

Straits Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103827
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	323905
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	David Carrington

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	307
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Downing
Headteacher	Adrian Slack
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Longfellow Road Lower Gornal Dudley DY3 3EE
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Straits Primary School is bigger than most primary schools. It has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in its Reception Unit and as part of the breakfast and after-school club that meets before and after school each day. There are two classes in each year from Years 1 to 6.

Few pupils are entitled to free school meals. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds and all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. When children start in Reception, they have good skills and knowledge.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Straits Primary is a good school. Pupils and parents are almost unanimous in saying it provides a complete education and all say behaviour is excellent. The inspection found that they are not wrong in their judgements. The school's key successes are due to the outstanding quality of leadership and management. Led by the inspirational headteacher, all staff, governors, parents and pupils strive to make their work even better. There have been many rapid improvements over recent years, not least to standards, which are well above average, and to achievement, which is good. Standards have risen markedly in mathematics and this year, there is strong evidence that pupils' writing is of a much better quality than it was a year ago. Pupils make good progress from their first day in school to their last. The school has outstanding capacity to continue its improvement into the future. There is no complacency and areas identified for improvement are tackled by a very strong team of governors and staff.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. They thoroughly enjoy their work and play, and attendance levels are very high. The pupils show an excellent understanding of health and safety. There is next to no bullying and if, on rare occasions, incidents do occur, they are dealt with swiftly. Pupils make an impressive contribution to their own and the local communities and they are well involved in supporting school children in countries such as Uganda, The Gambia and Bulgaria. They develop fully the essential skills to help them succeed in secondary education and life outside school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is first rate.

Teaching quality is good, and improving. Lessons are brisk, motivating and involving. The pupils work productively and purposefully. There are very good opportunities for pupils to find out how well they are learning and to consider what they must do next to improve. When this evolves from pupils' own evaluations, as it often does, it provides a particularly strong incentive for them to work with even greater enthusiasm and output. The pupils work from a good curriculum that includes high quality opportunities in sports, arts and modern foreign languages. Opportunities to develop creativity and extended writing across the curriculum are not yet fully established. Provision in EYFS is good, although the outdoor space is not yet used to the same maximum effect as the areas inside to help children improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. Nonetheless, the children progress well and reach above average standards by the time they join Year 1.

All staff provide outstanding care, support and guidance for pupils. Procedures to safeguard the pupils meet government requirements. Academic guidance is focused very carefully on the next steps in the work and enables pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to consolidate and extend their skills and knowledge at a good rate.

The school has forged strong partnerships with parents and outside groups in order to improve what it does. These are successful and contribute to the school's good work to foster community cohesion. Governors provide an excellent level of support and they adopt a supportive but critical focus to ensure the school is doing its best. Financial management is efficient and resources are used prudently. Staff and governors work to challenging targets that are checked and evaluated regularly and thoroughly.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children learn and develop well in the EYFS. They enjoy a good variety of activities, especially indoors, which helps them make good progress. The school makes sure that the very able children work more quickly towards their learning goals and start the first steps in the National Curriculum before they leave Reception. It also ensures that the children who take longer to build skills and knowledge have ample time to do so, including in the first few months of Year 1 if necessary. This careful match of work to children's needs is the key reason why they achieve well. Most children have reached all their goals by the time they leave Reception.

Staff are extremely well focused on children's welfare. They are watchful and careful in giving children excellent opportunities to develop their personal, social and emotional skills. The children are happy, well behaved and confident learners as a result. There is more success in providing the full range of learning activities inside than there is outside, although the EYFS leader recognises the scope for improving the outside space. The good provision for welfare and learning and development is maintained in the before- and after-school club, which are shared by many older pupils from the school. The good quality education provided in the EYFS is due to the effective leadership and management of the phase.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for the development of pupils' creativity and extended writing across the curriculum.
- Provide a fully stimulating outdoor area to ensure that the children in the EYFS enjoy learning, investigating and solving problems as they work and play outside.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

There has been a pronounced upward trend in standards during recent years and they are now well above average by the end of Year 6. Around half of the Year 6 pupils usually reach the higher levels in English, mathematics and science, which is above average. The school assessments show that each year, some of the oldest pupils are working at levels that are not tested until a later stage. In the past, standards in mathematics were not as strong as in other subjects, but the school seized every opportunity to improve the teaching of mathematics and to check that pupils in each ability group were as successful as each other. The current unvalidated mathematics results are well above average. Standards in science are at a similar level.

Standards in English are well above average. In Year 2, reading results are above average. Writing standards are above average at the end of Year 2, and although they dipped a little this year, they are now also above average in Year 6. School leaders wasted no time in identifying the cause of the dip and introduced successful measures to improve results in writing across the school. There is much evidence in pupils' books of improved achievement in writing, although the development of extended writing across the curriculum is not consistent. Pupils' very good achievements in modern foreign languages, dance, drama and sporting activities are recognised locally and nationally.

Pupils from all ability groups, including the higher attainers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make similar good progress. Boys are as successful as the girls, following

the school's careful evaluation of previous results and comprehensive planning for boys' interests in learning. The school sets challenging targets for standards and the information from its tracking of achievement shows that standards continue to move upwards at a rapid rate.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils act in a mature and sensible way as they move around school. They are supportive of each other and proud of their own achievements and those of their colleagues. They are enthusiasts for learning. Lessons are happy sessions when the pupils make good progress because they enjoy their teachers' company and the feeling is returned. Very rarely is a pupil reprimanded for poor behaviour. Instead, all work hard to earn rewards for kind and considerate actions that help others to do well.

The pupils are a rich source of ideas for school improvement. They have very good opportunities to share these thoughts and to work to achieve their goals. Thus, the school gazebo is a centrepiece of the school, where community events are focused and people gather to enjoy friendship and kindness. It is clearly a favourite spot in school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are well taught and some are even better. The quality of teaching has improved and all staff have the expectations and expertise to make sure learning is fun, enjoyable and systematic. Just occasionally, the teacher's explanation is too long or the teacher does much of the thinking and explaining for the pupils. When this happens, pupils do not make as much progress as they do when they are active hands-on learners.

Assessment procedures are well thought out and reflect the challenging targets set for the pupils. Anyone falling behind is spotted quickly and additional support is provided to speed up their learning. The teaching assistants play a valuable role in supporting the individual needs of pupils in all ability groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum has richness and relevance for the pupils. It is peppered with opportunities for pupils to follow their own interests. This is especially marked for boys, as the curriculum has been planned to provide stimulating and exciting themes that appeal to boys' interests and aspirations. During the inspection, sharks were evident in several lessons. Girls are not discriminated against in such work. They too find the themes fascinating, but they are also given good opportunities to follow their own lines of enquiry, such as finding the French words for familiar English games.

The school has launched an effective programme to support pupils in their personal, social and health education. It also encourages pupils in all age groups to take part in out-of-school activities. There is a wide programme of such events and clubs, which are very well supported by boys and girls, including those in EYFS.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is a centrepiece of learning, with all pupils in Years 5 and 6 working from a notebook computer reserved for their own use. The links between ICT and other subjects are good. Although there are some good opportunities for the development of pupils' creativity and extended writing, these are not consistent throughout the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school gives excellent care, guidance and support in both pastoral and academic matters. This enables the pupils to settle well to school life, collaborate with others and to develop as responsible young people. Pupils with any form of barrier to learning are counselled well and supported in their studies so that they achieve as well as all other pupils.

Pupils know what they have to learn next. Their targets are prominent in class and shared with parents, who appreciate the additional work the staff do to make sure they are part of the picture. Pupils know what level they have reached and what must come next so that they move on. Marking of their work is detailed and informative in these matters.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The outstanding leadership and management is the prime reason why pupils achieve well, reach well above average standards and become kind, considerate and helpful people. It is also the reason why improvement is a way of life for everyone in school. Parents expressed this very forcefully in their returned questionnaires.

Staff and governors have reliable and rigorous systems to check the quality of the school's work and its impact on pupils' learning. Their judgements of the school's strengths and areas for improvement are accurate. Development priorities are adopted only after exhaustive procedures to evaluate the school's work that involve parents and pupils as well as staff and governors. The key priorities are ranked clearly and form the backdrop to day-by-day systems and procedures and the detailed tracking of pupils' achievement. Everyone pulls in the same direction. The headteacher is at the root of this combined effort because he sets high expectations, shares his aspirations most effectively, and judges improvement realistically.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	1

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

12 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Straits Primary School, Dudley DY3 3EE

We enjoyed being with you in school for two days recently. We learned a lot about your school because you were so welcoming and shared your ideas and opinions about what it does well and what it might improve. We have put our main findings in our report, but want to share the most important with you here.

- You make good progress and reach well above average standards.
- Children in Reception also do well and most of them reach their goals quite quickly.
- You are extremely well behaved, kind and helpful children who really enjoy being in school.
- You are well taught and work from an interesting curriculum.
- All staff look after you carefully so that you can get the best from your education.
- Your school is particularly well led and managed. Mr Slack expects you to be very successful. The staff and governors help him make sure you are.
- Your parents and carers are very pleased you come to Straits.

There are two things we think can be improved to make the school even better.

- You should have more chances to develop your writing and creative work in subjects other than English, art, drama and dance.
- Outdoor learning for children in Reception should be more exciting and interesting to match the good quality activities inside.

We know you have some good ideas for improvements in school. You could now share with your teachers how you think the Reception outdoor area could be improved.

Yours sincerely

David Carrington

Lead inspector