

St Lawrence VA CofE Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109628
Local Authority	Bedford
Inspection number	356589
Inspection dates	17–18 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Jenny Batelen

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ben Lewis
Headteacher	Gilly Donald
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed seven lessons and four teaching staff. Inspectors held meetings with representatives of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents including the school improvement plan, safeguarding and welfare arrangements, and records of pupils' progress. Inspectors also analysed questionnaires from staff, pupils and 47 parents and carers.

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

- How the school is involving parents and carers in the life of the school.
- The consistency of the quality of teaching and learning and how the information about pupils' skills is used to promote positive outcomes.
- The effectiveness of recent changes to the leadership and management of the school in ensuring good progress for all pupils.

Information about the school

This primary school is smaller than average. It serves the local area, including the nearby town. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average as is the proportion of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a part-time nursery and a reception class. There are two single-age classes for Years 1 and 2 and one mixed-age class for Years 3 and 4. The headteacher has been in post since September 2010. The school is one of the 19 schools in the North Bedfordshire Trust. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools award. The after-school club is managed by the governors.

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

St Lawrence VA C of E Lower School is a satisfactory school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe and well cared for. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils behave well and are welcoming, polite and keen to talk about what they are learning and the activities they enjoy. 'It's great and helps you learn' sums up the views of pupils. The school community is cohesive and is valued in the local area for its involvement in village life. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the renewed relationship between them and the school. They recognise and are supportive of the recent significant changes in the school. 'Very proud to have my child attend such a lovely school' and 'It is a well led and a very happy and friendly environment' are representative of the many positive comments from parents and carers.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a very secure start to school. Thorough induction procedures and the opportunity for children in the Nursery and Reception classes to play and learn together mean that children are happy and confident and make good progress. Progress for most pupils through Key Stage 1 and 2 is satisfactory, but slows down, particularly in mathematics. This is because of inconsistencies in teaching and the previous lack of systems to track progress and ensure effective interventions. Progress for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar. Pupils' progress is now being carefully tracked and better use is being made of the information derived to identify and support those with difficulties. As a result, some pupils are now beginning to make good progress, but this is not yet consistent.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory but the quality varies. In the better lessons, planning recognises the needs of all pupils and tasks are set to challenge them at an appropriate level. Consequently, pupils are actively involved throughout the lesson which helps them to learn well. Teaching assistants give effective support, particularly to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and ensure that they understand and can participate fully. Where learning is less successful, tasks do not always successfully challenge pupils. Marking does not always help pupils to know how well they have done and rarely gives guidance on how they can improve their work and meet their individual targets. Pupils are not given enough opportunity to respond to teachers' written and verbal comments on how to improve their work.

The governing body has been proactive in securing strong leadership for the school, and developments in key areas are now becoming evident. The headteacher has worked hard to engage parents and carers in the life of the school and in their children's learning. This is reflected in the recent considerable improvement in attendance, which is now high. Challenging targets and clear priorities for improvement have been set, based on effective self-evaluation. Raising attainment in English and mathematics is a high priority. Progress

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towards targets is carefully monitored by the senior leaders. In this small school, all staff have responsibilities and recent support from a range of external partners is helping them to develop the necessary skills to lead effectively. The governing body gives good support, but is not always consistent in providing challenge. The school currently has satisfactory capacity for further sustained improvement.

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?

- In order to raise attainment in English and mathematics, improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that the large majority is good or better by:
 - ensuring the expectations of pupils' outcomes are suitably high and accurately matched to their skills and abilities
 - developing consistency in marking so that progress towards learning intentions is clear, and pupils know what to do to improve their work and learn next
 - ensuring time to allow pupils to respond to teachers' written and verbal comments.
- Develop further the skills of middle leaders and the governing body so that they can more effectively contribute to school improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Achievement is satisfactory. Pupils start school with skill levels broadly in line with those expected for their age and make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Progress is satisfactory in Years 1 to 4. By the time pupils leave school at the end of Year 4, attainment is often above that expected, especially in reading, but this is variable due to inconsistencies in teaching. Progress in mathematics is weaker than in reading and writing and the school has identified this as a priority for improvement. Pupils are confident users of information and communication technology and are beginning to apply their basic skills in a range of different contexts. Progress for different groups of pupils is similar. It is improving for all pupils as teaching improves, work becomes more interesting and challenging, and assessment data is used more effectively to provide additional support and to tailor work to meet individuals' needs.

Pupils enjoy learning and are keen to do well. This was apparent in a lesson for the Year 3 and 4 class, where good teaching enabled pupils to use their knowledge of patterns in numbers to investigate facts relating to the nine and four times tables. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities confidently explained facts about the two-digit numbers they had chosen to explore.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when using new technologies. They are confident of the help they will receive from adults in the school if they have any worries or concerns. They play well together across the age groups. Pupils acknowledge that some find playtimes difficult but are confident that adults ensure that the playground is safe place. Pupils know the importance of keeping themselves healthy and understand about eating healthy lunches and snacks. They have plenty of opportunity to be active and are aware of the dangers of misusing medicines.

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Pupils make a good contribution to the life of the school by enthusiastically taking on various tasks. The democratically elected school council represents the school in external events such as a 'Pupil Voice' conference, and influences school decisions, for example that to implement a class award system leading to rewards for good behaviour. Pupils make suggestions for fundraising and encourage parents and carers to work with them. They are making an increasingly strong contribution to village life, particularly through their links with the church. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to reflect and share their thoughts in assemblies. They enjoy involvement in various cultural events, such as singing together with other schools, visits from a string quartet and visits to theatres and museums. They are developing an understanding of other faiths and cultures through their studies and visits to various places of worship.

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	1
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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is inconsistent. In the best lessons, well-planned activities and effective questioning enable pupils to make good progress. For example, Year 1 pupils enjoyed building with solid shapes and were then confident in naming them and describing their properties correctly. In less successful lessons, often in mathematics, pupils sometimes become confused about the tasks they are given because their basic understanding is insecure, and the teacher has not taken sufficient account of this. Insufficient opportunities are given for pupils to be in control of their own learning, for

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example by talking about it with a partner or a group and deciding whether they have met the lesson's learning intention. Time is not always given for pupils to respond to teachers' comments written in their books, and while individual targets are set, pupils are not confident about what these are and whether or not they have met them.

The support, care and guidance given to pupils is improving well, particularly for their personal development and well-being. Strong relationships and good behaviour in all classes ensure that pupils are valued, safe and well-cared for. Parents and carers are increasingly involved in addressing the needs of their children and supporting their progress, as reflected in pupils' good behaviour and greatly improved attendance. Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has been particularly strengthened in recent months, and outside agencies are now much more frequently involved in supporting particular individuals. Individual plans to support pupils' progress are developing, although they are not yet used effectively by all staff to ensure that activities help pupils meet their targets. Marking is variable and does not always help pupils understand how to improve their work. The after school club gives good care to pupils who enjoy the fun they can have in a relaxed and safe environment.

The curriculum is improving. Cross-curricular links are developing and the school is focusing on ensuring that pupils develop skills that can be used across subjects, for example in writing and researching. A broad range of experiences is provided to enhance the curriculum, especially supported through effective links with other schools in the Trust. These particularly widen the range of sporting activities on offer to all age-groups. Visits and visitors help pupils understand the topics they are studying. 'Values' days support pupils' personal development and reinforce their understanding of values such as patience. Pupils' understanding of how to live healthy lives and the effectiveness of the school's provision in this area are reflected in the Healthy Schools award.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides strong and effective leadership and guidance. All leaders and managers are focused on ensuring that the school is an environment in which pupils can flourish. The current improvement plan is providing a secure basis to enable the school to continue and further the developments that have already taken place. As a result, outcomes are beginning to improve for all pupils. Teaching and learning is regularly monitored, currently with support from the local authority as senior staff have not previously had the opportunity to develop the appropriate skills. This is rightly acknowledged as a key area for their development.

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Governance is satisfactory. The governing body has a good understanding of the needs of the school and of its context and is proactive in accessing support to improve outcomes for pupils. Members are keen to support the school as it continues to improve. The governing body ensures that statutory responsibilities are met and that safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented appropriately. Members are keen to develop their skills and provide effective, constructive challenge to the school regarding its performance. However these skills are currently under-developed. The strong partnerships with the local authority and the Trust have been influential in recent developments in the school. For example, the improvement plan for mathematics is part of the Trust-wide initiative to raise standards in the subject.

Leaders and managers know the pupils and their needs very well and are improving their use of this knowledge to target actions to ensure equally good progress for all. Pupils work and play well together and there is no discrimination in the school's practices or the pupils' attitudes to one another. The school's promotion of community cohesion is good. It has links with a school in India and has supported developments there. There is also a developing link with a school in France. The link with a school in the nearby town gives pupils an insight into urban life. As a result, pupils recognise some of the similarities and differences between themselves and pupils around the world and the United Kingdom.

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	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage because the adults have a good understanding of their needs. The leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage has ensured that there is a strong team who work together effectively to provide an environment that supports children's learning in all areas of development. Parents and carers are very positive about the start their children have. 'My son is very happy in

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nursery' reflects the comments made by many parents and carers. They value the induction procedures that ensure that children settle quickly and are happy.

Children enter school with a broad range of skills, mostly at the level expected for their age. Good progress, particularly in personal, social and emotional development in the nursery, and the sharing of the space available with the Reception children, mean that children transfer to the Reception Year confidently. They continue to make good progress and enter Key Stage 1 with levels above expectations for their age in most areas of learning. Children understand how to keep themselves healthy. They enjoy an active lifestyle and take advantage of easy access to drinks. Hygiene routines are reinforced. Children know how to keep themselves safe and enjoy being able to contribute their ideas about what they want to learn.

Activities are planned indoors and outdoors to a common theme and in response to children's interests. Currently, for example, the 'Jungle' theme was inspiring children to make 'binoculars' and use them to search for animals outside. At the same time, constructing a jigsaw of the world indoors led to a discussion about whether there are jungles in Greenland and how the children could find out. Children are encouraged to explore and use a wide range of resources, including information and communication technology. Questioning is very effective and encourages children to develop their thinking and share their knowledge. 'I know this is Egypt because there is a picture of a pyramid' was the response to the question 'How do you know that piece is Egypt?' Good assessments are used to inform further planning for individual children and are shared with parents and carers. These are recorded in 'Learning Journey' portfolios which provide ongoing evidence of children's progress, complete with annotations and photographs. These are available to parents and carers, but as yet, they do not have the opportunity to regularly contribute.

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

The proportion of questionnaires returned is above average for similar primary schools. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and the returned questionnaires were mostly positive. Parents and carers comment favourably on the changes that have taken place since September, the happy atmosphere and the approachability of the staff. They value the progress their children make, particularly in the early years. A very small minority expressed concern about the behaviour of some pupils and the way this is managed. Inspection evidence found that behaviour was managed well, there was no disruption to lessons and playtimes were friendly, sociable occasions.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Lawrence VA CofE Lower 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 47 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 120 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	81	9	19	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	72	13	28	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	23	49	21	45	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	43	24	51	3	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	49	22	47	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	53	19	40	3	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	57	19	40	0	0	0	0
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)	19	40	21	45	2	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	53	20	43	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	38	20	43	6	13	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	53	21	45	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	85	7	15	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	79	8	17	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



19 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Lawrence VA CofE Lower School, Rushden, NN10 9LL

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. Thank you, also, to those of you who returned questionnaires about your school. We enjoyed joining in your lessons, singing with you in assembly and talking to you. Here are some of the things we found out about your school.

You behave well around school and look after each other well.

You enjoy school and feel safe, knowing that all the adults care a lot about you.

You appreciate chances to improve the school and to help others in your village and in the wider world.

You feel that your teachers do a lot to help you with your work.

Your school is satisfactory overall and we have asked your headteacher and the governors to do certain things to make it better. These are:

- to help you make faster progress in all the subjects you learn, but especially in English and mathematics, by making sure you always have lots of things to think about and do
- by marking your work so that you know exactly how well you have done and how to improve
- to help all the adults become even better at finding out what needs to be done to improve the school in order to help you make the best progress you can.

You can help by making sure you continue to try your best in all lessons.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Batelen
Lead inspector

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