

Seal Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118605
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379645
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kim Silver
Headteacher	Tracey Smith
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons involving seven teachers and observed assemblies. They held meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at planning documents, school evaluations, assessment information and pupils' work. In addition, inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 56 parents and carers as well as those from a sample of staff and pupils.

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

- The sustainability of last year's significant improvement in mathematics attainment in the Year 6 tests.
- The impact of the school's arrangements for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities on their achievement.
- The effectiveness of teachers' use of assessment information in taking pupils' learning forward quickly from their starting points, particularly in view of the number of pupils joining the school part way through their primary education.
- How well the school analyses its own performance and how this has been used to develop the correct priorities for improvement.

Information about the school

Most pupils in this smaller than average-sized primary school are from White British backgrounds, but other ethnic heritages are represented in small numbers. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is high, and the proportion with statements of special educational needs is above average. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school during their primary education is high.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two Reception classes. A second class was created for September 2011 at the request of the local authority to meet the increasing demand for school places in the area. The school's roll has risen steadily for the last five years. Pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 are taught in mixed-age classes, reflecting the lower numbers in these year groups. The school provides a breakfast club three days a week. A pre-school, run by a private provider, operates on site and this is subject to a separate Ofsted inspection. The school has a number of awards for its work, including Activemark, Travel Plan and Primary Languages awards.

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

Seal Church of England Primary School is a good school with an inclusive, caring ethos. The school has developed well since its last inspection, so that most aspects of its work are now good. There has been a steady improvement in pupils' attainment, representing good progress for pupils from their starting points in the school, either in Reception or when they join through their primary education. The improvements are largely a result of the hard work and dedication of the headteacher, governing body and staff team. They have undertaken rigorous and accurate evaluations of the school's work and used this information effectively to make the changes which have the greatest impact on pupils' achievements. For example, a focus on improving attainment in mathematics over the last two years has brought about a significant improvement. A greater proportion of pupils this year reached the higher levels in the Year 6 tests than nationally. There is an awareness of the need to improve pupils' writing skills in a similar way. As a result, initiatives are being systematically and carefully embedded in the school's practices. This record demonstrates the school's good capacity for sustained development.

The good start children get in Reception gives them a firm foundation for later learning, and all groups of pupils make good progress through the school. Over the last three years, the gap between school and national performance levels in the Year 6 tests has steadily narrowed, and attainment is broadly average in English and mathematics. A similar improvement in attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 shows that pupils now have a stronger basis for Key Stage 2 learning, helping to boost performance further. Pupils' numeracy and reading skills are stronger than their writing skills. During the inspection, many examples were seen of activities which enabled pupils to talk through their ideas before writing. However, this was not consistent across the school, occasionally limiting pupils' opportunities to test out and reflect on their own ideas and achievements. Similarly, not enough attention is given to implementing the handwriting policy to help pupils develop fluency in recording their ideas on paper. The acceleration in pupils' achievements since the last inspection is a result of good teaching and an interesting curriculum which ensures that pupils enjoy school and their learning.

Pupils get on well together and are tolerant of difference. They actively uphold the school's clear values and rules, seen in their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and promoted well through the 'spiritual box' in each classroom helping pupils to reflect on wider social and ethical issues. Pupils reflect maturely on matters that have an impact on their own lives and, as they broaden their understanding of

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the wider world, begin to participate in local activities. For example, the eco club actively supported a local initiative to improve the environment by planting flowers in the village. Teachers manage their classes well so that even those pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties behave well because they have a clear understanding of consequences and set appropriate standards for themselves. Pupils say they are free from bullying and that minor incidents of inconsiderate behaviour are dealt with quickly and effectively by adults. Although the vast majority of pupils attend well, the attendance of a few pupils is too low and has a detrimental effect on their achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is good or better to raise pupils' attainment, particularly in writing, and improve their future economic well-being, by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to articulate their thinking and reflect on their own learning
 - making sure that the handwriting policy is implemented consistently.
- Improve the attendance of the small number of pupils whose attendance is low.

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

Pupils commented on how much they enjoy their lessons and especially mention mathematics, practical work in science and learning about new things in their topics, such as about evacuees in the Second World War. They take a pride in their work so that it is well presented, helping them to see how well they are progressing. Pupils benefit from the encouragement of teaching assistants, who not only help deepen pupils' understanding through additional questioning, but also require them to try things out for themselves. As a result, pupils who have the greatest level of adult support make good progress from their starting points. Pupils appreciate that teachers match tasks well to different abilities and with a level of challenge. Consequently, they work hard and only occasionally need a reminder to refocus their efforts. Excellent concentration was seen in a lesson when pupils were considering how to create a sense of the passage of time; they were very focused when they watched a video clip so that they then made precise and perceptive comments to help their own writing. Pupils have a good understanding of what they have to do to improve their work further because marking includes clear comments on what has been achieved and the next steps to be taken. Increasingly, pupils are given valuable opportunities to test out these suggestions before undertaking new learning. From a below average start when they join the school, pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make good progress through the school. By the time they leave, their average skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology mean that they are satisfactorily prepared for secondary education.

Pupils understand how to look after their own health, reflected in the Activemark and Travel Plan awards. This is especially so for older pupils who say they have adopted a more healthy lifestyle because of the things they have learned in school. Pupils

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participate enthusiastically in a wide range of sports clubs. Some cycle to school and learn about bike maintenance, while others participate in the 'Walk on Wednesday' initiative. Older pupils contribute well to the school's positive ethos, acting as mentors and playground buddies, while Year 6 pupils run clubs for younger pupils. Pupils' growing understanding of citizenship is seen in their participation in a campaign for a zebra crossing to improve their safety on their way to and from school.

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	3
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	2
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

While most teaching seen during the inspection was good, it is not yet consistently good in all lessons. All teaching is based on thorough planning and preparation so that pupils have good quality materials to illustrate and enliven learning. The best practice is characterised by excellent relationships and high expectations of what pupils should achieve within a short time. Because teachers regularly assess and moderate the level of pupils' work, they have an accurate understanding of pupils' current achievements, including pupils who have joined the school recently. They use this information and their subject knowledge effectively to plan work to take learning forward quickly from pupils' starting points. This includes those pupils who have recently joined the school. In the few lessons where progress slows a little, it is because questioning is not sufficiently challenging for pupils to develop knowledge and understanding by expanding on their responses. This also means opportunities are missed for pupils to clarify their thinking by articulating their ideas, either in small

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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groups or to the whole class. Occasionally, some reviews of learning only require a quick indication of success against the learning objective without further checking pupils’ understanding by requiring them to explain exactly what they have learnt.

The curriculum makes useful links between literacy, numeracy and other subjects to make learning relevant and interesting. For example, the development of information and communication skills is achieved through preparing a presentation of learning in history. Pupils’ enjoyment of learning is promoted well by practical experiences, seen when all age groups developed their musical skills and understanding of African culture in a drumming workshop. The final performances were impressive and pupils showed genuine enjoyment in their achievements throughout this memorable experience. The Primary Languages award shows the school’s commitment to promoting pupils’ cultural development and widening their understanding of their place within a global community. Good use is made of the locality and the school grounds to make learning relevant. There are many examples where the curriculum is personalised to meet individual needs, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those not making the expected progress. Links with local secondary schools are used well to give gifted and talented pupils additional opportunities, for example in mathematics workshops.

A significant strength of the school is the priority given to ensuring pupils’ well-being alongside their academic development. For example, the school has attracted additional funding to increase pupils’ involvement in a range of activities, including a breakfast club, to boost their self-confidence and social skills. Extra-curricular provision is planned carefully to meet pupils’ needs and interests. The school goes to considerable lengths to build relationships with families whose circumstances make pupils vulnerable and to work with a range of external agencies to remove barriers to learning. The success of these strategies is seen in accelerated rates of progress for individual pupils following specific interventions. Effective transition arrangements ensure that pupils joining the school adapt quickly to its routines. Year 6 pupils say that they already feel well prepared for secondary school. Much hard work with parents and carers and pupils, together with rewards, including ‘Attendance Ted’ and ‘Punctuality Pup’, have successfully improved attendance and punctuality for many pupils.

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	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

A strong sense of teamwork is evident across the school, with staff committed to making learning as effective as possible. The governing body is committed to sustaining improvement and constantly questions and checks how well the school is doing. A well-planned programme of professional development and supportive monitoring has sharpened practice, particularly in assessment and the teaching of mathematics. Good evaluation and development planning identifies the correct priorities to sustain improvements. Safeguarding arrangements fully meet current requirements, and arrangements in relation to child protection are robust. Issues of safety are effectively integrated into pupils’ learning so that they develop the understanding to manage risks for themselves. The school is a happy and united community, reflecting the school’s success in promoting community cohesion, equal opportunities and tackling discrimination. All groups of pupils, regardless of backgrounds, enjoy their learning and make progress equally well. Links with other schools having contrasting school populations in Britain and abroad afford pupils experiences which effectively support their understanding of difference and diversity. Effective strategies to engage with parents and carers are seen, for example, in the good links made through the local authority traveller service. Other partnerships with external agencies, for example to develop expertise not available within the school, enable the school to support and meet the many and varied needs of its pupils.

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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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

The Reception classes provide a stimulating environment for children. Good induction procedures support children in settling and feeling secure so that they have adapted quickly to the school’s routines. Regular activities such as signing themselves into

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school in the morning make a good contribution to their early writing skills. Because they are happy and content, children make good progress. While adults work hard to develop children’s language skills which are low on entry, sometimes opportunities are missed to extend children’s speaking skills during play. By contrast, teachers promote children’s early reading skills exceptionally well, setting a warm and comfortable environment for them to enjoy being read to and to explore books. The teaching of phonics (letters and sounds) is effective, seen in children’s fast recall of the range of sounds they have already learned and their enthusiasm to play a game to match pictures of objects to their initial sound. A range of strategies successfully engage parents and carers, and support a smooth transition into school, for example through the ‘Sharing Books’ to help them support their child’s learning and the home visits prior to children starting school. Good leadership and management are reflected in the way the early years team has developed within a short time, and the accuracy of the areas identified for improvement, for example, further development with pre-school providers to encourage a consistent approach in the early stages of literacy and numeracy development. The creation of a second classroom has slowed the development of the outdoor area, but it currently gives children good opportunities for outdoor play and learning which stimulates their imagination.

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

Most parents and carers who returned the questionnaire are positive about all aspects of the school, and a few made comments indicating their appreciation of the school’s friendly atmosphere and the approachability of staff. Particular satisfaction was expressed for the extent to which children enjoy school, good teaching, and the way parents and carers are kept informed and enabled to help their child’s learning at home. A small minority of parents and carers are concerned that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour and that their children are not kept safe. Inspectors found that, while there are occasional incidents of unacceptable behaviour, these are dealt with robustly. Behaviour in lessons and in the playground is good and enables all pupils to learn effectively. The governing body has taken significant steps to secure the school site and the school meets safeguarding requirements well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Seal Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary 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 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 160 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	48	25	45	3	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	32	26	46	7	13	5	9
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	25	35	63	6	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	34	27	48	8	14	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	26	46	22	39	4	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	46	21	38	6	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	46	21	38	6	11	2	4
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)	17	30	26	46	7	13	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	39	23	41	9	16	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	30	21	38	10	18	6	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	20	32	57	4	7	3	5
The school is led and managed effectively	22	39	21	38	4	7	6	11
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	45	19	34	7	13	3	5

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.



5 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Seal Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Sevenoaks TN15 0DJ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently and for explaining what you were doing when we came to see you in lessons. We enjoyed talking to the school council members, who explained how you feel about your school well. We agree with you that Seal Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School is a good school.

These are some of the things that the school does well.

- Children get off to a good start in Reception and have interesting things to do.
- The school looks after you well so that you are safe and secure.
- You have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and you have many opportunities to be active in the playground and at sports clubs.
- You concentrate well in lessons, take care with the presentation of your work and make good progress.
- The interesting things your teachers plan for you in lessons help you to learn well.
- The school is well run and adults plan well for the future.

We have asked your headteacher, governors and teachers to help you to make even faster progress, especially in your writing. We have asked teachers to:

- give you more opportunities to talk your ideas through before you have to write, and to make sure that you always talk about your learning at the end of the lesson
- make sure that you all use the school's handwriting style to help you to write more confidently so that you can get your ideas down on paper quickly
- improve the attendance of a few of you who do not attend regularly enough.

We are sure that you will help by continuing to do your best. For a few of you, remember that if you are not in school you cannot learn well. You cannot help it if you are ill, but try to come to school whenever you can. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings
Lead inspector

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