

# Potten End Church of England First School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 117414           |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | HERTFORDSHIRE LA |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 312606           |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 21 February 2008 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Mike Best        |

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

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| <b>Type of school</b>                     | First  |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Voluntary controlled   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 3-9  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed  |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |  |
| School                                    | 167  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body   |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | Mrs Keren Moxey  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Mrs Jane Senior  |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 7 March 2005   |
| <b>School address</b>                     | Church Road<br>Potten End<br>Berkhamsted<br>Hertfordshire<br>HP4 2QY |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01442 865022   |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01442 874974   |

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- pupils' achievement in reading;
- what the school is doing to improve boys' progress;
- the impact of subject leadership and governance on the overall leadership and management of the school.

Evidence was gathered from observing lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and the school's documentation and discussions with pupils, parents, staff and governors.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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

The school is smaller than most primary schools. It draws pupils from a mix of privately owned and rented homes in the rural locality and in the nearby towns of Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead. Most children are from White British backgrounds and those from other backgrounds have English as their first language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

Children start in the Nursery on a part-time basis before becoming full-time in the Reception class. There are more boys than girls and higher than average numbers of pupils with summer birthdays in many year groups. The number of pupils in the school with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than average. The proportion of pupils joining the school other than at the usual time is lower than in other schools.

## 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 serves its pupils well. Under the strong and committed leadership of the headteacher, the school has made good progress since the last inspection and has a good capacity for further improvement. Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, reflecting the excellent provision made for their care, support and guidance. Parents speak highly of the provision made for their children and pupils say they thoroughly enjoy coming to school.

Achievement is good. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage and continue to make good progress as they move through the school. Assessments at the end of Year 4 in the summer of 2007 showed that standards were above those expected for pupils' ages in reading and mathematics and similar to those expected in writing. In the statutory tests at the end of Year 2 in 2007, standards were above the national averages in reading and mathematics and exceptionally high in writing. Throughout the school, the girls reach higher standards than boys but this gap narrows as the rate of boys' progress increases in Years 3 and 4, particularly in reading. Standards at the end of Year 2 have risen in writing as a result of the school's drive to improve spelling and develop boys' enthusiasm for writing, and this is helping to bring about improvement in Years 3 and 4. Standards have been maintained at similar levels to previous years in mathematics and reading at the end of Year 2. The school analyses pupils' results closely and monitors their progress robustly from term to term. Staff have rightly identified that weaknesses in linking letters and sounds have been holding pupils back in literacy. This is seen in the lower proportion of boys reaching the higher levels in reading at the end of Year 2 compared with girls. The recent introduction of a daily session in this area, led by teachers and support staff, is having a positive impact on pupils' skill development.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils are clear about what they are learning because teachers share this information at the start of lessons and regularly check pupils' understanding. Teachers and support staff work very well together, ensuring that pupils of different abilities are guided well and helped with their work. As a result, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully involved in lessons and make good progress. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is exemplary, reflecting the excellent relationships with staff and each other. Most lessons are well organised and move at a good pace, enabling pupils to settle down quickly to work that is well-matched to their needs. Challenging work stretches more able pupils to explain the reasoning behind their answers and thoughts. Occasionally, pupils' progress slows because teachers do not identify small enough steps in learning and instructions are too complicated. Pupils' work is marked regularly. Staff explain to pupils what they need to do next to improve their work but, particularly for older pupils, do not always include this guidance in their written comments.

The school provides a good range of curricular and other activities that successfully promote pupils' academic and personal development. Staff follow national guidelines for literacy and numeracy and make good provision for pupils' personal, social and health education, and citizenship. Pupils' preparation for the next stage of their education is good.

They make good progress in acquiring skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and successfully develop confidence as learners. A range of visits, including two residential trips for Year 4 pupils, and visitors support the curriculum, and weekly sporting, musical and hobbies activities are well supported. The school has started to

develop links between subjects to enable pupils to apply and develop their skills across the curriculum. Following the re-organisation of subject leadership responsibilities, staff are successfully identifying strengths and shortcomings in what pupils know and can do, and the best ways of developing planning across subject boundaries. The involvement of support staff in these teams is a particular strength, making good use of specialist knowledge and expertise. Through monitoring and evaluating, the hard-working staff are closely involved in setting and meeting challenging targets for improvement.

Arrangements for the pastoral care and support of pupils are very thorough and safeguarding arrangements robust. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is outstanding. The calm yet purposeful atmosphere in the school reflects a community where pupils feel very safe and secure. In discussion, pupils say they have no hesitation in turning to an adult for help. Through the school council and by taking responsibility for jobs around the school, pupils are developing an excellent sense of community. Their first-rate understanding of healthy living is very well supported by specialist teaching in physical education, appetising lunches and healthy snacks. Attendance is above the national average but, despite the school's efforts, a small but significant proportion of parents take their children on holiday during term time.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school's development and enjoys the respect and support of parents, pupils, staff and governors. The school has an accurate view of its overall effectiveness and uses this information effectively to plan ahead. Governors, many of whom have been appointed since the last inspection, bring a valuable range of skills and expertise to their role. They have benefited from training and are successfully developing their role as the school's 'critical friend'. The school provides good value for money.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

When they start in the Nursery, children's skills and experiences are broadly similar to those expected for their ages. Staff make good use of the outside area to provide a wide range of activities for children and this is complemented by well-structured indoor provision. By encouraging them to try out different activities, staff help children to quickly acquire good learning habits and make good progress. The transition to Reception is smooth and children quickly settle into new routines. Increased opportunities for adult-led and child-chosen activities successfully develop children's confidence, and they are keen to discuss what they are doing. When they move to Year 1, many children have met the early learning goals but staff have correctly identified that their early skills in linking letters and sounds require more emphasis. The quality of teaching is good. Staff have a secure understanding of how young children learn and give them good support. Records of what children know and can do are used effectively to plan the next steps in learning. The Foundation Stage is well managed and the staff team work very well together.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Accelerate pupils' progress, particularly for boys, in gaining the higher levels in reading at the end of Year 2 and in writing at the end of Year 4.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their skills and knowledge across different subject areas.

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## Inspection judgements

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|----------------|

### 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 <sup>1</sup> 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?                                  | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 1 |
| The attendance of learners  | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 1 |
| 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?   | 1 |

<sup>1</sup> 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**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 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

25 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Potten End Church of England First School, Berkhamsted, HP4 2QY

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school last week. I enjoyed hearing from you about all the interesting things you do at school. I was very impressed by your excellent behaviour and the great value you put on keeping healthy. You told me that Potten End is a good school and I agree. The staff take really good care of you and want you to do as well as you can. You work hard and make good progress because you get on well with adults and each other, and enjoy learning. Teachers make your lessons interesting and give you challenging work. They often ask you difficult questions but you showed me you are well up to answering these correctly.

There have been many improvements since inspectors last visited the school nearly three years ago. Through the school council and your various responsibilities in school, you are helping the staff and governors move the school forward. That's great news. I am especially pleased to see how well your writing is improving and I very much enjoyed watching you work on improving your understanding of letters and sounds. You are getting really smart with these and the work you showed me in your lessons confirmed this.

I have asked Mrs Senior and the staff to concentrate on two things to help you do even better. I want them to help more of you (particularly the boys) reach the higher levels in reading at the end of Year 2 and writing at the end of Year 4. I have also asked them to plan ways in which you can use and develop what you already know and can do across different subjects. You can help them successfully do these things by continuing to try your best in all your lessons and helping each other.

Keep working hard and enjoying school.

Yours truly

Mike Best

Lead inspector