

Southcott Lower School

Bideford Green, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 2UA

Inspection dates 12–13 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Some pupils make outstanding progress in reading.
- Children make outstanding progress in the Nursery and Reception classes as a result of teaching which is frequently outstanding and never less than good.
- Teaching in the other year groups is typically good. Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' learning needs, and usually match work well to their differing ability levels.
- Very positive relationships between pupils and teachers underpin the good teaching and achievement, and help pupils to feel safe.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning and are proud of their school. They behave well in lessons, try their best and work very effectively and supportively with each other.
- The headteacher has successfully engaged all staff and a high proportion of parents in a shared ambition for every pupil to achieve their very best, both academically and personally. This partnership makes a significant contribution to supporting the good achievement of pupils.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and further areas for development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a small number of lessons work is not set at the right level of difficulty for all pupils, so some make slower progress.
- Teachers do not always make sure that pupils use the targets set to improve their work.
- Pupils do not have enough planned opportunities to develop their writing skills in different subjects.
- The process of school development planning is not fully effective. It does not focus sharply enough on pupils' achievement.
- Not all governors have a detailed understanding of how to interpret information about the performance of staff and pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons, five of which were jointly observed with a senior leader. Members of the inspection team also made four short visits to lessons to check on the progress of different groups of pupils across a range of subjects.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, governors and senior leaders and staff, including those responsible for leading subjects.
- Inspectors analysed 118 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) during the inspection, as well as responses to questionnaires from 16 staff.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including those relating to the monitoring of teaching and the targets set for teachers to improve their work. They also looked at records relating to attendance, behaviour, bullying and safeguarding, the school improvement plan, data on pupils' progress and samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector held telephone discussions with a representative from the local authority as well as a consultant who works with the school.

Inspection team

Richard Sutton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynne Thorogood	Additional Inspector
Mark Cordell	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is much lower than average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The percentage of pupils supported through the pupil premium, which in this school provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is much lower than average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
 - pupils respond to and make full use of the short- and medium-term targets teachers set to help them improve their work, particularly in mathematics
 - work is always adapted so it fully meets the needs of pupils of different abilities
 - pupils have frequent opportunities to develop their writing skills, particularly by producing longer pieces of writing in all subjects.
- Make sure the school development plan focuses on measureable outcomes for the achievement of pupils, and is regularly monitored and evaluated against these outcomes.
- Improve governance by making sure that all governors have the training they need to:
 - understand and interpret information about the progress that pupils make in more detail
 - play a full part in making decisions about staff pay rises and promotion.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children usually join the Nursery or Reception classes with skills and abilities which are similar to those typical for their age. The vast majority make at least good progress in the Nursery classes, and many make outstanding progress. Children who continue into the Reception classes, and those who join from other schools at this point, make outstanding progress. They begin Year 1 with above-average standards across all areas of learning.
- Pupils make good progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Some make outstanding progress in reading. Standards at the end of Year 2 have been above average for many years, and often well above average. The standards achieved in 2012 were again above average, and reflected pupils' good progress.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language and those from ethnic minority groups get the help and guidance they need to achieve well. They make good or better progress in all year groups, and frequently outstanding progress in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Overall, pupils do not always achieve as highly in writing as they do in mathematics and reading. However, the very focused support pupils receive from teachers during the 'daily write', for example, is speeding up progress rapidly.
- The school spends its pupil premium funding in a variety of ways. These include financial support for eligible pupils to take part in educational trips and visits, as well as additional staff who provide a good level of personalised academic support. As a result of the additional academic support, as well as good or better teaching, eligible pupils are typically making good progress and the difference between their achievement and that of other pupils is narrowing. However, it is not yet consistently good across all subjects and year groups.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress as a result of good teaching, both in class and in small groups. The progress of these pupils has improved at a rapid pace this year, because the school has reviewed and improved the way they are taught and their specific needs are met.
- Some of the most-able pupils do not always make the good progress that they are capable of because some teachers do not always plan work for these pupils which is hard enough.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good and occasionally outstanding. Consequently, pupils are highly motivated to work hard and achieve well, and show good skills and abilities which are skilfully developed by teachers. This means that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education when they join Year 1 and when they move on to middle school.
- Teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes is outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled in structuring learning activities which are both fun and extremely well matched to the needs of the children.

- All teachers use good subject knowledge to ensure that in the majority of cases, lessons are well matched to the different abilities of pupils. For example, in a Year 2 writing lesson pupils made outstanding progress because they each had work at just the right level of difficulty to be challenging but achievable.
- The teaching of reading is a strength, which is why many pupils make outstanding progress in reading. Teachers are skilled in helping pupils to recognise the sounds that letters make very well.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the achievement of pupils. They work closely with class teachers in order to ensure that the academic support given to pupils is highly personalised and meets learning needs very well, both in the main classroom and when pupils are supported in smaller groups.
- Not all teachers consistently ensure that work is at the right level for pupils of different abilities. It is occasionally too easy, or too hard to complete without individual support. This slows the progress made by some of the most able pupils, and some of those supported through the pupil premium.
- Teachers mark pupils' work frequently and pupils told inspectors that they find this useful in helping them to improve it. Marking is not consistently effective, because teachers do not always check that pupils respond to the targets they set for pupils to improve their work, particularly in mathematics.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour throughout the school is good. In lessons, pupils have very good attitudes to learning and many demonstrate a strong determination to succeed and achieve their best.
- Pupils respond well to the good teaching they receive, and pay good attention in class. Their good skills enable them to work in groups and cooperate very effectively, including with others from different classes and age groups. The school council, for example, provides good opportunities for pupils to do this.
- Pupils value the various rewards they can achieve, and enjoy the 'rewards assembly' each week. Such activities make a good contribution to the good learning in the school and motivate pupils to work hard.
- Pupils have a good, age-appropriate level of understanding with respect to the different forms bullying can take. They told inspectors that bullying is rare at school, and that if any incidents do occur that teachers deal with them quickly and effectively.
- Pupils feel safe and happy at school. They have a good understanding of a wide range of safety issues, including road safety and how to stay safe when using computers.
- Pupils attend school regularly and on time. Attendance is above average.
- The reason why behaviour and safety are not outstanding is that some pupils do not always demonstrate the same high levels of behaviour at lunch and play time as they do in lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides the school with very good leadership and has successfully ensured that all members of the school, as well as a high proportion of parents, are committed to enabling all pupils to achieve their full academic and personal potential. As a result, standards of achievement and the quality of teaching are continuing to improve.
- Good strategies for monitoring teaching and achievement ensure that all leaders and managers, including those responsible for specific subjects, have a good and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and further areas for development.
- All teachers are set targets to improve their teaching, and these targets guide decisions about pay increases. Staff receive high-quality training which enables them to work towards achieving their targets and so further improve their teaching and the achievement of pupils. Staff told inspectors that they value this support, and they are keen to further develop their skills in order to benefit pupils.
- The subjects that pupils study are made more exciting by a range of educational trips and a wide and diverse range of after-school clubs and activities which are well attended by pupils. Pupils do not have as many opportunities as they should to develop longer pieces of writing. This limits the practice pupils get and so holds back their progress.
- Leaders ensure that pupils develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. For example, inspectors observed an assembly where pupils were encouraged to think about the life of Gandhi. The impressive and appropriate response from pupils showed their maturity and a high level of reflection.
- The school development plan identifies the most important aspects of teaching and achievement which need further development. However, it is not as useful as it could be because it does not contain clear, measureable targets for what pupils should achieve, for example at various points throughout the year. This makes it harder to closely monitor how well plans are working.
- The local authority provides an appropriate level of support and challenge to the school. For example, last year it provided training for some teachers in sharpening their assessment skills.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and further areas for development, and provides a good level of challenge and support. However, governors' awareness of pupils' performance is not yet sufficiently detailed to help them support the move towards becoming an outstanding school.
 - Governors manage school finances well, and have a good understanding of how additional funding such as the pupil premium is used and the impact it has on the achievement of eligible pupils. They are aware of how targets are set for teachers and how these guide decisions about pay increases, but do not always rigorously challenge the extent to which teachers have met their targets.
 - Governors make sure that the school fulfils its responsibilities regarding safeguarding. All staff have been checked as required and are trained appropriately to keep pupils safe and free from harm.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109523
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	412613

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	332
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edward Morley
Headteacher	Wendy Varney
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 November 2007
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