

Straits Primary School

Longfellow Road, Lower Gornal, Dudley, DY3 3EE

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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 to attain standards that are broadly average at the end of Year 6. Pupils in Year 5 and especially Year 6 make accelerated progress particularly in writing and reading. As a result attainment is rising rapidly.
- Teaching is typically good, and some is outstanding.
- The quality of teaching and learning has risen, thanks to thorough monitoring by leaders and managers that has led to well-considered training for all staff.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have good relationships with the pupils, who respond with a keenness to learn well.
- Good behaviour and pupils' positive attitudes to school promote good learning.
- Pupils and parents say they have few concerns over behaviour or bullying. The school provides a safe environment for its pupils.
- There is a positive atmosphere in the school as a result of strong relationships between pupils and teachers.
- Since the appointment of the new headteacher, the school has developed an accurate view of its strengths and areas for improvement.
- Despite many changes of staff, the governing body and the headteacher make sure that all leaders and managers contribute strongly to school improvement. As a result, sustained improvement continues.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress in mathematics is not always as good as it is in English because pupils do not practise their skills enough in other subjects or explore and find things out for themselves.
- Key leaders are not yet experienced enough in observing the impact of teaching to improve learning.
- The curriculum does not enable pupils to develop fully the skills and attitudes to participate positively in a culturally diverse modern United Kingdom.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 20 lessons, of which five were observed jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- The inspectors spoke formally with two groups of pupils and informally with others during work and play.
- The inspectors visited assembly, listened to pupils read and discussed their learning in class.
- The inspectors carried out a scrutiny of pupils' written work.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and considered a range of documentation provided regarding pupils' achievement, minutes of governing body meetings, records relating to attendance and behaviour, the school's self-evaluation of its work and information on the setting of targets for teachers.
- Meetings were held with the members of the governing body, staff, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the 52 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View, and spoke informally with parents and carers.
- An evaluation was made of the views of staff expressed in 32 questionnaires.

Inspection team

Terry Mortimer, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sue Calvert

Additional Inspector

Mark Cadwallader

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average primary school.
- The vast majority of the pupils speak English as their first language and there is a small minority of pupils from a mainly White and Asian background.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium, which is extra government funding for particular groups, including pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and looked-after children, is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special needs supported through school action is below average and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is about average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school provides a breakfast club and after-school activities for pupils.
- The headteacher joined the school in April 2012. There have been many changes to staffing and key leaders since then.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress in mathematics to be as good as reading and writing by:
 - enabling pupils to practise and refine their mathematical skills in different subjects giving pupils more chance to explore and find out things for themselves.
- Improve the effectiveness and impact of leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills of key leaders in observing the impact of teaching on learning through paired observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher
 - creating more curriculum opportunities to prepare pupils more thoroughly for life in the culturally diverse British society of today.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The current attainment of pupils in Year 6 shows improvement over 2012, and is above average. Data show that the pupils in Year 6 are making better than nationally expected progress. Progress is accelerating rapidly in all subjects, although it is not as fast in mathematics as it is in English.
- The new headteacher has made sure that teacher assessments in Year 2 are accurate through rigorous checking so that pupils enter Key Stage 2 with prior attainment at the correct levels. This has had a positive impact on the progress of pupils in Year 3.
- In Year 6 in 2013 a greater proportion of pupils made nationally expected progress across Key Stage 2, but a smaller proportion exceeded expected progress in mathematics. This reflects historic Key Stage 1 results which were not always as reliable as they are now. That this trend has been reversed is clear from the school's own data, which show that the current Year 6 pupils made expected progress or better from the end of Year 4, and are presently making even better progress while attainment is rising.
- Children start in Reception with skills and understanding that are broadly in line with levels expected for their age. Learning and progress are good in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The children experience a wide range of activities and flow freely between indoors and outdoors to access them.
- Children develop good skills in recognising numbers and patterns. They also make good progress in their physical and personal and emotional development as they have chances to make decisions about their own learning.
- Children develop a good knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) through many opportunities that promote their speaking and listening skills as well as reading. They learn phonics systematically and effectively. In the national Year 1 phonics check, a greater proportion of pupils reached the required standard than pupils of a similar age nationally in 2013 and showed great improvement over 2012. This is the impact of the school's focus on phonic development.
- Good progress continues throughout the school. By the end of Year 6 in 2012, standards were above average in writing and mathematics and broadly average in reading. School data for 2013 show that progress in reading and writing is slightly faster than in mathematics. This is mainly due to the sharp school focus on improving pupils' reading and writing over the last few years.
- Pupils use their reading and writing skills to support their learning well in other subjects. However this is not as obvious in mathematics as they are not given enough opportunity to find things out for themselves and this slows their progress.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making similar progress to their classmates. The current school data show that the gap between their attainment and that of others is narrowing at a good rate, especially those supported at school action plus.
- There was only one pupil supported through pupil-premium funding in 2013. In 2012, eligible pupils attained as well as their peers and similar to eligible pupils nationally. The gap in attainment from 2011 closed and they made better progress than similar pupils nationally and

other pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Approaches brought in by the headteacher to improve the quality of teaching are increasing the rate of pupils' progress. Staffing difficulties have been overcome and this has been an important factor in helping the school to improve teaching quality.
- The impact of the work of senior leaders can be seen in the consistently good, and sometimes outstanding teaching, more typically in reading and writing than in mathematics. The large majority of parents and carers agree that teaching is good.
- Most lessons build effectively on what pupils already know and are able to do. The teachers are particularly skilled at stimulating the pupils' interest and imagination, especially in English.
- Mathematical skills are developed well in most areas, but pupils do not have opportunities to use and apply these skills systematically across different subjects as they do in English.
- Outstanding teaching was seen when Year 5 pupils were asked to write descriptive sentence openers. The teacher showed that she valued their ideas and encouraged them when they used personification. As a result, the pupils came up with interesting ideas and were able to review their work clearly with the class, who they aided in finding some personifications for themselves.
- In the most successful lessons, teachers captivate pupils' interests by making them think for themselves and keep them actively learning throughout the lesson. Good organisation sustains a good pace of learning, expectations are high and teachers systematically review pupils' progress to continually move them on to higher levels during the lesson. Pupils are often encouraged to explore their own ideas in an open-ended way during these lessons, more especially in English than in mathematics.
- In the Reception classes, staff create well-organised and interesting spaces where a range of tasks nurture children's imagination and encourage them to try things out for themselves.
- The teaching of reading has a high profile. Recent spending is paying off and standards are rising rapidly, especially for boys, because books have been carefully selected to interest them.
- Relationships with pupils are good and this helps encourage pupils' positive attitudes to learning.
- Teachers' feedback to pupils through comments when marking their work is good and individual targets are used well by teachers. Pupils are clear about where they have achieved well and what they need to do to improve. Teachers make sure that their marking helps pupils to correct previous errors or to move on to the next step in their learning.
- Teaching assistants and other adults play an important role in supporting pupils' learning and personal development, especially for those who find some tasks difficult.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good; pupils are courteous to each other and all adults. Pupils say that behaviour is good. Parents who responded to the online questionnaire or met the inspector agreed with this.

- Pupils work well together and are enthusiastic to learn. In discussions pupils say that 'school is great and the teachers help us to learn'.
- The behaviour policy is effective. Pupils say that there is very little bullying, but if any happens the school deals with it very quickly.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school; parents and carers agree. Pupils know that they can talk to any member of staff if they have a problem. The school has visitors who talk with the pupils about how to keep themselves safe both inside and outside school.
- Effective management of behaviour and good use of praise and encouragement contribute positively to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teachers and pupils actively pursue the school's values. Opportunities to raise aspirations are always taken. For example, older pupils support the younger pupils very well, as prefects, playground buddies, librarians and school council. The 'praise' assembly was a good example of how successfully the school has fostered pupils' confidence.
- The school has kept attendance at above the national average. Pupils are punctual to school and lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- Since his appointment, the headteacher, supported by the deputy headteacher, has taken strong action to improve teaching. The headteacher has a well-defined picture of where the school needs to be and knows exactly how to get there. The drive towards becoming an outstanding school supported by the dedicated staff and committed governing body has led to improvements in teaching.
- More accurate information is being gathered and used to help improve pupils' progress. Some of the teachers with additional responsibilities are new to their roles as 'faculty leaders'. While they have received some external and internal training in developing their roles, they have not worked alongside the headteacher and deputy head teacher in checking the impact of teaching upon learning.
- Highly effective action has been taken to tackle all previously identified areas for improvement, though not enough existing outstanding teaching is shared with staff. Arrangements for the management of staff performance are very thorough and effective. This includes regular and accurate observations of lessons and half termly meetings to review pupils' progress.
- Teacher performance is carefully linked to a training and support programme. Teachers are rigorously held to account for the progress of their pupils. The impact of the quality of teaching is evaluated by focusing sharply on how well individual pupils learn in lessons. Pupils who are not progressing are quickly identified and support is arranged. This is tracked to check its impact on pupils' progress. As a result, overall achievement has improved year on year.
- Staff successfully make sure that discrimination is tackled and all pupils have an equal opportunity to do well. Pupil-premium funding is well targeted and checked carefully to make sure it is making a difference for eligible pupils. Half-termly meetings are held to discuss pupils' progress, to identify suitable strategies to advance pupils' learning, and to assess their impact. These are very successful in supporting all pupils, including those who are vulnerable due to their circumstances.

- The school provides an interesting and well-balanced curriculum, which involves pupils in determining the direction of some topics. This includes the teaching of physical education. There is a good range of visits and visitors to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This includes a residential visit in Year 6, which enhances pupils' learning and social skills very well. The school has good links with schools in Africa and France to enhance pupils' international understanding. However, pupils are not so clear about their understanding of life in British society today.

- Parents, carers and staff are positive about the school's leadership and would recommend the school to others.

- The local authority has provided appropriate and effective support to the school.

- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors work confidently with the headteacher to drive improvement. They understand the strengths of the school and what is needed to improve it. They understand the data on pupils' achievement and challenge the school in relation to pupils' progress. Governors regularly visit school to check on all aspects of school life. This strengthens their information to challenge and support the school. Governors know the performance of staff well and are fully aware of strengths and weaknesses, understanding how arrangements to manage staff performance are directly linked to pupils' progress and salaries. They have a thorough understanding of how the pupil-premium funding has an impact on pupils' progress. The systems to check on the performance of staff, including the headteacher, are effective. Governors make sure that all national requirements regarding safeguarding and child protection are met.

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	103827
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	427080

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	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	334
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Downing
Headteacher	Len Hazlehurst
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2008
Telephone number	01384 818575
Fax number	01384 818576
Email address	info@straits.dudley.sch.uk

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