra activities on offer, in which pupils can develop their physical skills and learn new skills such as yoga, knitting and gardening. Parents make a notable contribution by running some of the clubs.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and, along with their excellent attitudes, is a major factor in their good achievement. Pupils of all ages work and play together very well and enjoy celebrating each other's achievements, both personal and academic, as seen in a very good assembly. They feel safe, secure and free from bullying. Relationships between children and adults are trusting and caring and, as a result, pupils say they can always talk to an adult if there is anything they are worried about. The work the school has done to gain the Activemark award has helped pupils to have a good understanding of the need for regular exercise and for a healthy, balanced diet to keep fit and well. One pupil said, 'We do and;quot;Wake Up Shake Upand;quot; so our blood can go to our brains so we can think hard when we work.' The school council has a real voice in the school and is proud of its contribution to school life.

Children's skills and abilities when they begin school vary considerably from year to year but are broadly in line with those expected for their age. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average by the end of Year 2 and above the expectation for their age by the time they leave in Year 4. Within this positive picture, mathematics is the relatively weaker area. The school has correctly identified that problem solving and the application of mathematical skills are the areas to focus on to improve standards. The school keeps a very close check on where pupils are in their work and accurately identifies the next steps in their learning. As a result of this and of the good curriculum, excellent enrichment opportunities and good teaching, pupils achieve well. Recent changes in the curriculum, which include a more creative approach to planning, are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' motivation and to enable pupils to make meaningful links in their learning across different subjects. Pupils say that their project-based learning is fun and exciting and helps them to learn well. The purpose of lessons is usually explained carefully and pupils know what they need to do to

succeed. Pupils know their targets and how they can improve their work to achieve them because of good marking and feedback. Effective extra help is given to pupils to ensure that they all have the same opportunities, whatever their backgrounds or abilities. As a result, pupils with specific learning needs make at least similar progress to others. Skilled and experienced teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning by supporting individuals and small groups. The award of a Basic Skills Quality Mark, along with pupils' excellent personal skills, demonstrate that the pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher, who is supported well by staff and governors, has very successfully kept the children's welfare and achievement at the heart of the school's work. The impact of leadership is evident in many ways. For example, a major focus on writing since the last inspection has improved pupils' skills and standards, which are now above average, with more pupils reaching the higher Level 3 and above than in previous years. Community cohesion is good because the school works very effectively with its parents and partners in the local community. One parent wrote, 'I hope this school can continue to grow in this community as both young and old rely on it.' The school promotes good knowledge, understanding and tolerance of a culturally diverse population both nationally and globally. The global perspective is promoted, for example, through the link with a school in a village in Bangladesh. The governing body provides good leadership, supports the school well and holds it to account for its performance. There is good capacity to improve further, as demonstrated by the successful drive to raise standards further, and to ensure that pupils' personal development and enjoyment remain a high priority.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Their skills and knowledge are in line with expectations for their age when they start; they achieve well and most reach or exceed the goals for their learning by the time they move into Year 1. The six children who are currently in the Reception class progress and achieve well because of the good quality of the experiences provided for them. They benefit from individual attention and access to a good range of classroom resources, including computers. Children's personal development is good and they are able confidently to join in whole-school assemblies and the 'Wake Up and Shake Up' enjoyed by all pupils at the start of the day. There are good induction procedures that ensure children settle in well and benefit from the 'family' atmosphere and interaction with older pupils. Communication with parents is very good which means that staff know the children and their individual needs very well. Parents say they are kept well informed and are pleased with their children's good progress. There is a spacious outdoor area but it is under-resourced, which restricts the range of activities available; the school has correctly identified the scope for further improvement to support children's learning and development. Indoor space, although well used, is quite cramped but is adequate for the number of children using it.

There is a good balance between activities directed by adults and those where children can make their own choices. Children work well with each other and sustain their interest in specific activities. They make good progress in developing their early skills of linking sounds and letters (phonics) because of a consistent and 'fun' approach. For instance, they particularly enjoyed singing about Sammy Snake as part of their work on initial letter sounds. This is having a positive impact on their reading and writing work. Staff are particularly skilled in creating opportunities to develop children's communication skills and their knowledge and understanding of the world.

On occasion, however, the information recorded on the progress made by children is not used well enough to plan to meet the needs of the wide range of ability within this small group. Dancing to the music of Abba was very good for children's physical development and provided the opportunity for more mature children to talk about the effect of exercise on their heart rate.

The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good overall. This is because of the overview maintained by the headteacher who, with the very experienced teaching assistant, very effectively supports and guides the less experienced Reception class teacher. As a result, some valuable procedures, particularly in tracking and recording progress, have been established. The headteacher takes the class on a regular weekly basis and plays a major role in ensuring that routines are well established and that children are well cared for.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the provision for outdoor learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Ensure that standards in mathematics improve to the level of standards in reading and writing.

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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?	1
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?	3
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1

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	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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**

20 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Helen's Primary School, Ryde, PO33 1XH

I am writing to let you know how much my colleague and I enjoyed our visit to your school and what we found out. Thank you all for making us so welcome, for talking to us about your learning and telling us what you think about your school. We agree with you that yours is a good school and these are the reasons why.

- Your behaviour is excellent and this helps you learn well in your lessons.
- You reach good standards by the time you leave, particularly in your reading and writing. This means you are well prepared to move on to your next school. You have worked hard to improve your writing - well done for this.
- You told us that you really enjoy being at school and love all the different things you can do.
- Everyone in the school takes excellent care of you and helps you all to do your best.
- Your headteacher does a very good job in running the school.
- Your teachers make sure that they know exactly how well you are learning and what you need to do to next.

To make your good school even better, we have asked teachers to do two things. One is to help you do as well in your mathematics work as you do in reading and writing. The second thing is to improve the outdoor area for the Reception class children so that they can learn as well as they can. You might have some good ideas and suggestions for this.

We were very impressed with the way you all get on so well together and look after each other at work and play.

Thank you again for all your help and for being so friendly, polite and interesting to talk to.

My very best wishes to you all for your future.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Coussins

Lead Inspector