

Spring Meadow Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110760
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325213
Inspection date	23 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Jill Bavin

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	332
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	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Farrow
Headteacher	Mrs Sheila Sands
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Barns Ely Cambridgeshire CB7 4RB
Telephone number	01353 664742
Fax number	01353 666575

Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- What is the school doing to further raise standards in science and increase boys' attainment?
- What has been the impact of recent curriculum initiatives?
- Are there elements of outstanding provision for the most vulnerable children?

Evidence was gathered from observing lessons, lunchtime and breaks; talking with children, staff and governors; checking the school's record of lesson observations as well as assessment and children's progress records; and analysing the results of questionnaires returned by parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average infant school with a 104 place nursery and a 10 place Infant Assessment Unit on site. Children in this assessment unit learn in separate small groups and alongside their peers in the main school. The governors provide a breakfast club and a nursery lunch club. Some children from the school attend an after school club on the local housing estate, which governors do not manage. Most children join the nursery below expectations for their age in key skills. Most children are from white British backgrounds although the school population is changing. The percentage of children who are learning English as an additional language is increasing although it is below national averages. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varies considerably from year to year but is usually below the national average.

The school has achieved Healthy Schools Status.

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 experiencing success in raising standards and achievement for its children. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average and the percentage of higher attaining children increases as they move through the school. Many parents commend staff highly for their willingness to support them and their children. Comments that reflect the views of many include describing the school as going 'the extra mile for the children'. Another parent values support 'through some very difficult times' and a parent of a child supported by the Assessment Unit writes, 'I couldn't ask for more.' Although a handful of parents are concerned that the school does not take sufficient account of their or their children's views, many more say how approachable and friendly staff are.

The school reaches out to families who are new to Britain and whose children arrive with very little or no spoken English. This helps these children to settle quickly and become ready to learn. It has successfully forged very close links with representatives of other professions outside the school in order to ensure it meets the needs of children who find learning difficult. Because of the school's exemplary work with individual children in particularly difficult circumstances, these children make outstanding progress in their social skills as well as good progress academically.

Children have a good understanding of right and wrong and report little worrying behaviour from their peers. They are confident that adults in school will help them with any concerns. Children enjoy school because they like and trust their teachers and teaching assistants. Activities are well chosen to reflect children's age and stage of development. They reflect teachers' good level of expectation and challenge which they carefully adjust to meet differing needs within the class, and so they hold children's interest well. The most articulate children recall work they have enjoyed and talk about it confidently with visitors after the event. This is evident, for example, when children discuss their artwork in the style of Van Gogh. They use sophisticated terminology and the work demonstrates a good range of practical techniques. Nevertheless, children report occasions when their teachers 'talk too long'. While there is a successful focus on teaching key skills there are missed opportunities for children to learn actively and independently. Children's personal and social development is good overall, rather than outstanding, because opportunities for them to take responsibility for their learning are inconsistent.

A wide and varied programme of visits and special events enrich the curriculum. It makes a good contribution to children's cultural development while ensuring the school maintains close links with the local community, through participation in various local history and arts festivals. Events and activities such as these successfully add interest for children and contribute to the good progress they make. For example, a visit to a butterfly park successfully inspired a good quality of extended writing. Strengths in relationships also contribute to children's positive attitudes and good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Children receive constructive and encouraging feedback about their work, both verbally and through marking on their books. This is an area of significant development since the previous inspection. As a result, children have a good understanding of what they have done well and how to improve their work. Children who find learning quite difficult share their improved writing with considerable and justifiable pride.

Systems for checking how well each child is doing are relatively new and are beginning to generate useful information. The school has begun to analyse this information and has made a good start in using this analysis. For example, it has identified that fewer children reach the higher level 3 in science than in reading, writing and mathematics. It has taken a strategic whole school approach to improving the extent to which teachers adapt practical science work to meet differing needs. This is too recent to have had a full impact on standards.

The school recognises that it needs to encourage boys to voice their ideas more, in order to improve their writing. New ways of approaching topic work have been carefully researched and trialled. Teachers are pleased with initial responses, from their observation of boys' enthusiasm and discussion generated by designing a 'theme park'. Firm plans are in place for this kind of approach to be used more routinely after half term. However, evaluations of what has worked well do not always focus clearly on measurable outcomes in terms of children's skills. For example, children clearly enjoyed the recent information and communication technology, history and cultural 'Fens Project' but its impact on gains in specific skills is less clear.

Effective school leadership and management support good teaching and learning and contribute to the school's continuing development. This is a school where staff pull together to improve outcomes for children. Subject leaders make a good contribution to this process. This shared drive for improvement accounts for improved standards and achievement in tested subjects over the last three years. Children in Year 2 are on track for this rise in standards to continue in 2009. Boys' reading has improved significantly since the introduction of a specific approach to teaching reading two and a half years ago. The school's lack of complacency and its response to addressing areas of relative weakness and improvements since the previous inspection place it in a good position to carry on improving.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the nursery and reception classes make good progress from their starting points in all areas of learning. By the time they join Year 1 they have the level of skill, knowledge and understanding that is expected for their age. They make particularly good progress socially and in their readiness to learn, because of the emphasis staff place on this. Adults set a good example of how to behave and communicate. Staff make home visits before children join the Nursery and introduce children to school sensitively. Parents are pleased with how quickly their children settle. Day to day care for children's well-being and safety is good. Children in the breakfast and nursery lunchtime clubs enjoy suitable activities while they wait for school to start or for lunch. Children and adults in the clubs, Nursery and Reception classes enjoy good relationships: encouraging children to conform to working and playing alongside each other harmoniously is a positive process.

Adults place an appropriately high emphasis upon developing the key skills that will support children's future learning. Activities are chosen to engage children's interest and extend their horizons. For example, during the inspection, girls and boys enjoyed learning about Diwali, creating Rangoli patterns and dressing up for Indian dances. Staff take account of children's individual interests to an extent. However, there is more to be done here, especially in the Reception classes. Similarly, while children have reasonable chances to select activities and make choices, adult support does not always allow children to learn through their own experience. The school has improved access to an outdoor learning environment for children in the Reception classes since the previous inspection. The outdoor space is used more widely

to cover a greater variety of learning activities and the school is currently exploring ways to develop this further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the use of the school's assessment information to evaluate more rigorously the impact of school initiatives.
- Provide more opportunities for children to take responsibility for their learning, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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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	2

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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

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?	2

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 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 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	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

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

24 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Spring Meadow Infant School, Ely, CB7 4RB

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting and talking with you about your work in some of the lessons. A special thank you goes to the members of the school council who met us in the library and shared their ideas about the school. We agree with you and your parents that you go to a good school.

You told us that you enjoy school because people are friendly and we could see that you work hard. You particularly enjoy the way you learn to read (ERR) and we could see this in the way you concentrate so well in these sessions. Because your teachers plan how to help you so carefully, you make good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Teachers and teaching assistants are extremely good at helping children who find working in a group difficult. This means that these children make extremely good progress in learning how to manage their behaviour and make friends. This is one of the reasons why you tell us that there is not very much worrying behaviour around school and if there is you know you can go to an adult for help. You feel safe because you know your teachers and headteacher care about you.

The governors, headteacher and senior staff agree with us that in order to make your good school even better, they will find even more ways of working out what helps you most, especially when you have new projects. Sometimes your teachers help you almost too much. We have asked them to give everyone more chances to work things out for themselves, even the youngest of you. You can help by being willing to work on your own or in small groups more often, in the way children in Year 2 did when they were designing a theme park.

Thank you again for being so friendly and helpful.

Jill Bavin

Lead inspector