



St Nicholas Church of England Primary School and Nursery

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117456
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280084
Inspection dates 17 January 2006 to 18 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Georgina Beasley LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Six Hills Way
School category	Voluntary aided		SG2 0PZ
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438352706
Number on roll	233	Fax number	01438233227
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Father.Melvyn Barnsley
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs. Carole Lorimer

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized primary school serves seven parishes within Stevenage. Most pupils are from White British families. A small number are from other White, Asian, African, other Black or mixed heritage backgrounds. A growing number of pupils are joining the school at times other than nursery. A small number of pupils speak English in addition to another language but none are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than average. Most children enter the school with knowledge and skills that are average for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. Pupils with statements of special educational needs is fewer than other schools of this size.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with several good features. Christian values are at the heart of the school's friendly, family atmosphere. Very good relationships have nurtured children's positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour. The children have an exceptional commitment to the local and wider community. Systems for checking the quality of the school's work are rigorous and the inspection agrees with its view. There is good capacity to improve. Standards are at similar levels to those reported at the time of the last inspection and are average at the end of Year 6. The children make satisfactory progress overall. Children with special educational needs make good progress. In some lessons, more able children sometimes do work that is too easy and planned activities do not engage the children's interest and support the learning effectively. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is good and sometimes very good in the nursery and reception classes and in Years 5 and 6. This is leading to higher standards in English, mathematics and science this year. The broad range of activities is enriched by a wide range of extra experiences. The headteacher, supported well by senior staff and governors, provides clear direction that has resulted in good improvements since the last inspection. The headteacher shares information about the school's performance so everyone knows what the school is doing well and what is not so good. However, the good practice leading to improvements in some classes is not being adopted and adapted by all staff to improve teaching at a consistent rate throughout the school. The children's and parents' views are taken into account regularly so they are fully involved in decisions about school development. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that challenge for more able pupils is consistently planned and implemented in all classes.
- Improve the satisfactory teaching to ensure that tasks and activities in lessons are more interesting and more closely matched to pupils learning needs.
- Involve all staff in sharing good practice and checking directly the quality of the children's learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Most children start school with broadly average skills, knowledge and understanding. They achieve well by the end of the reception year. Provision for personal and social development is excellent and they take on the challenges presented with confidence, for example standing up in front of the school to introduce themselves. The significant improvements put into place following the last inspection in nursery and reception are resulting in the children's overall good progress. In Years 1 and 2, progress is satisfactory and at the end of Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards at the end of Year 6 were average in last year's national tests. More able children were not challenged sufficiently well for them to do as well

as they should in writing and mathematics, especially the more able boys. Improvements in the way the school uses assessment information to plan more challenging work are resulting in better progress. Standards are on track to be above average in English, mathematics and science this year, and boys and girls achieve equally well. Children make satisfactory progress in Years 3 and 4, and good progress in Years 5 and 6. This includes children who speak English in addition to another language. Children with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school because they are very well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. All children in Year 6 are on track to meet the challenging targets they have agreed with their teacher.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The success of the school's very positive Christian ethos is reflected in the children's good personal development. Their attitudes and behaviour are good and this helps teachers teach and children to learn. The children get along very well together because relationships are very good. Children's spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. It is particularly strong in extending their understanding of different faiths and cultures, and of how to behave as part of society. The children are aware, of and respond positively to, the school's monthly 'value'. They enjoy taking on responsibilities, which include office duties at lunchtimes and acting as representatives on the school council. These opportunities are giving them important life skills. The 'Healthy Schools Award' recognises the school's work to encourage the children to lead healthy lives and to develop useful skills to keep themselves safe. They know how to handle bullying, and they make healthy choices at lunchtimes. They enjoy at least two hours of physical education each week. Their contribution to the local and wider community, through links with charities, the church, other local schools and a school in Africa, and curriculum events such as 'Wonder Days', is outstanding. Attendance is above average and punctuality is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teaching in the nursery and reception and in Years 5 and 6 is good. Good teaching in the Foundation Stage, results in the youngest children having an excellent awareness of their own needs and those of others. This is evident in the way they play together and treat each other with care and consideration. Teachers and teaching assistants join in with the play at just the right time to develop a range of skills, but in particular, to improve the children's speaking and their knowledge of the world around them. Good teaching in Years 5 and 6 ensures that children are very clear about what they need to do to improve. They receive good guidance through comments in teachers' marking and the targets they identify for themselves and with their teacher. In these classes, more able children are challenged well so make good progress. All teachers identify precisely what they want the children to learn. In good

lessons they make sure that the planned activities and tasks support this learning well. This is especially so for the children who find learning hard. In some classes however, teachers have not given enough thought to how the children will learn new knowledge or develop new skills. Consequently, some more able children are not always challenged enough and some lose interest and become inattentive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum gives a suitable emphasis to developing key skills including literacy and numeracy. The nursery and reception children have good opportunities to learn in the outdoor areas everyday. However, these opportunities are restricted because access to the larger area is poor for the reception class and there is no covered area for the children in either class to choose to learn in the outdoors when it is wet. Children with special educational needs receive good quality support because the targets set for them are appropriately based on individual needs. The curriculum is adapted well when needed to support children who are at the early stage of learning English. Children enjoy the many musical, sporting, and artistic activities, the other clubs on offer, and visits away from school, especially the residential experiences, enrich their learning. The good number of visitors, such as authors and musicians help bring the curriculum to life. Good links with the local secondary schools provide interesting days and activities for gifted and talented children.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, support and guidance are good. All adults know the children well and provide good levels of care. The arrangements for first aid are good. Children who are hurt or upset are confident to ask for help or support. They particularly like being able to express and share their concerns in private by putting a message into one of the suggestion boxes. Child protection arrangements are good. The safety concerns expressed at the last inspection regarding traffic and parking remain. All governors, staff and parents are aware of the dangers and difficulties and the school has worked hard to minimise any risks to children's safety. The school has developed good systems for assessment that support most children's learning well. The quality of teachers' marking has improved since September because of the school's effective action to improve this aspect. Some very good feedback and target setting is in place in Years 5 and 6. Parents praise the school's excellent procedures for welcoming their children into the nursery.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher, supported well by two senior teachers, provides good leadership. Governors provide good support and challenge to the school. They are fully involved in making decisions, which affect

the school's development. The strong commitment to developing the children's personal and social skills is ensuring very good relationships and the strong ethos of respect, friendship and trust. During her time at the school the headteacher has put a detailed programme of staff training into place which has developed valuable skills for all staff. The good leadership of the Foundation Stage has led to significant improvement in the nursery and reception. The teacher in charge of special educational needs makes sure that help is carefully provided and is effective. The school's evaluation of how well it is doing is accurate and provides a clear picture of its strengths and weaknesses. All staff are involved and everyone is working towards the same purpose. This shared leadership is building a more effective team and beginning to result in higher standards, faster progress and better teaching. This is despite high levels of staff changes over the last few years. However, some staff are not yet involved in seeing for themselves how improvement strategies that are effective in some classes could be adopted and adapted for their own. The school development plan identifies clearly the action needed to bring about improvements but is not always clear enough about how the school will know when it is successful.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for being so friendly. We enjoyed talking to you about how you felt and what you liked most at your school. You told us that you liked your school, and most of your parents do too. You will be pleased to hear that we think your school is doing a fairly good job and we can see that it is improving a lot. We were impressed with your good behaviour and the way you care for one another. This is making your teachers' job easier and helping you and others in the class to learn. We like your determination to do well. Everybody we talked to said they were happy to come to school and it was good to see so many smiles on your faces. You told us that not all lessons are interesting but that you always have something useful to do. You know that if you have a problem or have some good news to share, you can go to any adult at any time. Mrs Lorimer, the governors and the adults in school encourage you to be healthy and to make sure you are safe. We think you make an outstanding contribution to the local and wider community through the work you do to raise money for many charities and the support you give to the school in Zimbabwe. Mrs Lorimer is a good headteacher and she works hard to make sure that the school is a happy place where you can all learn and grow into confident young people. However, we have asked Mrs Lorimer and the teachers to make sure that the work you do in lessons is even more interesting to help you learn even faster. Teaching is satisfactory but we think this can be better. We also think that some of you can do even harder work than you do now, especially in writing and mathematics. We are sure you will continue to like going to St Nicholas School because there are so many interesting things for you to do.