

St Nicolas Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123166
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	380610
Inspection dates	2–3 November 2011
Reporting inspector	David Curtis

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	431
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Dix
Headteacher	Mr R Furniss
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 20 lessons taught by 14 teachers. Meetings were held with pupils from Year 6, the school council, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Early Years Foundation Stage staff team and senior leaders and managers. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation relating to safeguarding and child protection, the school improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the governing body and the tracking of pupils' attainment and progress. Inspectors looked at the 202 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, together with those returned by pupils from Years 3 to 6 and by staff.

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

- The impact of measures to raise the attainment of boys in Key Stage 1.
- The effectiveness of strategies to raise attainment in mathematics, especially in Key Stage 2.
- How well leaders and managers and the governing body monitor the performance of groups of pupils.

Information about the school

This is a much larger than average size primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils come from a range of other minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, most of whom have speech, language and communication difficulties or social, emotional and behaviour needs, is below the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. There is privately managed on-site pre-school provision which 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: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. There are strengths in pupils' personal development and in the school's partnership with parents and carers. Pupils have an outstanding understanding of healthy lifestyles. Their behaviour is good and their enjoyment of school is reflected in above average attendance.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. They make satisfactory progress so that, by the end of Year 6, attainment in English and mathematics is broadly average. Although there is an improving trend in both subjects, data from the 2011 national tests showed that, in mathematics, progress was inadequate, especially for girls and for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. Evidence from the inspection indicates that these groups now make satisfactory progress because the level of support they receive from the school has improved. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, good provision overall ensures children make good progress with rapid improvement being made in communication, language and literacy as the result of outstanding teaching of the links between letters and sounds. In Key Stage 1, the excellent use of individual pupil targets, especially in Year 2, contributes to the improving attainment of boys.

Currently, there are too many lessons that are only satisfactory and, as a result, pupils do not make good progress over time. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and use technology successfully to introduce new learning, especially through interactive whiteboards. While marking is consistent in telling pupils how well they are doing, it does not always provide them with their next steps in learning. Similarly, there are inconsistencies in the way teachers encourage and support pupils in the use of individual targets in literacy and numeracy. Teachers' planning does not always focus tightly enough on what different groups of pupils should learn by the end of lessons. The range of extra-curricular provision is good and there is a high take-up by pupils of the wide range of activities offered at lunchtime and after school. The arrangements for pupils joining the Early Years Foundation Stage and transferring to Key Stage 1, and to secondary school at the end of Year 6, are excellent.

The headteacher and senior leaders and managers are effective in identifying areas of development for the school. They work as a very strong team but do not focus sufficiently on the impact of initiatives to improve outcomes for pupils. Similarly, while effective in many areas, the governing body does not focus rigorously enough on monitoring the impact of initiatives to accelerate pupils' progress. School self-

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evaluation is overgenerous, particularly in relation to provision for different groups of pupils. Taking into consideration the improvements in boys' attainment in Key Stage 1, improving attainment in Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics as well as the inconsistencies, particularly in teaching and learning, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all groups of pupils make at least good progress by:
 - matching work more closely to individual learning needs
 - rigorous monitoring of the performance of different groups of pupils, especially the more able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all lessons are good or better by December 2012 through:
 - ensuring that marking consistently informs pupils of their next steps in learning
 - ensuring that all pupils know and use their individual targets in literacy and numeracy.
- Ensure that leaders and managers, including the literacy and numeracy leaders and the governing body, place a more rigorous focus on measuring the impact of provision on the outcomes for pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Children start school at the age of four with skills that are expected for their age, except in communication, language and literacy where they are below, especially for boys. The quality of learning in lessons throughout the school is too variable. Where progress is good, pupils show good levels of concentration and work hard. In a mathematics lesson in Year 4, pupils made good progress in using and applying their measuring skills in identifying the person who 'stole a garden gnome' because they knew exactly what they had to learn by the end of the lesson. In Year 2, pupils, especially boys, made good progress in writing because they used their individual targets to support them. However, in a number of lessons, too many pupils sat passively during introductions and made little or no contribution in question-and-answer sessions. Similarly, when all pupils are expected to do the same work, including the more-able pupils, progress slows because pupils are not challenged sufficiently. While there is evidence of improvement in the progress of pupils with

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special educational needs and/or disabilities, and most make satisfactory progress, a few pupils in this group make inadequate progress.

In Year 6, pupils take their roles as prefects seriously and conscientiously, especially in supporting younger pupils at lunchtime. The school council is effective in enabling pupils to contribute their thoughts and views. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe in and out of school, including the use of the internet.

Relationships are mainly good, although on occasions a few boys show immaturity in lessons. While pupils are prepared effectively in terms of social development for transfer to secondary school, their broadly average academic performance means that overall preparation for the future is 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	1
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	2

How effective is the provision?

There are inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' planning. Where it is most effective, there are very clear success criteria which are matched closely to the needs of differing groups of pupils. The use of 'I can' statements linked to National Curriculum levels makes it explicitly clear what pupils should learn by the end of the lesson. Equally in lessons where teachers use 'Must, Should and Could', pupils make good progress. This is not the case in all lessons. On occasions, all pupils are expected to do the same work irrespective of their ability. As a result, more-able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. There is consistency in marking against the lesson objective and this tells pupils how well they are doing.

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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However, not enough marking informs pupils of their next steps in learning and is not always linked to pupils’ individual targets, especially for literacy and numeracy.

Strengths in the curriculum contribute positively to pupils’ good personal development and well-being. Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils in Year 6 talked enthusiastically about how much they enjoy taking part in school productions involving music and drama. While the curriculum is broad and balanced, it is not adapted successfully enough to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress. This is more evident in mathematics where planning does not always take into account the range of learning needs within each set (ability group).

Parents, carers and pupils are confident that the school is a safe place. Very effective links with pre-school providers and the recent introduction of home visits mean that children are prepared exceptionally well for joining the Reception classes. The school works effectively with a range of outside agencies to support those pupils whose circumstances make them at risk of being vulnerable. A few parents and carers, and pupils in Year 6, raised concerns about behaviour and the way it is managed. While there are striking examples of teaching assistants providing very effective support for pupils who find school challenging, there are a few inconsistencies between classes in the quality of support for such pupils.

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 and senior leaders and managers have a very clear vision of wanting to make the school outstanding. They are a cohesive team who work well together and are proactive in seeking and using external support to move the school forward, for example in providing guidance and advice for newly qualified teachers. The school has strong links with other primary schools through which it is determined to share best practice. While teaching and learning are monitored regularly, the focus is more on teaching rather than pupils’ learning. Currently, the literacy and numeracy leaders do not monitor teaching and learning in their subjects and, as a result, do not have a clear enough overview of pupils’ progress and attainment in these subjects. While senior leaders and managers have taken steps to address the need to improve the quality of provision for pupils, they are not involved sufficiently in measuring the impact of such initiatives on the academic outcomes for pupils.

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The governing body is effective in ensuring that it meets all of its statutory responsibilities. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and child protection procedures are good, especially in ensuring that all adults are vetted before they work with pupils. However, the governing body is less effective in challenging the school, especially in relation to the outcomes for pupils, and particularly the performance of different groups of pupils.

Equality of opportunity is satisfactory; gaps in performance between different groups of pupils are closing. The school does not tolerate discrimination in any form and has good strategies in place to develop the local, national and international dimensions of community cohesion. Pupils from different backgrounds get on remarkably well with each other in lessons and at play.

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	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

The attainment of children who left Reception in July 2011 was above average in problem solving, reasoning and numeracy, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative development and physical development. In communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development, attainment was below average. For children in the current Reception classes, progress is good and there is strong evidence that their attainment, especially in communication, language and literacy, is improving rapidly because of very effective provision. Children enjoy school and their behaviour is exemplary. They show good levels of sustained concentration when working individually, in pairs or in groups.

The teaching of phonics (letters and sounds) is a significant strength of provision and

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contributes successfully to children’s rapid progress in early reading and writing skills. There is a very strong focus on engaging boys in reading and writing, and the ‘Star Wars’ base in the outdoor area captures their interest and enthusiasm by encouraging them, for example, to write logs of their ‘space flights’. Resources are excellent, both indoors and outdoors, and provide a stimulating learning environment. All staff have a key person role and this is beneficial in supporting children’s needs and developing effective links with parents and carers. Day-to-day assessment is good and the children’s ‘Learning Journeys’ are very much a partnership between school and home in sharing progress. Currently, assessment by leaders does not focus enough on the progress of groups of pupils, especially by comparing boys with girls.

Partnerships with parents and carers, and with pre-school providers, are excellent. Recent initiatives by the team to address issues relating to children’s performance in communication, language and literacy, especially of boys, have a good impact. The staff work as a cohesive team with a shared vision and determination to provide the best possible Early Years Foundation Stage practice for children and their parents and carers.

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

Forty-seven per cent of parents and carers returned the questionnaire which is above the national response rate for primary schools. Most parents and carers are fully supportive of all aspects of the school’s work, especially in relation to their children’s enjoyment of school and the extent to which the school keeps children safe. In written comments, parents and carers were most positive about the quality of the school environment and the quality of transition for children joining the school in Reception. Negative written comments were also received. The main concerns related to the management of behaviour and to their children’s progress. Inspection findings show that there are slight inconsistencies in the management of pupils’ behaviour and that progress for pupils is satisfactory overall rather than good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Nicolas Church of England 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 202 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 431 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	134	66	61	30	2	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	136	67	58	29	5	2	1	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	67	33	125	62	8	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	79	39	104	51	13	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	93	46	96	49	4	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	86	43	100	50	12	6	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	91	45	104	51	1	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)	92	46	86	43	6	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	70	35	115	57	10	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	58	29	113	56	11	5	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	59	29	115	57	13	6	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	101	50	88	44	8	4	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	111	55	78	39	8	4	1	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 08 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.



4 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicolas Church of England Primary School, Abingdon OX14 1HB

Thank you very much for making your contribution to the inspection through completing questionnaires, talking to inspectors in lessons and in meetings with Year 6, and the school council. The inspectors enjoyed meeting you. We agreed that at the moment your school is satisfactory and that there are some areas in which the school is successful.

- Those of you in Reception make good progress and your behaviour is exemplary.
- In Years 1 to 6 you have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles.
- Your behaviour and attendance at school are good.
- Your parents and carers are supportive of how the school helps you learn.
- All adults in school know you as individuals and provide good care and support, including for those of you who may find learning a little harder at times.
- Your headteacher, teachers and governing body are determined to make your school even better.

There are a number of important things that we have asked staff and the governing body to do in order to make your school a good school. These are to:

- make sure all of you make good progress, especially in every lesson
- make sure that teaching and learning are good in all of your lessons
- make sure that leaders, managers and the governing body, check more closely that all of the things they provide for you help you make better progress.

You can help by using your literacy and numeracy targets in lessons in order to make sure you understand what you must learn.

Yours sincerely

David Curtis
Lead inspector

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