

Gillingham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113666
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311329
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Jon Palethorpe

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	366
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Male
Headteacher	Sian Thornton
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	School Road Gillingham SP8 4QR
Telephone number	01747 823245
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large two-form entry primary school which incorporates a unit for pupils with significant speech and language difficulties. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Children's attainment and experience on joining Reception represents a broad range, with a large proportion below average, particularly in terms of communication and language skills and personal development. Recent changes to staffing have resulted in the appointment of five new teachers this term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which takes exceptionally good care of its pupils and provides them with a good quality education. The headteacher, senior leaders, teachers and teaching assistants have been remarkably successful in supporting the school's outstanding progress since the previous inspection. The governors have made a very strong contribution to this. Parents clearly appreciate the quality of the school with such comments as, 'Excellent leadership and teaching at Gillingham Primary', and, 'This school is very well organised and listens to its pupils and their families.'

Children get off to an excellent start in the Foundation Stage. Many of them enter school with levels of attainment below what is usually expected of this age group; in some aspects of communication, language and personal development, a significant proportion are well below. As a result of several outstanding features in provision, especially in teaching, children reach broadly average standards at the end of Year 2. However, standards in writing are below average. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Bearing in mind the wide range of children's starting points, this represents outstanding achievement.

The school takes its responsibilities for pupils' welfare very seriously. There are many positive features in pupils' personal development, with moral and social aspects clearly outstanding. Pupils show particularly good attitudes and good, often exemplary, behaviour. Pupils themselves describe how behaviour has improved over the last few years and confirm that any bullying is quickly sorted out. This is recognised by parents, one typical comment being, 'My children really enjoy this school. It is a safe and happy learning environment.'

Part of the reason for pupils' marked progress is the outstanding quality of the teaching and of the curriculum. This is a great improvement in both areas since the previous inspection. Teachers are enthusiastic and work extremely effectively with each other and with teaching assistants. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive the same good quality provision, enabling them to make similar outstanding progress to other pupils. This is true in the main school and in the speech and language unit. Interest is maintained and pupils enjoy their learning because the curriculum is exciting and stimulating.

The school has come a long way in recent years. The leadership team and the governors have a very clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development, although in some aspects they have been too modest in their own self-evaluation. They have created a good quality learning environment in terms of personnel and the fabric of the building. The school's recent monitoring record indicates that it has an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Excellent planning and teaching for the Foundation Stage are helping children to make outstanding progress. From low starting points, they achieve very well to reach most of the goals expected of them by the time they start Year 1, a notable exception being in aspects of communication, language and literacy. There is a strong emphasis on speaking and listening to help overcome this, with very good support from teachers and teaching assistants, particularly for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learning to sound out letters and blends successfully supports children in progress towards reading and writing. They grow in confidence and enjoy role play. Good progress is made in number work through 'fun' games

and rhymes, together with more formal mathematics time. Children are learning to become aware of, and control, their bodies through physical activity and structured play. They learn to improve fine skills when using brushes, scissors and construction sets. There are some limitations concerning the size of, and access to, the outdoor play area, but staff work hard to minimise the impact of this, and plans are well in hand to address the situation. Children make outstanding progress in their personal, social and emotional development. This starts with a good induction into the routines of the school, then lots of sharing, consideration and turn-taking. This results in excellent relationships and behaviour.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of pupils' writing, developing vocabulary and sentence construction.

In the context of this outstanding school, these areas for improvement are already well known and being effectively planned for.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are above average by the time the pupils leave the school, which is better than at the time of the last report. This represents outstanding progress. By the end of Year 2, pupils have made very good progress to reach broadly average standards. However, writing is still weaker than reading and mathematics. The school has rightly identified that this stems from pupils' underdeveloped speaking and listening skills, which have negatively affected their use of vocabulary and sentence construction. The school has very good procedures in place to overcome any deficiencies. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Indications for 2008 are that the impressive rising trend in attainment is being sustained. Pupils with speech, language and learning difficulties achieve particularly well because of excellent provision and support. Higher-ability pupils respond well to challenging work and their achievement is equally good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Moral and social aspects are particularly notable. Pupils, parents and governors all report great improvements in behaviour, and inspectors saw examples of exemplary behaviour in and out of classes. Pupils enjoy school, and comments such as, 'It's a brilliant school,' and 'It's a co-operative school' sum up how most pupils feel. A pupil who had only been in the school for four weeks said, 'I feel as though I've been here for ages. I really like it here.' Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and are confident in going to an adult if they have worries. The school has gained the Healthy School Award and pupils understand about eating and exercising to keep them healthy, but not all lunch boxes put this into practice! Pupils contribute well to their own school community and further afield. They support charities and perform to old people, and the school council is leading a campaign to raise awareness of child labour abroad. Attendance was below average last year, holidays taken in term time being the main reason. However, the school is working hard, and successfully, to improve attendance, and it is presently satisfactory. Good basic skills in numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology, and the fact that pupils work very well together, mean they are well prepared for everyday life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Rigorous monitoring records of the headteacher, leadership group and core subject coordinators show how teaching and learning have been improved to outstanding. This is having a very positive impact on academic achievement and pupils' personal development, which are both outstanding. Work is very well planned to cater for all ability levels, with excellent support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially in the speech and language unit. Teaching assistants are used very effectively to support pupils, with particularly valuable help in the Foundation Stage. Teachers manage their classes well, with only very rare disruption for behavioural issues. Outstanding relationships have been built up. Good questioning techniques and interesting resources, including very good use of interactive whiteboards and computers, help motivate pupils to learn. Assessment is used well in planning lessons, and marking gives appropriate guidance on how pupils can improve, contributing well to pupils' excellent learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school has an outstanding curriculum covering all the required elements, and much more. Planning is thorough and guides the work of teachers and pupils. Inclusion is a major strength of the school. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those in the speech and language unit, and those who are more able are given appropriate challenges and support. The growing use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects through the new suite and interactive whiteboards is having a marked impact on pupils' learning. There is very good planning and teaching for pupils' personal, social and health education, with good use of external agencies and resources where necessary. Many activities enrich the curriculum. For example, there is a good number of after-school clubs, and visits and visitors help subjects 'come alive,' including residential visits for Years 4 and 6. Accommodation and resources have improved greatly over recent years. These, together with a school full of attractive displays, help to provide a rich and stimulating learning environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support given to pupils are outstanding. Academic guidance has greatly improved since the previous inspection. Rigorous assessment tracks pupils' progress through from Reception to Year 6, enabling teachers to give good advice on how to improve. There is a strong commitment to supporting pupils, particularly those who find learning difficult. Guidance on personal development is just as thorough, enabling pupils to make outstanding progress here as well as in academic terms. Staff know pupils very well and treat them with care and respect. This leads to excellent relationships, with pupils growing in confidence and self-esteem. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are robust and regularly reviewed, and staff make sure that policy is put into practice.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The direction and vision of the headteacher, together with the very strong leadership group, curriculum leaders and governors, are all having a marked impact on the school's development. The whole-school 'team' works together to manage and lead the school extremely well. The headteacher talks about the 'buzz' in the school, and it soon becomes apparent that everyone is 'buzzing' with enthusiasm. The development of the staff, both teaching and non-teaching, has created a climate where all can contribute, striving for higher standards. Teaching, learning, standards, achievement and personal development are all moving forward at a great speed. Assessment, target setting and thorough analysis of pupils' performance are all helping to raise standards. A focus on behaviour by staff, governors, parents and pupils themselves has led to great improvements.

Other highlights of leadership and management are evident in the Foundation Stage, the speech and language unit, and in provision for pupils with learning difficulties. Equal opportunities are at the heart of the school's work. There is no better example than the way that pupils from the unit take a full part in school activities, and conversely, other pupils benefit from working in the unit. Much-improved learning resources, including provision for ICT, underpin the work of teachers.

Rigorous self-evaluation is leading to good quality strategies being put in place that are leading to improved standards, although there is some modesty in the school's own reporting of its work. Governance has progressed at a similar rate, with governors being very well informed and very well organised with their committee structure. They are making an outstanding contribution with their challenge and support. Particularly notable has been the management of the recent new building works, with the result being of great benefit to the school.

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Annex A

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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

9 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Gillingham Primary School, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QR

Thank you very much for the way that you welcomed us to your school. You were very friendly and helpful, and it was a pleasure to be with you.

We think that yours is an outstanding school – that means very, very good. Here are some of the reasons we think that.

- You make excellent progress and by the time you leave the school, you reach above-average standards in English, mathematics and science.
- You do this because teaching is outstanding. Teachers and their assistants are all doing a very good job, which helps you to do your best. In fact, everybody in the school, including the governors, is working very successfully as a team to help you.
- The school is especially good at helping the youngest children when they start school, and those of you who find learning difficult.
- Your school is very well run and it takes exceptionally good care of you.
- You are being helped to keep fit and healthy and to grow up as sensible people, knowing how to treat each other. We saw this in your really good behaviour in and around the school.

We have asked the teachers to help you to improve your writing, not just in literacy lessons, but in all your subjects.

Well done to all of you. Thank you again for making our short stay so enjoyable. Keep working hard and trying your best.

Best wishes

Jon Palethorpe Lead Inspector