

St Nicholas Elstree Church of England VA Primary School

St Nicholas Close, Elstree, Borehamwood, WD6 3EW

Inspection dates 27–28 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher, staff and governors have been very successful in bringing about rapid improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection.
- They have meticulously addressed previous weaknesses and introduced a rigorous system for monitoring pupils' progress to ensure that achievement continues to improve.
- By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above national averages.
- Achievement is good and pupils in all year groups make good progress.
- Teaching is good. Work is carefully matched to the pupils' differing ability levels.
- Knowledgeable teaching assistants support pupils well and make sure they can all play a full part in lessons.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils are keen to learn and have positive attitudes to learning. They are well mannered and they enjoy school.
- Pupils feel safe at school and learn how to keep safe.
- Exciting topics created to motivate and engage pupils consist of a raft of experiences, including a range of visits, events and visitors.
- Governors have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They challenge leaders and hold them to account while providing support and encouragement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not practise and sharpen their key literacy and numeracy skills effectively in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Teachers do not help pupils to develop their writing skills in longer pieces of written work.
- Attendance has improved but is still only average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons or part lessons, attended assembly and visited the breakfast club. Sometimes they were accompanied by the headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their views of the school, listened to pupils read in Year 1, Year 2 and Year 6, looked at work in pupils' books and observed them during play and at lunch breaks.
- Discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, senior leaders and other staff, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 30 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and met informally with parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors also took into account the views of 10 members of staff.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including: the school development plan; the school's own assessment data and analysis of its strengths and weaknesses; policies and records relating to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour; and information on pupils' progress and attainment, the performance of teachers and the work of the governing body.

Inspection team

Valerie Palmer, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Ian Tett

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school and has a part-time nursery.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is higher than found nationally.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in the care of the local authority and those with a parent in the armed forces.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move teaching and achievement from good to outstanding by encouraging pupils to:
 - practise the skills they have learnt in literacy and numeracy in other subjects
 - complete longer pieces of writing in different subjects.
- Seek further ways to make sure parents see the benefits of regular school attendance and the positive impact it has on their child's learning and attainment.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Nursery with skills and knowledge which are broadly typical for their age. Pupils make good progress and by the end of Year 6, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children achieve well in the Nursery and Reception Years because teachers use a variety of creative, practical and physical activities to develop language, reading, writing and number skills while encouraging personal, social and emotional development. Thus, most children leave Reception as confident learners who are well prepared for Year 1.
- Pupils continue to make good progress throughout Key Stage 1. Standards are rising and in 2013, they were above average at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Younger pupils inspectors heard reading during the inspection made good use of their knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics) to help them read unfamiliar words; older pupils were able to read fluently with expression and discuss favourite authors. In 2013, the proportion of Year 1 pupils who reached the required standard in the phonics screening check was above average.
- Writing skills are encouraged from an early age. Children in Reception were seen writing notes to their friends by sounding out the words. Older pupils were writing an introduction for a biography, using information they had researched as homework on the life of Nelson Mandela.
- At the end of Year 6, pupils are almost two terms ahead of their peers nationally in mathematics. Progress over the last 18 months has been rapid and a small number of pupils reached Level 6 in the national tests, which is a standard much higher than normally expected in a primary school.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Work is adapted to suit their needs and support is given within the classroom, in small groups and on a one-to-one basis by skilled teaching assistants.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make similar good progress to their classmates. In 2013, eligible pupils in Year 6 were on average over a term ahead of their classmates in mathematics but behind them by a similar amount in reading and writing. The school's current data show that the gap is closing in reading and writing.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic backgrounds make equally good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In Year 6 in 2013, they attained standards above those achieved by similar pupils nationally.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because well thought-out lessons are lively and interesting, and pupils cover much work.
- Bright, colourful displays celebrate pupils' achievements and provide information which pupils refer to in order to help them with their studies. Good relationships between pupils and staff

ensure that pupils feel confident to express their views and answer questions enthusiastically.

- Consistently thorough planning takes into account pupils' previous knowledge and learning experiences while ensuring that the work they are given to do next is exciting, stimulating and challenging. In a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were investigating and calculating the size of angles. Practical work based on previous knowledge was well matched to all abilities, and the level of challenge was adapted and extended to ensure that all pupils attained to the full extent of their capabilities.
- Class books are well presented. Handwriting is neat and tidy, and pupils show a pride in their work. Teachers have high expectations and mark work thoroughly. Pupils say they know how to improve their work and have the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and monitor pupils' learning carefully throughout lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants intervene appropriately if pupils need greater clarification or challenge, and adapt work accordingly.
- Nursery and Reception children enjoy a wide range of motivating activities both inside and outside the classrooms. Writing, encouraged within the classroom, was being practised in the 'vet's surgery' outside, with appointments being made and children identifying illnesses and marking charts. Tasks that are often practical encourage concentration and cooperation, while giving children opportunities for enquiring and discovering things for themselves.
- Pupils have clearly presented targets, identifying what they are working towards, on the front cover of all literacy and numeracy books. When achieved, teachers date them and the next target is supplied. This means that pupils are very clear about the levels at which they are working, and they are keen to move on to next level.
- Speaking and listening skills are developed effectively throughout the school. Pupils are encouraged to talk through their ideas before writing, solve problems analytically by discussion and produce work of a high calibre. They do not have such good opportunities to write at length or use the skills they have learnt in literacy and numeracy to support their learning in other subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to behave well through the 'Sunshine System' which promotes good behaviour. They respond well to staff because behaviour is consistently well managed.
- Pupils want to do well. Their attitudes to learning are good. In class, they listen politely to adults and respectfully to each other when they answer questions or give their views. They cooperate well on tasks, from an early age, in both groups and pairs. They support and guide one another and enjoy working collaboratively.
- Older pupils are aware of their responsibilities and say they 'look after the younger ones'. Year 5 pupils are training to become playground leaders who will organise games at lunch and playtimes. The school council and 'eco' council give pupils a voice within the school and they organise events to raise money for a wide variety of charities and causes.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They talk enthusiastically about the many and varied clubs, visits and visitors to school, including an Olympic gymnast. They greatly enjoy the various event

weeks focusing, for example, on an area of mathematics, and the exciting topics they study such as the Egyptians, Victorians and Africa.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. They are aware of the different forms of bullying and racism, including cyber-bullying. They say that bullying 'doesn't really happen; just silly arguments'. They are very sure that should any incident occur, an adult would sort it out immediately.
- Almost all parents who spoke to inspectors and responded to the Parent View survey were positive that their child was well looked after, happy and safe at school.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet current national requirements.
- Attendance is average. The school has undertaken much good work in encouraging and promoting regular attendance, but there remains a small proportion of pupils who do not attend consistently and so do not always achieve the standards of which they are capable.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and senior leadership team have made numerous, important changes since the last inspection that have had a marked impact in accelerating pupils' achievements and progress. They have high expectations for all pupils and staff, understand the school's strengths and areas for development and are fully supported by a knowledgeable, active and able governing body. The welcoming environment is cheerful and bright, and clearly reflects the aims of the school.
- The headteacher and senior leadership team rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and learning. They identify areas for improvement, set targets for staff, and provide support and training to ensure that any weaknesses are eradicated and staff skills improve. Teachers are rewarded when pupils do well.
- The school development plan is based on leaders' accurate evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It is comprehensive, precise and drives the school forward. This working document is systematically reviewed and adapted to take into account the changing needs of staff and pupils. The 'Calmer Corner' currently under construction is based on the pupils' vision of a room for quiet contemplation and prayer reflecting all faiths.
- The standards achieved and the progress pupils make are tracked meticulously. All staff use the resulting information to make sure all pupils are working to their full capabilities. Any underachievement is picked up quickly and support is provided to rectify the situation.
- The newly developed curriculum covers a range of imaginatively named themes chosen to engage and motivate all pupils. It is enriched by a wide range of after-school activities and opportunities to participate in additional music and sports events. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. It is enhanced by the range of community links which encourages pupils' appreciation of their local area, awareness of Britain's culturally diverse society, and knowledge of life beyond the United Kingdom.
- The school is spending its new sports funding on training for staff in the teaching of gymnastics, providing additional sports clubs and joining the local sports partnership so that all pupils can access competitive sporting opportunities. This year, more pupils have taken part in sporting activities and the school has achieved a bronze kite mark in physical education.

- The local authority, working in partnership with the school, is providing ongoing staff and governor training while raising expectations for the attainment and progress of all pupils.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors have made many changes since the last inspection. They have undertaken a raft of training which has honed their skills in supporting leaders while challenging and holding them fully to account for the progress and attainment of the pupils in their care. They are fully involved in the school's development plan, and are keenly aware of the elements which have been achieved and what yet needs to be developed. They have a good knowledge of the quality of teaching, linked to pay and promotion and pupils' achievement. Governors use a variety of methods and information, including data analysis, to follow pupils' progress and attainment. They undertake 'learning walks' and discussions with staff and talk to pupils to ensure that their knowledge is first hand and up to date. They have introduced a regular bulletin for parents which complements the school's regular newsletter, and this keeps parents informed about their work. Governors are mindful of the school budget and are conscious of the impact made by the sports funding and the pupil premium.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117431
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	431620

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	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoff Strack
Headteacher	Kate Johnston-Grant
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2012
Telephone number	020 8953 3015
Fax number	020 8953 1162
Email address	admin@stnicholas610.herts.sch.uk

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