

Stroud Valley Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115541
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	311968
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Mary Harlow HMI

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	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Minett
Headteacher	Debbie Sleep
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	Castle Street Stroud GL5 2HP
Telephone number	01453 764400
Fax number	01453 755101

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Stroud Valley Community Primary School is slightly smaller than the average primary school. It is situated in the centre of Stroud and most pupils come from the local community. Most pupils are of White British heritage and very few are learning English as an additional language. Attainment on entry to the Reception Year is lower than that of typical four-year-olds. A significant number of children start school with poor social skills and underdeveloped basic skills, particularly in communication, language and literacy. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above the national average. The acting headteacher has led the school since May 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

'Stroud Valley Primary school is going forward.' 'It is improving enormously within a busy, happy atmosphere where the children are known and their needs are met.' These are the views of parents, and they are right! Stroud Valley is indeed an improving school and it provides pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. All at the school are working exceptionally hard to do the best for the pupils; as a result, their pastoral care is good. Recent drives to improve behaviour and tackle underachievement are already yielding positive results. The pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall, although the attendance of a minority of pupils requires some improvement.

Achievement across the school is satisfactory and improving. A significant number of children start school with a lot of catching up to do. They make good progress in Reception because of good quality teaching and care but opportunities for outdoor activities, as an intrinsic part of learning, are extremely limited. Across Key Stages 1 and 2, progress is now satisfactory but overall standards are below average, particularly in writing, because of past underachievement. Sensible plans are in place to improve writing and increase the opportunities for children to solve problems in mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of the careful attention they receive. The support for improving pupils' behavioural, emotional and social development is a strength of the school.

'The teaching and support staff are dedicated, professional and inject humour and fun into learning.' These parental comments are very apt and a fitting tribute to the consistently satisfactory and improving teaching across the school. Some lessons include practical opportunities for discussion and investigative groupwork. Nonetheless, there is still some way to go to ensure that all pupils develop independent attitudes and engage fully in their learning at all times. The use of data to assess and monitor pupils' progress is improving at a senior level but not all teachers are sufficiently confident in applying these tracking systems rigorously enough to ensure all the pupils are challenged to make swift progress.

The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. Appropriate links are developing between English and mathematics and some subjects, but these are at an embryonic stage. The school works well with the local community and offers a good range of visits and clubs.

'The acting headteacher is doing a great job.' 'There is a real sense of direction and transformation recently.' These parental views are also right! The acting headteacher knows what the school needs to do to improve and sets the right targets to make it better. There is now no room for complacency, and staff are challenged appropriately to develop their leadership roles. Improvements, including the issues identified in the last inspection, have been or, in the case of the outdoor learning environment for the younger pupils, continue to be tackled diligently. Partnerships are strong and the school has good capacity for continued improvement. The governing body has worked tirelessly and successfully to bring about the essential improvements to the accommodation in recent years but their monitoring role requires further development.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children have a good start to school life and in the main, they progress well. This is because teaching is good and they experience a curriculum that meets most of the needs of young

children. That said, the outdoor provision is insufficient and this is hampering the pupils' overall progress. Adults interact caringly with the children and this promotes good quality learning in language and social skills. An appropriate balance of whole-class, group and individual activities ensures that all the children are involved in their learning and concentrate well, although some find it difficult to do so for sustained periods. Activities are meaningful and fun, for example the use of games to teach mathematics and visits to the local 'Steam Museum' to bring learning alive. Although the adults have a good knowledge and understanding of the children, the systems used to assess and track their progress in all areas of learning are not sufficiently robust.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in writing, and increase the opportunities for pupils to solve problems in mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of outdoor provision in the Foundation Stage.
- Work closely with some parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly.
- Strengthen the use of data to assess and monitor pupils' progress rigorously to ensure they all make at least consistently good progress.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although pupils make good progress in the Foundation Stage, most enter Year 1 with below average levels of attainment, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development. The school has recently embraced wholeheartedly the national strategy support programme and, although it is early days, there are signs that this is contributing strongly to raising achievement across the school. Due to the introduction of rigorous targets, coupled with improvements in teaching, pupils in all years are making at least satisfactory progress. However, standards overall remain below the national average at both Key Stages 1 and 2, particularly in writing. Opportunities for pupils to solve problems in mathematics and science are insufficient. Pupils with specific needs achieve well because of the carefully tailored support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most children enjoy school immensely because adults try to develop them as individuals. As a result, pupils are refreshingly open and confident in conversation; they feel their voice matters and makes a difference, as exemplified by the recent purchase of attractive play equipment by the school council. Overall, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

The school's sterling work to improve behaviour is a success story. Indeed, the pupils are 'proud of their school and their new uniform'; they report this gives them a sense of belonging. Most pupils move calmly and sensibly in class and cooperate well in paired discussions and group tasks when given the chance to do so. That said, when teaching is over-directed and pedantic, the pupils respond passively and lack the confidence to take the initiative, particularly when they are not challenged. Around the school, pupils respond well to the new routines; they stand

back for visitors and adults and invariably greet them with friendly smiles. Although attendance stubbornly remains slightly below the national average, creative approaches are now in place to improve it.

Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of eating healthily, and clubs are well attended and do much to help the development of pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The choir, in particular, is making a very positive contribution to the local community through regular events for senior citizens. Pupils are developing satisfactory basic skills that prepare them for their next school and later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Whilst teaching is satisfactory overall, there are some examples of good practice throughout the school. Positive, caring relationships characterise all teaching. Teaching assistants play a full part in this and form good partnerships with the teachers and the pupils. Their carefully planned role ensures that pupils with additional needs are fully engaged and challenged appropriately to succeed. In the best lessons, pupils are given motivating activities that capture their interest, such as the use of correspondence with an imaginary character to stimulate the study of play scripts and the teaching of drama to improve the quality of 'suspense' writing. Together with high expectations of behaviour and a work ethic, humour is often a feature of these lessons; as a result, the pupils learn at a swift pace with commendable levels of enjoyment.

Pupils' learning invariably slows in lessons where the work is too difficult or too easy, and relies too heavily on worksheets at the expense of investigative group and challenging independent work. A new marking system is beginning to improve the assessment of pupils' progress in English and mathematics; as yet, this has had insufficient time to become embedded in all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Recent improvements to curriculum planning are providing pupils with additional practical experiences, with good use made of the rich cultural and historical local community to make learning meaningful. Notable examples include visits to the Victorian Folk Museum, participation in 'Mock Trials' at Stroud Magistrate's Court, interesting projects with the Farmers' Market and opportunities to participate in Roman Feasts. The integration of English and mathematics into other curriculum areas is progressing well, although cross-curricular links with information and communication technology are less well developed. The well-structured personal, social and health education programme, where pupils' social and emotional well-being features strongly, gives good opportunities for pupils to gain an understanding of how to keep healthy and stay safe. The school has rightly prioritised the need to develop creativity further in the curriculum and allow pupils more opportunities to investigate and explore for themselves. A thoughtful framework has been introduced to facilitate this in science, but plans in other subjects are still at an embryonic stage. A good range of clubs, such as artistic and sporting activities, are enjoyed by the pupils and appreciated by parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils' pastoral care is good and this contributes significantly to their enjoyment and achievement at school. Adults know the pupils very well and, as a parent aptly expressed, 'go the extra mile' to give time to resolve concerns. Good procedures are in place to allow pupils to express any anxieties, such as a 'worry box', which they value. This caring attitude is afforded to their families who receive practical advice from a support worker and other adults to help them tackle sensitive issues outside school. The academic guidance pupils receive is improving because of more careful marking and assessment. Pupils are gaining an appropriate understanding of their literacy and numeracy targets, together with what they need to do to improve. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are satisfactory but the use of data by all the teachers to monitor this progress is at an early stage of development. Procedures to ensure pupils are kept safe and secure, including those relating to child protection, are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Exceptionally determined and passionate leadership by the acting headteacher is ensuring that the school is moving forward at a swift pace. Under her purposeful but sensitive direction, senior managers and staff are growing in confidence to develop their leadership roles and there is an enthusiastic team spirit permeating the school. All are relentlessly focused on raising standards and there is a real will to bring about the necessary urgent improvements. The senior team have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, which are being tackled diligently. The administration and support staff are very committed; they too make a significant contribution to pupils' achievements.

The school's systems for checking on its progress are improving, but there is still some way to go to ensure these become fully understood at every level within the school. Partnership with parents and carers is a strength; the school genuinely values their views and acts upon them. The governing body possesses a range of valuable expertise but their monitoring role is insufficiently developed to enable them to hold the school to account in a challenging manner.

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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?	3
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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
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	3
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

13 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stroud Valley Community Primary School, Stroud GL5 2HP

I am writing to say thank you very much for giving us such a warm welcome during our recent visit to Stroud Valley. We were impressed with the way you greeted us so confidently and courteously with friendly smiles. We enjoyed talking with you about your work, hearing you sing in assembly and chatting to you at lunchtimes. What delightful children you are!

Your school is satisfactory, and good in many ways. Here are some of the special things that it does well.

- ?
- Your school looks after you well and the adults want to do their best for you. ?
- Your behaviour is improving. ?
- In Reception, you get off to a good start in most aspects of your learning and you make at least satisfactory progress; in all other year groups, results are improving and you are making satisfactory progress. ?
- Your teachers often plan interesting activities for you, which help you to enjoy school. ?
- The school council take its responsibilities seriously and is doing a splendid job. ?
- There are lots of clubs and visits, which you participate in enthusiastically. You contribute well to the local community, particularly by helping the senior citizens. ?
- Your acting headteacher and other adults are always looking for ways to make your school an even better place to be. They listen to your views and those of your parents and carers in helping them to do this.

You are lucky to have such a dedicated acting headteacher, caring adults and committed governors at your school. We have asked them to ensure you continue to improve at a swift pace, particularly in writing and solving mathematical and scientific problems. You must make every effort to attend school every day to help them achieve this. We have also asked the school to improve the outside play area for the younger children.

It was a real pleasure to visit Stroud Valley Community Primary School. Keep up the good work and, most importantly, continue to enjoy your learning.

Best wishes for the future; we hope that you achieve great things!

Mrs M Harlow Her Majesty's Inspector

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- ☺ Your behaviour is improving.
- ☺ In Reception, you get off to a good start in most aspects of your learning and you make at least satisfactory progress; in all other year groups, results are improving and you are making satisfactory progress.
- ☺ Your teachers often plan interesting activities for you, which help you to enjoy school.
- ☺ The school council take its responsibilities seriously and is doing a splendid job.
- ☺ There are lots of clubs and visits, which you participate in enthusiastically. You contribute well to the local community, particularly by helping the senior citizens.
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