

Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115187
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	379031
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Caroline Page
Headteacher	Sophie Massey
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2009
School address	Tollesbury Road Tolleshunt D'Arcy Maldon CM9 8UB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They visited eight lessons, observing four teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and members of the governing body. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and school improvement plans. Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires from 66 parents and carers, 66 pupils and 22 staff.

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

- How well does teaching meet the needs of all pupils, particularly the more-able?
- What evidence is there that the action to improve achievement in mathematics is having an impact?
- How effectively does the school support the development of pupils whose circumstances may make them particularly vulnerable?
- How successful are the steps taken to improve achievement in writing since the last inspection?

Information about the school

Pupil numbers are lower than average for a primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and there are a small number from settled Gypsy/Roma families who are seasonal travellers. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Their needs are mostly associated with learning difficulties related to literacy. Fewer pupils than average are known to be eligible for free school meals. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a mixed Reception and Year 1 class. Pupils in the rest of the school are taught in three mixed-age classes. The school has recently received the International Schools Award and achieved 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 a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. The steady improvement since the last inspection in the pupils' progress and attainment slowed slightly last year because of several staff changes, including in leadership positions. The momentum has been regained this year, although progress in mathematics remains slower than in English. This is largely because teachers are less confident when teaching mathematical concepts or when planning how pupils can apply their skills to solve problems and undertake investigations.

- Children make satisfactory progress in Reception. Sessions led by adults are effective in developing the children's literacy and numeracy skills but opportunities are missed to allow children to take the initiative to help them to become more independent in their learning.
- Pupils make satisfactory but uneven progress across the rest of the school as teaching does not consistently move learning forward rapidly for all pupils. Attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 6, but fluctuates because of the small size of year groups.
- The most effective teaching seen was lively, involved clear explanations and grabbed the pupils' interest by engaging all groups in a wide range of well-chosen activities. However, this is not a consistent picture across the school, as teachers do not always make effective use of assessment information to plan lessons that meet the learning needs of all pupils.
- Topic themes such as Years 5 and 6 studying Charles Darwin are making learning more interesting for the pupils, particularly when linked to educational visits. Writing has been greatly improved by developing the pupils' skills in contexts they find engaging, generally closely linked to these topics.
- The close relationship with home means that there is a good understanding of the circumstances of pupils and their families. This helps the school to target action to support potentially vulnerable pupils and their families.
- Careful attention is paid to safeguarding the pupils, helping them to cope with risks they might face and to care for the safety of others. The pupils say that they feel safe in school, which is a view supported by their parents and carers.
- Pupils from different groups work and play together in a generally harmonious atmosphere. Their behaviour is satisfactory and improving as they respond positively to the school's new policy and its clear 'ladder of consequences'. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in above average levels of attendance.
- Pupils are mostly keen to stay fit and healthy. They understand what it takes to adopt a healthy lifestyle, and greatly enjoy the sports activities provided.

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The school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The headteacher, assistant headteacher and governing body have a broadly accurate view through sound self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. This ensures that planning is focused on key priorities to improve the pupils' achievement, although subject leaders are not yet fully effective in supporting rapid and 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?

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching in order to accelerate progress by:
 - developing staff expertise in teaching mathematics
 - making better use of assessment information to plan lessons that meet the learning needs of all pupils.
- Accelerate the children's progress in Reception by:
 - providing more opportunities for them to take the initiative in planning aspects of their learning
 - ensuring that learning outdoors flows more freely from that taking place inside.
- Extend the school's leadership capacity by:
 - bringing greater clarity to the role of subjects leaders
 - providing structured training in order to develop their skills and expertise.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When learning is most effective, particularly in English lessons, pupils are attentive and show interest in what they are doing. Pupils in a Year 3/4 class worked hard developing their descriptive techniques as they wrote about an image of an Australian mammal. They developed their ideas in small groups and were happy to share these with the whole class. Pupils of all ages collaborate effectively when working in groups or discussing their ideas with each other. However, they sometimes lose concentration when the work is not engaging, when they spend too long on the carpet or when teaching is not closely matched to the next steps in their learning.

Year 6 test results have risen since the last inspection, particularly in terms of the proportion of pupils reaching Level 4 or higher in English and mathematics. They reached an average level in 2010 but fell back last year, although assessment data and observations in lessons show that attainment is rising again. Pupils who have problems learning literacy are supported appropriately through activities in lessons

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and specific withdrawal sessions, and make similar progress to their classmates.

Pupils have a good understanding of what might constitute a risk and how to deal with it, including when using the internet. They know who to go to with any worries and have confidence that their concerns will be dealt with positively, although a small number do not always treat others with care and consideration at playtimes. They are keen to participate in sporting activities and most know the benefits to their health of exercise and a sensible diet. They have a voice in school developments and in their learning. Older pupils proudly undertake responsibilities, such as when organising play activities for others at lunchtime. They raise funds for charity and for a care home for the elderly. Their appreciation of the lives of others is enhanced through the link with a school in Kenya, but they have a more limited understanding of diversity within the wider United Kingdom.

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	3
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Within a pattern of satisfactory teaching, there are strong features that move the pupils' learning forward well. For example, the teacher in a Year 2 and 3 English lesson used the whiteboard well to present the story of 'Thud' which the class had to retell, while in Years 5 and 6 the teacher played the role of Charles Darwin to stimulate questions and note-taking about his life. However, not all teaching is this effective. At times the learning of the more-able pupils is held back because they spend too long listening to explanations rather than getting on with more challenging activities. Through their marking, teachers indicate what pupils have done well and

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 to do better. However, they do not always give them time to respond to their comments and so improve their work in order to meet their targets.

Teachers devote appropriate attention to developing basic skills and provide pupils with the opportunity to develop their writing in many subjects. Pupils have increasing opportunities to use their computer skills to support learning. The early identification of any pupils falling behind their targets enables programmes to be adapted to help them to catch up. Pupils say how much they value the clubs and other enrichment activities, many of which benefit from the input of specialists such as sports coaches. The national award recognises the strong international dimension to the curriculum.

The school works hard to provide a warm, welcoming and safe environment for the pupils. The well-run breakfast club is greatly appreciated by the families accessing its service. Close links with a wide range of agencies to support the well-being of the pupils whose circumstances make them potentially more vulnerable provide expertise not otherwise available to the school. These links include engagement with a wide range of health and social services, and through this the school is particularly successful in supporting the academic progress and personal development of the Gypsy/Roma children. Drawing on aspects of their culture enables these children to see how much they are valued by the school.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's vision for the school is increasingly shared by all members of the staff team. Central to this vision is the promotion of equality of opportunity so that barriers that might impede the pupils' learning can be eliminated. The headteacher has introduced a sharp focus on evaluating the performance of key groups so action can be identified in order to close any gaps in attainment with national expectations. Targets for pupils have become more challenging and assessment data frequently checked to identify and deal with gaps in learning. Teachers are also benefiting from the support of experts from outside the school. However, subject leaders have not yet fully developed their leadership skills or have a clearly defined role to enable them to fully support the drive for improvement promoted by the headteacher and assistant headteacher.

The governing body fulfils its responsibilities appropriately, and the plan agreed with the local authority to reduce a budget deficit has been completed early. It has

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improved systems for monitoring school performance, but has not provided consistent challenge to the school’s leaders in order to bring about sustained improvements. The governing body is rigorous in ensuring that the robust safeguarding procedures are applied and updated in the light of regular monitoring of their implementation.

The school has planned carefully to promote greater community cohesion, based on a clear understanding of its context. The school’s cohesiveness is an indication of its success in tackling any forms of discrimination. By carefully evaluating the impact of action taken it has identified the next steps, such as to have greater impact nationally. The headteacher tries hard to engage with parents and carers, particularly those who are more difficult to reach, including travelling on school buses to outlying villages in order to meet them. Channels of communication are clear and information is provided for parents and carers on a regular basis. The headteacher is strongly committed to partnership working by bringing in additional expertise to extend the opportunities provided for the pupils and to support their welfare.

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	3
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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Visits to home and the pre-school settings, as well as the chance to spend time in the class in the term prior to their official entry, generate confidence in the children so that they settle quickly into school routines. Children enter the Reception class with skills broadly in line with those expected for their age, although this varies each year because of the small size of the class. They make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning and benefit in adult-led sessions by being taught alongside Year 1 pupils.

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All adults make notes during the day of the progress in each child’s learning and use this to develop detailed ‘Learning Journeys’ that record their progress. However, this information is not used sufficiently to plan activities to meet their interests or the next steps in their learning. Sessions are sometimes too formal and this limits the opportunities for the children to take the initiative in planning and developing their learning. The outdoor area is extensive and sheltered, but activities planned do not always link with those taking place in the well-resourced inside classroom to enable learning to flow freely between the two areas. Children mostly work happily and become immersed in the activities provided, but their concentration wanders when the purpose behind a task is unclear to them.

The class is under new leadership this year and planning for improvements in provision has not yet been fully implemented. Adults work closely as a team to ensure the welfare and safety of the children at all times. Links with home are developing, but parents and carers are not sufficiently involved in contributing to the picture of how well their children are progressing.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire is much higher than the average for primary schools. Inspection evidence endorses the very positive views of parents and carers about the school, particularly that their children are helped to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle. However, the level of satisfaction is well below average in response to several questions. Several parents and carers believed that the school does not manage behaviour well. Inspectors found that behaviour is satisfactory overall, and staff ensure that even when a small number of pupils behave inappropriately this is not allowed to disrupt learning. Inspectors investigated through discussions with staff the concerns of a small number of parents and carers about how well the school listens to their suggestions. They concluded that the school is increasingly seeking to take account of their views and provides appropriate information about pupils’ progress, as is the opinion of the large majority. Inspectors also investigated concerns about how well the school is led and managed, concluding that this is satisfactory but with areas identified for improvement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 115 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	48	32	48	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	32	48	32	48	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	29	44	33	50	3	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	41	27	41	7	11	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	24	36	36	55	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	26	39	34	52	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	39	37	56	2	3	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)	18	27	33	50	10	15	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	23	35	31	47	3	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	32	28	42	12	18	3	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	36	28	42	5	8	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	18	27	40	61	5	8	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	25	38	32	48	4	6	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 8 April 2011 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.



7 November 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School,
Maldon, CM9 8UB**

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We saw that you work hard and are proud of the part you play in school life. Inspectors were particularly impressed by your confident answers to their questions, and your views helped us in making our judgements. These are the things we liked most.

- The headteacher, staff and governing body take good care of you and make sure you are kept safe.
- The school works well in partnership with others to support your learning.
- You develop a good understanding of how to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle and make a valuable contribution to school life.
- Most of you behave well, and your attendance is better than in the majority of primary schools.

These are the three things in particular we have asked the teachers and other adults to do.

- Help you to learn better by improving teaching, particularly in mathematics.
- Improve the younger children's learning experiences in Reception.
- Train subject leaders so they can support the headteacher more in improving the school.

You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by working hard at all times.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale
Lead inspector

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