

Seal Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118605
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326855
Inspection date	12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes

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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	127
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	Avril Hunter
Headteacher	Tracey Smith
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Zambra Way Seal Sevenoaks TN15 0DJ
Telephone number	01732 762388

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	12 March 2009
Inspection number	326855

Fax number

01732 764249

Age group	4-11
Inspection date	12 March 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is smaller than most other primary schools. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage into the Reception class. The majority of pupils are from White British families. Others come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including Gypsy/Roma families. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average. There have been many changes to staff over recent years, particularly affecting Years 3 to 6, and including some key leadership roles. Staffing has now stabilised.

The school has been accredited with a number of awards including Artsmark (bronze) and a government Achievement Award for improvement.

There is a privately run pre-school provision situated on the school's site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. The school has many strengths and these are improving provision and helping pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning. Parents value the school's inclusive ethos, its sense of community and the good support for individual pupils. As one commented, 'My child is always excited about coming to school.' Pupils' personal development is good. They behave well, feel safe and are confident that adults will help them should they need support. These qualities provide an invaluable foundation for pupils' increasing rates of progress and are fostered by excellent pastoral care. Staff go that 'extra mile' to ensure pupils are nurtured by the best support possible. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now above average.

Achievement is satisfactory, and improving as a result of the school's strong provision. The benefits are especially marked lower down the school. Children make good progress in Reception, for example. Standards have also gradually risen since the last inspection at Year 2 and are above average. While learning in lessons has accelerated in Years 3 to 6, the progress of many of these pupils has been affected over time by constant changes to staff. As a result, standards remain below average in the present Year 6. In particular, too few pupils reach the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics.

A strong curriculum provides an invaluable support for good teaching and learning and pupils' enjoyment of school life. Pupils enthusiastically support the impressive range of extra-curricular activities, which add much to their personal development. In the main, staff plan meticulously to tailor activities carefully to pupils' needs, setting personal targets to help pupils to understand clearly what they need to do to improve. This approach is particularly successful with those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and ensures their good progress. The school recognises that it must now do more to challenge its more able pupils to reach the higher levels of attainment.

The headteacher, staff and governors have a great commitment to the school and it runs smoothly. The school is rigorous in its self-evaluation and is well focused on what it has to do to continue to raise standards. This focused approach has already brought about many improvements. Indeed, the sustained lift in standards at Year 2, combined with the school's excellent pastoral care and support, demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve further. Governors know the school well and work hard on its behalf. They are aware that they are not yet fully involved in monitoring the school's effectiveness and, therefore, not able to give it all the support they should in raising standards further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When they first join the Reception class, children's attainment is below expectations. They go on to achieve well, so that standards are average by the time they reach Year 1. Children settle in quickly because of effective transition into school and good induction arrangements. Relationships are supportive, leading to good gains in children's personal and social development. Children behave well, and their positive attitudes are reflected in their enjoyment and confidence to initiate activities for themselves. Pastoral care is a strength of provision and the welfare of children is given the highest priority. Children say they feel safe and are confident that staff look after them. Links with parents are effective.

Good teaching and a well-balanced curriculum ensure that children develop independence and make good progress in all areas of learning. Communication, language and literacy is a particular strength, reflecting a systematic approach to teaching children how to link sounds and letters together. Standards continue to rise because of the drive and good organisation of the leadership. Thorough assessment procedures identify the next steps in learning and ensure children are provided with challenging activities. The outdoor learning area currently provides limited learning opportunities. Nevertheless, plans are already in place to redesign this space so that it better meets the children's needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Catch up on slower progress in the past, in order to raise standards to average levels by Year 6 in English and mathematics.
- Ensure more able pupils in Years 3 to 6 are always challenged to do their very best.
- Ensure governors take a full part in monitoring the school's effectiveness so that they give the school their full support in raising standards.

A small proportion of 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

While achievement as a whole is satisfactory, progress has increased and is already good for many pupils. The impact of good teaching and learning is most marked in Reception and Years 1 and 2, where pupils are achieving well. Consequently, standards have risen steadily over recent years in Year 2, and are now starting to exceed average levels, especially in reading.

Improvement has been slower to influence achievement in Years 3 to 6, given the many changes to staff. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 are now doing well during lessons, as a result of consistently good teaching, but they have further to go to catch up. Consequently, achievement for these pupils at present is satisfactory, rather than good. This is particularly the case for the present Year 6, where standards are below average in mathematics and English. In particular, too few pupils reach Level 5 in either subject. However, pupils' current work indicates that standards are rising, supported successfully by teachers' high expectations and rigorous tracking of pupils' performance. Well-planned and targeted support from teaching assistants ensures that those with learning difficulties and and/or disabilities progress well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are enthusiastic, enjoy school and behave well. They say they feel safe and secure and are confident that the school will deal with any issues that may arise. Their participation in the many sporting activities shows their good knowledge of how to keep healthy and fit. Pupils' moral and social development is good. Many pupils welcome the informal opportunities provided by the school's breakfast club to talk about any issues that might be worrying them. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong. They are keen to play a part in maintaining the school's orderly community as, for example, members of the School Council, or as monitors and 'playtime buddies'. Opportunities for spiritual development are valuably given through close links with the local church. Pupils have a strong awareness of ethnic and cultural diversity, promoted

through projects such as 'One World Week' and 'Traveller Week'. Relationships with the wider community, through links with local schools, partnerships and community groups, are well developed. While pupils' good personal attitudes and qualities contribute valuably to their future economic well-being, the school is working hard to ensure that pupils' academic skills are as well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching is characterised by carefully planned and stimulating activities which motivate pupils. Good learning is also enhanced by the warmth of relationships between adults and pupils and among pupils themselves. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations. Opportunities for pupils to work with others, such as 'talking partners', are especially successful. In addition, teachers ensure that pupils understand what they are learning and how they will recognise success. They check what pupils understand and develop their thinking through probing questions. These qualities have already had a significant impact in Years 1 and 2, but have yet to fully influence longer-term achievement for the older pupils. In particular, although activities are mostly planned carefully to meet pupils' needs, they do not always challenge more able pupils to do their very best.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Programmes of work are planned carefully to meet the needs and learning styles of most pupils, although sometimes not enough is demanded of more able pupils in Years 3 to 6, particularly in English and mathematics. An excellent range of enrichment activities, including themed focus weeks, French and specialist sports teaching, as well as a good range of visits and visitors, all help to enhance the curriculum. Strong personal, social and health education provides many opportunities for pupils to develop their personal skills. Daily reading groups, have done much to improve standards in reading, particularly for the younger pupils. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) and interactive whiteboards in classrooms has enhanced pupils' experience and learning. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities is well attended by pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is excellent and academic guidance and support are good. Both are key factors behind the school's improving academic picture. The majority of parents and children view Seal as a caring, inclusive school. Those pupils with a range of learning and personal needs receive well-tailored care and support. The provision of a specialist family worker, well-organised systems and good links with external agencies help the school to provide a wide range of support. Training and procedures in relation to child protection and first aid are thorough. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good. As one parent said, 'Nothing is ever too much trouble.'

Marking provides helpful feedback to pupils about how well they are doing. Pupils benefit from individual learning targets in literacy and numeracy set as a result. Most older pupils know their targets and some can evaluate their progress. These effective strategies help pupils to know

how to improve their work. Although these procedures are good, they are not yet sufficiently embedded to be having a full effect on the progress of older pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The strong leadership of the headteacher has done much to increase the school's capacity for moving forward. Clear strategic direction, focused on key areas for improvement, has already brought about improvements in achievement and standards. Members of the senior leadership team provide valuable support, but to some extent improvement has been constrained until recently by the absence of some key roles. These responsibilities are now developing. The quality of provision and pupils' progress are monitored closely and the school is clear about its strengths and weaknesses and what remains to be addressed. Detailed tracking of pupils' progress has been used to set challenging targets for further improvement of standards and help has been sought from the local authority to assist the school in meeting them. The impact of strategies can be seen already lower down the school and is now starting to have a similar effect in Years 3 to 6.

Governor support has also played an important part in the school's improvement. However, while they are knowledgeable about the school, governors are not yet fully involved in evaluating its work and outcomes. Equality of opportunity and the celebration of difference are strongly promoted by the school. Community cohesion is good. Pupils benefit from a wide range of learning opportunities provided by the school's 'One World' initiative to find out about the ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds of pupils from their local as well as international and UK communities.

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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?	2
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?	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?	3
The standards ¹ 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	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	2
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	3

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?	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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**

13 March 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Seal Church of England Primary School, Sevenoaks TN15 0DJ

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you and watching you at work and play. You told us that you enjoyed school and that you got on well with your friends and adults in school. You said that you really enjoyed the Breakfast and the school's 'Week 53' Clubs.

We found that your school is satisfactory overall. It also has a number of good features. Most of you work hard, behave well in lessons and have good attitudes towards your work. Some of you make good progress, particularly the younger children, who achieve high standards, especially in reading. The Reception class provides really well for the youngest children too. You are taught well and your teachers plan your lessons carefully to help you enjoy your learning. Those who need help get good support. However, some older pupils have quite a bit of catching up to do, particularly in English and mathematics. All the staff and governors look after you well and are working hard to make the school even better. We have asked your school to do three things to make it even better still:

- to make sure that pupils in Years 3 to 6 catch up on their progress in order to reach higher standards in English and mathematics
- to ensure that pupils in Years 3 to 6 are always challenged to do their best, especially those who find their work quite easy
- to make sure that governors check very carefully how well the school is doing.

You can help as well by continuing to work hard and doing your best.

We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Wendy Forbes

Lead inspector