



St Helen's Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124646
Local Authority SUFFOLK
Inspection number 293063
Inspection date 2 October 2006
Reporting inspector John Messer

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	St Helen's Church Lane
School category	Community		Woodbridge Road, Woodbridge Road Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 2LT
Age range of pupils	3–11	Telephone number	01473 251333
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Fax number	01473 221913
Number on roll (school)	385	Chair	Mrs Gill Spencer
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mr John Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out over one day by an Additional Inspector

Description of the school

This school is larger than most primary schools. A high proportion, 41% of pupils are from families from minority ethnic backgrounds and 26% speak languages other than English at home. The largest minority group come from Bangladeshi backgrounds. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average as is the proportion that have learning difficulties or disabilities. Most pupils come from relatively disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Attainment on entry to the school is very low. When they start in the Nursery nearly a half of children speak little or no English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. There has been a long-established culture geared to promoting excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They love coming to school and enjoy learning new things. They are proud of their school. They say that is a very special place where pupils from a wide variety of cultures and who speak many different languages make friends with each other and learn happily together. Strong foundations for learning are laid in the Nursery and Reception classes. Here there is great emphasis on developing communication and language skills. Children who speak different languages at home make rapid progress in developing English-speaking skills. Children achieve well in all areas of the curriculum. Although children learn a great deal in the Foundation Stage, they start from a very low base so by the end of the Reception year standards are still below average. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2. They do well to attain average standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science by Year 2. They are well prepared to make more rapid progress in Years 3 to 6. Progress in Years 3 to 6 accelerates, particularly in English. This is because the school has a long history of developing good skills in literacy. By Year 6 standards in English are exceptionally high. Standards in mathematics and science are above average. Teaching and learning are good and there are some outstanding features. Teachers maintain high expectations of pupils' behaviour and performance. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning, especially when tasks are purposeful. What could be more exciting than actually writing the script for 'Oliver in a Twist' and making it into a grand school performance? Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent. Pupils are eager to please and keen to succeed. The school provides a good curriculum. The strong emphasis on developing language and literacy skills closely matches the learning needs of pupils. Pupils develop a wide range of skills in literacy and numeracy that provide a very good basis for their future economic well-being. They are also developing good computer skills. Above all they are developing as confident learners who are well prepared to face new challenges. The leadership and management of the school are good. The new headteacher and his deputy have given a new impetus to school developments. The roles of subject leaders are being enhanced so that they can take a stronger lead in developing their subjects and raising achievement across the school. The school has begun to measure the amount of progress that pupils make in each year group but the systems are not yet sufficiently well developed to give an accurate picture. Finances are managed well and the school provides good value for money. The issues from the last report have been fully resolved and the school is well placed to make further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop systems to measure the amount of progress that pupils make in English, mathematics and science more accurately so that subject leaders can identify where particularly good progress is made and where improvements are needed.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children's attainment on entry to the school is very low, especially in communication, language and literacy. Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. Pupils' attainment is still below average when they enter Year 1. The results of national assessments for pupils in Year 2 confirm that this age group attains average standards. Pupils achieve well in Years 3 to 6. They make good progress in mathematics and science and outstanding progress in English. The proportion of pupils who exceed the national target of Level 4 and attain the higher Level 5 standard is well above average in English, mathematics and science. This shows that the faster learners are appropriately stretched and challenged so that they make good progress. Pupils who arrive at school speaking little English are given extra assistance and most achieve well. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities receive good support so that they make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

St Helen's is a happy school where children and adults enjoy each other's company and treat each other with respect. This is the basis for the outstanding progress pupils make in their personal development. Clear routines are established in the Nursery and children are quickly made to feel safe and secure so they can develop self-confidence. Pupils in Year 6 expressed their views clearly, 'Our school is multi-cultural. We all respect each other and we are friendly and close.' Behaviour is excellent throughout the school. 'We've never had a proper bully. There is sometimes a bit of name-calling but when someone's told off for it they'd never dare to do it again'. Very good relationships and constant encouragement allow pupils to develop excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills since their views and thoughts are taken seriously. There is a strong emphasis on eating a healthy diet and on keeping fit. Pupils know how to stay safe and avoid danger. The newly established school council gets things done. It raised money, by organising a 'bad hair day', to buy paint to brighten up the toilets. The council gives good opportunities for the pupils' voice to be heard and encourages them to make a positive contribution to the school community in preparation for the responsibilities of adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils at the school are confident learners who communicate well. The good quality teaching which enables them to do this begins in the Foundation Stage where planning is centred on the needs of individual children of all abilities. A good programme for teaching children the links between letters and the sounds they make helps to sharpen

early reading skills. The school has identified the need to measure pupils' progress more accurately so that teachers have a clearer understanding of exactly where more help is needed. One key feature of all lessons is pupils' eagerness to learn. Pupils say that lessons are fun and some are certainly imaginative. In a darkened classroom pupils were helping a teacher, transformed into Winnie the Witch, to re-write a description of her grotesque 'familiar' who was concealed in a box labelled, 'Danger. Keep Out'. This was great fun. Children enjoy learning and respond really well when they are challenged. One exceptionally effective feature of the teaching is the way in which teachers give pupils choices about whether they think they need extra help or at which level of work they would feel most comfortable. Pupils make sensible decisions about their learning and this helps many to achieve well beyond what might be expected of them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is relevant to pupils' needs. Rightly, developing communication and language skills is given a high priority. The performing arts feature strongly and pupils have good opportunities for developing skills in music, dance and drama. Good attention is paid to developing healthy lifestyles. Pupils enjoy the pre-school exercise sessions and the swimming pool is used well. There is a good programme to teach pupils about sex and relationships as well as the dangers of the misuse of drugs. A good range of visits and after school activities enriches learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. The procedures to ensure that pupils are safe fully meet requirements. The team of teachers and support staff are committed to providing all pupils with good levels of care, support and guidance. Faster learners, those who are at an early stage of learning to speak English and pupils who find learning hard are supported well and this enables them all to become confident, successful learners. The school is good at listening and responding to pupils' views.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The new headteacher, working together with the new deputy, has reinvigorated the school and set it on a clear path of further improvement. Governors provide good support. They keep in touch with school issues and are increasingly involved in monitoring the school's performance. The school maintains a detailed document that describes how well it thinks it is doing. This self-evaluation is accurate although rather too modest in terms of pupils' outstanding personal development. The school improvement plan is a good management tool and is based on an evaluation of the school's most pressing priorities. The overwhelming majority of parents are delighted

with the quality of education provided for their children. One typical comment was, 'The school celebrates diversity, builds understanding, respect and tolerance... St Helen's children leave Year 6 feeling ready to take on the world'. This wholehearted backing means that the school is well placed to make further improvements.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 October 2006 Dear Children St Helen's Primary School, St Helen's Church Lane, Woodbridge Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 2LT What a great school! I thoroughly enjoyed visiting your school for a day and I would really have liked to stay longer so that I could have spoken with more of you. You were so polite and helpful. Thank you for telling me all about your school. There are some really outstanding things about the school. The thing that sticks most in my memory is your excellent behaviour. Everybody I met was so courteous and sensible. The other great strength is the fact that you are so proud of your school - and so you should be. You told me that everybody respects each other and that you will not put up with any silly behaviour. You help newcomers understand what it means to be a part of the St Helen's school community. The older children set a good example to all the others and this helps everybody to get on well with each other. Another strength is the sensitive way that you treat each other and the way that children from all sorts of different backgrounds mix happily together. Some of you helped me to calculate that there are at least 19 different languages spoken by children in the school. You agreed that this is a real strength because it helps you to appreciate the wealth of varied experiences that people from different cultures and beliefs bring to the school community. A group of the older pupils said, 'Our teachers understand us and listen to our points of view. We can always have our say'. I think that the teachers are great and work hard to help you to develop self-confidence in your ability. They help you to learn quickly and reach high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science. You are keen to do well and to succeed and this gives you a good springboard to succeed in life. I know that your headteacher and staff would like to make even more improvements. Although you said that there is nothing that you could think of to make the school better, I think that there is one thing that could improve standards further. I think that the school should measure and closely examine the amount of progress you make, so that all of you make as much progress as possible. That's all. I wish you every success in the future. Yours sincerely John Messer (Lead inspector)