

Swallowfield Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109429
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	377920
Inspection dates	5–6 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Ronald Cohen

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

Type of school	Lower
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	283
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Buck
Headteacher	Kim Brewer
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and observed 12 teachers. They held meetings with groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including development planning, pupils' work, documents regarding the safeguarding of pupils, self-evaluation records, school policies and performance data. Questionnaires from 98 parents and carers, 106 pupils and 14 staff were scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether teaching is effective in challenging pupils and helping them make maximum progress.
- How clear leaders and managers are about the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- How well leaders and managers raise performance and drive improvement.

Information about the school

Swallowfield Lower School is a larger than average school of its type. A large majority of pupils are White British and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average. However, the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average as is the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has Healthy School status and the International School Award. The on-site 'Busy Bees' pre-school provision was the subject of a recent separate inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school, in which pupils make good progress. It has several outstanding aspects. It provides an excellent caring and supportive environment, particularly, but not exclusively for those pupils whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. Pupils feel extremely happy and safe in the school because of the excellent relationships and good safeguarding arrangements, and consequently they enjoy school; their attendance is high. As one said, 'I love coming to school, because it's very friendly, and I am happy and learn lots of things'. Pupils know well how to keep healthy and fit, and they are well behaved and courteous.

The school is popular with parents and carers. This is reflected in their very positive comments on questionnaires. For example, one wrote: 'The teaching and support staff have consistently exceeded our expectations. Our son thoroughly enjoys all aspects of his schooling. The one-to-one contact and individual learning levels ensure that he is receiving the appropriate support'.

Pupils' achievement is good and their attainment is rising. They get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make good progress through the school and by the end of Year 4 they attain standards which are above those generally expected at this stage of their education. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified promptly, supported well and make good progress.

The curriculum is good. It is well organised and imaginative, and pupils' learning is enriched by many exciting in-school activities, as well as a range of visits and visitors. However, pupils have comparatively few experiences or knowledge of other cultures.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. There are examples of outstanding practice where expectations are high and work finely tuned to pupils' needs. In some lessons, the challenge and the opportunities for independent learning are less pronounced, and teachers' assessments of learning during lessons are not so sharp, so activities are not quickly adapted to move pupils forward more rapidly in their learning.

The school is well led by the headteacher, who is well supported by her deputy and staff. Morale is high and teamwork is strong. Self-evaluation is effective, drawing on observation of lessons and analysis of data. Excellent use is made of outside

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partnerships to benefit pupils' well-being and learning. Similarly, the involvement of parents and carers in their children's learning is exceptional. The knowledgeable and challenging governing body is systematically involved in monitoring the school to hold it to account in all areas. The school gives good value for money, and demonstrates good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure more consistently outstanding teaching by:
 - planning and implementing strategies which give pupils opportunities to become more fully involved in their own, independent learning
 - carrying out sharper assessment of pupils as they learn and adapting activities to meet pupils' needs.

- Deepen the pupils' understanding of the United Kingdom as a multicultural society by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to have experience and knowledge of ethnic communities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning. They are polite, bright and cheerful and appreciate the opportunities to work in groups to tackle problems. They affirm that they feel very safe in school. They adopt healthy lifestyles well, and a very large proportion participate in sports activities. Around the school, behaviour is often excellent. In lessons, too, the behaviour of the vast majority is very good and is a major factor in pupils' good progress. Pupils are engaged and stimulated when they are given opportunities to be involved in their own learning. However, this is not consistent. On those few occasions, where an activity does not challenge pupils well, or they sit passively for too long, the pace of the lessons slows. This in turn leads to pupils' becoming fidgety, and the high standards of behaviour wane. As a result, some pupils find it difficult to re-focus immediately and this slows the pace of their learning.

The large majority of children start school with skills that are those typical for their age and improve their attainment well as they move through the school. Some of those who arrived in Year 2 or later with much lower than expected standards have made outstanding progress from their starting points to attain standards that are broadly average. There is no difference in the progress made by boys or girls or those of different ethnic backgrounds.

Pupils are proud of, and undertake with maturity, their numerous responsibilities within school. They contribute to the running of the school as members of the school council, or the Eco club and as members of the playground 'friendship squad'. They

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also play an important role in the community. They offer their expertise to other school councils and attend conferences that inform schools in the same 'Learning Community' (cluster of schools) on issues of mutual interest. Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is seen in their quiet reflection in assemblies, their clear understanding of right and wrong, and their good relationships with each other. Pupils' appreciation of cultures and traditions in other countries is reflected in the school's International School Award.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good. Good relationships and good subject knowledge are strong features of teaching throughout the school. Most lessons are brisk and lively with teachers making good use of well-chosen resources, such as the interactive white board, to promote learning. In the better lessons, teachers use frequent checks and questioning to ensure activities remain finely tuned to pupils' needs as the lesson progressed. However, this practice is not yet the case throughout the school. In a small number of lessons, the pace is slower, teachers speak too much and pupils are passive recipients rather than active participants in their own learning.

The curriculum provides memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high quality learning. The curriculum further skilfully combines a range of subjects and further provides opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills through a thematic and topical approach. For example, Year 2 pupils were animated in

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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discussions when working on their current topic of 'space', which links a range of subjects together, including mathematics, English, and geography. Sports make a significant contribution to the pupils' personal, physical and social development. Other good features of the curriculum are found in the very wide range of opportunities for enrichment, where trips and visits are significantly enhanced by the use of external specialists in music.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Excellent focus on the children's social emotional and academic needs underpins the very high levels of care that the staff provide. Systems and structures for monitoring pupils' learning and personal development allow for early recognition of, and quick implementation of appropriate intervention strategies to ameliorate any problems. As a result, support for those whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable, both within and outside lessons, is often highly effective. The children have confidence in the staff, and rightly so, since the staff's sensitive and sensible handling of their problems are based, not only on a caring ethos, which permeates the school, but also on training and experience. Some members of staff are trained in different approaches to behaviour and they pass on their skills and knowledge to their colleagues. Transitions, into school from 'Busy Bees' and out of school to the receiving middle school, are underpinned by excellent procedures that smooth the passage from one phase in the children's education to the next.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides dynamic leadership of the school's drive to provide the best education possible for the pupils. She is ably supported in this by her deputy. These leaders provide very good examples to their colleagues as professional practitioners both within and outside the classroom. Staff have responded very well to their leadership, and pursue the best interests of the pupils. A wealth of information has been gathered about pupils' attainment and progress, and this is analysed well to identify patterns in learning and to ensure no group underachieves. Staff are thoroughly committed to ensuring equality of opportunity. Development planning is sharply focused on the results of monitoring, and as a result, outcomes are continuously improving. The school knows and evaluates itself very well.

Strong and effective links have been formed with other educational establishments,

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For example, one has been set up to support transition and maintain standards as pupils pass through the various phases of their education. A remarkably effective link has been established with the music department of the Open University, which enables the school to bring high level music tuition freely to pupils. Engagement with parents and carers, who are invited to come into school regularly to support and enhance their awareness of what their children are learning and achieving, is highly effective. These partnerships, together with those forged with health and other professionals are very successful in reducing barriers to learning.

Governance is good. Members of the governing body are closely involved in the school and are robust in holding the school to account. They meet their responsibilities effectively, particularly concerning the health and well-being of all pupils and adults. As a result, the safeguarding of pupils is good.

The school is a cohesive, harmonious community, where pupils have equal opportunities to access all the school offers. The school has strong links with communities abroad, for example in Bangladesh and Singapore and plans exist to further extend pupils’ understanding of other peoples and cultures locally.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress and enter Year 1 with above average attainment levels. They enjoy learning and participate enthusiastically. Independence is well promoted and they work and play together well. They behave safely because this aspect of their learning is given high priority.

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Teaching is good. Adults work well together as a team and engage well with the children. The outdoor areas provide good quality opportunities for learning, and activities are well planned to meet children’s needs with a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Excellent relationships and partnerships with parents and carers indicate the high regard in which the provision is held.

The leadership and management is good. There is a common sense of purpose between all adults. Assessment is thorough, regular, accurate and appropriately recorded, and allows for the quick provision of appropriate support for any child who is falling behind. Staff have a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve further. For example they have rightly identified aspects of provision which require further development such as greater use of free-flow activities to further enhance children’s independence and the ‘learning journeys’, which are a very good record of achievement are not yet in hard copy, so that they cannot be easily accessed by parents.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of the parental questionnaires returned were very positive. Parents and carers say overwhelmingly that they find staff helpful and supportive, and they appreciate the support given to them by the school. Where children have had some problems, whether academic, developmental or emotional, the vast majority of parents and carers were fulsome in the praise of how the issues were handled by the school. Inspectors found care to be outstanding.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Swallowfield Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 98 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 283 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total		Total		Total		Total	
My child enjoys school	76	78	22	22	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	83	85	15	15	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	50	51	48	49	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	61	62	37	38	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	72	73	26	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	56	57	42	43	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	51	52	45	46	2	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	66	67	29	30	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	68	69	28	29	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	62	63	33	34	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	54	55	41	42	2	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	67	68	31	32	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	78	80	20	20	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



7 December 2011

Dear Children

Inspection of Swallowfield Lower School, Milton Keynes, MK17 8SL

Firstly, may I say what an enjoyable time my colleagues and I had when we visited your school. Thank you for talking to us and showing us your work. We especially enjoyed hearing about what you did in the topic lessons, and how much you enjoyed them. You obviously enjoy school a lot, and feel very safe and happy there. You told us you thought the school was good, and we judged it to be good too. Your headteacher and teachers have done much to make your days fun while you are learning, and it is clear that they have good success already, because you are making good progress.

We have asked them to do these things to help the school improve even more.

- We have asked that all your teachers give you really exciting things to do in your lessons, and encourage you to find out as much as you can by doing things for yourselves. We have also asked them to look more carefully at what you are doing in lessons in order to help you progress even more than you are now
- We have also asked them to take you out more to see places and to meet people who are from different backgrounds to you. We think this will be really exciting and you will learn, first hand, about the different peoples who live nearby.

Of course, we know that you will help your teachers by working as hard as you can in all your lessons.

Best wishes for your future

Yours sincerely

Ronald Cohen
Lead inspector

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