

Staplehurst School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118313
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326804
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	410
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	Carl Hynes
Headteacher	Annemarie Bolt
Date of previous school inspection	11 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Gybbon Rise Staplehurst Tonbridge TN12 0LZ
Telephone number	01580 891765
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is larger than most other primary schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. Most pupils are from White British families and a few are from Gypsy/Roma backgrounds. A very small number are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Early Years Foundation Stage experience is provided in the Reception class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Staplehurst Primary School is a good school. It has continued to improve since its last inspection. One parent summarised some of the strengths of the school as: 'I am very pleased with the school. Our son is happy, challenged and his individual learning needs are well catered for.' An important reason for the school's continued success is the drive and determination of the headteacher. She provides clear and effective leadership and has encouraged a shared approach to school leadership, which staff appreciate and have responded to positively. Leadership and management are good, and the headteacher is well supported by other leaders, some of whom are relatively new to their roles, and by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic governing body. Improvement has been secured because the school has focused well on areas of relative weakness. The way that the school responded positively to concerns about standards in pupils' writing shows its proactive approach and illustrates good capacity for further improvement. A new approach to enlivening teachers' approach to writing through the whole-school 'Big Write' programme has been done well.

Standards and pupils' achievement have improved since the last inspection. Children in Reception have below the expected level of skills and knowledge when they start school. They make good progress and reach average standards by the end of Reception. The national test results have varied from average to above average. Although standards are currently closer to the average in Year 2 and Year 6, across the school as a whole they are rising and are above average. Pupils' speaking and listening and their oral skills are above average and standards in writing are rising rapidly. Taking a three-year average, pupils make good progress between Year 2 and Year 6 and this remains the picture currently. As a result, their achievement is good. Their progress in reading and writing is good, but in mathematics it is satisfactory. Until recently, procedures to enable teachers to monitor and encourage progress in this subject were not sufficiently rigorous.

The good teaching is appreciated by several parents. One commented, 'Staff work really hard for our children and inspire them with a variety of interesting teaching approaches.' These strengths in teaching and the new topic-based curriculum are confirmed by the inspection findings. Teachers are sometimes inspirational in their approach; they manage pupils well and develop very positive attitudes to learning and relationships with their pupils. Pupils are encouraged to do their best. The curriculum is also good. The new topic-based approach, which emphasises learning across different subjects, has been introduced in Years 1 and 2, and is being developed in Years 3 to 6. This approach, together with a good number of visits, visitors and clubs, is an important reason why pupils' enjoyment of school is excellent and they are well prepared for their future learning.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent. Pupils are exceptionally enthusiastic, articulate and confident in the way they express views on a wide variety of issues. Behaviour is good overall, and sometimes in lessons and assemblies, it is excellent. Pupils enjoy school very much and their attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils have an excellent appreciation of the school and comment maturely on aspects of its work. They contribute very positively to the wider community. Pupils receive good care, guidance and support. The needs of pupils who find learning difficult are quickly identified and met well by class teachers and their assistants. Appropriate support groups are provided and links to other agencies when required. Different assessment systems have been tried but recently introduced systems are now providing clearer information about pupils' progress. The assessment of pupils' writing is effective. However,

assessment information is not used consistently by teachers to plan the next steps for all pupils or to set learning targets for pupils in subjects other than writing.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get a good start to their time at school and achieve well because of the good quality teaching and care they receive. Provision is led and managed well. Standards by the beginning of Year 1 have varied recently. Some groups have been above age-related expectations but the standards reached by the current group are as expected for their age. Adults make good use of questioning and discussion to assess and develop children's learning. Independence is encouraged and developed as children confidently select their own activities to follow and equipment to use. Children work cooperatively in pairs and bigger groups, and they share resources and support each other well. The classroom is attractive and well resourced. The curriculum is planned effectively to include a full range of interesting activities, both inside the classroom and in the outside area. The focus on teaching letter sounds is good and is having a positive impact on the development of early writing skills. Children are becoming more confident in writing for different purposes and are adventurous in their attempts to spell more complex words. The school is aware that children generally make less rapid progress in developing their number skills. Sometimes, teachers' planning does not show clearly enough the specific learning intended in an activity. Care and welfare are good, especially in the sensitive way in which children are introduced to school, and the effective links established with their parents. Children feel safe and happy and are quickly ready to learn.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate the progress that pupils make in mathematics.
- Ensure that assessment information is used more effectively to inform teachers' planning and to set learning targets for pupils in subjects other than writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have been mostly above average, especially in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 3. The current group is on track to reach standards that are broadly average. Standards in Year 6 have been more variable. In 2008, standards in the national tests in English, mathematics and science were broadly average. However, indications from the school's own assessment records, and confirmed by inspection evidence, are that standards across the school are rising and are above average in important areas. Across the school, the standard of pupils' speaking and listening skills is above average. More able pupils are particularly well challenged, and develop exceptionally good, confident, expressive oral skills. Standards in writing across the school are improving rapidly as a result of the introduction of the whole-school 'Big Write' programme. Pupils who need extra help with their learning make good progress because of the effective support they receive. Pupils' achievement overall is good, but their achievement and progress in mathematics is satisfactory. This is because, until very recently, procedures to track the progress pupils make have not been sufficiently robust. In addition, assessment information is not used to set pupils learning targets that show them how to improve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Relationships are good and the large number of pupils in the school, from a wide range of different backgrounds, gets on very well together. Pupils of different ages are extremely confident and articulate, and willingly express well-considered opinions, including their views on things they consider wrong. Younger pupils are very confident in talking to older pupils. In assemblies, pupils display excellent behaviour and a willingness to collaborate, seen, for example, in their very effective four-part singing of an African song. Pupils know about different world faiths and their festivals, although their knowledge of the different cultures within Britain is less secure.

Pupils feel safe in school and have a good understanding of safe practices, including the importance of using the internet sensibly. Pupils have an excellent awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Healthy eating and the importance of exercise are strongly in evidence and physical education is the 'favourite' subject of a large number of pupils. Pupils' excellent enjoyment is shown in their readiness to learn and their enthusiasm for school in general. Smiles on faces and pleasure in learning are very common! Attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. They relish opportunities to take on responsibility, and talk enthusiastically about being house captains, and members of the eco committee and the school council. They are effectively involved in village activities, for example through choir concerts. Older pupils are proud of the support they give to younger ones. Pupils develop well as confident and independent learners and thereby make good gains in the skills essential for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Strengths in teaching are in the positive way in which pupils are managed and the encouragement given to, and opportunity provided for, pupils to share their opinions and ideas. This is done through teachers' effective use of questioning, whole-class discussions and the use of 'talk partners'. Pupils' confidence and ability to discuss and reflect are developed particularly well. Other important strengths in teaching, which were often evident in other lessons across the school, were observed in a very effective literacy lesson for pupils in Year 4 which focused on persuasive writing in advertising slogans. The relevance of the topic, a clear reference to what pupils were expected to learn and the effective use of the interactive whiteboard immediately secured pupils' interest and involvement. Pupils shared their views with each other and commented critically on them. The importance of other grammatical features, such as rhyme, alliteration and the use of rhetorical questions, was also cleverly introduced by the teacher. As a result, pupils made very good gains in their appreciation of the wider impact of the written word. Occasionally, teachers do not use assessment data sufficiently clearly to plan for the next work for all the pupils in the class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum provides an effective balance between provision of basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills and bringing together learning across

other subjects. A new approach to teaching the curriculum through separate topics has been well researched by leaders and carefully and sensitively introduced in Years 1 and 2, and is currently being extended to Years 3 to 6. The school is aware of the need to continue to evaluate and review its introduction to enhance its effectiveness further. The curriculum is responsive to the needs of pupils, who say how much they enjoy what is provided. The curriculum promotes and encourages pupils' personal skills very effectively. The clear emphasis on physical education activities is valued by most pupils and helps their appreciation of healthy living. The wide range of enrichment activities through the use of visitors, visits and carefully planned theme weeks, helps to make learning fun and relevant.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils develop very well as confident learners within a very supportive, safe and orderly environment. The importance of a healthy lifestyle is promoted particularly well. The arrangements to safeguard pupils are robust and regularly reviewed. The needs of vulnerable pupils and those who find learning difficult are met well through appropriate additional support. Good links are established with outside agencies when required. The school effectively sustains its good level of attendance through careful monitoring and its effective partnership with parents. Marking often provides specific helpful advice, although it is not done consistently by all staff. New assessment procedures are well established in writing, suitably involving pupils and giving them a good understanding of how to improve. These systems are beginning to be established in other parts of the curriculum but have yet to be fully embedded.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has led the school well through a time of low standards and aspirations and provides an effective and shared style of leadership. She supports the professional development of staff well and is continually looking for ways to improve the school's performance. Some school leaders are new to their roles and are developing their skills and responsibilities well. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are effective in providing an accurate view of the school's own performance. The drive to raise standards and to accelerate pupils' achievement is clear in its improvement plan. The priority in the school improvement plan to target improvement in writing has been managed well and the need to focus on improving numeracy is recognised. The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. The school has a good view of its own community and is developing its links with more distant communities in Switzerland and Bermondsey. Governors have a secure knowledge of the school and are very supportive. They use their individual interests and expertise well and challenge the school effectively in its work.

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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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
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?	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**

15 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Staplehurst Primary School, Tonbridge, TN12 0LZ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to the school recently to see how well you were doing. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing you at work and at play. Your school is continuing to improve and now provides you with a good education.

Here are some of the best things about your school:

- You enjoy school and you make an excellent contribution to the school community and wider village life.
- You are making good progress and are achieving well in most subjects.
- You behave well and the enthusiasm you show in lessons and the thoughtful and sensible comments you make in discussions are very impressive indeed.
- Teachers mostly make learning come alive for you and the way the topics are taught helps to interest you and make your learning fun.
- The children in the Reception classes get off to a good start to their time at school.
- You have worked hard with your teachers to improve your writing and you really enjoy the 'Big Write' approach.
- Your headteacher and other leaders work hard and share a clear view of how to make the school even better.

Here are a few things that we have asked the school to improve:

- Ensure that you make faster progress in mathematics.
- Ensure that teachers use information about how well you are doing in planning your work and set you targets that show you how to improve in subjects other than writing.

You can help by always working as hard as you can. Thank you again for your welcome. We wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Paul Missin

Lead inspector