

# Swallow Dell Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133488
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	316135
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Raymond Jardine

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	307
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Susan Jennings
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 October 2003
<b>School address</b>	Blackthorn Road Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire AL7 3JP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01707 339079
<b>Fax number</b>	01707 880922

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school serving an area which has above average levels of social and economic disadvantage, reflected in the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds but there are a few from a range of minority ethnic groups. A small but rising proportion are at an early stage of learning English and receive additional support. An above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities.

Since the last inspection, the school has gained Investors in People, Artsmark and Healthy Schools Awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Swallow Dell is a good school that provides good value for money. The school provides a secure and very encouraging learning environment where an enjoyment of learning is fostered, enabling pupils to grow in self-esteem and to achieve well. Parents are very pleased with the school's work, summed up by one who said: 'Since joining the school my children are happy and confident and their school work has improved dramatically'. Teamwork is strong in implementing the school's vision: 'Striving to build self-esteem through achievement'. A key reason for this success is the good leadership and management, particularly by the experienced headteacher and effective senior management team. They provide clear direction and help to maintain the momentum of improvement, guided by a secure and accurate analysis of the school's performance. The school consults widely and makes good use of partnerships to help ensure that pupils do as well as they can. Standards have risen since the last inspection and the potential for further improvement is good.

In the Reception year, children make good progress in most areas of learning from their low attainment on entry. This good progress continues in later years. By Year 6, standards are broadly average, and highest in English and science. Standards in mathematics have lagged behind because pupils lack confidence in applying their knowledge and skills in different contexts. The subject is rightly a key focus for improvement. The knowledgeable and effective teaching that typifies lessons is an important reason for the pupils' good progress. Pupils respond well to the stimulating and challenging lessons that involve them, both individually and collaboratively. Their good behaviour in lessons and around the school ensures that little time is wasted and the pace of learning is good. Curriculum targets, shared with pupils and their parents and carers, help to focus learning. These are proving effective, especially in literacy, but pupils are not yet skilled at using them to review their own work or to help signpost their next steps, a weakness that the school is currently improving through newly introduced recording systems.

The school provides high standards of care and support. Pupils work and play together within a harmonious and secure environment and they acquire good personal skills. Most pupils respond very positively to the good guidance and choices provided to help them live healthily. They grow in confidence and readily take on responsibilities, such as 'buddies' to younger children or school councillors. The many additional activities, visits and visitors enrich the curriculum. Pupils acquire good basic skills in literacy and science but numeracy and, to a lesser extent, information and communication technology (ICT) skills are not applied enough across subjects.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills which are well below those expected for their age. Boys and girls from all groups make good progress overall and achieve well. Even so, by the end of their time in Reception, few children reach the standard expected for their ages. Leadership and management are good. As a result, there are good induction procedures for children to get to know the class before they come into school. The curriculum is planned well. It places much emphasis on developing literacy, numeracy, personal and social skills. Routines are established effectively, children are happy and they know what is expected of them. This includes routines and procedures for their care and welfare, which are good. Children learn to sing 'Happy Birthday' as they wash their hands to ensure that they take sufficient time to do

the job properly. Behaviour is good and the children learn to care for each other; for example, while searching for shapes in the outdoor area, one child handed the shape she had found to another child to take to the teacher, saying 'I have found this one for you!' One of the main reasons that the children thrive in the Reception class is the good quality teaching and learning. Planning is effectively focussed on the needs of the children. Support staff are knowledgeable and are deployed efficiently. One area of relative weakness is in the resources the school has for physical development.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in mathematics by building pupils' confidence in applying their knowledge and skills to solve problems in other subjects and contexts.
- Extend pupils' skills in working independently by enabling them to use targets to review the quality of their work and guide the next steps in learning.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

The good progress made by the children in the Foundation Stage is built on well at Key Stage 1. Year 2 assessment results improved considerably in 2007 despite being below average in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good progress for most pupils given their low starting points. Pupils also make good progress at Key Stage 2. Standards by Year 6 have improved steadily since the last inspection, particularly in English and science, to be about average in 2006, although they fell slightly in 2007. Inspection evidence, including the school's accurate assessment data, shows that standards are rising again and pupils are currently progressing well, particularly in English and science. Efforts to improve writing have proved successful and scientific enquiry skills are well developed. The school's focus on mathematics is beginning to show benefits but there is some way to go to match the standards of other core subjects. Pupils from different ethnic groups achieve equally as well as their peers. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities progress well because they receive good support, such as through the 'Nurture group'.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

A significant strength of the school is in how well pupils get on together and understand right from wrong. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respect and help each other and learn to work and play collaboratively and independently. They behave well and are safety conscious, for example, when moving between the buildings. Bullying is rare and any disagreements are usually resolved through discussions. Through the school council and in other ways, pupils make a positive contribution to the school community. They enjoy raising funds for charities and taking part in other activities, such as working together to grow vegetables or helping younger children. They gain good insights into their own and other cultural traditions and learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and stay safe. Pupils enjoy school and make the most of sport and other activities on offer. Attendance is average; it has improved significantly in recent years.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is particularly good in English and science. Relationships and pupils' behaviour are very good and one reason why time is used very well. Teachers plan stimulating lessons that engage pupils directly in learning and they make good use of questioning to encourage pupils of all abilities and backgrounds to think and explain. The very good use of 'talking partners' helps promote pupils' confidence, speaking and listening skills. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and the pace of lessons is brisk. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations and use assessments well to ensure that pupils are challenged appropriately. Pupils are provided with curriculum targets to help guide literacy and numeracy. This is a developing area and, while teachers use them regularly, pupils do not use them well enough to reflect on their progress or to help guide them in their next steps.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

There is a high emphasis on developing pupils' personal and social skills and literacy. Consequently, they are encouraged to grow in confidence and live safe and healthy lives. There are good opportunities for pupils to write and read for a range of purposes. The school is currently extending opportunities to apply mathematical skills and the use of ICT more fully across other subjects. Attractive displays that reflect the school's strengths in the creative arts contribute to a very positive learning environment. A good range of visits and visitors and additional well attended clubs further enrich the curriculum.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

The good levels of care and support provided for pupils help to create a calm and harmonious community in which they feel safe and well cared for. Comprehensive policies and routines underpin the school's work. Rigorous systems are in place to safeguard pupils' welfare and ensure their well-being. Staff are quick to identify pupils who fall behind or have learning difficulties and work well with a wide range of agencies to help them catch up, address their needs and support families. The system for checking how well pupils are achieving is effective. Marking is regular and mainly good, providing praise, correction and guidance but the use of curriculum targets with pupils is underdeveloped. Good arrangements ensure that pupils feel confident when moving from one stage of learning to another and are well prepared for their secondary schooling.

## Leadership and management

#### Grade: 2

A strong sense of teamwork pervades the staff. Good monitoring systems ensure that resources such as external agencies, intervention programmes and support staff are deployed effectively, illustrating the school's commitment to inclusion. The school accurately evaluates its performance by comparing its standards with others, consulting parents and monitoring teaching quality. Consequently, school priorities are appropriate and development plans acted on promptly.

Good strategic use is made of challenging targets to monitor the school's effectiveness and help raise standards. The senior management team provides a strong lead in driving forward school improvements. Subject and curriculum leaders play a prominent role in reviewing and improving their subjects, although the school recognises that further training is required, particularly for less experienced leaders.

The governing body has a good mix of experienced and new governors, and is well organised and led in supporting and challenging the school. They help shape its direction in extending its services to, and involvement with, the local community.

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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?	2
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

### 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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

22 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swallow Dell Primary School, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3JP

Thank you for the very warm welcome that we received when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed speaking with so many of you and visiting all your classrooms. I am writing to let you know what we found out. You told us how much you enjoy school and we agree with you and your parents that yours is a good school. You have such nice grounds and buildings in which to play and work. All the adults in the school work hard to help you acquire good knowledge and skills and to make sure that you get the support that you need. You respect each other and behave well - keep it up!

We were also impressed by the following.

- You enjoy your lessons, get fully involved and work so well together because the teaching is good.
- You are making good progress and gaining new knowledge and skills, especially in English and science.
- Most of you are making good choices to live healthy and fit lives. You enjoy the healthy lunches provided and these are very social occasions.
- You contribute to school life and care for others in many ways, such as being buddies to younger children and through the work of the school council.

Mrs Jennings, the staff and governors look after you very well. They are always trying to find ways of making your education even better. Currently, they are focussing attention on improving your mathematical skills so that you become more confident at solving problems. We agree, and you can help too. You all have targets for your English and mathematics. You can use them to review your own work and to think about what you need to do next in your new learning logs.

With all good wishes for your future at Swallow Dell Primary.

Ray Jardine

Lead inspector