



Inspection report

St Barnabas CE Aided Primary School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 118724
LEA Kent

Inspection number 275786
Inspection dates 23 and 24 May 2005
Reporting inspector Mr R Ellis HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Primary	School address	Quarry Road
School category	Voluntary Aided		Tunbridge Wells
	<i>Diocese of Rochester</i>		Kent
Age range of pupils	4 to 11 years		TN1 2EY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01892 522958
Number on roll	94	Fax number	01892 522958
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Father K Macnab
Date of previous inspection	November 2003	Acting Headteacher	Mrs T Anderson

Age group	Published	Reference no.
4 to 11 years	28 June 2005	275786

Introduction

When St Barnabas CE Aided Primary School was inspected in November 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on three occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in May 2005.

Description of the school

St Barnabas CE Aided Primary School is situated in Tunbridge Wells. The school is smaller than most primary schools, with 94 pupils on roll. Thirty four per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the national average. About one in three of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, including two who have a Statement of Special Educational Need, which is above the national average. A relatively high proportion of the pupils speak English as an additional language. The pupils' standards on entry to the school are well below average. In the past a significant number of pupils joined or left the school at various times during the year. As a result of falling rolls and a projected surplus of primary school places in the local area, there have been proposals for the school to be amalgamated with another small local primary school to create a new school located on the St Barnabas's site. The local education authority (LEA) has made the decision not to proceed with the amalgamation at present. As a result of the reduction in pupil numbers the school has planned to restructure from five classes to four in September 2005.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The school had previous difficulties maintaining pupil numbers and securing effective leadership. However, as a result of determined leadership from the acting headteacher and hard work from the staff, the school now provides a sound education for its pupils and standards are rising, but remain low. While most of the teaching is good or very good, some does not meet all of the pupils' varied needs. The curriculum is broad and balanced, however, the provision for science is underdeveloped. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to learning. The school has a positive ethos that encourages good relationships and mutual respect. Visitors are made to feel welcome and the school is developing good links with the local community.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection in November 2003 required the school to take action to address issues concerned with raising standards, improving leadership and management, and improving the quality of teaching. Progress in addressing improving leadership and management and improving the quality of teaching have been good, and reasonable progress has been made in raising attainment, although the school acknowledges the need to continue to raise standards.

Capacity to improve

This is a rapidly improving school. The acting headteacher has developed a clear sense of purpose within the school, promotes high aspirations, and has developed an ethos that values staff and pupils alike. Systems for monitoring the school's performance and tracking the pupils' progress are appropriate, and the information provided is being used to inform decisions about the deployment staff and resources. The school's strategic plan recognises the school's strengths and areas for development, prioritises actions appropriately, and provides appropriate timescales for action. The school's further progress is threatened by the falling numbers of pupils and a perceived uncertainty about the long-term future of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- raise standards;

- develop the curriculum to ensure progression in mixed-age classes and improve the provision for science;
- continue to develop teaching to support the learning of groups of pupils with widely varying attainment.

Achievement and standards

The pupils' overall attainment on entry to the school is below average, but the pupils make a good start in the Foundation stage and make satisfactory progress towards achieving the nationally set early learning goals. The results of the 2004 national tests were well below average at Key Stage 1 and the majority of pupils failed to achieve the standards expected for their age. The Key Stage 2 results were well below average overall but there was some improvement in mathematics when compared to the previous year. The school recognises that, despite recent improvement, standards remain too low and has implemented intervention programmes to boost the pupils' attainment. The majority of pupils are making at least reasonable progress and many are making good progress, although weaknesses in past provision have resulted in significant gaps in the pupils' knowledge and understanding, and the relatively low attainment of many pupils in basic skills hinders their progress.

Personal development

As a result of higher expectations and improvements in the quality of teaching the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are at least satisfactory, and often they are good or very good. The pupils are learning good work habits and are increasingly being expected to take greater responsibility for their own learning. Most pupils settled quickly in lessons and generally sustained their concentration on the task in hand, although some still need reminders to stay focused and not to waste time. Many pupils worked with enthusiasm and interest when the teaching challenged and excited them and readily answered questions. The pupils willingly accepted responsibilities and most took pride in their work. Representatives from each class constitute a school council which ensures that the pupils' views and opinions are sought and heard.

The pupils' attendance for the previous year was 94.1% which is close to the national average. About a dozen pupils have very poor attendance and between them account for almost half of the total absence. The school continues to take appropriate action to challenge poor attendance and reward good attendance.

The overall provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good. The pupils play well together and many participate in organised games at playtimes. Daily assemblies, often led by individuals, organisations from the local community, or the pupils themselves, are used to celebrate the pupils' achievements and provide good opportunities for prayer, reflection and discussion.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all ten lessons seen, and was good or very good in seven. In the best lessons the teachers provided clear learning objectives and gave the pupils success criteria so that they could judge their own progress against the learning objective. The quality of marking has improved and teachers are providing constructive comments that show the pupils how they can improve; in some cases these comments made specific reference to the learning objective. All classrooms are now stimulating learning environments and commonly the displays celebrated the pupils' achievements and were relevant to the topics the pupils studied. The teachers' short-term lesson planning follows a common format and generally identifies at least three levels of targets that are matched to the needs and prior attainment of groups of pupils. The teachers have established good working routines and the relationships between adults and pupils were mutually friendly and respectful.

In the less successful lessons some pupils were unsure about the purpose of their activities and key vocabulary was not reinforced sufficiently. Questioning was not used effectively to track the pupils' progress toward the learning objective or to help them understand the progress that they were making.

In some lessons that were judged to be satisfactory overall, the teachers and teaching assistants tended to focus their support on middle and low-attaining pupils, leaving the higher attaining pupils relatively unsupported. While this was appropriate for most of the time, these pupils were not always able to sustain their focus without adult intervention, and this hampered their progress.

An effective system for tracking the pupils' progress has been established and the teachers are able to identify the progress that pupils are making. Where underachievement is identified intervention programmes are being developed. Individual portfolios of the pupils' work are kept to support the monitoring of their achievements and the pupils are involved in choosing items for inclusion. Groups of pupils have achievement targets and they are usefully reminded of these by target sheets on their worktables or through displays in the classrooms.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, and based on national requirements. However, the provision for science is underdeveloped. The school recognises that the planned restructuring of classes will necessitate changes to the curriculum to ensure progression in mixed-age classes. The pupils who have special educational needs have full access to the curriculum and they are well supported in lessons. Many pupils participate in the range of visits, clubs, and sporting activities that the school offers. The pupils enjoy musical activities: the school recently participated in the Tunbridge Wells primary music festival, and the choir and musicians are preparing enthusiastically for a musical performance of *The Selfish Giant* later this term. The pupils respect their environment and, for example, pupils in the gardening club take responsibility for planting and maintaining areas within the grounds.

The school pays appropriate regard to the pupils' health, safety and well being. Adults are readily available at playtimes; the pupils feel that they are approachable and can confidently turn to them for help.

Accommodation and resources are satisfactory overall, and outside play areas have been improved considerably since the previous inspection.

Links with parents and the local community are good and the school has planned to develop these further.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The acting headteacher provides very good leadership and management. Since her recent appointment she has had a significant and positive impact on the school's environment, the pupils' attitudes and expectations, and the school's relationship with parents. The teachers and other staff support the headteacher and have continued to work hard to bring about the necessary improvement in standards. The subject co-ordinators have received appropriate training and support which has enabled them to fulfil their roles more effectively. With the sharp focus on improvement provided by the headteacher their work is starting to have positive results.

Systems are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the teachers have responded positively to feedback provided following observation of their lessons, and have worked hard to improve their own practice. The school recognises the important role that teaching assistants play in the pupils' learning and provides them with appropriate professional development opportunities.

The school's self-evaluation accurately identifies strengths and weakness in provision.

Governance has improved; the governing body is developing the role of critical friend and is successfully monitoring the work of the school. Financial management is sound and the school's budget is monitored effectively. Governors have received training to prepare them for school visits and are well placed to hold the school to account for the standards it achieves.

The LEA has provided good support for the school, particularly through the interim arrangements for leadership and management in the period prior to the appointment of the current acting headteacher.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

St Barnabas CE Aided Primary School was inspected by two Additional Inspectors in November 2003. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in May and September 2004 and in February 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of November 2003.

In May 2005, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Ten lessons and one assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, and representatives from the LEA and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of November 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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