

Stevenage St Nicholas Church of England Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 117456 |
| Local Authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 326615 |
| Inspection date | 4 February 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Roderick Passant |

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.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 229 |
| 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 | Mr Keith Hopkinson |
| Headteacher | Mrs Jackie Roberts (Acting head) |
| Date of previous school inspection | 17 January 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Six Hills Way Stevenage Hertfordshire SG2 0PZ |
| Telephone number | 01438 352706 |
| Fax number | 01438 233227 |

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the Early Years Foundation Stage; the standards and progress pupils are making; aspects of pupils' personal development and aspects of the school's leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from: classroom observations; analysis of data, school documentation, and analysis of parents' questionnaire responses; discussions with the acting headteacher and senior staff, chair of governors, a group of pupils and a telephone conversation with the school improvement adviser. 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 its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is average in size. As a voluntary aided Church of England school, it is actively involved in the Anglican faith and draws pupils from the seven parishes of the town. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils who need additional support for their learning is below average as is the percentage who have statements detailing their specific educational needs. A growing number of pupils join or leave the school at various points during the school year. The school provides a range of extended provision to support families, such as the breakfast club and lunchtime care for Nursery children. The majority of children entering the Nursery have attended a pre-school setting. Attainment on entry to the Nursery is a little below that typically seen, especially in children's personal, social and emotional development. The school has gained a number of awards in recognition of its curriculum and approach such as Investors in People, Investors in Children, Basic Skills and Healthy Schools accreditation. The acting headteacher has been in post since September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Pupils are justifiably proud of their good school. Summing up the strengths of the school, one girl expressed it as a 'place where everyone keeps you [feeling] up and nobody brings you down.' Pupils clearly enjoy school a great deal and this is evident in their excellent attendance. The majority of parents too are supportive of the school and some took the trouble to write in warm and supportive terms about the school stressing: how happy their child was, its atmosphere and 'community feel', how inclusive and supportive the school was, the effectiveness of the school's leadership and the approachability of the acting headteacher.

Because of the good curriculum and the good quality of care and guidance, pupils' personal development is good. Pupils' behaviour is good. During the inspection pupils played together, often with friends from other year groups, with joyous enthusiasm in the snow-covered playground. Around the school, there were a number of small but significant acts of kindness where older pupils took care of the younger ones. The school fosters pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well with spiritual and moral aspects being strong elements. Pupils feel extremely safe in school because everyone is friendly and they are taught how to look after themselves, for example, when using the internet. They have an excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The school takes a strong stance on anti-bullying and racist use of language is rare. Pupils are confident to approach an adult if troubled. Pupils have good opportunities to contribute to the school community through their various roles and responsibilities. In some classes, pupils' independent learning skills are fostered well, so that they take some responsibility for their learning, seeing themselves as partners in the learning process. In these classes, pupils work independently, concentrating well on the task in hand. However, this is not consistent across the school. Pupils have some opportunity to show initiative in their extensive fund-raising. The school lays down the early foundations of pupils' economic well-being well and ensures that they are well prepared for the next steps in their education.

By the end of Year 6, pupils attain standards which are securely above average. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. In the 2008 tests at the end of Year 6, indicative results show that overall standards were well above average. Standards in science and English were higher than in mathematics, particularly in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels. Just under half of pupils attained Level 5 in English and nearly three quarters in science, well above the national average. These are the result of the high profile science has in school and the work by staff in developing pupils' writing which has led to overall improvements in standards. There has not been a similar focus on mathematics and the proportions attaining the higher levels were closer to the national average in 2008. Current Year 6 pupils are on course to meet their challenging targets. Pupils who find learning difficult make good progress because of the quality of support they receive. Pupils at an early stage of learning English also receive good support and make similar good progress. One parent noted how helpful the phonics programme had been in helping her child get to grips with unaccustomed letter sounds. Standards show an improving trend. The main reason for this is that there is increasing sophistication in the way the school monitors the progress of individual pupils as they move through the school, detecting early when pupils are slipping behind and need additional support. The school also monitors carefully the relative performance of boys and girls, which shows year-on-year variation.

The good teaching is the result of carefully planned lessons, which meet the needs of the pupils well and the good teamwork between teachers and skilled teaching assistants. The relationships

with pupils are good which means that they foster the growth in pupils' confidence. Because teachers 'make lessons fun' and are 'kind and helpful', pupils enjoy their work. The acting headteacher has a very accurate view of the quality of teaching and knows exactly where to focus in order to improve this further. The school makes effective use of professional development opportunities to give members of staff additional skills. The result is that staff are not only very committed to the pupils but also very reflective and open to new ideas and developments.

Because the school draws in pupils from across the town, there is not an obvious immediate neighbourhood community of parents, although the school's Christian ethos provides a common sense of identity. The school is extending its links with other faith groups. Stevenage has international links with Kadoma in Zimbabwe. The school sees its extended school programme, developed after full consultation, as a means of building links and supporting parents for the benefit of their children. The school sees itself as a co-educator alongside parents, consequently it treats liaison as essential. The school makes good use of specialist agencies to support individual pupils. The breakfast club provides pupils with a calm, sociable start to their day, and reinforces their enjoyment of school. It is clearly valued by working parents. The extended provision for Nursery at lunchtime provides children with good social opportunities to relax and play with each other and helps ease the transition to more fulltime placement. Both provisions reinforce effectively healthy eating. The school knows its own community well. Governors are keen to ensure that no pupils are disadvantaged because of financial reasons and have put in place an alternative to the residential trips, which were becoming costly. The school actively teaches pupils to value diversity. Through the personal, social and health education programme and Christian assemblies, it challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping. With its good links to the local community and other faiths, allied to its overseas links, the school generates a strong commitment to developing community cohesion in its widest sense.

Leadership and management are good. The acting headteacher is leading the school well. By ensuring that the school has not lost its momentum of improvement she has gained the confidence of parents. She has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be developed further, derived in part from detailed analysis of school and other data. The senior leadership team provide effective support. The school's improvement since the last inspection indicates that there is good capacity amongst the leadership to take the school further. Across the school, the sense of teamwork and mutual support is apparent and clearly staff are valued for the contribution they make, as are the pupils. The school is highly inclusive and works hard, drawing on external resources and agencies where necessary to ensure that individual pupils are fully integrated into the school community and make the best possible progress. All staff are clearly very committed to supporting the pupils academically and pastorally. Appropriate systems for safeguarding and child protection are in place. Governance is good. It has undergone some changes of personnel and adjusted how it monitors the school so that it is now more involved in curriculum matters. It is supportive but does question and challenge when appropriate.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and achieve well. By the end of Reception children attain standards above those expected in most of the areas of learning. Standards in physical development and personal, social and emotional development are more

typical. Adults have good relationships with the children, and teaching assistants are used well. Teaching is good and promotes children's independence well. Teachers questioning is skilful and encourages effectively the development of children's language skills. Assessment processes in place promote learning and identify next steps but sometimes lack the refinement needed to target aspects of individual children's learning. Adults use information and communication technology well to promote learning. The good curriculum, which is topic based, links the early learning goals and promotes children's enjoyment of learning effectively. There is good emphasis on keeping safe and on healthy eating. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision meets welfare requirements. The outdoor area currently does not provide rich learning opportunities and its use in all weathers is limited by lack of a covered area. Leadership and management are good. Leaders accurately identify the strengths of the provision and aspects requiring development. There is strong and effective teamwork, which ensures staffing flexibility and the effective integration of new staff into the school's Early Years Foundation Stage ethos. The Early Years Foundation Stage provides an effective foundation for children's work in the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the outside area to promote rich opportunities for learning for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Ensure that standards in mathematics match those in science and English.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

| | |
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| 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

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| 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

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 1 |
| 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

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|--|---|
| 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? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

Leadership and management

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| 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 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 | 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 |

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stevenage St Nicholas Church of England Primary School and Nursery, Stevenage, SG2 0PZ

Thank you for making me so welcome in your school. I enjoyed my brief stay very much. I particularly enjoyed your assembly and hearing you sing so well. My particular thanks go to those pupils who gave up some of their lunchtime to talk to me. What you had to say was very helpful.

You told me you were proud of your school and so you should be because it is a good school, which is helping you make good progress in your schoolwork and helping you to develop into thoughtful considerate young people. You clearly enjoy school a great deal and you said that you feel safe in school because it is so friendly. It was good to know that you would talk to an adult if you were troubled. Your behaviour is good.

You told me that lessons are 'fun' and teachers are 'kind and supportive' and I agree with you. Because teaching is good by the time you reach Year 6, standards are well above those you see in most schools. The pupils in Year 6 are doing well and are on track to meet their demanding targets. Having spent a little time in that class, I am sure you will do well. All adults work effectively as a team and clearly want you to do the best you can.

Mrs Roberts is leading the school well. At the moment standards in science and English are higher than in mathematics. I have asked Mrs Roberts to work with staff to even out the results by raising standards in mathematics. I have also asked her to find ways of developing the outside area for the very young children so that they can use it more during their lessons.

Sincere good wishes for your future school careers.

Roderick Passant

Lead inspector