

# Sonning Common Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123038
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	327836
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Olson Davis

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>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	362
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>	Mrs Jackie Million
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Chris Hirst
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 November 2005
<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>	Grove Road Sonning Common Reading RG4 9RJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	0118 972 2105
<b>Fax number</b>	0118 972 1019

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<b>Age group</b>	4–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a large school in which the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. Most pupils are of White British heritage and very few pupils are at the early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is below average. The range of needs includes pupils with moderate learning difficulties and pupils with behavioural difficulties. There is Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision for pupils in the Reception classes. The headteacher joined the school two weeks before the inspection. There is privately-run pre-school care on the site during term time. A special school is also located on the same site.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school that has made notable improvements since its last inspection and is well placed to improve further. Central to the school's success is good leadership and management. The newly appointed, experienced headteacher has very quickly acquired an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Other senior leaders and subject managers provide clear direction within their areas of responsibility. There is a strong sense of shared purpose and a clear vision for future development among staff. The school is supported and challenged to do even better by a strong governing body. The majority of parents are pleased with the school's work. One parent wrote: 'There is a strong values ethos in the school community. My children have had the opportunity to learn, in the widest sense, and to develop their particular academic and sporting abilities.'

The school's commitment to placing 'values education' at the centre of its work is reflected in its strong ethos of care for pupils. As a result, their personal development is good. Pupils are polite and friendly, and show respect for each other's feelings and opinions. The school council enables pupils to contribute positively to improving the school. Through the 'e-kids' and the gardening club, pupils develop insights into environmental issues. They make a valuable contribution to the life of the school as they promote notions of sustainability and organise recycling and energy saving. Pupils show a good understanding of the benefits of good diet and exercise. They participate eagerly in physical exercise in the physical education lessons, and in the wide range of sporting activities after school.

Pupils achieve well regardless of their gender, ethnicity or additional learning needs. Children enter the Reception class with broadly average levels of skills, and attain above average standards at the end of Year 6. This is the result of good teaching and good support for vulnerable pupils. Pupils are enthused by an interesting and varied curriculum, which is greatly enhanced by a wide range of enrichment activities. The curriculum stimulates and responds to pupils' interests in the creative arts. Pupils' vibrant artwork contributes to the pleasing displays in school. Pupils' learning benefits from the interesting way that teachers make use of the extensive grounds that surround the school. Despite these strengths in the teaching and curriculum, standards in writing are not as high as in reading, mathematics and science. Fewer than the expected proportions of pupils reach the highest levels at Year 2 and Year 6. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to acquire advanced writing skills or to practise these skills other than in literacy lessons. Nonetheless, pupils have good levels of basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology. These, along with good personal and social skills and attitudes, prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education.

Recent developments in the roles and responsibilities of staff have brought greater rigour to the use of assessment information. Several initiatives, such as strengthening the procedures for tracking pupils' progress and providing more opportunities for pupils to use their skills in real contexts, have resulted in higher standards in reading and mathematics. This shows the school's good capacity to improve, although there is still more work to do to raise standards in writing. Governors know the school well through their own effective monitoring. This allows them to participate fully in managing the school's strategic development.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Children are well cared for and happy. This is because relationships are good and adults provide positive role models for the children on how to behave and to treat others with respect. As a result, children settle quickly and make good strides in their personal development and confidence. There is a strong emphasis on developing the children's knowledge and understanding of the world, and on their physical and creative development. Activities are enhanced by the imaginative use of the school's spacious grounds. During their time in the 'forest school', the children are able to develop their own ideas, be inquisitive and explore. At the same time, their skills in language are promoted well; for example, one little boy observed that meat eaters are called carnivores, because he had remembered the term from a previous 'forest school' activity. Indoors, handling and observing ice melting also generated discussion and vocabulary, especially as the activity was presented in an interesting way using rubber gloves to provide 'frozen hand sculptures'. As a result of good teaching and stimulating activities, many children reach the expected goals in most areas of learning by the time they enter Year 1. However, teachers realise that there is more to do to raise children's skills in communication, language and literacy, particularly as these skills are often at a lower level when children start school.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve writing by providing more opportunities for pupils to develop advanced writing skills in other subjects.
- Raise children's attainment in communication, language and literacy in the EYFS.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Standards in reading are above average, and pupils make good progress throughout the school because teachers provide well-planned reading activities. However, standards in writing at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are lower than expected. In particular, too few pupils are reaching the highest Levels 3 and 5 at the ends of Year 2 and Year 6. This is because pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop more advanced writing skills within different kinds of writing, and to write purposefully in other subjects. Achievement in mathematics for middle-ability pupils dipped last year. Effective school self-evaluation, and swift action by school leaders, have led to improved achievement for this group through focused group teaching pitched at the right level for them. Pupils do well in science, and also reach above average standards, because they are given good opportunities to plan and carry out investigations. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds make the same good progress as their classmates. Pupils who find learning difficult also make good progress, because of the effective support they receive. Pupils are set to achieve their challenging targets at the end of this year.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Assemblies successfully reinforce the moral and social values of the school community. There are good relationships between adults and pupils, and between pupils. In classrooms this results in a happy, productive and purposeful learning environment in which pupils are increasingly taking responsibility for their

learning. Pupils behave well in response to the school's core values and clear behaviour code. Those who occasionally display challenging behaviour are well supported in their efforts to improve. Pupils enjoy coming to school, and this is reflected in their good attitudes to learning and good attendance. They feel safe because occasional instances of unkind behaviour are dealt with promptly and effectively. Pupils are keen to take on responsibility, for example as peer mediators and as buddies. They regularly take part in local events such as singing to local groups, and show a sense of social responsibility by raising money for charities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Pupils feel involved in their learning because teachers give clear explanations and encourage pupils to discuss their work. Teachers make good use of resources, including the interactive whiteboards and laptops, to support pupils' thinking and stimulate their interest. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to provide good-quality help for pupils who find learning difficult, allowing them to participate fully in the lessons. Teachers regularly and rigorously assess pupils' work so that they know their pupils well, and are working on involving pupils more actively in assessing their own progress. They provide interesting work for pupils that is mostly well matched to their abilities. However, they sometimes miss opportunities to add extra challenge to pupils' work in writing. The quality of marking varies. In most lessons, work is carefully marked and teachers' comments help pupils to improve. In other lessons, comments do not provide enough guidance for pupils because they are not often linked to the purpose of the lesson or to pupils' targets.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

School leaders monitor the curriculum carefully to make sure that it meets the needs of different groups of pupils, particularly those in the mixed-age classes and those who find learning difficult. Opportunities for pupils to extend their writing skills by writing for different purposes are becoming increasingly effective in English lessons, but are not planned well enough in other subjects. Pupils' personal development benefits from a well-planned programme in personal, social, health and citizenship education. The school reaches out to the local and wider community and promotes community cohesion well. Pupils' learning profits from the good links with local schools, schools abroad and other agencies. Pupils learn different languages, such as Italian and French, which aids their social skills and boosts their confidence. The outdoor space is used well to help pupils become more environmentally aware. For example, Year 1 pupils were involved in a project to produce a field of wheat which they harvested. Produce grown by pupils and eggs laid by the school's chickens are used as ingredients in pupils' meals at lunchtime.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school's strong caring ethos means that pupils feel valued and grow in confidence. Procedures for ensuring the protection, safety and well-being of pupils are robust. As a result, pupils feel safe. There is a well-organised and informed approach to providing the right type of support at the right time for pupils who find learning difficult. The expertise, both in the school and also from links with the special school on site, mean that there is a wealth of staff

knowledge and experience to ensure that pupils make the progress they should. Teachers make good use of assessment information to identify, track and support pupils' learning needs and to set challenging targets. Pupils are aware of their targets for writing, but this process is not yet sharp enough to ensure that all pupils make the same good progress in writing as they do in other areas of learning.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' good progress in their academic and personal development owes much to the good leadership and management at all levels. School leaders know what the school is good at and where it needs to improve, and use this knowledge well to pinpoint actions which have led to improvements. Professional development has focused on helping subject leaders to play their full part in improving standards and providing good support for staff. As a result, subject leaders have strengthened provision where needed, but know there is more to be done to ensure that even more pupils attain higher standards, particularly in writing. Parents are positive about the school, but a number would like to be kept better informed about their child's progress and events taking place in school. Governors are determined to ensure the school continues to improve. Their efficient committee structure, close involvement in drawing up the school development plan, and visits to school to see how well the plans are progressing, are helping them to work closely with the leadership team to ensure that this occurs.

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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 <sup>1</sup> 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

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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>	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	2

## The quality of provision

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

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

04 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sonning Common Primary School, Reading, RG4 9RJ

My fellow inspectors and I visited your school recently to check how well you were getting on. Thank you for being so friendly and making us feel so welcome. We found that your school provides you with a good education that prepares you well for the next stage of your learning.

Here are some of the good things about your school:

- your attendance is good, and the staff take good care of you
- the children in the Reception classes do well because they are given interesting activities, particularly in the 'forest school'
- you enjoy your learning and the other activities in school
- you behave well and want to do your best in lessons
- the school listens to you when you suggest how things could be better, and you value being given responsibilities
- you are making good progress in your learning
- the new headteacher, staff and governors have clear plans on how to improve the school.

To improve further, we have asked the school to:

- help you to do better in your writing by teaching you more advanced writing skills, and giving you more opportunities to practise your writing skills in different subjects
- help the children in the Reception class to improve their language and literacy skills.

We hope that you will continue to enjoy your school. We also hope that you will help your teachers as they work hard to make your school even better for you.

Yours faithfully

Olson Davis

Lead Inspector