

Stondon Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109469
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337295
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Sudworth

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Russell Bragg
Headteacher	Jill Davies
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 10 lessons and meetings were held with the Chair of Governors, members of staff and a group of pupils. They observed the school's work, looked at a range of documentation and analysed parents', staff and pupils' questionnaire responses.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The progress and attainment of the current Year 2 and Year 4 groups to gain a view about possible improvements taking place
- The provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage to confirm the school's view of significant improvement over the last two years
- The way that staff evaluate teaching and learning and the impact of this.

Information about the school

The school is of a below average size. At the time of the inspection, there were four classes including the Early Years Foundation Stage. Years 3 and 4 pupils were taught in a mixed-age class. Pupils enter the Reception class full-time in the September before their fifth birthday. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is lower than usually found. The proportion of pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities is slightly higher than the national average. Three of the four teaching staff had joined the school in the last few months, including two in September 2009. The school has recently been selected to have a children's centre.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It is improving rapidly under the very good and energetic leadership of its head teacher who has done much in the past two years to enhance the provision. It is a happy, welcoming and very caring establishment with a good team effort from the classrooms and office to the kitchen. The governing body offers good support and is keenly involved in securing further improvements. Staff changes have interrupted the flow of development because these have necessitated alterations to staff's leadership roles. The school has persevered well through these difficulties. New staff are prepared and ready to have their skills developed so that they can support the head teacher more effectively in monitoring the school's work with greater rigour.

Pupils have achieved satisfactorily in reaching average standards in the main and sometimes above average standards, especially in reading. Teaching is satisfactory with some good features but there are variations between classes. More effective teaching is contributing to improvements in pupils' attainment at both Year 2 and Year 4. Parents report that their confidence in the school has increased since the head teacher's arrival and this is reflected in rising pupil numbers. One parent sums up the views of many when commenting, 'I am very proud that my child attends Stondon Lower School. He is really happy with school. I am very impressed with the improvements to the school over the past couple of years.'

The curriculum is satisfactory but still relies much on published ideas. It is not yet sufficiently creative, particularly in linking subjects together to make learning as meaningful as it could be for the pupils. Pupils are involved well through the various responsibilities that they hold. They acquire a well developed appreciation of healthy living in its widest sense. This is achieved, not only through their knowledge and practice in eating sensible choices of food and exercising, but through the strong emphasis the school places on values, such as cooperation and respect. This emphasis supports pupils' good behaviour and positive care for one another and promotes their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The school demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve because there is still inconsistency in quality between the provision in different classes and the school has not yet managed to sustain a trend of consistently good progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the amount of good teaching by 20% by September 2010 by ensuring that:

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- staff make more consistent and accurate use of assessment in planning new work, especially in mathematics;
- The good practice already in the school is modelled as a positive example.
- Improve the skills of staff with subject leadership roles so that they develop a good level of competence in evaluating teaching and learning outcomes, are confident to take action on their findings and so increase rates of progress and levels of attainment further.
- Refine the curriculum so that it is more appealing to pupils, develops subject skills in a structured way and makes more effective links between subjects.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Attainment has mostly been average at the end of Years 2 and 4 but in some years results have been above those expected. Overall, progress has been satisfactory and occasionally good. Reading is a particular strength and the good support of parents in this has assisted the work done in school. The effective arrangements for homework, which bring families and children together in learning, reap good rewards. Pupils with learning and/or emotional difficulties make good progress because their needs are identified early and they receive good support.

Pupils made satisfactory progress in the lessons observed in Key Stage 1 and good progress in the Year 3 and 4 class. Good use of time, a brisk pace and clear expectations of what the pupils should do supported the good progress. In a mathematics lesson in this class about perimeter, pupils worked meaningfully, making new designs for the school's hen coop keeping to a fixed perimeter length. Pupils with less experience in understanding this term measured the perimeter of different raised beds in the school vegetable garden and, in so doing, gained a better understanding. Pupils develop good personal skills. They enjoy school. As one pupil said, 'It draws first place of schools in all the world.' It is also shown in their above average attendance. They know how to keep themselves safe, such as 'stranger danger' and how to live healthily. The school council arranges cake sales for charity and pupils participate well in after school opportunities. They regularly take part in the good range of extra activities and also sports opportunities out of school. They contributed designs to the local Recreation Association for play equipment in the local park. Year 4 pupils act as buddies to new Reception children and help them settle well. The standards that they reach and the skills acquired prepare them soundly for the next stage of their education. The breakfast and after school clubs make a good contribution to pupils' personal development. The children take turns to wipe the dishes and they learn to play fairly when playing board games together.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and additionally, given the school's size, there are good opportunities for pupils to engage in extra activities. Interesting features, such as French, gardening and guitar support pupils' cultural development and their understanding of sustainability. Nevertheless, learning is not yet organised as creatively as it might be in the more academic subjects. Links between them are not well enough developed to support pupils' understanding and to help them build up their skills sequentially, other than in English and mathematics. Some good practice was observed linking English and information, communications technology. Year 3 and 4 pupils wrote their shape poems (calligrams) on computers, increased their computer skills in doing so and thoroughly enjoyed the work.

There is a good level of consistency in sharing 'steps to success' with pupils at the start of lessons so that they know what they are expected to be able to do in their work. Pupils are aware of how they can improve their work in English through targets, but they are less sure in mathematics because there is less consistency in setting targets in this subject. Tracking of pupils' progress is regular and assists staff to set up intervention programmes for those who are not making expected progress. These contribute to the good progress of pupils who initially find learning the basic skills difficult. Marking has been satisfactory but it is improving as a result of a recent school initiative that was picked up from the head teacher's monitoring. Best use of teaching

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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assistants was observed when they were briefed about their role in advance of the day's activities. In one mathematics lesson, they had not been briefed sufficiently well and as a result they were not clear enough about the intended learning for the groups they were supporting. The pupils did not make enough progress as a result. Teachers work hard to plan activities for different abilities but the use of assessment when planning work for pupils does not always ensure a good enough match of work to pupils' abilities in mathematics lessons.

The staff take very good care of the pupils and know them and their families very well. There are very good links with external agencies. The special help staff provide for pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable helps them to take a full part in the school community and to deal with their personal difficulties. Safeguarding procedures are very secure and child protection arrangements well understood. Robust systems ensure health and safety matters are dealt with swiftly. Secure arrangements in a homely atmosphere are in place for the care of pupils who attend the breakfast and after school clubs and, as a result, these pupils enjoy the activities provided. The breakfast and after school clubs make a good contribution to pupils' personal development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The head teacher and governing body ensure that safeguarding arrangements are securely in place and that staff have regular training. The school has good systems to reduce any possible risks and to keep the pupils safe. Pupils are known well and given equal opportunities in all aspects of school life. The governing body has a good range of skills and expertise among its members and it is well led by its committed chair. Governors visit, make written reports and regularly review the school development plan. These activities keep them abreast with school development and give them first-hand knowledge when they contribute to discussions. The school has passed the national competency assessment for financial management. It has carried out an initial audit of community cohesion. The pupils make a good contribution to the school community and also locally, but with developments still needed in their appreciation of different cultures in the United Kingdom and the wider world.

The priorities on the school development plan are the correct ones for the school's current development. The head teacher has been assisted by the willingness of all staff

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to take on areas of responsibility. There is real team effort going forward and an evident commitment to provide the best for each individual pupil in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. However, there is still room to embed the ambition and drive improvement forward with the new staff and to ensure consistency in approaches to teaching and learning so that the best practice is emulated by all. Monitoring procedures for teaching and learning are in place and cover a range of techniques but staff, apart from the head teacher, have not always challenged each other enough in the past and been prepared to say where improvements can take place. The after school and breakfast clubs are well managed. Parents book their places in advance so the ratio of adults to children is not exceeded.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall levels of skills on entry are usually at the expected level for children's ages. Some children exceed expectations. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage which has a particular emphasis on child initiated learning. In the last two years their attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has been above average. The outside area is an excellent resource for learning. They learn about healthy food by growing vegetables and collecting the eggs from the hens. They search for mini-beasts and play imaginatively. There is always something interesting for the children to do outside, although there are not always enough stimulating activities indoors. Teaching is good because the staff work cooperatively as a team and engage well with the children in their learning. They use observations effectively to move the children's individual learning on. The provision is well led and managed. Effective

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records are kept of the children's progress. In the whole class sessions, the children sometimes spend too much time on the floor and they can become restless. Their behaviour is exemplary. The staff provide a very secure and safe environment where the children thrive. Children in the Reception class make good progress in their social development.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and praise the progress that has been made in the last two years under the head teacher's leadership. A few have had minor concerns with their individual children and these have been shared with the school already. There is no major issue that comes through either in the responses to the questionnaire or in the written comments. Parents are very supportive of the head teacher and state that she has turned the school round. They feel that the staff do a great job for their children and that they are well cared for.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stondon Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspector received 52 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 81 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	73	13	25	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	42	81	8	15	1	2	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	56	20	38	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	56	20	38	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	33	63	17	33	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	62	18	35	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	75	12	23	0	0	1	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	23	44	24	46	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	65	14	27	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	54	20	38	1	2	2	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	52	21	40	2	4	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	38	73	11	21	1	2	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	49	40	49	2	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stondon Lower School, Henlow, SG16 6LP

Thank you for your help when I visited the school, for talking to me about what you do and sharing your work with me. Your school provides a satisfactory education for you and it is getting better all the time. Your head teacher has worked very hard since her arrival to make it a place that you enjoy coming to each day. The staff work together well as a team to make sure that you are safe and are well cared for.

I liked your outside area and that you keep chickens and grow your own vegetables. You behave well in class and set a good example in your attitude to your work. You look after each other. You are interested in learning about the values which make for a happy school and a peaceful world. I could see that you try hard to practise the values so that you are growing up with respect for one another and to care for your world.

The staff are very keen to do their very best for each one of you and to make your school even better. There are three areas that I have asked the school to look at particularly in making further improvements.

To improve the teaching in parts of the school where lessons are not as exciting as in others.

To help staff to develop their skills in leading subjects and in helping one another.

To have a look at the curriculum so that it is more interesting and makes better connections between different subjects.

Thank you once again for your help when we visited. I wish you all well for the future and hope that you will continue to work hard.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Sudworth

Lead inspector

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