

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115122
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357702
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Steven Hill

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	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lorraine Holliday
Headteacher	Hilary Dieu De Bellefontaine
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Ten lessons were observed, taught by six teachers. Meetings were held with staff, groups of pupils and representatives of the governing body. The team observed the school's work and looked at a variety of documentation, particularly that relating to safeguarding and to pupils' achievements. Samples of pupils' work were examined and questionnaires were analysed from staff, pupils in Key Stage 2, and from 49 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Inspectors investigated whether the school had succeeded in improving pupils' progress in lessons over the last year, particularly in writing.
- The progress made by pupils who arrive at the school during Key Stage 2 was analysed.
- The team checked the quality of teaching, particularly the extent to which teachers use assessment to help pupils to learn.

Information about the school

This is a small primary school in a rural village location. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage, and none speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, and a high proportion have a statement of special educational needs. These proportions are particularly high in the older classes. This is because a large number of pupils started at the school in Key Stage 2 over the last couple of years, often with high levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities, and a significant number with behavioural or emotional problems. For example, about half the pupils who took national tests in Year 6 in 2010 began their primary schooling elsewhere, and three out of the 19 had a statement of special educational needs. Over the last two years, there have been several changes in teaching staff.

The school has gained the intermediate International Schools award, and has Healthy Schools status.

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: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school provides pupils with a satisfactory education. Children start in the Reception class with standards that are below expectations, and make good progress, although they go into Year 1 with attainment that is still a little below average. Attainment in the rest of the school varies from year to year, and is broadly average by the end of Year 6, but progress has been inconsistent from year to year, especially in Key Stage 2. Some pupils, particularly girls, who do well at Key Stage 1, do not make the progress expected at Key Stage 2 in mathematics. Writing standards are weaker than those in other subjects. Data show that pupils who spend all their junior years in this school usually make average progress. The results of national assessments have been distorted in some years, because of the large intake, into older classes, of pupils with high levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Despite many of these pupils having behavioural and emotional difficulties when they start, they settle in well, and there are notable improvements in their personal development because they are given good pastoral support. Once established in the school, they make the same satisfactory progress as their classmates, but some still lag behind academically because of their weak learning in the past.

Good care, guidance and support ensure that pupils' personal development is good. They behave well and enjoy learning, as well as the many positive social aspects of school. The school is a harmonious community where boys and girls get along well together regardless of ability or background. They feel very safe in the school, and are confident that both adults and their classmates will support them if needed. Pupils take a pride in their achievements, and contribute well to the school and local communities. They develop a good understanding of people from around the world, and show concern and empathy for those less fortunate than themselves.

Leaders have made a concerted and successful effort over the last year to improve teaching and so raise achievement. Over the last academic year, inconsistencies in teaching meant that, although progress was satisfactory overall in mathematics and reading, it was too variable from class to class. This variation was even greater in writing, where progress was not good enough. There is clear evidence that, since September when teaching has been more stable, pupils' achievement is much better. The school's data suggest that recent progress has been good in reading and mathematics, and satisfactory in writing, and pupils have started to make up some lost ground from previous years. This is because teaching has improved and is satisfactory overall, more good lessons are taught, and pupils respond positively to an improved curriculum. Some inconsistencies remain in teaching, but these are being eliminated as senior staff provide good guidance to colleagues on how to improve their practice. The school has accurately identified what it needs to do to improve further, and is taking effective action to address this. The recent improvements and clear plans for the future show the school's satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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A significant contribution to better learning comes from the school's use of more accurate assessment data. Teachers at both key stages routinely use this to prepare different tasks for pupils of different attainment, although sometimes there is a lack of challenge for the more able in mathematics. A new system of promoting pupils' writing skills was introduced in January. This has included better opportunities to write at length, and high quality marking that shows pupils clearly how to improve. A focus on giving pupils the strategies to assess and continually refine their own work is proving successful. Initial data suggest that all this is having a positive impact on standards. A commercially-designed, integrated curriculum introduced this year is also helping achievement by making learning more interesting and meaningful to pupils, and giving them good opportunities to write in different subjects.

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?

- Improve progress and raise standards in writing by:
 - consolidating the recent improvements by embedding the use of the new approach to teaching writing
 - raising spelling and handwriting standards, particularly by ensuring pupils make more consistent use of a fluent, joined hand in their day-to-day writing.
 - Ensure that higher attaining pupils, particularly girls, make better progress in mathematics during their time in Key Stage 2.
 - Eliminate the remaining inconsistencies in teaching by ensuring that:
 - lessons have a good pace throughout
 - work is always sufficiently challenging for higher attaining pupils in mathematics
 - teachers consistently monitor pupils' ongoing progress in lessons, so that any difficulties can be addressed at once.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils' progress is satisfactory, though its rate has begun to accelerate recently so that it is good in some lessons. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 greatly improved their understanding of poetry and language when they considered the feelings and perspectives of the different characters in the poem *The Highwayman*. They responded thoughtfully to challenging questions, and showed good collaborative skills as they discussed their ideas in groups. Despite such improvements in the progress made in writing, many pupils fail to use a joined style of handwriting in their everyday work, even though they do so in their handwriting books. For many, spelling skills are weak. In a good lesson with Year 1 pupils, they improved their understanding of telling the time when they listened attentively to their teacher's explanations, joining in enthusiastically with a version of *Hickory-Dickory-Dock*. Pupils try hard and generally concentrate well. However, some inconsistencies in progress remain. In some lessons seen, progress slowed at times as pupils lost concentration because the pace of activity slackened. In another lesson, a few pupils

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made slow progress because they misread a question, and the adults in the room did not pick up their lack of understanding for some time.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same satisfactory progress as their classmates because of the specialist support they receive which is well matched to their needs. Pupils who have behavioural difficulties improve their ability to conform because of the clear but firm guidance they are given, and the use of specialist counselling or guidance. In class, pupils who struggle academically succeed because teaching assistants provide a well-judged balance of support and challenge through careful questioning and direction. Pupils whose physical coordination is weak benefit greatly from the 'gym trail' programme that improves their concentration as well as their physical skills.

Pupils contribute well to the community through the support they provide to each other informally, as well as through more formal contributions through the Pupil Forum, and in the wide variety of jobs they undertake cheerfully around the school. They have a good understanding of moral issues, and consider them thoughtfully, showing good empathy for others. Links with a variety of schools in this country and abroad contribute well to pupils' good cultural understanding. Pupils have a good awareness of healthy lifestyles, and are enthusiastic about exercise. They cooperate well in groups, and are developing good levels of independence. However, their average basic skills mean that their preparation for the future is only satisfactory.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are improving. More good lessons and the occasional outstanding session contribute to the improvements in achievement, although some inconsistencies remain, particularly in the pace of learning. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils, establish clear routines and manage behaviour well. In most lessons, teachers and teaching assistants monitor ongoing learning effectively, so that misconceptions are addressed quickly, but some lapses in this can limit progress. Marking of pupils' work is good, especially in writing. Since a new system was introduced, teachers now show pupils very clearly how they can continually revise and refine their own work, and this is proving very effective.

The recently changed curriculum includes strong links between subjects that make learning more meaningful and enjoyable for pupils. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 plotted graphs of the level of tension in a narrative poem, after listening to a musical accompaniment to *The Highwayman*. Good use is made of information and communication technology to support work across the curriculum, observed when pupils in Years 3 and 4 produced, on laptops, a journalistic account of their visit to a local college. A strong personal and social education programme is greatly supported by the recently adopted curriculum. This gives pupils a good understanding of key skills for learning, so they understand and can improve their own learning habits. Good use of the local area to support learning is a strong feature across the school. A good range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors contributes to both progress and pupils' enjoyment.

The school takes good care of pupils and consistently reinforces positive values. This greatly supports their good personal development. The current focus in the new curriculum on 'empathy' is helping pupils to develop their relationships with each other, as well as having a positive impact on their written work. The school has had notable successes in helping pupils with major emotional or behavioural problems to settle happily into school. Good use is made of a wide range of external professionals, as well as the expertise of its own staff, to help such pupils to improve their behaviour, to get on well with their classmates, and to enjoy learning. Good liaison with parents and carers, as well as the consistent approach of staff, contributes to this.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

After the previous inspection, there were some shortfalls in provision, and difficulties beyond the school's control, that led to weaknesses in progress. The school has managed

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this situation increasingly well to restore progress to its previous satisfactory level. The staff now form a coherent team who share a common vision, and work together increasingly effectively to bring about improvements. Recent vigorous action to address problems with teaching have worked well, with inadequate teaching now eliminated, and more good teaching seen. The good support given to teachers, and the rigorous systems to hold them to account for the progress that pupils make in their classes, have led to these improvements. Leaders have managed this well, though the full impact in terms of pupils' achievement is yet to be seen. Governance is good. The governing body has good systems that give it a clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and it holds the school to account well for its performance. Safeguarding is good, with governors having a very good understanding of issues. All required systems are in place and the school is very pro-active in continually updating its practice, drawing on the views of different stakeholders well, and making very good use of other local agencies. Parents and carers have good relationships with the school, which consults them regularly about important issues, and takes their views into account in making decisions. Links with outside agencies make a strong contribution to the well-being and progress of pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. Good links with local schools have enabled a broadening of provision, in sports and in the arts, but also in sharing costs to adopt the new integrated curriculum. Links with schools in Malawi, France and London have complemented the good promotion of community cohesion locally and within the school itself. The school is successful in eliminating any discrimination. It works hard to overcome differences in the attainment of different groups, but a weakness remains in the progress in mathematics of bright girls. The school has analysed the reasons for this through interviews with pupils about their attitudes to mathematics, and has a secure plan to adjust the curriculum to meet girls' needs and aspirations better.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Good provision is leading to good progress and well-being. Children settle happily into the setting and have good relationships with each other and with the adults. Particularly good use is made of outdoor learning, both in the school's own well-equipped outside area, and in the immediate locality. A good balance is drawn between activities chosen by children and those closely directed by adults. Planning successfully draws together different strands of learning within an overall topic, such as the current focus on Michael Rosen's *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Children took a delight in acting out the story led by one of the adults during an excellent lesson that was observed. Other children focused very well on drawing maps of the journey under the careful guidance of another adult, while the class teacher monitored children's 'free' play, intervening sensitively to develop their vocabulary and take forward their understanding. The setting is well led and managed, with the two teachers leading their colleagues as an effective team. Assessments are regular and thorough, feeding into a good record of progress that enables staff to match activities closely to children's needs. Links to parents and carers are good, and they are given good information about their children's development, both formally and informally.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are very positive about the school and how it provides for their children. They particularly value that their children enjoy school, are safe there, and that the school provides them with good information. A few parents and carers had concerns about different aspects of the school, with the principle issue being how well the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. The team saw consistently good behaviour during the inspection. When questioned, pupils said that behaviour was generally good and they are confident that any misbehaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively by the adults. Records show that the school has been very successful in re-integrating pupils whose behaviour had been a major cause of concern in their previous schools.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 49 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 119 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	45	26	53	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	45	26	53	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	51	23	47	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	45	23	47	4	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	39	26	53	3	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	41	24	49	5	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	35	28	57	3	6	1	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	11	22	31	63	2	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	37	25	51	4	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	18	26	53	9	18	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	29	26	53	5	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	15	31	26	53	5	10	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	47	22	45	2	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



24 March 2011

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Southminster, CM0 7TJ

Thank you for your warm welcome and all your help when we visited your school. We were pleased to find that you are well behaved, and that you all get along together. We think that you are polite, friendly and sensible young people, who are a credit to your parents and carers, and your school. You know a lot about keeping healthy and you feel very safe in school because the adults are good at looking after you. You are learning about different people around the world and you are enjoying your lessons because the teachers give you interesting things to do. It was good to see how well you understand the idea of empathy, and how you try to help each other.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. Your learning has improved recently, so you are making the level of progress expected. This is because your teachers have made better use of information, about how you are getting on, to give you work that is just right for you. Sometimes, they still do not quite get this right for everyone, and we have asked them to carry on improving this, as well as making sure that all lessons go along at a good pace. You have not been doing as well in writing as in other subjects, but the new way you are learning is making a difference. We have asked you teachers to carry on with this, and also to make sure that you all use joined-up writing more and improve your spelling. A few of you who did well in mathematics at Key Stage 1, especially some of the girls, do not make good progress in the older classes in this subject. We have agreed with the teachers that they are going to concentrate on helping these pupils to do better.

The adults are keen to improve the school and I know all of you will want to help them. You can do this by keeping up your good behaviour and hard work, and by trying particularly hard with your writing.

I hope you carry on enjoying your education.

Yours sincerely

Steven Hill

Lead inspector

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