

St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109158
Local Authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	309904
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Denise Morris

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	221
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Doreen Gale
Headteacher	Jonathan Cooke
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Greenhill Alveston BS35 2QX
Telephone number	01454 866530
Fax number	01454 866532

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is just coming to the end of a three-year building programme to improve the accommodation. There are fewer children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or from minority groups than usual.

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 that provides well for all its pupils. Its key strength is the good personal development of pupils, which results in their outstanding behaviour, positive attitudes and their enjoyment of school life. Pupils lead healthy lives, resulting in the award recently of Healthy School status. Pupils' good spiritual and moral development are effectively supported by the close links with the Church.

Pupils are cared for well. They say that there is always someone to talk to and they like their teachers. According to a parent, 'It is a good school that really cares well for the children.' Pupils are safe and secure at school. Provision to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted or talented is good. The assessment of pupils' achievements is satisfactory. Targets are challenging but not all teachers have been trained in the best use of the new target-setting and tracking system. This results in some inconsistent practice in measuring pupils' achievements.

Standards are above average by the end of Year 2, and these are maintained through the school to Year 6. Pupils achieve well, making good progress during their time at the school. Although standards of attainment on entry vary from year to year, they are broadly average. Good standards have been maintained over the past few years in English, mathematics and science, although standards in writing dipped last year. A more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics in younger classes is helping to improve standards in writing and spelling.

Good teaching and learning are helping pupils to make good progress. Some outstanding teaching occurs and is exemplified by very positive relationships, clear objectives and the use of exciting activities and resources, which lead to high quality learning. The main weakness in the teaching is that marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and this does not help them to know how they can improve their work. The curriculum is good because it provides a rich and varied range of learning opportunities for all pupils within an exciting environment. A few parents are concerned about the current limited number of clubs. Plans are in place to increase the number and range of clubs now that the lengthy building work is almost complete.

Good leadership and management are at the centre of the school's success. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school. He is well liked by pupils and is well aware of what the school needs to do to improve further. Formal self-evaluation has improved recently and there are many informal, but productive, ways in which the school gathers information about its performance. Senior managers are committed to raising standards and are clearly focused on their aims. Governors are helpful and challenging and parents are supportive of the school's work. There has been good improvement since last inspection, particularly in the accommodation and resources available to the school. Recent records that show improving standards in writing indicate that there is good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children behave well and quickly settle into the Reception class. Attainment on entry is average, although it is below in aspects of literacy, particularly writing. Children achieve well, making good progress in Reception because of good provision. Teaching is good and the exciting new environment for learning is almost complete. It is beginning to engage children well in learning. Relationships are good and children enjoy their activities. They are well supported and

relationships with parents are good. Children show mature attitudes and work well together, developing good independence skills. They are safe and secure. Their achievements are regularly measured and daily observations help staff quickly build a picture of what each child can do and needs to do next to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment by ensuring that all staff are fully involved in setting and reviewing targets and by ensuring that marking helps pupils to know what they need to do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress during their time at the school. Standards are above average and pupils achieve well. Children in the Foundation Stage achieve well because of good teaching so that by the time they enter Year 1 they achieve at just above the levels expected. This good progress is continued throughout Years 1 and 2 and by the time pupils complete Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The pattern continues throughout Years 3 to 6. In 2007, standards were above average in English, mathematics and science. Boys achieved particularly well. Pupils did not achieve as well in writing as they did in reading and mathematics. Strategies to improve writing, including a good phonics programme for younger pupils, are beginning to have an impact and indications are that standards in writing are improving. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' attitudes and enjoyment of school life are good, as shown by their good attendance. They feel happy and secure because of the warm relationships between staff and pupils. Their behaviour is exemplary and older pupils are willing to take on additional responsibilities such as looking after younger children in the playground. They develop a strong moral and spiritual sense and exhibit a creditable understanding when they have the opportunity to reflect on their feelings. The Healthy School award is evidence of the strength of their physical and mental well-being. They contribute well to the local community with their music making and support many fundraising activities for national charities. They work cooperatively together in school and their high standards in core subjects will equip them well for their later education. Pupils develop a clear understanding of cultures and religions other than their own, but they are not sufficiently aware of the variety of cultures that make up modern Britain.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are well planned, with clear objectives. Relationships are strong and form the basis of good behaviour and high quality attitudes to learning. Pupils with additional needs are well supported. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which leads to good learning in lessons and overall good achievement by pupils. Examples of outstanding teaching are characterised by high quality relationships, clear learning objectives for pupils of different abilities and good deployment of teaching assistants. Older pupils are regularly challenged to extend their thinking

and problem-solving skills through focused questioning. Planned activities, particularly for younger pupils, include a good range of practical experiences that helps them to practise and improve their literacy and numeracy skills well. Marking of pupils' work is variable. It does not consistently help them to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' good progress as they move through the school. In the Reception class and in the outside area there are many opportunities for children to develop as independent learners. The core curriculum is effective throughout the school and new developments in numeracy and literacy are strengthening these aspects. The curriculum is enriched through the addition of specialist teaching in music and French and through a good range of visits and visitors. In addition, variety is created through the provision of 'focus weeks.' These concentrate on developing pupils' skills in subjects such as art and by taking children out of school to museums and activity centres. Work is in progress to begin to develop more links across subjects. Video conferencing is a new initiative, which is helping pupils to link with museums in other parts of the country.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The high quality of care that the school provides makes pupils feel safe and secure. Pupils say that 'the teachers are kind and helpful'. The spiritual and moral development of the children is enhanced by the contributions made by the close links with St Helen's Church. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place and risk assessments are robust, ensuring the safety of pupils both inside and outside the school. The teaching assistants provide valuable support to many pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The assessment of pupils' performance is satisfactory. A good new assessment and tracking system has recently been introduced and is beginning to provide good quality information about pupils' achievements. However, all members of staff do not yet use this new system accurately enough and so academic guidance for some pupils lacks the rigour it might otherwise have.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders and managers work well together to improve the work of the school. Through effective self-evaluation they have successfully set challenging whole-school targets and maintained good achievement and above-average standards year on year. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school and, since his appointment, has implemented many exceptionally good changes to the accommodation and resources. As a result, the school buildings are now of high quality and pupils benefit from the good new ICT suite, the many additional learning rooms and the exciting environment created for the youngest children in the Foundation Stage. These are helping to improve levels of enjoyment and achievement. Although senior managers are fully involved in the school's work and regularly monitor teaching and learning, they rightly recognise that more could be done to improve the rigour of the new assessment and tracking process. Governors are supportive of the school. They are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses and regularly monitor provision and challenge leadership

about their decisions. Links with other schools and with parents are good. The improvement since the last inspection has been good.

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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?	2
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	2
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	2

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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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

28 November 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Helen's Church of England Primary School, Alveston, South Gloucestershire
BS35 2QX

Thank you for your help during our recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and talking to you about your school. You told us that yours is a good school and we agree with you. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found during our visit.

Your school is giving you a good education. You enjoy school and you attend well. Your achievements are good and you make good progress. This leads to high standards that are above those expected for your age. Your behaviour in and around the school is excellent. You try hard to keep fit and healthy. Good teaching helps you to learn and improve your skills and you have some exciting activities in your classes. Sometimes your work is not marked well enough to help you to know how to improve. You are well cared for and those of you who have difficulties with learning are given good support. The way your work is checked by the school is satisfactory. A new system for checking your work is not yet being used as well as it could be.

Your headteacher and other leaders keep you safe and secure. They lead the school well and look after you. The recent building work has provided a spacious and good quality place to learn and an exciting area for the youngest children in the Reception class.

We are asking the school to improve the way your work is checked by:

- making sure that the way it is marked helps you to improve and by making sure that all the teachers are trained to use the new assessment system.

Thank you again for your help.

Best wishes,

Denise Morris Lead Inspector