

Sheering Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	115099
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	379002
Inspection dates	12–13 July 2012
Lead 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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Uncle (Acting Chair)
Headteacher	Julie Lorkins
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Selwyn Ward

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited 15 lessons taught by four teachers, with a particular focus on the progress made by boys and girls in reading, writing and mathematics. The inspector listened to pupils read, and spoke with parents and carers, pupils, all teaching staff, and members of the governing body. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books and school documentation, including self-evaluation and leaders' monitoring of teaching. The inspector also took account of the questionnaire responses of 30 pupils, 17 staff and 47 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This school is much smaller than average. Almost all pupils are White British. There are none learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. An above average proportion of pupils join and leave the school part-way through their primary education. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum levels expected for attainment and progress. Sheering has Healthy Schools status and the International Schools award.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Sheering provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It is an inclusive school that lives up to its motto: 'Everyone Matters'. The school is not good because pupils do not make consistently good progress in lessons and not all teachers make the best use of assessment information to raise attainment. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory and pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 is average. Throughout the school, pupils generally make faster progress in reading than in writing and mathematics, although a focus this year on mathematics has helped to raise attainment.
- The teaching is satisfactory. Teachers know the pupils well, although they do not always use this information to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' individual learning needs. The curriculum is made interesting and exciting, but opportunities are missed to develop and apply numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics. The very good marking, assessment and target-setting in creative writing books are not mirrored in other subjects, including mathematics.
- Misbehaviour is rare, as are incidents of bullying. As a result, pupils feel safe and happy at school. Behaviour is satisfactory rather than good because pupils do not all listen attentively enough in lessons. When pupils fidget or lose concentration, this inevitably slows their learning. Attendance is good.
- This is a well-run school. Leaders have a very accurate picture of the school's performance and a firm handle on its strengths and its areas for development. Well-focused monitoring has resulted in clear feedback to teachers on how to improve the effectiveness of lessons. Coupled with rigorous follow-up and staff training, this has successfully eliminated any inadequate teaching and increased the proportion of lessons where pupils make good progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress in lessons by:
 - ensuring that learning objectives are always sharply focused on what pupils are expected to learn rather than the task to be completed
 - making full use of assessment information always to match work to pupils' different capabilities, especially to stretch more-able pupils in writing and mathematics
 - finding more opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics
 - making more effective use of 'talk partners' to engage pupils and develop their listening skills
 - ensuring that 'plenary sessions' at the end of lessons consolidate pupils' learning by involving them fully in evaluating what they have learnt.

- Improve assessment and its impact by:
 - ensuring that marking in all subjects corrects spelling and punctuation errors and gives pupils the same clear guidance that they have in their writing books
 - extending opportunities throughout the school for pupils to check and assess their own and each other's work
 - developing partnerships with other local schools to assure the reliability of assessments.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Parents are happy with the progress their children make, although inspection evidence shows achievement, though improving, is satisfactory rather than good. Children join Reception with starting points in line with those expected for their age. Their social development is stronger because most of the children benefit from pre-school provision and there is close liaison with pre-schools and with parents to ease children's transition to school. Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception Year and their attainment is broadly average when they join Year 1.

In 2011, pupils left Year 2 with exceptionally low attainment. They were assessed as the equivalent of more than 18 months behind the national average. Though in no doubt that this represented underachievement, school leaders also considered whether their assessments were accurate, including of children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. As the result of much more effective teaching in Key Stage 1, attainment is considerably higher this year. It is average in reading, writing and mathematics. This is similar to the picture in each of the years prior to 2011.

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Attainment continues to be average overall in Key Stage 2, though it is higher in reading than in writing and mathematics. Attainment is not materially affected by the number of pupils who join the school partway through their primary education. As parents confirm, these pupils are quickly helped to settle and they go on to make similar progress to their peers. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs also make satisfactory progress. They benefit from good support from learning support staff that is tailored to their specific needs. There is not always enough challenge, however, for middle-ability and more-able pupils when all are given similar work to complete or where the different tasks assigned are not closely enough matched to individual pupils' specific learning needs. In both Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 mathematics lessons, for example, the different activities that groups were given were not specific to their particular needs. This meant that work was too easy for some and, for a few, it was too hard. By contrast, there was a very close match of task to pupils' different abilities in a mathematics lesson seen in the Year 5/6 class.

There has been a marked difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Girls have generally done considerably better than the boys. The gender gap has sometimes been the equivalent of a year's progress, but there is evidence that boys are catching up.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved. It is consistently satisfactory or better. That has not always been the case in the past. Teachers routinely set out objectives at the start of lessons so that pupils know what they should be learning. On occasion, however, these are too broad to be meaningful, such as, 'I can write fractions'. In other cases, they summarise the task to be carried out rather than the learning intention. Lessons are often planned to end with a 'plenary session' to pull the learning together. When these involve the pupils fully in evaluating what they have learnt, they help to consolidate the learning. This is much less the case on those occasions when they are mainly led by the teacher telling the pupils what they have done or should have learnt.

Through Reception and Key Stage 1, pupils are grouped for phonics (letters and the sounds they make) according to the levels at which they are working. This is effective; systematic teaching of phonics has contributed to faster progress in reading. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are supported well in lessons and so are helped to join in fully with all class activities. Teachers are well aware of the wide gender gap in achievement between boys and girls, and they have sought to address this by devising curriculum topics that better engage the interest of boys without in any way discouraging the girls. Pupils confirmed the success of this, with both boys and girls commenting favourably on the way teachers make learning interesting and fun. The stimulating cross-curricular topics inspire pupils to undertake much research as part of the homework that is regularly set in every class, though homework assignments are not usually tailored to pupils' different

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abilities.

Parents express very positive views on the quality of teaching and especially the way teachers promote pupils' personal development. As one parent put it, 'The school is a nurturing and caring environment in which children flourish; each child is accepted as an individual and encouraged to develop as a well-rounded pupil.' Another praised the way, 'Teachers encourage the children to gain confidence through music, drama and other activities.'

Marking in writing books is of a high standard, giving pupils very clear guidance and individual targets that show pupils precisely what they need to do to improve their work. This is contributing to improvements. This very good marking is not mirrored in other subjects, including mathematics. Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to practise and apply their literacy skills in subjects other than English, many more so than for numeracy. However, where teachers fail to pick up spelling and punctuation errors in other subjects, this sends mixed messages to the pupils. Pupils are involved in some self-assessment but this is quite limited. Pupils are not invited routinely to check their own and each other's work against clearly defined success criteria.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils get on well together and their conduct is good because teachers manage classes well. In the playground, pupils play together sensibly and treat each other with consideration. As a parent explained, 'The children have a very caring attitude, and older and younger children mix well together.' Older pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to take on responsibilities, including as play leaders. Pupils and their parents confirm that bullying is rare, and pupils show they have a good awareness of the different forms that bullying can take so they know what to look out for. Pupils feel safe at school, and parents are unanimous in their view that the school takes good care of them. Attendance is above average.

Behaviour is judged satisfactory rather than good because pupils' attitudes to learning sometimes let them down, for example by fidgeting or not listening when another child is explaining a point to the class. Teachers use initiatives such as 'talk partners' (where pupils discuss an idea in pairs) but opportunities are missed for these to reinforce good listening skills when pupils merely report back what they told their partner rather than what their partner told them.

Leadership and management

Performance management arrangements have greatly strengthened teaching by identifying each teacher's strengths and the specific areas where they can improve their practice. Monitoring is followed up, and supplemented with appropriate staff training. As a result, teaching continues to improve and inadequate teaching and underachievement have been eliminated. There have been marked improvements this year in Key Stage 1. There are systems now to confirm the reliability of assessments in writing across the school. Leaders appreciate that there are no formal

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arrangements to assure the accuracy of other assessments, however, for example by working alongside other local schools to confirm each other's assessments.

The school is rigorous in tackling discrimination and promoting equal opportunities; for example, in adapting the curriculum to better appeal to pupils' interests and so narrow the attainment gap between girls and boys. These successes, and leaders' sharply accurate picture of the school, demonstrate its capacity for improvement.

School development planning is comprehensive and incorporates measurable targets against which the governing body is able to gauge success. A particular innovation that stands out at this school is the translation of the school development plan each year into easily understood child-friendly language that can be discussed with the pupils. The school does not capitalise fully on this potentially outstanding feature, however, because the child-friendly plan is not routinely referred to the school council for them to monitor termly to mirror the governing body's monitoring.

The governing body ensures that arrangements for pupils' safeguarding meet regulatory requirements. It has contributed strongly to the very effective partnership that the school has built with parents. Families are kept very well-informed through the school website and through regular newsletters. These are supplemented with a termly newsletter published by the governing body. This includes profiles of individual governors, as well as reports highlighting school events; particularly the many that contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Recent editions have turned the spotlight on art, with pupils exhibiting work at a local gallery, and performance, with pupils eagerly gearing up to take part in the upcoming Sheering 'Stars In Their Eyes' contest. As part of its International School initiative, prominence is given to broadening pupils' awareness of different world cultures and beliefs. In the Reception class, for example, children enjoyed hearing the Chinese folk tale that inspired the 'willow' pattern, as they went on to create their own story plates. They enjoyed other activities that extended the Chinese theme, including reproducing Mandarin numerals and turning their outdoor playhouse into a very reasonably priced 'Chinese restaurant'. Such cross-curricular links are typical throughout the school and are what make Sheering's curriculum stimulating and fun.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



16 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sheering Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Bishop's Stortford, CM22 7LU

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when I came to visit your school. I would particularly like to thank those of you who gave me your views by completing questionnaires and by talking with me in lessons and in the playground.

Sheering gives you a satisfactory education. The school is well run, and this was especially evident from the improvements there have been in teaching. Teachers help you to make steady progress so that you reach average standards by the end of Year 6. I would like to see you do better, and I know this is also the view of your headteacher, staff and governors. With that in mind, I have suggested some ways in which teachers can help you to make faster progress in lessons. You can help by telling your teachers any time you think your work is too hard or too easy. Among the changes I have suggested is for you to have the same detailed feedback on your work in other subjects that you have in literacy. I have also asked staff to involve you all more in checking and assessing your own and each other's work. This will also help you to improve and achieve higher standards.

I was pleased to see how well everyone gets on at Sheering. These good relationships bring to life the school motto 'Everyone Matters'. I have judged behaviour satisfactory rather than good. This is not due to naughtiness but because you do not all listen as carefully as you should in lessons and this slows your learning. You can greatly help yourselves and each other to make faster progress by all trying very hard to concentrate in lessons and to listen to each other's contributions as well as to what your teacher is saying.

Thank you again for the welcome you gave me, and my very best wishes to all of you for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward
Lead inspector

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