

Old Church Church of England C Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104224
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	308546
Inspection date	15 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Hodgkinson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	346
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Baker
Headteacher	Jeff W Perrins
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	School Street Darlaston Walsall WS10 8DL
Telephone number	01215 686329
Fax number	01215 265973

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the provision for, and progress made by, more able pupils and pupils with learning difficulties, and the school's use of targets for raising standards and helping pupils make progress. Evidence was gathered through discussion with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the school leadership team, the chair of governors, parents, pupils, and the School Council, together with visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work, and analysis of school records and planning documents. Parents' questionnaire responses were also analysed. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This very large, popular and over-subscribed school serves an area where the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, including those with statements of special educational need, is generally below average, although this varies widely between year groups. Most pupils are White British. A new headteacher replaced a long-serving headteacher in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, where children enjoy their learning in what one parent described as an 'inviting and welcoming environment'. 'Old Church make it fun and interesting for the children', said another parent, 'with different activities and topics to enjoy.' The environment is indeed very stimulating. Colourful displays of pupils' work are all around and there is much vibrant activity, such as high quality music performances and pupils working enthusiastically with a wide variety of resources in and outside the classroom.

Good teaching by well-qualified and experienced staff does much to promote pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Lessons are typically well planned and pupils are clear about their purpose. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well. When they join the school, either in the part-time Nursery or in the Reception classes, children's skills are well below the levels expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy and in emotional development. The good start they make in the Foundation Stage continues across the school so that overall standards are in line with the national average by the time pupils leave in Year 6. Indeed, a greater proportion of pupils than average reach the level expected for their age in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in their Year 6 national tests. This is because of the strong progress made by those whose attainment was low when they joined the school. Pupils with learning difficulties make excellent progress, with many achieving the nationally expected Level 4 in one or more of the core subjects. The support and guidance given to pupils with learning difficulties is outstanding. Teachers have a very strong awareness of their needs, and work very effectively with teaching assistants and external agencies to provide highly personalised learning programmes. The progress of these pupils is tracked very carefully, allowing programmes to be adapted when necessary.

In all subjects other than reading, fewer pupils than average reach the higher levels of attainment, including in national assessments at the end of Year 2 and national tests at the end of Year 6. The progress made by more able pupils is satisfactory, but not as strong as the progress made by other groups in the school. More difficult work is prepared for more able pupils in all classes. However, the quality of the guidance given to pupils about what steps they should be taking to improve their work varies considerably, and constrains the challenge given to more able pupils. In some classes, for example, pupils have very clear targets to improve in literacy; teachers' marking of work refers clearly to those targets and pupils respond sharply and make good progress. In other classes, targets are under-used and marking makes too little reference to them to help pupils improve as much as they could.

A good curriculum ensures that pupils have a well-rounded education and make good progress across a broad range of subjects. Together with a broad extra-curricular programme of activities and visits, the curriculum does much to promote pupils' good personal development. It ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Information and communication technology (ICT) is widely and confidently used by pupils to support their learning. Music flourishes in the school, so that a high proportion of pupils learn to play and perform. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and they develop a very good capacity to work collaboratively in groups and teams. They develop a very good understanding of the variety of cultures and faiths in modern Britain through visits to diverse places of worship. Pupils from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds integrate well, and pupils say they feel safe. They are well cared for, and the school meets requirements for

safeguarding pupils' welfare. Pupils' behaviour is good overall, and frequently exemplary in assemblies and classes.

Pupils make a good contribution to school life. They take responsibilities seriously. The newly-established school council has been much involved in improving facilities, activities and supervision at lunchtime, and pupils report that the playground is now a calmer place as a consequence. Pupils have a good awareness of how to live and eat healthily, and many participate in the broad range of sporting activities on offer.

The school is well led and managed. The leadership team of phase and curriculum leaders is much involved in the monitoring and improvement of pupils' performance, which leads to an accurate appraisal of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher, relatively new in post, has sharply focused school priorities for improvement on raising standards in writing and improving the use of assessment to support pupils' learning. The gap between pupils' progress in writing and their progress in other subjects is consequently now beginning to close. Pupils' attendance has improved steadily since the last inspection, and is now average, as a result of sharper action in collaboration with external agencies to reduce persistent absenteeism. Such effective action confirms the school's good capacity to improve further. The governing body's re-constituted committee structure is helping governors provide a more rigorous scrutiny of the school's work.

The forward-looking nature of the school is clearly demonstrated in its strong commitment to the development of its 'virtual learning environment', which uses ICT to extend learning opportunities and to improve communication across the school community. Initiatives to involve parents more in the learning of their children, and help parents improve their own learning, further demonstrate the school's willingness to 'go the extra mile' in support of the families it serves.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. The open-plan design of the accommodation, with easy access to very good outdoor learning facilities, allows for high quality 'free flow' between activities, although the busy activities of others can be distracting when a class is trying to concentrate 'on the mat'. Children are able to develop a range of skills across all areas of learning while their learning is set in interesting and stimulating contexts, for example on the theme of organising summer holidays at the end of the summer term. There is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Children's skills are below average by the end of Reception, but this represents good progress relative to their low starting points. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Staff work effectively as a team to keep a close check on children's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Extend the challenge to more able pupils to ensure that their progress is at least as good as that of other groups in the school.
- Ensure that pupils in all classes are clear about the next steps they need to take to improve their performance through more effective marking and use of individual targets.

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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?	2
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

16 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Old Church CE C Primary School, Wednesbury WS10 8DL

Many thanks for the welcome you gave me when I visited your school for its recent inspection. I really enjoyed talking with many of you and seeing you at work and at play. I was delighted to be able to listen to the numerous high quality musical activities presented, including the performance by the Year 5 orchestra and choir.

Yours is a good school. You are well taught by staff who plan the curriculum carefully to ensure that you learn well and enjoy what you do. As a result, you make good progress to reach standards which are similar to those in most schools. Those of you with some learning difficulties receive support and guidance of a very high quality and make excellent progress. You are well prepared for the next stage of your education. You learn to work effectively in groups and teams, and to make good use of computers. You behave well and show respect for each other. It was good to hear how the school council had set about helping to improve the way lunchtimes are organised, and how much you appreciate these improvements.

The school is well led and managed by a headteacher and leadership team who have a clear idea about how to keep the school moving forward to serve you and your community better. My report identifies two main ways in which the school can improve further. Firstly, those of you who are able to cope with harder work could make even better progress. Secondly, while some classes get very clear guidance on how they can improve the standards of their work, this is not so for everyone. Some of you would benefit from better marking linked to clearer targets for improvement. I am sure that you will all continue to play your part in helping the school by getting involved in all that the school offers and by working hard.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson Lead inspector