

Tonwell St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117388
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326593
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Glynn Storer

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	44
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Diana Howarth
Headteacher	Mr Alan Wright
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ware Road Tonwell Hertfordshire SG12 0HN
Telephone number	01920462894

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Inspection number	326593

Fax number

01920469606

Age group 3-11

Inspection dates 4-5 March 2009

Inspection number 326593

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This exceptionally small school serves the village of Tonwell and surrounding areas, near to Ware, in Hertfordshire. All of the pupils are from White British backgrounds and none speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Children's attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is similar to that normally expected of three-year-olds. However, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is quite high for a school of this size. In recent years, the school has had a complete turnover of staff, including the appointment of a new headteacher less than two years ago.

The school holds two awards for its work in promoting healthy lifestyles.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Tonwell St Mary's Church of England Primary is a good school, which provides good value for money and ensures pupils leave the school well prepared for the future. Pupils benefit enormously from the school's small class sizes that enable staff to really get to know the pupils well. Staff form strong relationships with them, and in many cases, with their families and the levels of pastoral care for pupils are high. Pupils get a lot of good quality one-to-one or small group attention from staff, which promotes effective learning and good levels of personal development and well-being. The school has the strong support and approval of parents. One parent put it like this: 'The school is like one big family and my child does not have to vie for the attention of teachers as she would in a larger school.'

The headteacher has done a good job in seeing the school through an unsettled period in its development that has seen a complete turnover of teaching staff. It is therefore to the credit of all those who have joined the team that the school has continued to improve and that pupils' achievement has strengthened. These things have happened because, after his appointment, the headteacher quickly gained a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. His vision and drive have enabled him to sustain the impetus of school improvement and to rebuild a staff team who are united in their commitment to the way ahead. Consequently, many key areas of the school, such as arrangements for tracking pupils' progress and for setting challenging targets for raising achievement, have all improved. In addition, the quality of the learning environment, pupils' voice in school matters and the involvement of parents are also better than they were.

Year on year, standards vary markedly according to the make-up of the school's extremely small year groups. More importantly, however, recent years have seen a strengthening in pupils' achievements. Current pupils are making good progress throughout the school and their achievement over time is good. Pupils learn well because an increasing proportion of lessons are good. A key factor in establishing a good overall standard of teaching and learning has been the work that has gone into the induction and mentoring of newly qualified teachers. Members of the senior leadership team, also recently appointed, have already shown themselves to be capable leaders. Their coaching, support and example in the classroom have done much to bring out the best in less experienced colleagues.

The curriculum is satisfactory, although there have been improvements here too, especially in the range of first-hand experiences that enhance pupils' learning. However, current arrangements do not make enough links between subjects to ensure that learning is really coherent and purposeful. Furthermore, pupils do not learn enough about other cultures, beliefs and lifestyles or about global issues to promote community cohesion effectively.

Leadership and management are good overall. The school's record of improvement and the proven capability of recently appointed leaders in supporting the professional development of staff indicate that the school has a good capacity to improve further. Nevertheless, the pressing need to support newly qualified colleagues means that the roles of these leaders in checking on standards and quality and in planning for school improvement remain relatively underdeveloped. As a result, their full impact is yet to be felt. Governance is satisfactory but there is scope for governors to gather more first-hand information in order to fully support or challenge aspects of the school's work.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

There is effective provision for children in both Nursery and Reception. Intake groups are very small and vary markedly in their attainment on entry. Good adult support helps children to settle quickly into school routines. They form caring relationships with adults and with other children and adopt positive attitudes and behaviours that help them to learn effectively. In this way, the school promotes children's personal development and welfare effectively. Though standards vary considerably by the end of Reception, almost all children achieve well in relation to their starting points. Recent improvements to the teaching area make this a stimulating environment for children, where the effective organisation of resources invites them to learn. Children learn and develop well because staff make good use of these facilities. They use their detailed knowledge of children's development to match a good range of activities led by adults and those that children choose themselves to the needs of individuals. Learning out of doors has become a daily experience, but the school rightly plans to extend this approach into all areas of children's learning. The headteacher has done a good job in leading the improvement of Early Years Foundation Stage provision while preparing a colleague to take on the leadership role in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the curriculum and promote community cohesion by making more links between subjects and improving pupils' understanding of the diversity of modern society and issues affecting the wider world.
- Ensure that senior staff and governors have a prominent role in checking on standards and quality and in planning for school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Almost all pupils, including those who find learning difficult, achieve well. Standards appear to vary enormously from year to year because numbers in each year group are exceptionally low. Standards in 2008 were somewhat above the national average in Key Stage 1 but below average in Key Stage 2. However, despite these variations, pupils' progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities was good throughout school. Tracking of pupils' progress shows that virtually all are well on course to attain the challenging targets that the school has set for them. The majority of pupils in the current Years 2 and 6 are already close to or already attaining the standards expected for their age. A high proportion is set to exceed them by the end of the school year, particularly in Key Stage 2. This again represents good achievement over time.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They say that 'the school has lots of good stuff to make lessons interesting' and 'teachers make us want to learn'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Pupils relate exceptionally well to teachers and to one another, and display a clear sense of right and wrong. Consequently, behaviour is excellent and pupils treat others with consideration and respect. However, pupils' understanding of the diversity of cultures in Britain is limited and this restricts the school's capacity to promote community cohesion. Nevertheless, pupils make a good contribution to school life and are increasingly

involved with the local and wider communities. Pupils know how to be safe and have confidence in the adults who care for them. They are adamant that bullying is not an issue, and know exactly what to do should it arise. Attendance is satisfactory and marginally above the national average. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles, are enthusiastic about physical education and sport and know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils' above average standards of literacy and numeracy, along with positive attitudes to learning, lay firm foundations for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Senior staff act as strong role models for recently qualified colleagues and this, along with effective induction and mentoring, is already bringing out the best in them. Throughout school, teachers have high expectations of their pupils and successfully promote effective learning behaviour. Consequently, pupils listen carefully to and cooperate well with others and strive to succeed in the face of difficulties. High expectations are also reflected in demanding tasks that really make pupils think, particularly in upper Key Stage 2. Staff give lots of one-to-one challenge and support that moves pupils on effectively. Strong relationships between pupils and staff give rise to a positive atmosphere, which allows staff to give pupils the guidance that they need in order to improve. However, in a small number of lessons, the inappropriate timing of activities or missed opportunities to reinforce learning means that some pupils do not make quite the progress that they could. Teaching assistants approach their work conscientiously and provide good, well-focused support, especially to pupils who find learning difficult.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The improving curriculum meets the needs of pupils of all ages and abilities. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is embedded throughout and reflects in pupils' good standards of personal development. The school now provides modern foreign language learning for all Key Stage 2 classes. Staff also place a greater emphasis on planning practical, hands-on activities and they organise a good range of educational visits, visitors and special events that, pupils say, 'make learning more enjoyable'. Curriculum leaders have well-conceived plans to take curriculum development much further by linking subjects creatively and by introducing a global dimension to pupils' learning to support the drive to promote community cohesion. At present, however, many of these plans are still 'on the drawing board'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils thrive in a secure, supportive environment, where their teachers really know them well. Arrangements for ensuring pupils' safety and well-being are extremely thorough and fully meet government requirements. The school encourages pupils to express their views and acts on their opinions, enabling them to influence school improvement. Staff work closely with outside agencies and parents to promote pupils' care and welfare. The school monitors pupils' attendance closely and assigns mentor support where attendance causes concern. This has proved effective in improving overall attendance rates and adds to the quality of care that vulnerable pupils receive. Academic guidance is developing well. The needs of pupils who find learning difficult

are met sensitively by a skilled team of support staff. Teachers regularly check the performance of pupils and tell them about their progress. They also use tracking data well to set targets to help pupils move on to the next level. Pupils have a good understanding of their personal targets in English and mathematics. However, while teachers' marking of work is consistent in celebrating effort and achievement, it does not always identify what pupils need to do to improve further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management, as measured by the school's on-going record of improvement, are good. The headteacher has led the school almost single-handedly through a period of intense instability and staff turnover. He has successfully rebuilt the team and established a new vision for the school. In addition, there is now a new leadership team and effective management structure that provide a good basis for future improvement. He has also overseen substantial improvements to the learning environment and in the school's communication and partnership with parents and the wider community. Senior staff support the headteacher satisfactorily as a leadership team. They have already shown their potential as effective leaders by acting as mentors to newly qualified colleagues. This work has been essential in enabling younger professionals to reinforce and extend their classroom skills. However, because this task has been of paramount importance in maintaining good overall standards of teaching and learning, other aspects of their leadership role have been 'on hold'. Consequently, they are yet to have a full impact on school self-evaluation and on planning for school improvement. Governance is satisfactory. Governors rightly see their revised committee structure and new links with subject leaders as the way to gather the first-hand information necessary to both support and challenge aspects of the school's work. However, this improved way of operating has yet to come into practice.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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	3
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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

6 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Tonwell St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Tonwell, SG12 0HN

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I was pleased to see how well you are all doing and how your school is getting better and better. I was particularly impressed by the contribution that you, the pupils, are making to the smooth running of the school.

Here are some more of the good things that I found out about your school.

- Almost all of you make good progress and overall standards are above average.
- The school is good at bringing in outside help, such as your local potter, to make learning more interesting and enjoyable.
- You get on well with one another and you behave exceptionally well.
- Groups such as the school council, the playground buddies and the green Eco group enable you to improve school life and to help the wider community.
- Your teachers and other adults get to know you really well and this allows them to help you to learn and to care for you when you have problems.
- Mr Wright, the staff, governors and you, the pupils, work hard to make your school a better place.

Because I know that everybody at Tonwell St Mary's wants the school to be as good as it can possibly be, I have asked them to improve two things. First I have asked staff to plan work that links subjects together - I'm sure that you would really enjoy topics presented that way. When staff plan these topics, I have asked them to make sure that you learn more about people who have different beliefs and lifestyles from your own and about issues that affect people in the wider world. The second thing is that senior staff and governors should check regularly on how well you are all doing so that they can help Mr Wright to plan for future improvements. You can help by continuing to give your ideas when staff ask you...because I know that they will.

I hope that you will all go on working hard and enjoying your time in school.

Glynn Storer

Lead inspector