

Sceptre School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	928/6072
Unique Reference Number (URN)	135799
Inspection number	344427
Inspection dates	16-17 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline Wordsworth HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Sceptre Primary School is an independent co-educational, non-fee paying school which admits children aged seven to eleven. The school is registered for 75 pupils and there are currently 28 full-time pupils on roll, taught in two classes across the school. The school was established by the Sceptre Trust in 2008 and educates the children of families from the Brethren community in Northampton, Banbury, Brackley and Buckingham. The school aims to provide a safe and secure learning environment that upholds the ethos of the Brethren community and allows all children to succeed and fulfill their full individual learning potential. The education provided at the school is prescribed by the Focus Learning Trust. The school teaches all of the National Curriculum subjects. Religious education is taught by the faith's own instructors and it is restricted to lessons on the Bible. Pupils also have weekly French lessons. The Trust allows the limited use of computers in lessons. This is the school's first inspection report.

Evaluation of the school

Sceptre Primary School has made a purposeful start and provides a good quality of education for the pupils and meets all the requirements for registration. The school has successfully created a strong spiritual and nurturing environment firmly based on Christian principles effectively meeting its stated aim of incorporating the Brethren ethos into the heart of each pupil's education. The family atmosphere evident in the daily life of the school securely and effectively promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Through the use of a good curriculum, teaching in small classes, with teachers providing sensitive and empathetic approaches to learning, pupils make good progress. The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety, including procedures to safeguard pupils, is good. The school's self-evaluation has led to a good understanding of its strengths and has highlighted areas of the teaching and assessment that it is continually seeking to develop.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of education is good and the school fulfils its aims well. It is underpinned by a broad and balanced good curriculum that provides rigorous coverage of the core skills of literacy and numeracy. The use of specialist teachers throughout the school for music and physical education is a particular strength, with pupils benefiting from their good subject knowledge. The personal, social, health and citizenship programme includes a wide variety of activities, from guidance on how to adopt healthy lifestyles to giving an understanding of public institutions, which successfully promote pupils' good personal development.

There is consistency of planning for all subjects supported by appropriate schemes of work. Basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are covered well, so as to ensure that pupils build on them securely from year-to-year and make good progress. Nevertheless, the school is aware that there is occasionally an over-reliance on worksheets that are not always appropriately matched to the pupils' needs. This has a particular impact on writing, where the teachers miss opportunities to consolidate skills taught in English lessons and to increase the range and extent of pupils' writing. Consequently, standards in writing across some year groups are lower than in reading. As a result, pupils make slower progress in this area because writing skills are not taught systematically. Also there are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length or to use a range of more complex writing styles. Similarly, in mathematics opportunities are missed to involve pupils in more open-ended investigations and problem solving activities.

Teaching and assessment across the school are good. Lessons are mostly well planned and have clear learning objectives. Of particular note are the very positive relationships teachers have with their pupils and the effective use of praise and encouragement to motivate pupils. These features were exemplified in a Year 3/4 English lesson on instructional writing. The pupils buzzed with excitement and worked in a mature and independent manner to test out the effectiveness of written instructions because they clearly understood the task and what it was they were learning. Pupils forge ahead in such lessons and make good progress, because the work is challenging and the pace is brisk. During these effective lessons, all pupils have many opportunities to work together or individually to discuss and plan their work.

Notwithstanding all of the above, there are some inconsistencies in teaching. The school is well aware of this because the senior leaders keep a close eye on what goes on in the classrooms. They make regular visits to check that school policies are implemented and regularly give teachers clear written advice on how to improve their teaching. Where teaching is less effective, all pupils complete the same work, even though for some it covers what they already know and can do. Furthermore, pupils often continue with an activity long after they have gained all they can from it and are ready to move on to more difficult work. It is here that pupils' learning slows to satisfactory.

Most teachers use information about pupils' progress well and use appropriate assessment strategies. Tracking systems are in place to monitor pupils' progress over time but this approach is not yet used consistently across the school. There are some good examples of target setting and analytical marking. The best examples make clear what pupils need to do to improve with pupils given the opportunity to ask questions if they have not grasped something.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all ages is good and an important strength. The Christian ethos of the school underpins all the work in school. There is a friendly, welcoming atmosphere and pupils say that they are happy and enjoy their school life. This is well reflected in their good behaviour, positive attitudes towards learning and high attendance. As one pupil commented, 'I don't want to miss a single day'. This was also confirmed by the pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all were very positive about the school. Pupils are good at distinguishing right from wrong and they develop well under the influence of the school's strong moral code. As a result, pupils of all ages build very strong and trusting relationships with their peers, and with their teachers. They are mindful of the needs and feelings of others as they grow as polite, responsible and considerate young people. Pupils gain an insight into the life and culture of other countries through planned activities such as Chinese day, where pupils learn about the clothes and foods of other cultures and compare and contrast them with their own secure understanding of their own culture and tradition. The school council is an effective example of pupils' positive contribution to school and community life. This is further enhanced by the school's involvement in a recycling project enabling pupils to understand the impact of global issues on their own local environment. Pupils make a strong contribution in supporting those who are less fortunate than themselves.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. A range of relevant policies has been implemented including a suitable plan to address a range of disability, discrimination and access issues. The school has a sound approach to inclusion, with appropriate provision set up for pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils of all ages feel safe in school because they are reminded about health and safety issues during lessons and because instances of bullying are rare. Pupils confirm that if any unpleasant incidents occur they are dealt with swiftly by the staff. There are thorough systems for risk assessing educational visits and for the recording of accidents and incidents. The school has sound systems for requesting prior written permission from parents for seeking emergency medical advice or treatment and for first aid. However, there are some elements of the school's procedures in this area that lack consistency. Fire safety procedures are thorough. Regular fire drills are carried out and the inspection and testing of the fire alarm and emergency lighting are done within agreed timescales. The school has an appropriate policy for child

protection. Pupils have a good understanding about how to lead healthy lifestyles and this is promoted well through the school's 'activate' programme.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Employment and staff vetting procedures meet requirements. The single central register has very recently been updated and contains all of the required information. The school has appropriate procedures in place for the safe recruitment of staff. Appropriate checks as to their identity have been made together with medical fitness checks. References have been taken up.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is housed in temporary accommodation in four large mobile structures on the site, while the school awaits full planning permission. The temporary accommodation consists of three classrooms, an assembly hall, office accommodation, a sick room, a staffroom, two sets of washrooms for boys and girls and a washroom for staff with a disabled toilet. Outside there is a suitable grassed area for play. The school uses a local sports centre for games as it has very small space on site. From April 2010 the school will have access to its own sports field. The accommodation is in a good state of repair and it is warm and tastefully decorated.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides suitable opportunities to consult with parents twice a year. Parents receive two written reports each year which provide them with a clear overview of their children's progress. The school has recently updated its prospectus and it now fulfils all of the requirements.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- ensure that teaching is consistently good across the school
- teach writing skills systematically across the school and provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length
- introduce more investigative and problem solving activities in the mathematics curriculum.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

Name of school	Sceptre School		
DCSF number	928/6072		
Unique reference number (URN)	135799		
Type of school	Primary Faith School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2008		
Age range of pupils	7-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 12	Girls: 16	Total: 28
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	N/A		
Address of school	468A Billing Road East Northampton NN3 3LF		
Telephone number	01604 633819		
Fax number	01604 626789		
Email address	nicola.sutcliffe@focus-school.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Nicola Sutcliffe		
Proprietor	Sceptre Trust		
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline Wordsworth HMI		
Dates of inspection	16-17 March 2010		