

St Stephen's Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118537
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326844
Inspection date	22 October 2008
Reporting inspector	David Collard

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	345
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vic Hester
Headteacher	Stuart Pywell
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2005
School address	Hales Drive St Stephens Canterbury CT2 7AD
Telephone number	01227 464119
Fax number	01227 780855

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

Achievement in writing and whether the top end of the middle ability range are making the same levels of progress as other groups.

How well assessment data are used to provide individualised learning and how much impact this has on the levels of achievement.

The quality of leadership and management and how this has provided the challenge and impact to move the school forward.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, interviews with the headteacher, senior leadership team and governors, and discussions with pupils and staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but no evidence was found to suggest that the school's own self-assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger-than-average junior school, on the outskirts of the city, serves its immediate locality. There are a higher proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than that nationally. Most of these pupils have learning difficulties linked to literacy and/or numeracy, social or emotional development.

The school has gained a number of prestigious national awards, including Healthy School status and the Gold Artsmark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This school provides an outstanding quality of education. It is striving successfully to achieve its aim of producing pupils who have the knowledge and understanding to be independent learners capable of 'thinking outside the box'. This is due to very highly effective and consistent teaching through the school, all of which is ensuring pupils make excellent academic and personal progress from one year to the next. Pupils enter Year 3 with standards that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. By the time pupils leave in Year 6, national test results are significantly above average. However, this is only part of the story because the school's extensive curriculum and the outstanding care and guidance means that pupils are extremely well prepared to get the most from their future education. As some Year 6 pupils said, 'It is not all writing; I am proud of everything I do.' Their achievement is excellent.

Pupils are outgoing, very enthusiastic about learning and are keen to share all their successes with others. In lessons and around the school, they get on well with each other, sometimes mixing and playing with younger pupils from the adjacent infant school. Through their school council, they are invited to suggest new ideas and are particularly proud of their imminent introduction of a 'friendship stop' to help any pupils who are sad or find it difficult to make strong relationships. The council has received a budget this year but members are making sure that it is used wisely, otherwise, as they said, 'we will have the money clawed back'.

Pupils have an extremely good understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle. Many take part in the very extensive range of physical activities, sports clubs or competitions and there is an early morning exercise programme in all years. The care, consideration and courtesy award, presented termly, is highly sought after and encourages pupils to think about their interactions with others and how to act safely. Pupils make a good contribution to the community. They are active fund-raisers and, through the family days, are able to go to shows, museums and sporting events. The school has innovatively used the well attended 'Laze on the Lawn' days to help families understand more about different areas of the curriculum. There are links with France and Spain. However, the school has rightly started to extend these further to ensure that pupils are fully aware and can experience and value the diversity of different cultures and traditions. This is too recent to have a full impact but will also build upon the good quality community cohesion that already exists.

The very extensive assessment information, along with national and local comparators, indicates that all pupils make at least good progress from their starting points. Many of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve the age-expected levels by the time they leave, but from much lower starting points, an outstanding achievement. Different groupings and setting have identified specific groups in danger of underachieving, particularly those at the top end of the middle ability range, and the very strong support they have received has helped raise the proportion of pupils achieving above the age-expected levels. In some year groups, this is nearly half of all pupils. Through further creative development within all subjects, the school is now correctly working on building upon this success to ensure that all pupils achieve as highly as possible in their writing as they have consistently done in mathematics and science. Achievement is good in writing but outstanding in mathematics and science.

Pupils receive high quality teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge and there are a number of specialists and recognised advanced skills teachers whose delivery of lessons is exciting and innovative. For example, one class, learning about micro-organisms, were able to

show the spread of bacteria through the use of spray glitter on their hands and how this passed between each other so rapidly. In another English lesson about characterisation, film clips linked neatly with a proposed trip as part of national film week. Those teachers who are less experienced, as well as teaching assistants, quickly gain confidence through the very strong support network, regular monitoring and being able to see 'what good learning is all about'.

The curriculum provides many opportunities to enable pupils to become independent learners. It has been linked very well to emotional, academic and social needs so that pupils can experience different activities enabling them to make choices about what interests and motivates them most. Topics and themes are extensively discussed between the staff to ensure there is a balance between pupils learning new skills as well as developing a secure knowledge base. Improvements are being trialled to see how to make the best use of this creative approach so that it will provide the highest level of challenge for all, for example to ensure that pupils still get the chance to extend basic skills such as writing in other curriculum areas. At regular intervals, pupils and teachers discuss what needs to be done next to improve so that small steps in learning are understood and celebrated when they are achieved. In this way, pupils are increasingly aware of their own capability and teachers know how best to support this.

The extremely able headteacher sets the highest expectations for the whole school community. He, along with the equally able senior team and governing body, are reflective about the best educational practice and, because of a clear and articulated vision for the school, use innovations wisely. Finances are handled prudently and resources, including the accommodation, have been improved. The partnership with other schools and with support agencies is exceptionally strong. There is good support from the parent body but the school is not complacent. For example, following its own questionnaires, it is actively working to find ways to ensure that every parent knows and understands the reasons for any decisions. Since the last inspection, the school has continued to provide a high quality education for its pupils and has raised standards to become significantly above average. It has also built upon its many successes, all of which demonstrate an excellent capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' standards in writing by developing the curriculum to provide extensive opportunities to use writing in different forms.

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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?	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

23 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Stephen's Junior School, Canterbury CT2 7AD

Thank you for making me so welcome during my recent visit. I thoroughly enjoyed talking to so many of you and seeing what you were doing in your lessons. As I promised some of you, I am writing to let you know the main findings of my report.

- You told me how much you enjoyed school. I can see why. I think you are receiving an outstanding quality of education and are being very well prepared for your next schools. You all have a lot to live up to so that this excellent achievement continues.
- You are making excellent progress both in your schoolwork and in your personal development. As some of you told me, this is because of the excellent teaching and very strong support you are getting to help you do your best. I enjoyed watching some of the exciting lessons and practical work and I am sure that this is all helping you think really hard.
- There are lots of exciting things happening in different subjects. Along with this, you also told me just how many different clubs and activities you and your families can get involved with. I wonder how you fit it all in!
- I have said that I think you are looked after and cared for well. You have been helping in this so keep passing on good ideas to the school council to help the school improve even more.
- Your headteacher, along with all the other members of staff and the governors, know what to do to make things better. I have asked them to ensure that the standards you reach in writing are as good as those you are already getting in mathematics and science. They are going to work on giving you more opportunities to improve writing in lessons.

Finally, I wish you all good luck for the future. Continue to work hard so that your school continues to be one of the best.

Yours sincerely

David Collard Lead inspector