

Swaffham CofE Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121089
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	332275
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2009
Reporting inspector	John Francis

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	166
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Ward
Headteacher	Miss Tracey McCarthy
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Brandon Road Swaffham Norfolk PE37 7EA
Telephone number	01760 721831
Fax number	01760 722747

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized junior school, created from a middle school following local authority reorganisation in September 2007. Since then, pupil numbers have fallen and the school has been reorganised into six classes. A new headteacher took up post in September 2008. Pupils come into the school with broadly average standards, although the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. Most pupils are of White British heritage and almost all have English as their first language. The school has the Norfolk Healthy Schools award, the Activemark for physical education and is a leading school in the local authority for its work in the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL).

When Swaffham Junior School was inspected in March 2007, it was judged to require special measures as it was failing to provide its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. It is providing its pupils with a satisfactory and improving quality of education. Good leadership, well supported by an effective leadership team and governing body, has raised expectations, made teaching consistently good and improved pupils' personal development. With the clear direction and single-minded approach of the school's leadership, along with the rapid progress seen over the last six months, the school has a good capacity to continue this rate of development.

With consistently good teaching and good use of assessment data in lesson planning, pupils' progress is improving. At Year 6, standards are now broadly average for the first time for many years. However, given the significant drop in standards over the last few years, this has only brought the pupils back to where they were when they came into the school. Nevertheless, the most recent assessments show a good rate of progress across all year groups in most subjects over the last six months. English shows the greatest gains, especially pupils' writing. Mathematics continues to be the weakest of the core subjects. Too many pupils lack the rapid recall of basic number facts and have difficulties in understanding what they need to do to solve word problems.

A real success of the school is in improving pupils' attitudes to learning and raising their personal development to a good level: in particular their behaviour. Its work in developing the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) has created a positive learning culture in the school. Pupils understand their responsibilities and manage their own behaviour well. Some teachers are now capitalising on pupils' ability to show initiative, through using more practical and investigative approaches to learning. Good monitoring ensures pupils know their targets and understand how these help their learning. However, there are inconsistencies in marking pupils' work. Pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve nor are they given the time to follow up any staff comments. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and there is good attention given to pupils' health, safety and well-being. Pupils understand what they need to do to stay safe and are very knowledgeable about what they must do to be healthy; a strong feature of the personal, social and health education curriculum.

The clear direction given to the school by the headteacher, well supported by the leadership team, has raised expectations and accelerated the pace of change. The school's leadership has a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a good development plan to take the school forward. The school has identified the needs of its own local community well and is now widening its horizons to look beyond this to develop links throughout Great Britain and further afield. What is less well developed is the strategy by which the school and the governing body can evaluate the impact of these initiatives.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics across the school through improving pupils' recall of basic number facts and using more practical, problem solving approaches.
- Improve the marking of pupils' work so they clearly understand what they need to do to move to the next stage and give time for pupils to respond to the marking.
- Extend the work on improving community cohesion, including how the school will evaluate its impact.

A small proportion of the 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

After many years of very low standards in national tests, recent assessments show better achievement and improved progress for pupils in Year 6, and indeed throughout the school. However, this is much more recent and has only put the oldest pupils at the standard expected of them given their starting point in Year 3. Mathematics continues to be the weakest subject and many pupils lack the rapid recall of tables and number bonds they need to make their work more efficient. In addition, many have difficulties in solving word problems and applying their numeracy skills to everyday situations. Pupils in Year 4 are particularly weak in mathematics and have made inadequate progress over the last six months: something that rightly concerns a number of parents. Reading, writing and science show steady progress across the school with writing benefitting from a strong focus over the last year. Pupils who have learning difficulties, mostly in their language skills, make the same satisfactory progress as other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. They reflect on issues that impact on their own lives and those of others and have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They take responsibility for their actions and, as a result, behaviour is good. Cultural development is satisfactory, but pupils have few direct links with contrasting cultures within Great Britain or the wider world. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles as demonstrated by their Healthy Schools and Activemark awards. Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school and have a sound understanding of how to take care of themselves. They know about safe websites, for example, but are less clear about other aspects of internet safety, for example, the use of email. Pupils enjoy school and almost all have good attitudes to work. As one pupil says, 'We want to do the best we can for our future lives.' However, attendance remains just below average despite the work of the school. The school council takes its duties seriously and pupils feel they have a voice through the suggestion boxes in each class. However, their involvement in the wider community is underdeveloped. Pupils' basic academic skills, supported by good social skills provide a sound foundation for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Improving teaching and learning, and raising expectations were key areas for development from the last inspection. Improved planning, better subject knowledge and good behaviour management have addressed these well. In most lessons, teachers use the principles of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) very effectively and pupils respond well to this. This good teaching is leading to better achievement and more rapid progress for pupils. Teaching confidently employs a wide range of strategies such as partner and group work and more practical and investigative work. However, there is still more scope for these approaches now that good conditions for learning are firmly established. Teachers are making good use of

the data provided for them to gain a better understanding of pupils' needs, which is informing their planning. Teachers inform pupils what they are to learn at the start of lessons; in the best examples of this, teachers also identify the key features that will enable them and the pupils to judge how successful they have been, but this is not consistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There has been good improvement in the provision for English and science in recent months. This is because subject leaders have analysed where there are gaps in learning and are adjusting curriculum planning to compensate. As a result, there has been accelerated progress, especially in English. The effective personal, social and health education curriculum has generated a significant improvement in pupils' social skills, self-confidence, attitudes and behaviour. The school follows government guidance for all subjects. However, at present, there are few links made between them to make learning more relevant and provide opportunities for pupils to use their skills across the curriculum. Although the curriculum is satisfactory overall, there are some good opportunities for enriching learning. During the inspection, many pupils in Years 5 and 6 were on a residential visit to an outdoor activity centre. A good range of additional activities, including football, cooking and keyboard, add zest to the curriculum. Pupils learn French and some are joining the high school in their production of 'Joseph', but there are fewer links between other local, national and international communities, limiting pupils' understanding of cultural and economic diversity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All staff have a high level of commitment to encourage pupils' enjoyment and achievement and in promoting pupils' health and safety. The school meets the requirements for safeguarding pupils and there are good health and safety procedures in place. There is effective support for pupils with specific medical, social or emotional needs, ensuring their full integration into all aspects of school life. All pupils, including those who find learning difficult, have relevant targets to enhance their achievement, although there is sometimes too little guidance to help support staff identify the approaches necessary to enable pupils to achieve their targets. Good assessment and effective analysis of results provides good quality information for the school's leadership and class teachers. Staff use this well to identify and record individual pupils' progress. However, the school is less effective in providing the broader picture of achievement by analysing the performance and progress of different groups enabling direct comparisons with the national figures. Some of the marking of pupils' work does not give them enough guidance about what they need to do next to improve and does not target common, recurring errors sufficiently well. Nevertheless, pupils are well informed about their progress and in lessons, are encouraged to evaluate their own learning. Increasingly good links with parents and other agencies are enhancing pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The good leadership of the new headteacher has given a real boost to the school and she has quickly gained the confidence of pupils, staff and parents. Many of the parental responses to questionnaires commented on the positive changes in the school. Good, accurate self-evaluation

involves staff at all levels and has produced good plans for the continuing development of the school, although the impact is not evident in mathematics. One particularly important element is the detailed data analysis and evaluation that guides whole school planning. However, while the school's development plan is a well thought out document, some elements lack clear enough criteria by which school leaders and governors can accurately measure the impact of the initiatives. The school is making sound progress on strengthening community links, and while this remains an area for further development, there is progress in engaging a broader range of partnerships. The wider national and international dimension is more limited and there is not yet a fully developed strategy as to how the school will monitor the impact of this work over time. The high level of involvement from the governing body, well supported by the local authority during special measures, has provided security and stability over time. Through their work and the drive of a very active and knowledgeable chair of governors, governors provide good support and robust challenge to the school's leadership.

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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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	3

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	3
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	3
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?	3
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	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	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**

11 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swaffham Junior School, Swaffham, PE37 7EA

Mrs Dawson and I really enjoyed our visit to your school and felt you made us very welcome with your good manners and friendliness towards us. This letter is just for you to tell you what we found out during our visit. We have also tried to reflect some of the things you told us in our report. Many of you will know I have been visiting regularly for almost two years to check on the school's progress. I am really pleased to tell you that you have done so well that I will no longer be coming to do this. You, all of your teachers and the other adults in school, deserve many congratulations for what you have achieved, especially over recent months. I do also wish to make a special mention of Miss McCarthy, who has really made some important changes to your school since she started. Your school is now providing a satisfactory education for you but has a number of good things that we would like to share with you.

We can see how you behave well and care about each other. The work you have been doing through SEAL has really made a difference. As well as that, all of the adults take good care of you and work hard to make your school an interesting place to come to. You also told us how much you enjoy school and try your best. We can see this in the work that we saw in your books and the displays around school, especially in English. This is not quite as good in mathematics so we have asked your teachers to give you lots more opportunities to practise your number skills and use more practical activities.

We have also asked teachers that when they are marking your books to tell you clearly what you need to do to get better and give you time to look at what they have written and act on it. There are many exciting things going on in your school now and as you continue to improve, I can see that Miss McCarthy and the teachers are beginning to look beyond the school to make links with the wider world. This is a good step but we have asked them to find a way of judging how well this works for your school and the benefits it brings.

We wish you well for the future and hope you continue to work hard and get even better.

Lead Inspector