

St Nicholas CofE (VA) Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117456
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379422
Inspection dates	31 January 2012 – 1 February 2012
Lead inspector	David Shepherd

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Hopkinson
Headteacher	Jackie Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2009
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Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	31 January –1 February 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Shepherd

Additional inspector

Sandra Teacher

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons led by 10 teachers for a total of seven hours. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They held meetings with the senior staff, four groups of pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at safeguarding documentation and the school's analysis of its data. They analysed the responses to questionnaires from 104 parents and carers, 23 staff and 98 pupils.

Information about the school

This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average, but the proportion who speak English as an additional language is average. The largest minority ethnic group is Black African and the main language spoken by these pupils is Yoruba. A below-average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of one Nursery class and one Reception class. The school runs a daily breakfast club. The school meets the current floor standard, whereby the government sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school has gained the Basic Skills Agency's Quality Mark.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. The ethos of the school is welcoming and industrious. Relationships between adults and pupils are good. Pupils reflect thoughtfully about their rights and responsibilities. Pupils from different backgrounds get on well together and learn to respect each other’s views, customs and differences.
- Children make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They continue to make satisfactory progress in Key Stages 1 and 2. Progress is quickest in reading and slowest in writing, especially in Key Stage 2. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory.
- Pupils’ achievement is satisfactory. Over the past three years, attainment in reading has been higher than in writing because pupils are taught effectively to sound out individual letters and groups of letters to work out unfamiliar words. Attainment in writing is lower because not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to write at length across the curriculum. Attainment in mathematics is broadly average.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall. Some teaching is good and fully engages and motivates pupils in their learning. However, there is inconsistency between classes, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Pupils’ behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Parents, carers, pupils and staff are generally positive about behaviour although some concerns have been raised. Pupils’ behaviour contributes to a safe and orderly environment. Pupils feel safe because they are looked after well.
- Monitoring and evaluation are carried out accurately by the headteacher, senior staff and middle leaders. However, this has not yet led to higher standards in Year 6 because school and subject plans have not set out clearly enough how improvements in pupils’ attainment and progress will be measured.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2012, raise attainment and progress in writing by providing pupils with

more opportunities to write and use their computer skills across the curriculum.

- By December 2012, improve the quality of teaching so that at least 75% of lessons are good or better by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - identify in planning what pupils at different levels of ability are to learn in lessons
 - inform pupils through marking about the next steps in their learning
 - provide pupils with opportunities to respond to the guidance given.
- Ensure that school and subject plans lead to improved outcomes for pupils by:
 - training senior leaders and middle leaders further in the techniques of monitoring and evaluation
 - providing them with opportunities to monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility
 - ensuring senior leaders and middle leaders devise, implement and evaluate plans that focus on improving standards in their areas of responsibility and set out clearly how success will be measured.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Children start school with skills that are broadly in line with those typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress and reach standards in all areas of learning that are broadly average by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress in Key Stages 1 and 2, and their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly average by the time they leave in Year 6. This is consistent with standards seen by inspectors in lessons and books. Almost all parents and carers who responded to their questionnaire were positive about how well the school develops their children's skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Inspectors found that the school develops pupils' skills in these subjects satisfactorily.

Attainment in reading is the strongest aspect of pupils' learning, and is average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Pupils of different ages were keen to read to inspectors and talk about the books and authors they like to read. However, a few lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not find it easy to work out unfamiliar words because they cannot always remember the sounds made by individual letters. In discussions with pupils, they felt that the school helps them develop their reading skills well. Pupils receive good opportunities to write at length in literacy lessons, but this is not the case in geography, history and science. This prevents them from consolidating and extending their writing skills, and making faster progress.

Both boys and girls achieve at similar levels to their peers in other schools nationally as do pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. In small

group sessions led by teaching assistants, they learn the sounds letters make and this helps them to achieve in line with their capabilities. In lessons, they sometimes receive too much help so do not have enough opportunities to think for themselves. This slows down the progress they make, and prevents it from being good. There are examples of pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable making good progress, but a few do not make the progress they should because their needs have not been identified quickly enough. However, the school generally identifies satisfactorily any areas of underachievement through termly pupil progress meetings, and suitable provision is allocated to meeting their needs.

Quality of teaching

Technology is used well by staff as a valuable aid to make teaching intentions clear to pupils. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour, and this teaches pupils effectively how to act responsibly and work together in pairs or larger groups during lessons. Teachers make good use of classroom displays to help pupils with key words and skills in literacy and numeracy.

Pupils enjoy their work and settle down to it quickly. For example, pupils in Year 6 were keen to demonstrate their empathy by adopting a role of one of the characters in an historical picture. They entered into the feeling of these characters in role using emotive language, such as 'disgusted', 'cruel' and 'shocking'. One pupil was so moved by her role that tears welled up in her eyes. Year 4 pupils eagerly worked out the code that enabled them to identify the mystery times table that had been given to them. They enthusiastically adopted the role of detectives looking for clues to crack the code.

Evidence from pupils' questionnaires and discussions with pupils indicate that they feel teaching is good at the school. Parents and carers are equally as positive about the quality of teaching. Inspectors found evidence of good teaching, but that it was not consistently good in all classes, especially in Key Stage 2. Teachers' planning indicates the main focus of lessons but does not include what pupils at different levels of ability are expected to learn. As a result, work is not always tailored sufficiently to meet individual needs, and this slows down progress, particularly of higher and lower ability pupils. On occasions, not enough support is given to pupils working independently, and their mistakes are sometimes not corrected quickly enough to enable them to make faster progress. Marking is encouraging but does not consistently provide guidance about how to improve and not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to respond to suggestions made.

Teaching to promote pupils' spiritual development is a strength of the school. Pupils have good opportunities to reflect on those less fortunate than themselves, and they support a number of charities as a consequence, for example, the Air Ambulance and The Children's Forces Trust. The teaching of different cultures and ways of life is not as strong.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Good relationships promote pupils' positive attitudes to school and their willingness to make valuable contributions around the school, such as older pupils helping

younger ones during lunchtimes. Pupils generally respond promptly to their teachers in lessons and work cooperatively with each other. Discussions with pupils indicate that they, including those with identified behavioural difficulties, are aware of the school's strategies for managing and improving behaviour, and think they are appropriate and carried out fairly by staff. They try hard to conform to them.

In replies to their questionnaires, a small minority of pupils and of parents and carers indicated that behaviour is not always good and that bullying occurs from time to time. A few parents and carers expanded on this in written comments and indicated that some of the bullying takes the form of name calling. Inspectors analysed the school's behaviour log and school behaviour policy, and discussed these with the headteacher. In conversations, pupils say that any inappropriate behaviour and bullying are dealt with effectively.

Pupils feel safe. They have a good understanding of the risks they face and how to keep safe. For example, pupils of different ages told inspectors how they keep safe on roads, rail, around water and in the event of fire. They also have a good understanding of internet safety.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, supported by senior staff and middle leaders, incorporates areas for improvement into detailed plans of action. Monitoring and evaluation by senior and middle leaders of pupils' achievement are leading to some improvements, such as in reading and in mathematics following the last inspection. However, while school and subject plans have been implemented, they lack detailed criteria to judge their success, which has reduced their effectiveness in accelerating improvement further. Teaching is monitored regularly by senior staff and appropriate areas for improvement are identified. As a result, the proportion of good teaching is improving. However, some weaknesses in teaching remain, particularly in Key Stage 2.

The school's curriculum includes all the required subjects. The planning of this curriculum includes broadly satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The curriculum is enriched by a range of visits to places of interest and visitors to school. The small number of out-of-school clubs also enriches the curriculum. However, the school does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to extend their writing or technology skills across the curriculum, particularly in geography and history.

Members of the governing body are keen, enthusiastic and show high levels of commitment to the school. The governing body provides a satisfactory level of challenge to the school. Safeguarding procedures comply with statutory requirements. Both pupils and their parents and carers indicate that the school provides a secure environment for learning. The school promotes equality for different groups and tackles discrimination satisfactorily. This enables all groups of pupils to make satisfactory progress. The progress the school has made since its last inspection confirms that there is sufficient capacity for further improvement.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



2 February 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Nicholas CofE (VA) Primary School and Nursery,
Stevenage SG2 0PZ**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting and talking with you. Thank you to those of you who completed the questionnaire for us. We found your responses very helpful. You go to a satisfactory school where adults work hard to prepare you for the future. Here are some things you do well.

- You are very welcoming, well mannered and courteous to each other and adults. You get on well with each other.
- You feel safe and work in a calm and colourful learning environment.
- You like your teachers and teaching assistants and try your best to please them.
- You are enthusiastic about all the different activities provided for you, including visits out of school and visitors to the school.
- You enjoy reading and talking about books and stories you have read.

To make the school even better we have asked your headteacher, teachers and the governing body to:

- provide you with more opportunities to practise writing in different subjects
- let you know what you are expected to learn in lessons, indicate what you need to do next to learn and give you time to carry out the improvements suggested in marking
- make sure that the plans that the school has to help you learn in different subjects are working well.

All of you can help by continuing to work very hard.

Yours sincerely

David Shepherd
Lead inspector

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