

St Nicholas Elstree Church of England VA Primary School

St Nicholas Close, Elstree, Borehamwood, WD6 3EW

Inspection dates 19–20 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The quality of teaching is not yet consistently good enough across the whole school to promote good achievement for pupils.
- Pupils' progress through the school is uneven, better at Key Stage 1 than other areas.
- Leaders and managers have not yet ensured that the quality of teaching is improving strongly or consistently enough, particularly in mathematics at Key Stage 2.
- Teachers do not always consider carefully enough the different ages and abilities of pupils when planning, and carrying out lessons.
- Teaching time is not evenly distributed across subjects so that pupils' experiences of English, mathematics and information communication technology (ICT) vary from year to year.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils behave well in lessons, feel safe and work hard. Parents are positive about the care offered to their children.
- Pupils have good opportunities to reflect, get on well together and develop cultural and moral awareness. Leaders check teaching to identify strengths, key areas for improvement and identify professional development needs. Effective training has improved literacy teaching, raised attainment in writing at Key Stage 1 and improved the quality of marking.
- Effective support for individual pupils has improved their achievement over the last year; for example, Black minority ethnic pupils, those eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs made good progress last year.
- The school has made good use of the local authority support in their drive to improve literacy, particularly at Key Stage 1 and its use of the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place over two days and included 25 lesson observations across a range of subjects and years, meetings with senior and middle leaders, governors and pupils.
- All teachers present during the two days were observed teaching, and pupils were observed in class and around the school.
- Informal discussions were held with parents and the 13 responses from Parent View were analysed.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work and heard pupils reading. A wide range of school documentation was considered including progress data, the school improvement plan, its self evaluation, local authority reports and safeguarding information.

Inspection team

Najoud Ensaff, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Bimla Thakur

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average sized, one-form entry primary school with a part-time nursery.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average, as is the number of pupils with English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported through school action is broadly average, while the proportions of pupils with a statement of special educational needs and those supported through school action plus is slightly below average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the national average.
- This small school has had significant staffing changes since the last inspection.
- The school currently meets government floor standards which set the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching to good by:
 - ensuring that staff have an accurate and consistent view of the characteristics of good teaching
 - strengthening the use of planning and assessment so that pupils' prior learning and needs always inform teaching practice
 - ensuring that teachers provide opportunities for pupils to use and apply mathematical and information communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum and in real life contexts.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - sharpening performance management of staff so that individual teacher targets are reviewed and progress towards targets is measured
 - ensuring the curriculum is consistently balanced and carefully planned for the ages and abilities of pupils
 - developing governors' understanding of pupils' achievement at the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children enter the nursery with varying abilities but they generally demonstrate skills that are in line with those expected for their ages. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6 their achievement is broadly average.
- The trend over recent years is one of uneven progress, with good progress across Key Stage 1, particularly in writing but slower progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 2.
- Progress in English, is stronger than in mathematics in all key stages with more time spent on developing literacy skills than mathematical skills. Pupils' reading skills are improving and are generally at levels expected for their ages. Pupils are more aware of targets in literacy than in mathematics.
- Progress in lessons is variable. It is not yet good for the majority of pupils because they have an uneven experience both across the school and between subjects.
- Progress for some groups of pupils improved last year. Some Black minority ethnic pupils, the few pupils with English as an additional language and those known to be eligible for the pupil premium made good progress in English and mathematics.
- The number of disabled pupils, those with statements of special educational needs and those pupils supported at school action also made good progress in English, but not in mathematics.
- Gifted and talented pupils made good progress in mathematics but not in English. Girls performed less well than boys at Key Stage 2 but better than boys in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching. While there is some good teaching in each key stage, consistently good teaching resulting in sustained good progress is only evident in Key Stage 1 in English, especially in writing.
- Good teaching was seen in a Year 5 writing lesson where individual pupil targets and focused support, as well as good quality teacher feedback, helped to guide pupils well in their learning. Pupils were given good opportunities to evaluate their own and others' work, which allowed them to gain ownership over their learning.
- Teachers do not routinely use assessment information and planning to cater well for pupils in their classes. As a result pupils do not yet make good progress, overall. In the better lessons, teachers planned well for the different abilities in their classes, made clear the learning focus, provided effective support to pupils and made learning fun.
- In a Year 1 science lesson, for example, the teacher demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of pupils' abilities and used the outdoor learning environment and a video effectively to stimulate pupils' interests. As a result, pupils were well motivated and made good progress.

- Pupils are not always challenged to reach their full potential where adults do not direct them well enough or have high enough expectations of them. While teachers in many observed lessons made clear the learning focus and purpose, some lessons in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2 lacked direction and pace.
- Marking has improved in recent years so that more effective guidance is provided to pupils about how to improve their work, but this is more apparent in English than mathematics. Good marking was seen in Year 6 English books where comments included next steps and where pupils were beginning to reflect over their learning. However, pupils do not routinely respond to teachers' comments.
- Teachers do not consistently provide opportunities to pupils to use and apply their mathematical and information communication skills in other subjects and in real life contexts. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise and develop these skills in their topic work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Almost all pupils behave well in lessons so that there is very little disruption to their learning. They concentrate and work hard. Occasionally some pupils do not readily focus on their work as a result of the task being too easy for them, which is not always identified by their teacher. Overall staff monitor and manage behaviour well.
- Pupils say that they enjoy school and during the inspection, pupils from a range of backgrounds were seen interacting harmoniously.
- They contribute well to the community through acts of charity and reflect the mission statement of the school, demonstrating a clear understanding of kindness.
- Pupils show a good awareness of how to keep safe and of different forms of bullying such as cyber-bullying and race-related bullying. Any rare instances of bullying are effectively dealt with.
- Over the past year, attendance has risen from below national levels to above average as a result of the school's focused efforts.
- All parents believe their children are happy and safe at the school and most parents think behaviour at the school is good and that their children are well looked after by staff.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Drawing on broadly accurate self-evaluation, leaders and managers have identified some key strengths and areas for development. This has led to improvements in the teaching of literacy, in particular, and in the progress made by some groups of pupils last year. Additionally, attendance has improved, better use is made of the outdoor area by staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage and there has been an improvement in the marking of pupils' work.
- While an organised schedule of monitoring is in operation at the school linked to performance management, this has not yet had an impact in raising the quality of teaching to good. The monitoring programme, which includes middle leaders, has been used to inform professional development training. However, although teachers are given individual

targets for improved performance, progress towards these targets are not accurately measured.

- The curriculum is not yet balanced and is not always planned well for pupils' different ages and abilities. As a result, pupils experience an uneven balance of English, mathematics and ICT, and lessons that do not always cater for their ages, abilities and needs.
 - The school promotes equality of opportunity and is seeking to close the gaps in performance of different groups of students. Although differences in achievement between some groups are starting to close, gaps remain between the performance of girls and boys, across key stages and in English and mathematics.
 - Safeguarding is strongly secure and discrimination is not tolerated. Staff promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and parents are generally very positive about their experiences with the school.
 - The local authority has provided effective support to the school in raising literacy, particularly at Key Stage 1, and in improving practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - does not yet have a good enough understanding of the school's work to be able to offer effective challenge, particularly in relation to pupils' achievement and the school's self evaluation. This is partly a result of a change of governors.
 - ensures that safeguarding is secure.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupil’s needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupil’s needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school’s leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

19–20 September 2012

School details

Unique reference number	117431
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	405706

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	221
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoff Strack
Headteacher	Kate Johnston-Grant
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2010
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