



St Nicolas Church of England Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110013
LEA West Berkshire LEA
Inspection number 278344
Inspection dates 20 September 2005 to 21 September 2005
Reporting inspector Steven Hill AI

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Link Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Newbury
Age range of pupils	7 to 11		Berkshire RG14 7LU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0163541282
Number on roll	249	Fax number	01635582427
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Markham
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs T Whiting

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a junior school in the centre of Newbury. Pupils come from a wide range of social circumstances. The attainment of pupils when they start varies from year to year but is generally average. The numbers of pupils with learning difficulties is also average. Most pupils are white British in origin, a very small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It gives good value for money. The school views itself as effective and inspection evidence supports this judgement. Standards are above average because pupils make good progress in most lessons. This good progress is principally because teaching is good. Pupils do well in English and science, particularly in reading. Standards in mathematics are average. Pupils achieve particularly well in the arts and in sport. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They behave well, work hard and enjoy their lessons, and get on very well with other children and with adults. The outstanding curriculum is a major factor in pupils' enjoyment. A wide range of exciting and interesting activities supports learning in most subjects. The curriculum in mathematics, while satisfactory, is not as diverse or stimulating, and progress in mathematics is only satisfactory. Leadership and management are good. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is the driving force behind the good quality of education. She gets good support from other staff and from governors. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and the school is well placed to continue to improve in the future. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and one who wrote of a happy, enthusiastic and loving school accurately reflects the views of most parents.

What the school should do to improve further

* Provide a more exciting curriculum in mathematics, so that achievement improves.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils start in Year 3 with average standards, and they achieve well. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average. The school sets very challenging targets, which most pupils meet. Both boys and girls make good progress, whatever their ability or ethnic origin. Pupils with learning difficulties do well in the light of their starting points. Pupils make good progress in English and science, and satisfactory progress in mathematics. Standards in reading are particularly high. Standards in mathematics are generally only average, however. The weaker progress in mathematics is partly because the school's curriculum is not as exciting or wide-ranging as in other subjects, and partly because teachers do not always match work carefully enough to the needs of all pupils in the class. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT), which were well below average at the last inspection, are at expected levels. There are major strengths in standards in the arts. For example, high quality work in art and design, particularly in ceramics, is on display throughout the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school creates time and space for pupils to reflect on different issues and values, and they have a well-developed sense of what is right and wrong. Pupils develop very good social skills, getting on well with each other and with adults. Their high levels of cultural development are reflected in the school's Arts Mark Gold award. Pupils participate enthusiastically and conscientiously in the life of the school and the local community. The Greenham Common project, where pupils presented their proposals for the development of the area to local officials, is a good example of the latter. Pupils are fully involved in the school's decision-making, particularly through the Class and School Councils. Pupils like coming to school and attendance is good. They enjoy learning and find their lessons interesting. They value the many visits and visitors that enrich their learning. Behaviour is good so that lessons are orderly and playtimes are friendly and relaxed. Pupils take their responsibilities seriously, for example as Buddies to help new pupils settle in. Pupils have a very good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and participate enthusiastically in the wide range of sports on offer. They know how to keep themselves and others safe. Vulnerable pupils settle well, make good progress and feel secure because of the sensitive and carefully targeted support they receive. High standards in English and in using ICT, links with industry and the strong ethos of working together as a team ensure that pupils develop good skills that contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Pupils respond positively to this by working hard, and they take a pride in their achievements. Relationships are very good, and pupils like and respect their teachers because they know they are valued as individuals and their views are respected. Lessons have a good pace and little time is wasted, so progress is generally good. Teachers give clear explanations and question pupils carefully to extend their thinking. They provide interesting activities to enthuse pupils, and are good at making links between different subjects, so that work is more meaningful. In most lessons, work is well judged to cater for pupils' needs. However, in some mathematics lessons, teachers do not take sufficient account of the range of abilities in the class. In these lessons, a few pupils have work which is too difficult for them, or which is insufficiently challenging.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school has an outstanding curriculum. There are major strengths in the arts and physical education. The variety and quality of artwork that pupils produce are excellent. Pupils take part in a wide range of exciting activities both in school and out. They have lots of opportunities for practical work in different subjects, which stimulate their interest and enthusiasm. Visits to a variety of places enhance their understanding and bring ideas to life. For example, pupils visit a mosque and a synagogue, as well as the local church, to give them a better understanding of different religions. The curriculum for mathematics, while satisfactory, is not as exciting. The school plans to remedy this over the course of this year. All pupils in the older classes have the opportunity to take part in two residential visits before they leave. These contribute well to their personal development as well as to their learning in different subjects. A wide range of clubs is on offer, and pupils participate enthusiastically. Sports clubs significantly enhance the good quality physical education lessons. During the inspection, a large group of boys and girls attended football club, worked hard and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's care and support for pupils are outstanding. A supportive Christian ethos underpins a commitment to securing the welfare of all pupils. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are fully in place. The school provides a safe, supportive environment in which all pupils can grow and flourish. There is very good provision for the promotion of pupils' health and safety. Healthy food options are available for pupils at break and lunch times, and they are given a thorough understanding of how to live healthily. This together with the school's commitment to Sport for Life has resulted in the receipt of a Healthy Schools Gold Award. The school is very aware of the needs of its vulnerable pupils and keeps a close eye on how they get on. These pupils are given excellent support both for their learning and personal development. The quality of academic guidance for all pupils is good, and is based on careful assessment. The quality of care and guidance provided for pupils with learning disabilities is extremely sensitive and thoughtful, and contributes strongly to the good progress they make.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school's outstanding self-evaluation procedures give a clear and accurate view of strengths and weaknesses. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has high expectations of herself, and for all in the school, and a clear vision for how the school should improve. She communicates this well to the whole school community so that everyone works together towards the same goals. There are very good arrangements for parents and pupils to make their

views known, and these are taken into account when planning improvements. Governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are supportive of its development. The school's work focuses rigorously on improving standards, personal development and care for pupils. This is based on carefully checking how well pupils are learning, and why. Teachers benefit from observing each other's lessons so they can share expertise and learn from each other. Subject leaders use the information gained to provide clear guidance on making improvements. The progress of all pupils is carefully tracked and extra help is given to any children who are not doing as well as they should. Very thorough analyses of the results of national tests are used to identify weaker areas of the curriculum and steps are taken to put them right. Last year, this resulted in significant improvements in pupils' writing, reflected in higher scores in the 2005 national tests. Since the last inspection, the school has made continual improvements under the strong guidance of the headteacher. Writing is now a strength, and provision and standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have vastly improved. The school is well placed to continue to improve by tackling the relative weaknesses in the standards and curriculum in mathematics, which it has already clearly identified.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	NA
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for all your help when we visited your school. We enjoyed watching your lessons and talking to you. Many of you told us that you enjoyed school, and we can see why. This is what we found out.

St Nicolas is a good school because you learn a lot in lessons. Your behaviour is good and you get on well with each other. You are particularly good at science and English, especially reading. We were also very impressed by the excellent work in art. Although your work in maths is OK, you don't do so well in this as in other subjects. You are good at helping the school to run smoothly. You give your views sensibly through the Class and School Councils. You are very reliable when you help around the school, with jobs like being Buddies to new children. The teachers are very good at explaining things to you and they make sure that you keep busy. In lessons, you work hard and do your best. Usually, teachers give you work that you can cope with but which really makes you think. However, in a few maths lessons, the work is a bit hard for some of you, or is too easy for children who are really good at maths. You get interesting things to do in different subjects, and there are plenty of trips out and visitors to school, to make learning more exciting. You get lots of chances to take part in sport. In maths, the lessons are sometimes a bit more ordinary, and the teachers are planning to change this. Your headteacher organises the school very well, and all the staff keep a careful eye on how you are getting on. They make sure that you get extra help if you need it.

For the school to get even better, the most important thing is to do more interesting things in maths lessons, so that you get better at this subject.