

Ponsbourne St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117396
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326597
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2009
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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)	85
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 Gill Sutcliffe
Headteacher	Mrs Tracey Gaiteri
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Newgate Street Village Hertford Hertfordshire SG13 8RA
Telephone number	01707 872395

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2009
Inspection number	326597

Fax number

01707 872779

Age group	3-11
Inspection dates	15-16 June 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

There are four classes in this small village primary school. Children in the Nursery and Reception year groups are taught together in the Early Years Foundation Stage unit which is soon to move into a new purpose built classroom. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average overall but in some year groups it is very high. The proportion of these pupils who have statements of special educational needs is much higher than average. The range of pupils' particular difficulties is wide and includes physical difficulties as well as problems with speech, language and communication. Nearly all pupils are from White British families and none speak English as an additional language. The school has the Activemark, for its work in developing physical education, and the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. When children start school the attainment of most is broadly in line with expectations for their age. They make excellent progress and, by the time they leave at the end of Year 6, most attain standards that are well above average in English, mathematics and science. The high standards seen in their work are reflected in national test results for pupils in Year 6 where the school's performance is often exceptionally high, especially in science. The school's success is founded on the excellent leadership of the headteacher and in particular her passion for making sure that the school helps all pupils to flourish and succeed. High expectations of all individuals is at the heart of the school's ethos. The progress of each pupil is analysed closely to make sure that everyone does as well as they possibly can. Provision for pupils who find learning difficult is excellent and so their achievement is often outstanding. Special provision is made for more able pupils so that they maximise their potential. Staff also concentrate on boosting the performance of the more average attainers so that they often exceed their predicted attainment and manage to reach the highest levels. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the move to the next phase of their education.

The school is a learning community. Staff and pupils reflect and conduct research on how to improve learning. Pupils in Year 5 worked with Cambridge University to examine the impact of encouraging children to become more actively engaged in managing their learning. This encouraged older pupils to research homework and bullying and enabled them to contribute to writing revised school policies. Staff have conducted research that has led to highly successful adjustments to teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy. All staff are engaged in a wide range of training programmes to further develop their expertise in promoting high quality learning. This demonstrates excellent capacity for more improvement in provision.

Pupils' outstanding personal development, including their excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, supports their learning exceptionally well. They are keen to learn and eager to succeed. Excellent care, guidance and support makes pupils feel secure and confident. This enhances the climate for learning well. Pupils develop an excellent understanding about how to lead healthy lifestyles. Safeguarding systems and child protection procedures are robust and meet requirements. Pupils know how to stay safe and look after themselves.

The outstanding quality of teaching generates great enthusiasm for learning. A high proportion of lessons involve practical activities, such as cutting up fruit to examine seeds. Great emphasis is placed on exploring and investigating and so scientific enquiry is promoted exceptionally well. Pupils have access to an excellent range of equipment so that they can use probes to measure friction over different surfaces or electronic sensors to measure the water resistance of different materials. This facilitates analytical studies particularly well. Teachers are exceptionally good at matching tasks to the very wide range of ability in each class so that every pupil is appropriately challenged. The excellent team of support staff make a strong contribution to the quality of learning. An overarching strength of the teaching is the way in which pupils' curiosity is constantly stimulated. Consequently pupils are bubbling with enthusiasm to find out more about how things grow, how they are made and how they work.

The curriculum is exciting and highly relevant to pupils needs. Carefully planned events, such as 'Forensic Science Week' when pupils had to use their skills to find a kidnapper, generate highly effective learning.

The governing body, ably led by the chair, has been a major influence in sustaining the school's success. Governors have a good understanding of all school issues. They monitor provision systematically and ask searching questions about standards and achievement. Bonds with the local community are strong and pupils make a good contribution to the village by litter picking and planting bulbs, for example. The governing body is very aware that pupils' understanding of different communities needs strengthening. They plan to forge links with communities in other areas. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, highly analytical and helps to pinpoint areas for improvement. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in provision for physical education, and the school is poised to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children receive a warm welcome when they join the Early Years Foundation Stage. They skip happily into school and thoroughly enjoy chatting with their friends. There is a strong emphasis on teaching children about letters and the sounds they represent. This helps them to get off to a flying start in developing early reading and writing skills. There is much good, imaginative teaching. Children creep bravely down the winding path through the woods as they go hunting for bears, for example. Activities are linked to a particular theme, such as 'jungles', which helps to make learning meaningful. They search for jungle animals in the school grounds and develop a good understanding of camouflage. Books, such as 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea', are used as a stimulus for learning in the role play area. They see how solids, like chocolate, change into liquids, when they cook chocolate nests and how oil floats on water when they make lava lamps. They were intrigued by the eggs that they hatched in the class incubator and were awed by the emerging chicks.

Children achieve well and most attain all the early learning goals by the end of the Reception year. Good attention is paid to children's welfare and safety. They wear good quality sun hats when on expeditions in the school grounds, for example. However, conditions inside are cramped and particularly constrain the development of independent learning, such as getting out equipment and putting it away again. The outdoor area is not well equipped and is not yet organised as an effective learning resource. The headteacher leads the management of Early Years Foundation Stage exceptionally well. Together with the governing body she has succeeded in acquiring a beautiful new building for the unit and plans for developing the inside and outside areas are being formulated.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop provision for children in the early years Foundation Stage so that it matches the excellent quality in the rest of the school.
- Implement plans to forge links with communities in other areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2 and, by Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' writing is of high quality. By Year 6 they have learned a wide range of strategies that help them to write sensitively, persuasively and imaginatively. Their writing is enriched by their use of appropriate imagery and they understand how to select powerful vocabulary or use devices such as very short sentences to speed the action. Pupils are particularly good at thinking through possible solutions to solve mathematical problems.

The most able learn how to apply Pythagoras' theorem and understand how to use square roots to solve particular problems. Their knowledge and understanding of science far exceeds the standards generally expected. They used chromatography techniques on a pen, for example, and analysed DNA samples to solve a crime. Pupils attain high standards in French, information and communication technology, music, especially singing, and drama.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This is a key strength of the school. Pupils quickly become confident learners who are bursting with curiosity and are keen to find out more about their world. This prepares them well for the future. They are sensible, polite and well behaved. They are involved in writing school policies, such as the health and safety policy. The older ones organise activities in a local museum for the younger ones and act as teachers during the visit. They take such responsibilities seriously, which is testament to their commitment to supporting the school community. They know how to keep safe and eat healthily. They enjoy the small size of the school and say that it is like 'one great big happy family'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers plan lessons that are designed to capture pupils' interests and fire their imaginations. Carefully selected stories are often used as inspiration for pupils' own writing. Specialist teaching for French, art and design, drama, physical education and music makes a strong contribution to the quality of teaching. A creative approach to homework is very effective and includes photography, interviewing, dancing and drama. Relationships between teachers and pupils are warm and friendly so that pupils enjoy school. This encourages them to offer their views, comments or theories. Lessons encourage pupils to think things through, work in teams to check calculations and solve problems, evaluate the quality of their work and consider how it could be improved. Consequently learning is highly effective.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school has been highly successful in providing a rich and diverse curriculum. Links with the Royal Opera House have helped older pupils to use many skills as they learn how to produce an opera. They generate the plot, write the script, compose the music, organise the staging, lighting and advertising before presenting their performance. There are many visits to places of interest, such as the Henry Moore Foundation, which inspired some excellent sculpture. Visits to the places of worship of different faiths and visitors who subscribe to world faiths help pupils to develop a good understanding of different customs and beliefs. The grounds have been developed well as a learning resource. The stillness of the pond and the enchanting wood promote spiritual reflection well. Gardening and recycling initiatives feature strongly. A good range of after school activities enriches learning. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, look after themselves and stay healthy. Pupils enjoy a curriculum that helps them to understand their responsibilities to the community and prepares them well for the future.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff are, first and foremost, committed to ensuring that each pupil is safe and well looked after. Pupils say that they would have no hesitation in sharing any worries with staff and that they feel safe and secure in school. They receive very good guidance about leading healthy lifestyles and how to avoid danger. They are also expertly guided, through tutorials, target setting and marking, about the ways they can improve their work and reach the next stages in their learning. They also support each other and are particularly caring of vulnerable pupils. They delight in the successes of those who find learning difficult. Support for pupils who experience learning difficulties is well organised and highly effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's enthusiasm for teaching is highly infectious and this is a key element in the way all staff work so well together as a team. Responsibilities are shared according to teachers' particular strengths and a good balance of expertise has been established. Governors monitor the school's performance closely. All pupils have equal access to all aspects of the curriculum. The school is effective in promoting pupils' understanding of local issues and global but is aware of the need to improve links with other communities in this country. Excellent links have been formed with parents who are kept well informed about how their children learn. The overwhelming majority of parents are delighted with the education provided for their children and appreciate the excellent quality of provision. One comment was typical, 'My child has made exceptional progress and is a confident, well rounded member of the school who has been given many opportunities to gain experiences and learning in many different ways.'

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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
The extent to which 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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

17 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ponsbourne St Mary's C of E Primary School, Hertford, SG13 8RA

Thank you for making my short time at your school such an enjoyable experience. You were all very helpful and friendly.

You go to a wonderful school. Your headteacher leads the school extremely well and her enthusiasm for making sure that you all get the very best education possible has helped all the staff to become equally enthusiastic. The teachers make lessons fun and plan exciting events, such as science weeks and visits to interesting places. As a result you work hard and attain high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science. You also do well in French, information and communication technology, music, and drama. I wish I'd seen some of the operas you have produced. You are very polite, well behaved and sensitive to the feelings of others. The research into learning that some of the older pupils conducted is very impressive. It's great that the older ones help to write school policies on bullying, health and safety and homework. The school grounds are great and I especially liked the pond and the woodland area. Your parents are right in saying that you go to an excellent school.

I think that there are two things needed to further improve the school. The room for Nursery and Reception children is not really as good as it should be so the sooner they can move into their new classroom and the sooner their outdoor area can be developed the better. Also it would be helpful if you could make contact with school communities in other areas so that you get a better understanding of how other people live.

I know that you will continue to do your very best and will help to maintain excellent standards.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

John Messer

Lead inspector