

Smallthorne Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123987
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	328025
Inspection date	5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	227
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	Richard Grigson
Headteacher	Patricia Broadley
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Chetwynd Street Smallthorne Stoke-on-Trent ST6 1PR
Telephone number	01782 235265
Fax number	01782 235266

Age group	3–11
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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:

- the extent to which pupils have opportunities to develop their writing skills across the curriculum
- how effectively the school grounds are used to promote pupils' learning
- the quality of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, assessment and tracking records, parental questionnaire responses, observations of the school at work, discussions with staff, the chair of governors and pupils. Other aspects of the school 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 the report.

Description of the school

This average-sized school has Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Nursery and Reception classes. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.

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. It provides pupils with a caring and friendly setting in which to learn. The vast majority of parents support the school and are rightly proud of the interesting activities their children experience. Two parental comments are typical: 'My child cannot wait to come to school and is desperate to attend even when ill' and 'The teachers are very caring and give extra attention to the needs of all pupils.'

Pupils achieve well because of consistently good teaching and learning throughout the school. Strong emphasis is rightly placed on developing children's language and communication, and social skills in the Nursery and Reception classes, as these are lower than is typical on entry to school. This emphasis is successful and children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, though standards are below average on starting Year 1. This good progress is maintained throughout the rest of the school and, by the end of Year 6, pupils attain broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science. Pupils do particularly well in science because of the many well structured investigations in which they can take part. Pupils show positive attitudes toward their activities, being keen to learn and to do their best in lessons. Pupils are inquisitive, willing to ask questions and work well together to solve problems. Teachers provide pupils with interesting work that builds well on previous learning. They manage lessons well to ensure pupils maintain their concentration and have a good work rate. Teaching assistants are deployed well and provide valuable support for all pupils.

Good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to make the same progress as other pupils. Good leadership has forged strong links with outside agencies, such as the educational psychologist and speech and language therapists. This ensures that extra help for individual pupils is available, as required. Teaching assistants play an important role in providing extra well targeted support for these pupils. Parents of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities greatly appreciate the extra help given to their children.

The headteacher and senior leaders provide good leadership. The strong focus on school improvement using accurate self-evaluation has identified key areas for development. Leaders' prompt action to bring about improvement is typified in the improved opportunities for pupils to write in different subjects of the curriculum. The training provided for teachers has improved their expertise in planning activities across subjects to raise pupils' motivation to write. The introduction of initiatives, such as a bookmaker working with pupils in all classes, has effectively raised the profile of writing in subjects other than English. Opportunities for cross-curricular writing are now good and make a significant contribution to the increasing rates of progress evident in pupils' writing skills. Leaders at all levels promote community cohesion well, particularly within school and the local community. This stems from the strong relationships in the school between staff, pupils, parents and governors, and a willingness to be outward looking in their shared ethos of promoting a sense of belonging by all communities. Pupils' understanding of international and global issues is developed effectively through the curriculum and by links with European schools. The role of governors has been improved since the last inspection and they play a full part in supporting school improvement.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and this means pupils behave well and are kind and considerate to others. They willingly take on responsibilities, such as being a member of the school council and, in so doing, make a good contribution to the life of the school. They adopt healthy lifestyles well and show a good understanding of how to stay

safe. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the wide range of enrichment activities, including extra-curricular clubs, which add further interest to the good curriculum. They particularly enjoy the residential experiences away from school in Years 5 and 6, which they say help them to gain confidence in their ability to show initiative and make decisions. Despite the school's best efforts, attendance is satisfactory rather than good, because some parents do not recognise the importance of sending their children to school regularly. Good links with other providers effectively extend pupils' experiences and skills in areas such as music and sport. The school grounds are extensive but contain few features that can be used to develop pupils' learning or fire their creativity. This is particularly the case in the outdoor area for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Leaders have rightly identified the development and use of the school's outdoor environment as a priority area for improvement.

The safety and well-being of pupils are given a high priority and safeguarding arrangements are rigorous. For example, child protection procedures are comprehensive and all staff are aware of the action to take if they have concerns about the well-being of a pupil. Pupils say they feel safe in school and on the playground and are confident they could talk to an adult if they have any worries or concerns. The information gained from the good procedures for checking the progress that pupils make is used well to provide them with guidance on how to improve their work. The guidance for pupils to evaluate for themselves how well they are doing and how they might improve is not yet sufficiently developed and hinders them making quicker progress. It is currently being trialled in Years 5 and 6 before being extended to other classes. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The school's recent track record shows it has good capacity to make any necessary changes.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of good teaching and learning. They start in the Nursery with attainment that is well below what might be expected for their age. By the time they start in Year 1, children's standards have improved, even though they are below average. Assessments are used well to adapt activities to suit children of different abilities. Children learn at a good rate because the staff spot the right moment to introduce new skills and ideas. Teaching places great emphasis on children developing good listening skills. This means that children learn the new vocabulary introduced by adults and use it in relevant situations, such as describing the properties of shapes. The good balance between activities directed by adults and those chosen by children makes an effective contribution to their development as independent learners. Children show much enjoyment in their activities and work well together in pairs and small groups. Children's confidence thrives in a supportive atmosphere because of their good relationships with adults. The full involvement of their parents means that they feel secure in the school environment. Indoor activities are supported by a bright and lively environment in which children use their curiosity well to shape their learning. The provision for children is well managed and the improvement of the outdoor facilities has rightly been identified as an area for development. Currently, the outdoor environment has too few features to spark children's imagination or their exploration of space.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the make-up and use of the outdoor environment, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, so that it promotes pupils' physical and creative learning more effectively.
- Give pupils more guidance about how to evaluate and improve their own learning and progress.

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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	3
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?	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	3
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

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?	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**

6 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Smallthorne Primary School, Smallthorne, ST6 1PR

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing the many exciting things you do. Your school is good. It helps you make good progress and reach standards that are average in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6.

What we found about your school.

- You show a lot of enjoyment in coming to school and are keen to learn.
- Your behaviour is good and you work well with others in pairs and small groups.
- Anyone who needs extra help with their work is always given it.
- Your writing skills are developing well because of improved opportunities for you to write across the curriculum.
- A lot of you enjoy taking part in the wide range of after school clubs that add further interest to the good curriculum.
- Adults look after you well and make sure you are safe in and around school and on visits.
- You are leading healthy lifestyles and show a good understanding of how to stay safe.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes develop their independence well by trying things out for themselves.
- Your headteacher and teachers are working hard to help you do even better.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Improve the make-up and use of the school's outdoor areas to better promote your learning and develop your creativity.
- Involve all of you in evaluating for yourselves how well you make progress and how you might improve.

You can all help your school improve further by continuing to try your best in your activities and being kind and considerate to others. All of you are a credit to your school.

Yours faithfully

Melvyn Hemmings

Lead inspector