



Cold Ash St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109958
Local Authority West Berkshire
Inspection number 278320
Inspection date 9 November 2006
Reporting inspector Sean O'Toole

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Cold Ash
School category	Voluntary controlled		Thatcham
Age range of pupils	5-11		RG18 9PT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01635 862600
Number on roll (school)	182	Fax number	01635 295601
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr N Ralph
		Headteacher	Mrs S Plackett
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2000		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school. Most pupils come from advantaged homes. A very small proportion of pupils have free school meals. Fewer pupils than usual have learning difficulties. About five per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds but none is at an early stage of learning English. There has been high staff turnover in Years 1 and 2.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides a good quality of education. Pupils are happy and speak positively about the friendly atmosphere and the ways in which teachers explain lessons. As one boy said, 'Everyone is helpful, teaching is good and learning is fun'. In this climate, pupils show outstanding qualities of respect, high standards of behaviour and enthusiastic attitudes to learning. One girl in Year 6 summed it up by saying, 'You are accepted for who you are.'

The promotion of successful personal development and learning starts with the good provision for, and progress of, children in the Foundation Stage. Achievement is good. By the end of Year 6 pupils reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science but there remains work to be done to improve pupils' writing. There is too much variation in the quality of writing and in some instances not enough is asked of the more able pupils. The over reliance on worksheets in history and geography and insufficient attention to good presentation do not extend pupils' writing skills. Pupils are very successful readers and are confident in holding a complex conversation.

Teaching and learning are good. There is a good focus on supporting and encouraging pupils with learning difficulties. Strong relationships and firm but fair discipline contribute much to pupils' high levels of enjoyment and help them to feel safe. Teachers know their pupils well but do not make sufficient use of marking and target setting to guide them on how to improve. Because of the good curriculum pupils have an excellent understanding of how to live healthily. They relish the opportunities to take part in extra curricular activities and extended visits which contribute much to their social skills.

Staff are keen to help the pupils to succeed. They have clearly identified the central areas for development and begun teaching programmes to improve writing. Under her good leadership the headteacher has created a committed team and this has resulted in improved standards and consistency in the quality of teaching. The school has good capacity to build on these successes. Governors keenly support the staff and contribute well to the school's strategic plans. A few parents are concerned that their views do not count but the large majority correctly appreciates the ways in which the school cares for and educates their children. Pupils are outstanding ambassadors for their school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress, especially the more able, in writing ensuring that there are better opportunities for them to explore their ideas in a wide range of subjects.
- Ensure greater consistency in marking and target setting so that pupils are clearer about what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start in the Reception class with good skills and understanding. They achieve well and by the time they start in Year 1 they are working at levels which are in advance of those expected for their age. They are very confident, cope very well with having different teachers during the week, have excellent relationships with one another and talk enthusiastically about their work.

Achievement is good and pupils of all abilities make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties benefit from well focused support and make good progress; most attain average standards by the time they leave the school. Throughout the school, reading is especially good and pupils cope with increasingly complex texts. They really enjoy using the new library for research. One boy remarked, 'The new library is great and I like to spend time just looking through the non-fiction books'. Boys and girls are equally successful in national tests at the end of Year 6 and standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. There is room for improvement in extending pupils' writing, especially among the more able, in subjects other than English. Test results have improved well in the last few years and indications are that the pupils will meet their challenging targets this year. Because of their good levels of competence in basic skills pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils speak glowingly of all the school does for them and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. Their high levels of spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities are seen in the ways in which they value one another, listen attentively to different views, raise funds to support charities and welcome opportunities to learn about the wider world. Behaviour is exemplary and pupils say, 'There is no bullying here, we all get on well together and everyone is friendly.' Pupils love coming to school and their attendance is above average.

Pupils express their ideas clearly and enjoy the opportunities to be involved in decision making. They are very positive about how the staff respond to their needs and enjoy being school council members, because as one girl said, 'We can really make a difference'. The pupils make a good contribution to the local and wider communities, joining in a variety of events. They enjoy responsibility and work hard as librarians and supporting younger children. They are knowledgeable about how to keep healthy and safe, and have a well developed understanding of the dangers and benefits of drugs. Pupils eagerly join in the many and varied extra curricular sporting and musical activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are planned thoroughly and structured to achieve a balance between instruction and time for pupils to practise and improve their skills. There are strong relationships between staff and pupils. As a result, pupils work hard, listen well and maintain concentration for long periods. Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects and also appreciate that different pupils have a variety of needs. Well crafted individual education plans and focused support contribute much to the progress made by those with learning difficulties. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is lively and interesting and provides children with ample opportunities to make choices, work in groups and to acquire essential skills such as knowing the sounds that letters make.

Lessons start with a clear explanation of what is to be learned and end with a time when pupils discuss their work and ideas. This was especially successful in a Year 2 lesson when the pupils, pretending to be Van Gogh, wrote a letter to his brother. The teacher's questioning was spot on and helped the pupils to understand different ways of expressing feelings. Although teachers mark the pupils' work they do not set sharply focused targets and give sufficient advice on how the pupils might improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Because the curriculum is good the pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities to enjoy learning and to make substantial gains in their personal development. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in visits, events and extra curricular activities and these enhance pupils' social awareness and equip them for the future. Staff have given good consideration to the organisation of the curriculum so that all subjects are taught regularly. A particularly effective initiative has been to teach design and technology extensively over a short period. Pupils commented very favourably on this approach and produced some high quality work which included garden designs. The school is working on extending links between subjects although more remains to be done to extend links between English and history and geography.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Overall, care, support and guidance are good. There is more work to be done on making sure that pupils receive well focused guidance on improving their work and on having targets for them to aim towards. However, pastoral care and support are of high quality. There are robust risk assessments and all requirements for health and safety are met. The school has made extensive efforts to ensure that everyone who works in the school is checked for suitability. Pupils are confident that any concerns or worries will be dealt with quickly and sensitively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management underpin the work of the school. Staff are an effective team. Governors are supportive and involved effectively in strategic planning. All involved in leading and managing the school share a commitment to improvement and are ambitious for all pupils to succeed. The school's self-evaluation is mostly accurate. The staff and governors are not complacent with the success in recent years and have well focused plans to improve further. Areas for development are identified and priorities, time scales and responsibilities are clearly listed. The headteacher and staff are called to account for their performance by the governors and respond positively to any suggestions for development.

The headteacher and staff have tackled the issues raised in the previous inspection report well. Standards have improved in the last few years, staffing difficulties have been resolved and teaching is now much more consistent. Leadership of the subjects has improved although more remains to be done to link literacy with other subjects and to secure consistency in marking.

Although a few parents expressed concerns about how the school responds to their views, the staff and governors do take account of parental opinion. Pupils say they are listened to and believe that they make a good contribution to school improvement.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me so welcome and sharing with me your thoughts and feelings about school. You obviously thoroughly enjoy lessons and activities and contribute much in making the school successful. Almost everything about the school is good but your behaviour, positive attitudes to work and play and the ways in which you care for one another are outstanding.

I have asked your teachers to make a few improvements to make the school even better. Work has begun on helping to improve your writing. This could be even more effective if you had better opportunities to write in greater detail in subjects like history and geography. You can play your part in this by always presenting your work well and making sure that your handwriting is neat and tidy. Although your teachers know lots about you they need to make sure that when they are marking your work they give you better advice about how to improve.

The school is a caring place and the staff work hard to make learning fun. The teaching is good and the curriculum also helps to make learning interesting. I was impressed by your enthusiasm for all of the extra activities you join in and for the sensible way you discuss your work. The school is well organised and your headteacher and the staff make sure that everything runs smoothly. You play your part well in making decisions through the school council.

I hope that you continue to enjoy your time at school and wish you well for the future.

Yours truly,

Sean O'Toole

Lead Inspector