

Barkway VA Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117422
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379417
Inspection dates	3–4 May 2012
Lead inspector	Norma Ball

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Fletcher
Headteacher	Margaret Davies-McKeon (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2009
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

Inspection team

Norma Ball

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited eight lessons and observed a range of small teaching groups within classes. A total of five teachers were observed and short observations were made of learning support assistants teaching small groups. The inspector visited all three classes to look at displays and observe individual pupils and groups at work and to listen to pupils read. Parents and carers were met informally during the inspection. Meetings with the headteacher, teaching staff, members of the governing body and pupils also took place. The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised samples of pupils' work, teachers' planning, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and documentation relating to management, curriculum and safeguarding. In addition, the inspector noted the responses to questionnaires from 12 parents and carers, 10 staff and nine pupils.

Information about the school

Barkway is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Very few of the small number of pupils from minority ethnic heritages speak English as an additional language. A very small proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, including those supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, is smaller than found in most primary schools and their needs are varied. Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes from Reception to Year 4. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the Reception class offers nursery provision in the morning. There is one class for pupils in Years 1 and 2 and the third class is for pupils in Years 3 and 4.

The acting headteacher has been in post since January 2011 and in January 2012 became acting-executive headteacher of two schools when the school formed a collaborative arrangement with Barley First School.

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

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

Inspection judgements

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

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not good yet because the quality of teaching is variable and not all pupils achieve as well as they could. This is notable in the Early Years Foundation Stage where activities for children in the outdoor learning area sometimes lack challenge and skills are not always developed progressively. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit before their next section 5 inspection.
- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. It improved in 2011 but is currently inconsistent between subjects and classes across the school. It is strongest in reading. Pupils' achievement is sometimes limited by writing targets that are not sufficiently clear or helpful and marking in mathematics which does not always guide pupils carefully in how to improve their work.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Planning is not always matched closely to pupils' needs in some lessons and this slows progress for some pupils. Support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has improved and some make good progress.
- Parents and carers are pleased with behaviour but investigation of the concerns raised by pupils during the inspection indicated behaviour is no better than satisfactory. Behaviour has improved as a result of the work of staff and pupils to develop the new anti-bullying policy.
- The acting headteacher leads the ambitious drive to improve achievement further and this is showing clear signs of success. Careful monitoring of performance is helping to improve the quality of teaching. The governing body provides support and challenge in equal measure and has guided the school efficiently through the challenges posed by senior staff changes. Monitoring of pupils' progress has improved. However, information and communication technology is not fully developed across the curriculum. Most parents value the good range of information from the school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to good and accelerate progress consistently across year groups by January 2013 by ensuring:
 - assessment information is used in all classes to match activities closely to the different learning needs of pupils
 - challenging, informative targets are set for pupils in writing
 - teachers mark pupils' work clearly to show consistently how and where it can be improved and the next steps in their learning.

- Improve the quality of learning, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - developing the outdoor learning area to provide an exciting range of challenging activities that meet the needs of children and extend learning opportunities from the indoor classroom
 - developing children's skills progressively
 - developing the use of information and communication technology across the school in different curriculum subjects.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with the skills and abilities expected of children of a similar age. They make a sound start to their learning so their development and knowledge are similar to those expected for their age when they enter Year 1. A decline in attainment at the end of Year 2 in all subjects was reversed in 2011 and attainment was above average. Regular daily reading sessions with adults, improved reading books, and good library facilities have ensured that attainment in reading remains above average at the end of Year 2 and also above expectations in Year 4. Effective steps to improve pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics are being taken by the school, and are showing signs of success. Teacher assessments, together with work in pupils' books and lessons observed during the inspection, show achievement in writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 4 is satisfactory. Pupils' progress is now tracked well and there is a flexible range of support for pupils identified as in need of additional help to improve their achievement. Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were pleased with the progress their children were making. Inspectors found that progress was satisfactory overall.

Teachers are using new strategies securely to improve writing through developing pupils' vocabulary and spelling, pupils talking about their ideas with their classmates, and extending opportunities for creative writing. In mathematics a focus on

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developing pupils' mental mathematics and ability to use numbers, especially in solving problems, is also working well throughout the school. Pupils respond enthusiastically and enjoy learning. For example, in a Year 4 lesson pupils showed great enthusiasm for using numbers in an enjoyable and practical way in a measuring task. They estimated and recorded the weights of a range of food products and worked on calculating fractions of grams keenly. However, some inconsistencies in planning for pupils of different abilities in the small year groups, both in writing and in mathematics, are restraining faster progress. Early identification and carefully tailored support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are also improving their achievement. The development of these pupils' social skills contributes to their growing confidence and progress in class and individual sessions.

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers and most pupils who replied to the questionnaire are pleased with the quality of teaching. Inspectors found that teaching is satisfactory and stronger for older pupils. In the Early Years Foundation Stage staff do not always develop children's skills progressively. The outdoor learning area is not used to full potential to provide a lively and attractive learning area. In the Nursery class, children were developing their writing skills by sending postcards to themselves or a family member. The task was enjoyable but not all children recognised the word 'to' and time was not taken to correct this. All lessons in Years 1 to 4 set clear objectives and pupils know what they are expected to learn. Where teaching is good, pupils make good progress because expectations of what they can achieve are high and the pace of the lesson engages them well. In a Year 2 writing session, for example, pupils used their story pictures to begin writing a lively introduction for the story of 'Cinderella'. Boys and girls were so engrossed in their work they asked for more time to write before moving to a lively drama activity.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well supported in classes and individual sessions. They are encouraged to develop their independence and often contribute to class discussions well. Teachers take appropriate opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, especially through the creative learning themes such as the 'Olympic Games'. Reading skills are regularly assessed. Staff and adult volunteers hear pupils read frequently. This well-planned approach to improving pupils' reading has a good impact on the above-average attainment of all pupils. Writing skills are also extended well through creative topics such as the 'Queen's Jubilee'. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to extend their information and communication technology skills. Pupils have targets set in mathematics which they find helpful because they are clearly shown at the back of their books. As a result, pupils are clear about what they need to learn next. This is not the case for writing however. Pupils' work is marked regularly and although good praise and encouragement are given, marking does not always show pupils how they can improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

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Pupils showed mostly positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour in most of the lessons observed. On a few occasions some silly behaviour by a few pupils can interrupt learning for the whole class. Pupils have a clear perception of right and wrong and recognise that what they do can affect others. They have taken an active part in reviewing behaviour in school, especially in the playground, and through the pupil council have helped develop an anti-bullying policy. They understand clearly about behaving sensibly and safely but the school has not yet initiated a programme to develop their awareness of using the internet safely.

As a result of a school focus on improving behaviour, pupils are very clear about recognising bullying, such as name calling, using inappropriate language and physically hurting others, which they know are unacceptable and must be reported to an adult. Parents and carers were pleased with behaviour but a few pupils expressed concerns. Inspection evidence indicates that behaviour is typically satisfactory and improving. Attendance overall is below average but rising steadily. Attendance is closely monitored and issues are followed-up quickly. The school is working consistently to discourage parents and carers from taking holidays in term time. Pupils feel safe in school, a view supported by parents and carers. When asked about their school several pupils said, 'We give it ten out of ten.' One pupil went further to say, 'We learn lots and it's our place.'

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher, in close partnership with the deputy headteacher and governing body, has taken rapid and effective action to bring about improvement. School self-evaluation is accurate and has resulted in achievement improving, especially in reading. Close monitoring of progress means support is targeted to good effect and, although there are fluctuations due to small cohorts, achievement is satisfactory and good in reading. Leaders use performance management effectively to improve teaching. There is regular monitoring of teaching and learning by the headteacher with professional development provided where needs are identified. This has been especially beneficial in improving the support for pupils identified as falling behind in their learning and improving their achievement. The governing body is knowledgeable, has an effective committee structure and is developing its skills to offer increasing challenge to leaders and managers on pupils' achievement. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements, are supported by good policies and procedures and regular training for staff. There is a shared ambition to improve achievement for all pupils and the success of strategies so far means the school has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

All pupils are treated fairly and equally and the school is free of discrimination. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of experiences for pupils of all ages but information and communication technology is underdeveloped across different subject areas. Learning is enriched by a good range of visits and visitors to the school and the curriculum contributes appropriately to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Work on the Sikh faith, for example, was extended by a

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visit to a gurdwara. There is a good range of well-attended clubs and pupils' participation in local sporting and creative events add to their social skills as well as extend learning. A few parents and carers did not feel they were kept well informed by the school. The inspection evidence did not substantiate this view. Good links are forged with parents and carers from home visits and introduction sessions to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents and carers receive a good range of information, both about their children's progress and the life of the school. Each of the three parent consultation events is now followed by a written report and parents and carers are encouraged to respond with their views.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

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

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

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

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

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

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

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



7 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Barkway VA Church of England First School, Royston, SG8 8EF.

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed seeing how you work in lessons, talking to you and reading the questionnaires some of you completed. It was fun to sample some of the apple, raisin and cinnamon muffins that some of you made in your cookery lesson.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. Your teachers and those who lead the school help you make satisfactory progress. You enjoy learning and feel safe in school. You have done a lot of work to improve behaviour and know a lot about being safe and healthy. I have asked the teachers to improve some important things so that you can make better progress.

- I have asked your teachers to use what they know about how well you are doing to plan challenging work at just the right level to speed up your progress in writing and mathematics and also to set clear targets to identify what you need to learn next in writing.
- In addition to praising you when they mark your work I have asked them to make clear how you can improve it.
- I have also asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to use your information and communication technology skills in different subjects.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage I have asked that the outdoor learning area is made exciting for the children and extends all that they are learning indoors. I have also asked your teachers to make sure that children are learning the skills they need to make good progress in their work.

You can help by working hard, always doing your best and behaving well. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Norma Ball

Lead inspector

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