

St Nicholas' Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	132829
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	381474
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2012
Lead inspector	Robert Lovett HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	311
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Graves
Headteacher	Frances Nash
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2010
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Robert Lovett

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ann Sydney

Additional inspector

Sue Quirk

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. All 13 teachers were observed at least once; those teaching in Years 2 and 6 were observed twice. Five teachers were observed jointly with senior members of staff. Meetings were held with subject leaders, teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at improvement planning and self-evaluation documents, the minutes of meetings of the governing body, records of the school's monitoring of teaching and documentation on the safeguarding of children. They scrutinised questionnaires returned by staff and pupils and 91 returned by parents and carers.

Information about the school

When the school was last inspected it was given a notice to improve. Significant improvement was required in relation to the progress pupils make, their attainment at the end of Year 6, and their behaviour. An Ofsted monitoring inspection in July 2011 judged the school to be making satisfactory progress.

St Nicholas' is a larger than average sized primary school. There are two classes in each year with the exception of Year 6 which has a single large class supported by additional teaching assistants. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as a first language. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is average. In 2011 the school narrowly failed to meet the government's floor standard, which sets a minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress. There have been a number of recent changes in staffing. More pupils than is usual leave and join the school during the year. The school's most recent external award is a Platinum Standard award in recognition of its contribution to reducing road congestion and to sustainable transport. The school shares the site with an Early Years Centre which provides pre-and after-school care including a breakfast club. Although most children enter the Reception class from the Early Years Centre Nursery, this provision is not managed by the governing body and is subject to a separate inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. St Nicholas' is now a satisfactory school. This is because pupils' achievement has improved and is now satisfactory. Pupils' behaviour, which was inadequate, is now satisfactory. Overall effectiveness is not good because recent improvements in provision do not result in good achievement.
- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Attainment rose in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2011. Improved teaching is continuing to have an impact on pupils' progress so that those in Year 6 are doing better than Year 6 pupils last year. Children in the Reception class make satisfactory progress during their time in Reception.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Almost all of that observed during the inspection was satisfactory or good. There is some excellent practice which is not yet shared widely across the school. Teaching does not always offer sufficient challenge to particular groups of pupils and sometimes expectations are not high enough. The teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) does not consistently enable pupils to apply these important early reading skills well enough across the curriculum or have sufficient impact on their reading. Teaching does not always ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to make choices and show independence.
- Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. Pupils generally listen well in lessons, have positive attitudes to learning and respond well to teachers and other adults. They are polite and friendly. Older pupils say they would welcome opportunities to assume a greater range of responsibilities around the school.
- While senior leadership is effective and well established, middle leadership teams are much newer. In addition, the school's action and improvement planning does not have a sharp enough focus on the impact of the school's

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actions on pupils' achievement. Members of the senior leadership team regularly monitor the quality of teaching and have had a significant impact on improving practice. Underperformance at all levels has been addressed by the headteacher in order to raise attainment. The senior leadership team have an accurate picture of teaching across the school and a determination, shared with staff, to accelerate progress and enhance the life chances of pupils.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement through:
 - improving the teaching of phonics so that pupils are better able to apply their phonics skills to reading
 - sharing best teaching practice across all classes
 - ensuring there is a consistently good pace of teaching and learning, particularly at the start of lessons
 - ensuring pupils can see how the work they are doing will help them reach their targets
 - increasing challenge and raising expectations for all pupils, particularly for the most and least able.
- Improve pupils' sense of independence so that pupils become more active learners, and provide more opportunities for pupils to contribute to the life of the school through enhancing their responsibilities.
- Improve middle management and strengthen accountability at all levels by ensuring that improvement and action planning is explicit about the link between actions taken and their measurable impact on pupils' achievement.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement rose in 2011 and continues to improve. Many children join the school at the beginning of the Reception year with levels of skills and knowledge which are lower than those expected. They make satisfactory progress overall and good progress in the development of their personal, social and emotional awareness and their ability to link letters and sounds. Pupils join Year 1 with levels of attainment close to those expected. Attainment is now close to average in Year 2 with pupils doing best in mathematics and least well in reading and writing. At the end of Year 6, whilst attainment in reading, writing and mathematics remained significantly lower than average in 2011, the gap with pupils nationally closed considerably. There is good evidence that the gap is continuing to narrow, and that the school is set to

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meet or exceed the current floor standards in 2012. In the most recent national tests not enough Year 6 pupils reached the higher level (Level 5) in English or mathematics. Observations of progress in lessons indicate that challenge for more-able pupils and expectations of what they can achieve are not always high enough. There are weaknesses in the teaching of phonics which limit the ability of some pupils to read unfamiliar words. In 2011, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs reached similar levels of attainment to their peers nationally. However, observations in classrooms indicate that in some classes the work set and the support these pupils receive are not matched closely enough to their specific individual needs so that in some lessons their progress slows.

Pupils make the best progress when learning gets off to a prompt start and the early pace of teaching is good. This ensures pupils are quickly and fully engaged in their work. In an excellent introduction to an English lesson the teacher began by introducing pupils to the learning objective and asking them to discuss which of their progress targets could be met through meeting the learning objective. This gave pupils' learning a sharp and specific focus for their writing. When pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress in lessons it is because learning is too slow at the start of the lesson, pupils take too long to settle and expectations of what pupils are capable of are not consistently high enough. Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are able to work well both with others and on their own. Sometimes teachers could make better use of time and increase the pace of learning if they gave pupils opportunities for greater independence; for example, by allowing them to select and organise their own resources rather than adults giving them out.

While most parents and carers say that their children are making good progress, a few rightly believe that pupils could make more progress and expectations could be higher.

Quality of teaching

Whilst almost all parents and carers say that the quality of teaching is good, inspectors judge it to be satisfactory. Parents and carers commented positively on the school's inclusive ethos and good support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

Almost all teaching is at least satisfactory and an increasing proportion is good. There are significant strengths in the marking of pupils' work and target setting and pupils say that they value opportunities to discuss their work with teachers. The best teaching is characterised by good introductions to lessons, including a discussion of what pupils are expected to learn and how this links to their improvement targets. Teachers take time to explore new vocabulary and reinforce prior learning. In an excellent start to the day in a Reception class, children gathered together quickly and sensibly, talked about the date and found out what the pattern of the day's work was to be. This effectively reinforced their sense of well-being and confidence in starting the day's learning. There is much good practice to be observed and adults who work in the school say they would welcome more opportunities to observe and share best

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practice, particularly in the teaching of pupils' early reading skills. Good teaching reinforces pupils' ability to work collaboratively and effectively supports their social development. However, pupils of all ages have too few opportunities to work independently, to select and organise their own resources and to assume a broader range of responsibilities across the school. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and have positive attitudes to learning. However, at times it takes them too long to settle, particularly when starting again after a break.

The newly-introduced curriculum is having a positive impact on day-to-day teaching. Staff and pupils welcome a more cross-curricular approach to learning where themes, such as 'Trains', link across subjects. These themes are further reinforced by visits, such as to a local heritage railway and to the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green. The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural understanding, with a good focus on the beliefs and customs of other faiths.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour was judged inadequate at the time of the last inspection. It is clear that behaviour has improved considerably, with most pupils, parents and carers now believing that behaviour is good. However, the whole school community is ambitious to improve behaviour from satisfactory to at least good and this remains the area of most concern for some parents and carers. This is partly due to a lack of information for parents and carers about the school's strategies to manage and improve pupils' behaviour and the success this is having. Behaviour observed in lessons and around the school was always at least satisfactory and often good. The best behaviour in lessons was observed when the pace of learning was brisk and expectations were high.

While there is a range of equipment and activities available for pupils at lunchtime, older pupils say they would welcome the opportunity to play a more active part in the school community, perhaps through being trained as play leaders or mentoring and supporting younger pupils. Support staff welcome the higher visibility of senior teachers at lunchtimes and say it has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. Pupils have a secure awareness of the different forms of bullying, including physical bullying and cyber bullying. While pupils say there is some inappropriate name calling, they say that bullying is rare and that when it happens staff resolve problems quickly and effectively. All pupils say they feel safe in school, a view shared by the vast majority of parents and carers. Pupils say they know about how to stay safe online. They recognise what constitutes a healthy diet and the dangers associated with alcohol and drugs.

Leadership and management

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. One parent commented, 'I think the head and all the teachers have worked extremely hard and the school has improved immensely.' The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear, widely-shared vision for raising achievement through ensuring that pupils' learning

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improves and that the school's behaviour policy is consistently applied. The senior leaders have provided effective leadership and have been a driving force in school improvement. However, senior leaders recognise that the newly-formed middle leadership teams are still developing their roles, and are not yet fully effective in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and tracking pupils' achievement. In addition, the important link between changes in the school's provision and the anticipated impact on pupils' achievement is unclear. In consequence, it is difficult for the school to be certain about which initiatives have been most successful and to achieve maximum benefit and value for money.

The school recognises that a sharper focus on pupils' attainment is essential in enabling the governing body to better hold the school to account. Notwithstanding this, governors are now better informed about how well the school is doing. They offer more robust challenge and know the school well. They have been well supported by the local authority. Effective leadership of the Reception classes is beginning to have a positive impact on children's progress. In spite of some weaknesses in improvement planning, the school has taken appropriate steps to tackle the weaknesses reported in the last inspection and has the capacity for further improvement.

Recent changes to the curriculum have been widely welcomed with one parent saying the new curriculum 'has been the best improvement – fantastic'. The new model ensures a more creative and better integrated approach to learning which seeks to embed key personal and academic skills within a cross-curricular approach. The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. This aspect of the school's work is a significant strength. Information and communication technology is used appropriately across a range of subjects, such as that seen in the work of Year 6 pupils on Judaism. Some parents and carers say that they would welcome the extension of the curriculum to enable pupils to enjoy a greater range of out of school hours clubs and sports activities, including competitive sports.

Safeguarding arrangements are thorough. The register of adults able to work with pupils is well maintained. Although the school recognises that there are inconsistencies in the progress of some groups of pupils, gaps in achievement are closing. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The school is a happy and cohesive community where pupils do their best to live up to the school's vision of being 'kind and helpful people who always try our best'.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

16 March 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of St Nicholas' CofE Primary School, New Romney TN28 8BP

Thank you for making me and the inspection team so welcome when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up part of your lunchtime to tell us about the school and to those who read to us. We wanted to see how well you are all doing and how the school has improved since it was last inspected. We are pleased to say that the school has improved and is now satisfactory.

You are now making now better progress and the quality of your work is improving. It improved last year and when we looked at your books we could see that it is continuing to improve.

Your behaviour has improved and is now satisfactory. The inspection team saw no poor behaviour and much that was good. This matches well with what you, the adults who work in the school and your parents and carers say. Those of you we spoke to, and those who completed the questionnaire, say that bullying is rare but that when it happens you are sure your teachers will sort it out. Some of you also said that name calling happens more often than you would like. We have told the senior leadership team and governors that, like most of you, we would like this to stop.

While the school is improving it is not yet good so we have made some suggestions for further improvement.

- Help you improve your work through teachers sharing their best ideas, making sure lessons get off to a quick start and improve the teaching of phonics.
- Give you more opportunities to be independent, and provide more opportunities for you to take on responsibilities and help others.
- Make some changes to the ways in which the school plans for improvement so that it continues to get better and better.

I hope you continue to enjoy school and always sing as well as you did in the singing assembly I joined.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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