



St Swithun's VC Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109604
LEA BEDFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 278222
Inspection dates 19 October 2005 to 20 October 2005
Reporting inspector Dr. Anna Coyle LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Ivel Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		SG19 1AX
Age range of pupils	3 to 9		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01767 680692
Number on roll	157	Fax number	01767 690992
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Rev.D Williams
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr. David Morton

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Swithun's Voluntary Controlled (VC) Lower School has been through a period of great upheaval since its last inspection in 1999 and is only just emerging from its problems, aided by the close support of the local authority (LA). It has a new headteacher, several recently appointed staff and governors, and a new administrative assistant. This is a smaller than average first school, situated in Sandy in Bedfordshire. The vast majority of children are of White British descent. A small proportion are from traveller backgrounds and a very low number of children speak English as an additional language. Several children have learning difficulties and disabilities, of whom two have statements for their needs.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is an improving school that is now coping effectively with change, after coming through a period of serious difficulties. The inspectors agree with the school's own assessment of itself is that it is satisfactory. Its best feature is in the good quality of leadership provided by the new headteacher, who has been inspirational in leading the school out of its troubles. As a result, the school has improved satisfactorily overall since the last inspection, despite its set-backs, and dealt with most of the issues that were identified in 1999. It provides satisfactory value for money. Children make satisfactory progress overall and reach the nationally expected standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 2. However, standards are not high enough by the time they leave at the end of Year 4 because teaching and learning are not consistent in the upper part of the school. The provision for children in the Foundation Stage Unit is good. This is a strength of the school because children are given a good start to their education in the nursery and reception age-groups. Most achieve the early learning goals by the time they reach the end of the reception year and are well prepared to move into Year 1. The procedures for self-evaluation are good. Staff, children and most parents feel that their views are valued. The school has good capacity to continue its development. It is currently forging links with local schools to aid teaching and drive up standards.

What the school should do to improve further

Focus on: - Improve the quality of teaching in Year 4 - Raise standards in writing and mathematics, especially amongst the oldest and most capable children.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are satisfactory in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 2. Children achieve standards that broadly match those of similar schools in the national tests for 2004. However, standards have declined since the previous inspection and the test results show fluctuations over the intervening years, with major dips in reading and writing. This downward plunge has now been halted and standards are rising again steadily. The school has accurately identified the need to go on improving children's writing and mathematics as key priorities, and it has secured very close support from the local authority to help drive up standards. This is having a positive effect on children's progress, especially in literacy and numeracy. However, progress is not good enough at the top end of the school because learning falters and is insecure. As a result, children are not reaching the expected standards in Year 4 and many are underachieving, especially the most capable. Children start school with similar skills to most children of their age and make satisfactory progress overall from the time they enter until Year 2. Most work hard, and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are soundly supported by teaching assistants to help them make sufficient progress. The older children make a good start in the junior classes but standards fall

away and are below the expected levels by the time they leave. This is because the teaching is inconsistent and occasionally inadequate, and it is exacerbated by the lack of challenging targets and the poor behaviour of a few children who disrupt learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children enjoy school and generally work hard in lessons. Attendance has improved in recent years and is now satisfactory. Children's behaviour is satisfactory overall, although there are occasions when the older children's learning is disrupted by poor behaviour and lack of concentration. Most are fully aware of procedures to follow in the rare event of a dispute and 'playground buddies' play an increasing part in ensuring the playground is a safe and secure environment. Children are aware of healthy living through diet and exercise. The school's commitment to fitness and healthy lifestyles is evident in the governors' decision to organise the sale of fresh fruit to Years 3 and 4. The links with a local secondary school, and specialist sports coaching to all classes, have raised children's awareness of the importance of keeping fit. The school council plays an important part in helping children to understand how to be involved in the school community. Raising money for charity and the organisation of fruit sales are helping older children to learn business skills to benefit them in later life. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school has placed considerable emphasis on moral and social development recently, and children have a growing understanding of the importance of respect. Close links with the local church make a good contribution to children's spiritual development, and their increasing awareness of different cultures is fostered well by linking with schools in Ghana and Kenya.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall. However, it varies from being occasionally good to inadequate. The inspection findings concur with the school's own views about the quality of teaching and learning. The best teaching extends children's literacy skills well by using skilful questioning and well organised activities. For example, children improved their writing effectively in Year 2 when learning how to use speech marks in the story, 'Not Now, Bernard!' However, when the teaching has shortcomings, the pace is slower and the children's poor behaviour limits learning. Senior managers have devised a rigorous system of monitoring lessons. This has helped the school to identify the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and act upon the findings promptly. As a result local authority advisors and consultants have been brought in to provide training, support and guidance for staff, especially for the teaching of literacy and numeracy. These strategies have had a good effect on improving teaching over the last two terms and have helped colleagues to feel better equipped in the classroom. Teachers make good use of the new interactive whiteboards to make lessons enjoyable and interesting for the children. Computers are used confidently to aid children's learning, as seen in

the Year 4 Internet research work on animals, and the work in Year 3 on making pizzas. Teaching assistants are well deployed to help children to learn effectively and make sufficient progress in small groups. They also help to provide good opportunities for children to develop their speaking and listening skills through discussions during group activities. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. They are being developed carefully to include better targets for individual children so that they can understand more about how well they are doing during lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and has strengths in music and sport, which are taught effectively by specialist part-time teachers throughout the school. Learning activities in the classrooms are generally adequately planned to respond to the needs of different ages and abilities. However, in Year 4 the planning does not consistently take account of different abilities and this is resulting in some underachievement. Effective planning and support for children with learning difficulties and disabilities enable them to be fully included in lessons. The school is rightly reviewing its learning policy before it begins to undertake a full curriculum review. This review is intended to provide a greater range of creative and practical activities and integrate children's literacy and numeracy more consistently into other subjects. Visits to local places of interest add to the children's learning. The school's half-termly cross-school activities, such as a book week, create exciting opportunities for children of different ages to work together. Through its lessons in personal, social and health education, the school is successful in developing children's awareness of safe and healthy living. Popular extra-curricular activities, particularly in sports, also enhance children's understanding of the importance of exercise.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school's care, guidance and support for children are satisfactory overall. This is a school with a friendly atmosphere, where children are happy and generally well looked after. Children make a good start in the Foundation Stage because of the careful induction arrangements. Child protection procedures are clearly understood and the necessary systems are in place to safeguard children who need extra care. Teaching assistants give good support to the learning and behavioural needs of groups of children. The staff are not afraid to try new ideas if they think they might help the children. For example, the use of small groups for children with emotional and behavioural problems has been most successful in improving children's behaviour and attitudes to school life. Arrangements at lunchtimes are good at keeping children happy and occupied. Recent investment in small play equipment gives a real purpose to children's activities. The support for children's academic development is satisfactory. Personal targets have been set in numeracy and literacy for the first time this term, but many children do not yet fully understand the significance of these. Whilst most

children's work is marked conscientiously, there is a lack of consistency in the way teachers inform children how to improve their work or move towards their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The new headteacher provides a very clear lead to colleagues and has inspired staff and governors with his commitment and drive. He and the two assistant headteachers work well together to promote a sense of teamwork. They provide good support to the staff, many of whom are new and not yet had time to develop their management roles. After a very difficult period of instability, the school is now in a position to improve further under the careful guidance of the headteacher and the watchful eye of the local authority. This bodes well for the future. The school has good systems for checking how well it is doing and identifying what it could do better. These have been developed considerably since the arrival of the new headteacher in less than a year and self evaluation is now effective. The views of everyone in the school community are sought and then considered carefully before taking them into account when devising the school development plan. Staff work hard to ensure that children are treated equally and fairly, which has a good impact on children's personal development. Governance and financial management are satisfactory. The governors have developed their roles over the last year and meet all statutory requirements. They work with the senior managers to achieve satisfactory value for money. Despite the school's major difficulties over the last five years and lack of improvement until recently, it has now dealt with most of the issues from the previous inspection by developing the monitoring of teaching and improving children's behaviour. However, it has yet to improve the provision for the most capable children who are still underachieving in the junior classes.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	NA
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so helpful when we came to inspect your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and watching you working with your teachers. It was good to speak to your headteacher about how well you work and to hear about all the changes that have happened recently, such as the new playground games and freshly painted classrooms. We also enjoyed your singing. We think that your school does a few things well, but there are some things it needs to do better. What we liked most about your school - Your headteacher is doing a good job. He knows how to make the school better for you. - Those of you in the nursery and reception class make a good start. - You enjoy school and get on well together. - Those of you who find work hard are getting the right sort of help and you use it well. What we have asked your school to do now - Give better support for your learning in Year 4 - Help you to improve your work in lessons