

Strathmore Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 117114 |
| Local Authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 338950 |
| Inspection dates | 18–19 March 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Christopher Gray |

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

The registered childcare provision, 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 | 3–7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 241 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Mary Quinn-Halliday |
| Headteacher | Mrs Bernadette Holmes |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 November 2007 |
| School address | Old Hale Way Hitchin SG5 1XR |
| Telephone number | 01462 459558 |
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| Email address | admin@strathmore.herts.sch.uk |

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Age group | 3–7 |
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**Number of children on roll in the registered
childcare provision****Date of last inspection of registered
childcare provision**

Not previously inspected

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They spent the majority of their time looking at learning, visited 20 lessons and observed all eight of the teachers. They also met groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at a sample of pupils' work. They also looked at school plans and policies, records of pupils' progress, curriculum plans and the school improvement plan, and analysed 85 parental questionnaires.

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

- the extent of pupils' progress given that standards are lower than at the last inspection
- the impact of leaders and managers on raising standards
- the accuracy of teachers' assessments and how well this information is used by them to meet pupils' needs
- the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

The school is average in size and larger than at the last inspection. The majority of pupils are of White British origin. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than in many schools. The largest groups are of Indian, Bangladeshi and Caribbean heritage. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is also above average, although few pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above what is normally found, although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is lower. The largest group has moderate learning difficulties. Children join the Nursery aged three and move to Reception in September or January, depending on the month of their birthday. The school runs a breakfast club for its own pupils and those of a neighbouring school. The headteacher started at the school in September 2009. The deputy headteacher and the other member of senior staff left on promotion shortly after. Their management posts are held on a temporary basis by two teachers.

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

This school gives its pupils a satisfactory standard of education. Pupils enjoy coming to school and behave well. They are confident that the school is a safe place to be and parents' comments reflect this sense of trust. One parent wrote to say, 'Strathmore Infants is a very caring school where all the staff work very hard to ensure the children are happy, safe learners.' All adults offer the pupils good care, guidance and support. An example of this is the calm and supportive atmosphere provided by the breakfast club.

The new headteacher has made a good start in difficult circumstances, losing her two next most senior staff in her first term. She has received the full support of all her staff, two of whom stepped in to fill the vacant posts on an acting basis. Their inexperience of management has inevitably meant that the cycle of monitoring the school's work has not proceeded as quickly as it might otherwise have done. For example, the school recognised that standards of pupils' reading needed to be higher and so has recently introduced daily sessions for the teaching of letters and sounds and for guided reading in all classes. This is evidence of the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation. Inspectors found that these sessions work well in some instances but are not consistent. Senior staff have not had time to monitor these sessions to ensure that all groups are equally effective.

Children begin school in the Nursery with skills that are generally a little below those expected for their ages and reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 2. This represents satisfactory achievement. Standards are lower than they were at the last inspection. Pupils achieve better in mathematics and writing than they do in reading. The school is improving its use of the analysis of pupils' progress and this is having an impact on raising standards; for example, a higher percentage of pupils are expected to perform at the higher level in this year's national tests and teachers' assessments. However, the school is aware that a few of its teachers' assessments sometimes lack precision. The school monitors the progress of all individuals and uses this information to support any who are falling behind, but staff have only just begun to look at how well groups of pupils progress. Senior staff acknowledge that they do not use the system with sufficient rigour to ensure that as many pupils as possible make good progress.

Teaching is satisfactory and pupils enjoy most lessons. Relationships between adults and children are good and promote a calm learning environment. Good teaching was observed in some classes during the inspection, but other lessons lacked pace and pupils became restless when the teacher kept them too long on the carpet. Senior leaders are working with good effect to improve the consistency of teaching throughout the school. Provision in the Nursery is a strength of the school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress by:
 - improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work
 - using greater rigour in the analysis of assessment information
 - ensuring that teachers make more effective use of this information when planning what pupils need to learn next
 - monitoring the effectiveness of the extra support given to help pupils who need to catch up.
- Raise standards in pupils' reading by:
 - making better use of the time available for guided reading
 - ensuring that teachers and assistants receive training to make the best use of sessions for teaching sounds and letters
 - monitoring the effectiveness and consistency of small group sessions.
- Strengthen the senior leadership team in order to increase the rigour of monitoring of teaching and so improve its consistency.
- 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

Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 and some make good progress. There is little underachievement, but the percentage of pupils who make better than the expected progress is not much higher than 30%. The school realises that this is because of the varying effectiveness of teaching. For example, good teaching and learning were observed in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, where pupils were finding out for the first time how to use a Venn diagram to sort objects into sets. Pupils discovered for themselves what the area outside the diagram meant because of astute questioning by the teacher. However, the group contained only nine children because of arrangements to teach pupils in ability groups. This meant that too few pupils benefited from this good teaching, while provision in other groups was less effective.

The school's data show that all groups perform at broadly similar rates. Published data for Year 2 pupils in 2009 indicated that boys outperformed girls, but this is not evident in the pupils' current work. A few pupils from minority ethnic groups also reached lower standards than other pupils in 2009, but the school's records show that this is likely to have been related to this cohort. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities reflect the same picture: some achieve well while most achieve satisfactorily. The progress of pupils whose first language is not English is also similar to that of most pupils.

Pupils say that they enjoy most aspects of school life, although a few say that they are

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not very fond of homework. They are very welcoming to strangers and explain the lengths they go to to ensure that new children settle quickly into school. Inspectors could see this for themselves in the very friendly way many children greeted them each morning. Pupils know why it is important to keep fit and healthy and can name foods which ought not to be overindulged in. They are less clear on what is good for them. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and reflect this in their behaviour and politeness. They take good advantage of the many opportunities to learn from the curriculum and from their friends about the many different backgrounds and cultures represented in the school. The impact of this is seen in the harmonious relationships between all groups in the school. Pupils are developing the ability to weigh up important values, such as a group who tried to decide whether academic achievement or personal values such as caring are more important in later life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

| | |
|---|----------|
| 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 | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 2 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |

How effective is the provision?

In nearly all lessons, teachers exercise good strategies to manage pupils' behaviour and

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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this results in calm classrooms and promotes pupils' involvement. Teachers plan interesting lessons and activities that are relevant to pupils' experiences. They do not always make enough use of their knowledge of pupils' prior attainment in matching the work closely to pupils' needs. Sessions for teaching the links between letters and sounds vary in their effectiveness. Good examples were seen where the pace was fast and pupils were given a series of short activities which held their attention and reinforced the sounds quickly. In other sessions, pupils were passive for too long and so did not have enough chance to practise the sounds. Guided reading sessions are also variable. In some groups, pupils all focus on the same text and adults promote and explore understanding through plenty of pertinent questions, ensuring that all are taking part. In other groups, pupils are insufficiently involved in the mechanics of reading. The curriculum satisfactorily promotes pupils' progress and is planned to take account of their interests. Learning is planned around topics, but the school has yet to check that all aspects of the National Curriculum are covered by them.

The school makes very good use of a range of agencies to help pupils overcome barriers to learning, such as support workers to help pupils and their families from minority ethnic backgrounds. The attendance support officer's work is having a demonstrable impact on improving attendance rates and decreasing the numbers of persistent absentees. All adults know their pupils well and pupils respond by saying that any adult would help them with problems.

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 new headteacher has been effective in sharing her vision for the school with all staff, based on an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Staff have rallied round to help in the absence of senior staff. New appointments have already been made for September to strengthen senior management. Monitoring the effectiveness of the school's work has been largely undertaken by the headteacher since her appointment. The school is free from any discrimination or inequalities. All groups of pupils perform at broadly similar, satisfactory rates. Senior leaders are aware that greater rigour is needed in the analysis of pupils' progress and in holding teachers to account for this. All members of the governing body are very involved in supporting and visiting the school. They are very representative of the community. They acknowledge that their ability to hold the school to account has hitherto been limited.

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The impact of the school's work to promote community cohesion is evident in the school and its own community. One parent commented, 'Socially and academically, Strathmore has a great ethnic diversity in its community and the children benefit from this. It's a real strength at the school.' The school links its work with that of another school in South Africa and pupils learn about the very different lives of its pupils. At present, evaluation of the impact of this work is informal. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and effective. All statutory requirements are met and there are examples of good practice in the thoroughness of checks and records.

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 | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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

Children join the Nursery with skills that, in most years, are a little lower than expected for their ages, especially in communication, language and literacy. Provision in the Nursery is good. The accommodation is attractive and resources are of good quality and imaginatively used. For example, a large corner is set out for role play, presently as a garden. A group of children were observed enjoying an extended 'picnic' where they laid the cloth, prepared all the dishes and cutlery and went to collect the 'food'. Their behaviour and interaction were outstanding and they worked for a long period without need of adult intervention. When adults are involved, their questioning is astute and brings out the skills they intend to develop. Children work inside and outside at will at all times. Provision in the two Reception classes is satisfactory and children make satisfactory progress. By the time children move on to Year 1, their skills are broadly as expected, though a little below in reading. Resources are sometimes less attractive in Reception than in the Nursery and adults do not always keep an eye on all groups to

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make sure that learning and play are proceeding as intended. All welfare requirements are met and children in all three classes are happy and secure. Leadership and management are satisfactory. One of the Reception teachers has assumed temporary responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage since Christmas. A current focus is to improve Reception children's knowledge of sounds and letters, but there has not been enough time for the impact of this work to be seen.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |

Views of parents and carers

Virtually all parents expressed themselves as happy with the education their children receive and reported that children enjoy going to school. Many of those who responded wrote in praise of the school, its staff and their work. A very small minority said that they do not receive enough information about their children's progress. The school feels this opinion is justified and plans to increase the opportunities for parents to come and speak to the teachers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Strathmore Infant and Nursery 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 inspection team received 85 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 241 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 51 | 61 | 32 | 38 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 45 | 54 | 39 | 46 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress | 28 | 33 | 45 | 54 | 9 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 32 | 38 | 41 | 49 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 1 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 42 | 50 | 34 | 40 | 6 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 32 | 38 | 43 | 51 | 7 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 35 | 42 | 46 | 55 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 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) | 29 | 35 | 45 | 54 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 2 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 29 | 35 | 43 | 51 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 28 | 33 | 44 | 52 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 31 | 37 | 46 | 55 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 34 | 40 | 46 | 55 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 46 | 55 | 35 | 42 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

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.



22 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Strathmore Infant and Nursery School, Hitchin, SG5 1XR

We enjoyed meeting so many of you when we visited your school recently. I especially liked chatting to those of you who were at breakfast club on Friday morning. Thank you for making us so welcome and for greeting us in such a friendly way. We were pleased to see how well you behave in and around the school. With such long corridors, it must be hard to remember always to walk.

Strathmore gives you a satisfactory education. By the time you leave Year 2, you reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are similar to those of most seven-year-olds. You make satisfactory progress, but you could reach higher levels in reading. We have asked the school to help you do this by making sure that all adults and pupils make the best use of daily sessions for guided reading and practising letter sounds. Adults will check your progress frequently to make sure that you are doing as well as you can in many subjects, not just in reading.

Your school council told us all sorts of interesting things about school life and about how they are hoping to make it even better. They did not seem to have a way of consulting all of you, though, so this is something you all might like to think about. You know about safe and unsafe situations and how to keep secure in school, at home and in between. You take exercise and understand the need for healthy eating but perhaps not all of you follow these ideas.

You told us that you enjoy lessons and that teachers make them interesting. Sometimes, we noticed that lessons are more enjoyable because you are more involved and have to spend less time listening to the adults. We have asked the school to make sure that all your lessons are equally good, and to make sure that keep an accurate track of how well you are all doing.

We hope you continue to enjoy life at Strathmore.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Gray

Lead inspector

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