

Sycamore Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135443
Local Authority	Nottingham City
Inspection number	341645
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Terry Elston

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Monk
Headteacher	Paul Worley
Date of previous school inspection	8 January 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent the vast majority of their time looking at learning. They observed all teachers and visited ten lessons. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at: the school improvement plan, the tracking of pupils' progress, curriculum planning documents, attendance figures, evidence of lesson observations and information from the questionnaires completed by pupils, staff and 104 parents and carers.

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

- the attainment and achievement of pupils in Key Stage 1
- the progress of boys compared with girls
- the effectiveness of measures to improve attendance.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized school created in September 2008 by amalgamating the infant and junior schools that occupied the same building. The current headteacher joined the school when it opened. Compared with other schools, the proportion of the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. The majority of these have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Over half the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage. A fifth of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Somali and French are the most common mother tongues apart from English. A high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school runs a breakfast club each morning.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Sycamore Primary is a good school that serves its diverse community well. Pupils' behaviour is consistently good, and the effective teaching throughout the school means they achieve well. By Year 2, while their attainment is below average in reading, writing and mathematics, this represents good progress from their starting points. Progress quickens further in Key Stage 2 so that, by Year 6, attainment is broadly in line with national averages in English, mathematics and science. In the 2009 national tests, the rate of progress from Year 2 to Year 6 was in the top 19 per cent of schools in the country. The boys, however, tend to do better than girls because they set themselves higher goals. Their hands shoot up when the teachers ask a question, and girls are often happy to let them do the work.

While the provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory, the expectations of them, both indoors and outside, are not always high enough to ensure they make the best possible progress.

Pupils are well cared for by adults, who have a good awareness of their individual needs and make them feel special. This helps them develop their personal skills well. They enjoy school and, while attendance of a small minority of pupils is below average, it is improving steadily because of the many effective strategies to reduce unnecessary absences. Pupils take responsibility readily and recently played a big part in deciding on the school rules. They think deeply about those less fortunate than themselves and raise funds enthusiastically for global charities.

Pupils appreciate the way teachers are kind to them and help them when they find work hard. As one said, 'They help me succeed, and I know I can be anything I want to be.' Teachers are good at explaining things clearly, and make a point of valuing pupils' contributions. They place great emphasis on developing pupils' language skills, and those for whom English is an additional language make very good progress. Teaching assistants and bilingual support staff play an important part in lessons as they work effectively with small groups and individual pupils who need extra help.

The curriculum provides a good balance between developing pupils' language, literacy and numeracy skills and enhancing their creative talents. It teaches them how to keep safe and be aware of the hazards of smoking, drugs and unsupervised internet access. The school has done much to make topics exciting to boys, and this has raised their attainment significantly. They are right to now be looking at how to do the same for girls.

The headteacher's good leadership and his effective teamwork with other leaders are keys to the school's success, and show that the school has a good capacity to improve

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further. The leaders share high expectations of the school, and set challenging targets for improvement. The systems for self-evaluation are based securely on detailed analyses of the performance of all groups of pupils and have, for example, helped the school to rectify weaknesses in boys' writing.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that girls at Key Stage 2 make faster progress by:
 - teachers insisting that girls take a bigger part in class discussions
 - planning more activities that capture their imagination.
- Improve attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - having higher expectations of children's work and play
 - providing more opportunities for them to learn outside.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In the vast majority of lessons, pupils learn at a good pace. At Key Stage 1, they make particularly good progress in their language because teachers make a point of speaking clearly, using words very carefully and expecting pupils to do the same. At Key Stage 2, pupils learn to read with expression, write exciting stories about Trolls and Hobbits and work out complicated problems in mathematics. The older boys make excellent progress and enjoy competing against each other to produce the best work. This helps to explain their above average attainment in English and mathematics in the latest national tests. Pupils from different minority ethnic groups achieve well, and many of their parents and carers say how pleased they are with their progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. They are supported well in class and show great pride when able to answer questions in class.

Pupils take a pride in their school and persevere well with their work. They behave well, and acts of bullying or racism are rare. Pupils' good awareness of how to look after their bodies is evident in the way they talk knowledgeably about the best foods to eat and choose the healthy options at lunchtime. By the time they leave, pupils are well prepared for the future because of their sound literacy and numeracy skills, strong sense of teamwork and enthusiastic participation in activities that teach them about future career options.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

In typical lessons, pupils learn quickly because the teachers provide tasks that are challenging yet achievable. They set high standards for pupils' behaviour and this makes the most of their time in lessons. Teachers are quick to praise pupils for their efforts, and this gives them confidence to tackle even the most demanding work. Teachers use computers and interactive whiteboards effectively, and pupils respond enthusiastically to these. For example, one class came up with some excellent ideas for their writing after watching a brief video about strange creatures in a wood. Teachers ask probing questions to make pupils think, but sometimes leave it to the same pupils who put their hands up to provide the answers. Teachers assess pupils' work carefully, and use the information well to plan future work. Their marking, however, does not always provide pupils with sufficient guidance on how to do even better.

The school has done much to make the curriculum more interesting for boys, and the exciting topics have been successful in improving their work, particularly in writing. Staff rightly see the next priority as firing girls' enthusiasm in the same way. The good, detailed, planning for pupils of different ability ensures that all work and tasks are matched well to their ages or abilities. The many extra-curricular clubs are popular and help pupils develop their skills in sporting and creative activities.

Parents say how much they appreciate the good care, support and guidance offered to their children by all staff. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable benefit from sensitive support and flourish as a result. They are prepared well for the next stages of their education by comprehensive links with other schools. The school works very closely with parents and outside specialists to provide effective support for pupils

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with learning, behavioural and emotional difficulties. There is a wide range of measures to encourage good attendance. While these work well with the vast majority of pupils, the same few have too many days off or arrive late.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has been successful in knitting together staff of two schools and creating a common sense of ambition. The leaders analyse individual pupils' performance rigorously and use the improvement plan effectively to help rectify any weaknesses. The strong focus on providing equal opportunities for all pupils and determination to tackle any form of discrimination is evident in the way all pupils feel safe and ready to meet any challenge. The leaders evaluate the quality of teaching and learning rigorously and give teachers clear guidance on how to improve their work. Safeguarding is taken seriously, and systems are robust. The school benefits from effective partnerships with other schools and local businesses that do much to enhance the provision and share expertise. In order to promote community cohesion, the curriculum and visitors to the school provide many opportunities for pupils to learn how other people in the United Kingdom and across the world live and worship. The school enjoys a good partnership with parents and carers, and the large majority feel proud of the school and well supported. The new governing body supports the school well, but does not yet have the experience to fully to hold the leaders to account.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision is satisfactory. Children make satisfactory progress from a low starting point, but only a minority attain average levels by the end of the Reception year. Progress is good, however, in language skills because of the strong focus on speaking and listening throughout the day.

The adults are successful in helping children feel safe and happy in school. The bright classrooms are full of exciting things to stimulate their imagination. Children move confidently from one activity to another, but are not always challenged sufficiently to make the most of playing with sand, for example, or sorting toy cars.

Staff observe children's learning and development carefully, and make detailed assessments of their achievements. The curriculum provides some good opportunities for children to develop their skills in the classrooms, but makes too little use of the good outside area to develop their capabilities further or encourage their independence. When children do go outside, they have great fun and make good progress. For example, one group gained much from building the 'Three Little Pigs' house and trying to blow it down.

Children's personal, social and emotional development is good. Although many in the Nursery lack confidence and seek adult support, the sensitive encouragement and guidance they receive makes them look forward to school every day. Children behave well and learn to play with and help each other. The leaders evaluate the provision satisfactorily, and have good plans to improve it.

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 vast majority of parents and carers feel the school does a good job. They are pleased that their children feel safe and enjoy school. They appreciate the way that the teachers make learning fun and have such high expectations of their children. A

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significant minority, however, say they would value more information on the curriculum and how well their children are progressing. Inspectors found that the information provided is good. Some of the parents and carers' comments in the questionnaires, both positive and negative, relate to provision in the previous schools rather than the amalgamated one.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sycamore Primary 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 104 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 230 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	49	47	52	50	3	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	41	39	56	54	6	6	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	35	52	50	13	12	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	33	64	62	6	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	43	41	53	51	6	6	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	33	60	58	8	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	36	61	59	6	6	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)	37	36	58	56	6	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	32	63	61	6	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	36	35	56	54	9	9	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	28	62	60	9	9	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	28	27	65	63	7	7	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	42	40	58	56	3	3	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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.



1 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sycamore Primary School, Nottingham, NG3 4QP

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we visited your school. We really enjoyed seeing you work hard in lessons, get on so well with each other and play happily outside. We especially enjoyed having lunch with you because you told us so much about what you liked about school. You think yours is a good school, and you are right.

This is what we found out about your school.

You make good progress because you work hard and listen carefully to the teacher. Boys do especially well and like to answer all the teachers' questions.

You behave well and are kind to each other.

You like doing jobs around the school, and do them well.

You know a lot about how to live healthy lives and stay safe.

You think carefully about people in the world who are not as lucky as you.

The leaders know how to improve your school and help it run smoothly.

You like the activities provided for you, and your work on Ancient Egypt and the Victorians was really good.

Your good teachers make learning enjoyable and help you when you find things difficult.

All staff at the school take good care of you and keep you safe.

To make your school even better, we have asked your teachers to:

- help older girls to make faster progress so that you do as well as the boys; you can help by always putting your hand up to answer questions and not letting the boys do all the work
- make sure that the youngest children work a bit harder and have more time to learn outside.

Yours sincerely

Terry Elston

Lead inspector

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