

Stratford St Mary Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124675
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	340627
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Emily Barrell
Headteacher	Joan Wardle
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2007
School address	Strickmere Stratford St Mary Colchester
Telephone number	01206 323236
Fax number	01206 323236
Email address	ad.stratfordstmary.p@talk21.com

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector at the school for two days and an additional inspector in school for half a day. Inspectors visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils, parents and a representative of the local authority. They looked at samples of pupils' work, analysis tracking pupils' progress through the school, school policies and procedures, the school development plan and the questionnaires received from 41 parents, 36 pupils and 11 staff.

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

- how well pupils of all abilities are helped to build on what they learnt before, especially in writing
- the barriers to improvement in this school and how well these have been tackled by leaders
- how outcomes for pupils can be improved and their achievement accelerated.

Information about the school

There are twice as many girls as boys in this small, three-class school. Almost all of the pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but an above average proportion of pupils join or leave the school partway through their primary education. The acting headteacher took on the leadership of the school in September 2009.

An independently managed pre-school on the school site was separately inspected.

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 has emerged from a difficult period. Rates of progress fell and some parents lost confidence in the way in which incidents of misbehaviour were dealt with. Parents confirm, however, the positive impact that the acting headteacher has already had in her short time at the school, working with a staff team who together share a commitment to moving the school forward. Although current arrangements for leadership and management are temporary, governors have worked with the local authority to help to ensure a period of stability until a permanent appointment can be made. Urgent points for improvement identified by the local authority in its review in July 2009 have already been tackled successfully. Together with the accurate picture that the acting headteacher, staff and governors have of the school's strengths and areas for development, these show Stratford St Mary's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Girls and boys enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good. They have an especially good appreciation of the need for exercise and a healthy diet, showing that the Activemark award was well earned. Pupils generally make satisfactory progress. Although staff know all the pupils well, in the youngest class they do not make enough use of observations made of children's development as, for example, they learn together through play. This means that activities are not always planned to help each of the children in the Reception Year and Year 1 to build on what they have learnt before. Throughout the school, teachers often give pupils 'learning objectives' at the start of each lesson. These are sometimes too broad, however, to be useful to pupils in evaluating for themselves what they have learnt in the lesson. Teachers plan separate work for the different age groups in each class but they do not generally match work to the often quite wide differences in ability of pupils in each year group. This results, for example, in more able pupils being given tasks that do not challenge them to the full. Pupils' work shows that there has been an over-reliance on relatively unchallenging worksheets - again, often identical for pupils with very different capabilities. Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is much improved this year, but it is still developing. All pupils now have individual education plans, but these do not set out clearly enough the strategies that support staff should use to help accelerate these pupils' learning.

One of the improvements this year is that pupils have individual targets in literacy and numeracy and they generally know what their targets are. Marking, however, does not always give pupils enough guidance on what they need to do to do better.

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.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the spring term 2010, teachers should accelerate the pace of learning in lessons by:
 - making sure that the objectives set out for pupils at the start of each lesson identify for pupils precisely what they are expected to learn
 - matching work not just to the different year groups in each class but also to pupils' different needs and capabilities
 - reducing the dependence on worksheets
 - ensuring that all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have clear and specific individual educational plans and that these are used to tailor provision to fully meet these pupils' needs.
- Make more effective use of assessment and tracking information in the Reception Year and Year 1 by making frequent short records of children's day-to-day achievements and using these to plan each child's future learning. This improved tracking and planning system should be developed so that it is in place for the start of the summer term 2010.
- Ensure that all marking gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. This new marking policy should be developed over the coming term and be consistently in place by the start of the summer term 2010.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The lessons observed during the inspection confirmed that attainment is broadly average, and that pupils are mostly making satisfactory progress. Although pupils have not always made the progress they should in the past, especially in writing, the small group of pupils in Year 6 in 2009 made satisfactory progress and pupils' current writing and other work shows that girls and boys continue to achieve satisfactorily.

Nevertheless, it is clear that more able pupils, in particular, are not working at a fast enough pace to reach the levels of which they are capable. In the past, some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have not achieved their full potential because their needs have not always been clearly enough identified and catered for.

A parent attending an assembly during the inspection commented on how much the pupils' behaviour had improved this year. Pupils are friendly and treat each other with respect. They do not have well-established listening skills, however, so many begin to fidget and get restless when asked to listen passively for more than a few minutes. The worries that a number of parents voice about misbehaviour relate to incidents in the past, and pupils themselves confirm that they now feel happier and safer at school. Pupils enjoy the opportunities that they have to take on responsibility, for example in running the healthy tuck shop. Their key literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills prepare them appropriately for the next stage of their education.

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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	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

There is much praise from parents for 'the dedication that all the teachers and support staff give to this small school'. As one parent explained, 'Without their care, thought and consideration, we would not have such happy, smiling children.' With more than one year group in each class, teachers are careful to plan activities to avoid pupils repeating what they have done before. They often set different tasks for each of the year groups within each class but they do not usually match work to pupils' different capabilities. This means that work is sometimes too easy for more able pupils. There are good arrangements to help the pupils who join the school partway through their primary education. One parent told inspectors, 'I can't believe how well my son has settled in.' Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved this year but their individual education plans still lack precision over the way in which staff should help them to achieve their targets. There is a lack of precision too in the 'learning objectives' that teachers set out. When these are too broad, they do not help pupils to assess for themselves whether they have achieved what they should.

Pupils are enthusiastic about the opportunities they have to use information 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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communication technology, including through the online 'virtual learning environment' which they can access at school or from home. Able mathematicians, in particular, are boosting their success by challenging themselves with the online mathematics quizzes. The curriculum lacks vibrancy because of the heavy reliance on worksheets, which are sometimes unchallenging and uninspiring.

Pupils' targets show them what they need to aim for but the feedback they get from marking is more variable. Although teachers' marking gives pupils encouragement, it does not routinely set out for pupils what they need to do to raise the quality of their writing and other work.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

'Our new headteacher is a joy to work for; she has made a great change for the good since she arrived.' This comment from a member of staff mirrors the positive views voiced by several parents who refer to the improvements this year in staff morale. Monitoring of lessons by the acting headteacher, including those carried out during the inspection with the lead inspector, show that the leadership team now have an accurate picture of the steps needed to raise the quality of teaching and learning. When given constructive feedback, teachers respond positively. The way that the staff have pulled together, for example deciding unbidden to come into school in their own time to improve the school environment, shows the team's renewed commitment to moving Stratford St Mary forward. The staff team and governors have updated the school development plan so that it sets appropriately focused priorities for the year ahead, but the plan does not include tight enough, clearly measurable success criteria.

Government requirements are fully met for checking on adults working with children, but it is a cause of grumbling among pupils that, in order to ensure pupils' health and safety, some previously accessed play areas are now out-of-bounds.

Some of the boys' parents worry about the gender imbalance in the school, but staff are careful to ensure that boys are as engaged and achieve as well as the girls. A more pressing equality of opportunity issue is that provision for more able pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is not sufficiently well tailored to their needs. Likewise, some elements of the school's contribution to community cohesion are stronger than others. The school plays a part in the local community and pupils learn about other countries and have raised funds, for example, to buy goats for a village in

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Zambia. Leaders and governors acknowledge, however, that pupils have hitherto had too few opportunities to learn about different beliefs and ways of life in other parts of Britain.

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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
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

The children learn alongside Year 1 pupils and are happy at school. They make satisfactory progress in most areas of learning, although their social skills have been lower than might be expected because children have not been consistently encouraged to follow orderly routines. The children benefit from an appropriate mix of activities, including the opportunity to choose activities for themselves. The school has correctly identified, however, that the learning environment is not as stimulating as it could be. Although the classroom areas are of reasonable size, clutter limits opportunities, for example, for role-play. There is no covered area outdoors, and the outside area does not encourage learning across all aspects of the recommended Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. The school development plan shows that this shortcoming has already been identified by leaders and governors as a priority for improvement.

Staff make 'Post-it' notes of what Reception and Year 1 children are doing and these are stuck into each child's 'Learning Journey' folder, but not enough use is made of these observations to plan activities that help each child to capitalise on what they have already learnt.

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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

The views expressed by parents are quite mixed. Many voiced criticisms of previous management arrangements, including the way in which incidents of misbehaviour were tackled. However, a number wrote especially to praise the positive impact that the new acting headteacher has already had on the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stratford St Mary 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 41 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 64 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	39	23	56	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	32	27	66	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	9	22	17	41	7	17	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	17	19	46	8	20	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	27	19	46	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	22	19	46	6	15	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	24	30	73	1	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)	8	20	23	56	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	8	20	21	51	3	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	15	15	37	10	24	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	27	18	44	4	10	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	11	27	8	20	8	20	4	10
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	22	28	68	1	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.



5 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stratford St Mary Primary School, Colchester CO7 6YG

Thank you for making us to welcome when we came to visit your school. I especially enjoyed reading the letters so many of you wrote me. They told me a lot about the school. Stratford St Mary is providing you with a satisfactory education. I could see that, under the guidance of your new acting headteacher, a number of things have already improved, and I have asked the school to make some further changes to help you make faster progress. In Kingfishers' class, for example, I have asked the staff to use the notes they make on what each of the children are doing to plan activities that help the children to build more on what they have learnt before.

You enjoy school, and I could see that behaviour has improved, although some of you need to practise your 'good listening' skills as that will help you to learn more. I was pleased to see how good your attendance is and how much you know about keeping fit and healthy. Those of you who I asked about literacy and numeracy targets knew what they were. That is a good start in showing you what you need to do to improve your work. I have asked teachers to build on this by giving you more guidance through marking on how to do better. The school is already working on ways of improving support for those of you who get extra help with your learning. I have asked them to make sure that their notes to teachers and teaching assistants show them clearly how best to help you. I have also asked that when teachers set out 'learning objectives' at the start of the lesson, these are clear enough to enable you to assess for yourselves whether or not you have learnt new things and made good progress.

Teachers are careful to set different work and activities for the different age groups in each class. When those of you in the same age group are all doing the same work, it can sometimes be too easy for some of you, particularly when you are filling in worksheets. I have asked teachers to make sure that you are all set work that stretches you and to look at ways of giving you more opportunities to record your work in your own way.

Thank you again for your friendly welcome, and my very best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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