



St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114563
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 279414
Inspection date 12 December 2006
Reporting inspector Eileen Chadwick

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Friars Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Winchelsea
Age range of pupils	4-11		TN36 4ED
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01797 226479
Number on roll (school)	146	Fax number	01797 222948
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Sharon Simpson
		Headteacher	Mary Westhead
Date of previous school inspection	9 October 2000		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This small school serves Winchelsea and surrounding area. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is average. Children's attainment on entry to Reception is average, although wide-ranging. Since the school was last inspected, there have been many changes of headteacher and deputy headteachers. The leadership team is now stable. The headteacher took up post nearly two years ago and the deputy headteacher started at the beginning of this term. The school is larger than when last inspected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school with strengths in pupils' good personal development and well-being. School leaders are successfully tackling underachievement caused by a period of disruption due to the many changes to the senior leadership team. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and since the arrival of the headteacher, gained a greater impetus. There is a caring atmosphere and pupils enjoy good relationships with each other and staff. Their behaviour is good and they enjoy school. As one pupil said, 'It is a friendly school and we all work together. It is not too big so we all know one another.'

Pupils' academic achievement, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Children make satisfactory progress in Reception and standards meet expectations for this age. Pupils' satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 leads to average standards in reading and mathematics. However, pupils' slower progress in writing results in below average standards. By Year 2, spelling and handwriting have weaknesses and there is not enough writing at length. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 make satisfactory progress in English and good progress in mathematics. By Year 6, standards are average in English and science and above average in mathematics.

Teachers provide interesting activities which pupils enjoy. However, they do not always successfully match work to the wide range of abilities in the mixed age classes. On these occasions, too much teaching is aimed at the average and as a result more capable pupils underachieve. A number of procedures have been put in place to raise standards and achievement. Their impact is greater in mathematics than English because of teachers' better subject knowledge and the local authority's considerable support for improving the teaching of mathematics. The school is fully aware of this and writing training has been planned for next term. The quality of care, guidance and support for pupils is satisfactory. Pupils are kept safe and receive good personal support. Academic assessment is now in place and is satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. There are particularly good opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures through links with schools abroad. Pupils' social development is satisfactory but opportunities for them to make decisions and to develop teamwork skills are inconsistent.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Reading systems are thorough and have been strengthened this year. However, pupils do not have consistent opportunities to develop their writing in other subjects. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision is satisfactory and better than when last inspected. Leadership and management are satisfactory. That of the leadership team is good with the headteacher the driving force for school improvement. There is work to be done to improve the leadership of Years 1 and 2 where it is not having enough impact in ensuring pupils always achieve their best. Apart from mathematics, subject leaders are not yet involved enough in improving standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by improving the teaching of writing skills in Years 1 and 2 and giving all pupils good quality opportunities to develop their writing in other subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by making sure more capable pupils are always given work closely matched to their needs.
- In Years 1 and 2 check pupils' progress more rigorously.
- Develop the impact of subject leaders in improving standards throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Children's attainment on entry to Reception is in line with expectations and, by the end of Year 6, they reach average standards in English and science. Standards are above average in mathematics.

In Reception, standards have improved because of recently improved provision. Most children now reach the standards expected and some exceed these. More capable pupils' progress has much improved in reading and writing.

Pupils' overall progress in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory. Standards in Year 2 are average in reading and mathematics. However, they are below average in writing. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make slow progress in writing because they are not given enough opportunities to learn sounds, spelling and handwriting. More capable pupils do not have enough opportunities to write at length. In the last few years standards have been broadly average at the end of Year 2 but more capable pupils have not always achieved as well as they should in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory. However, the school has identified unevenness of progress in the past, with pockets of underachievement. The headteacher has taken suitable action to address this. High quality teaching in Year 6 is helping pupils to catch up from a legacy of underachievement.

Standards in the 2006 national tests for Year 6 pupils were average in English and science and above average in mathematics. In 2006, standards improved in mathematics. However, in English standards in writing were weaker than in reading, particularly for boys and for more capable pupils.

Pupils with learning difficulties achieve satisfactorily. There is some good extra support through catch up programmes in literacy and numeracy in Years 3 to 6. However, in Years 1 and 2 lower attainers' progress in writing is unsatisfactory when work is not presented in small enough steps. Targets set for pupils' achievements are satisfactory for English and mathematics. The school exceeded its targets in 2006 at Level 5 in both subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Behaviour is usually good and exceptionally good around the school. However, in class, weaknesses in teaching can occasionally cause pupils to lose interest and concentration and work too slowly. Pupils say they enjoy school although a few say there is too much repetition of what they already know.

Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. Close links with the Church and the Christian ethos enable pupils to develop a strong sense of what is right and wrong. Good links with schools abroad, such as one in Uganda, enhance pupils' awareness of other cultures. However, pupils' social development is only satisfactory because opportunities for them to make decisions, work in small teams and solve problems are inconsistent. Attendance is satisfactory and improving due to the school's rigorous procedures for improving attendance.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe and the need to follow a healthy lifestyle. They make a good contribution to the community by raising money for charities. Preparation for their economic well-being is satisfactory. Their progress in acquiring basic skills is satisfactory but there are limited opportunities for pupils to learn about the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers are enthusiastic and manage pupils' behaviour appropriately and this ensures that pupils usually remain on task. Teachers use their better subject knowledge for teaching mathematics well and this is a major reason why pupils' progress in mathematics is improving. Their subject knowledge for teaching writing is not as good and this sometimes limits their expectations of pupils and the way writing is taught. There is not always enough direct teaching of key literacy skills and as a result pupils' progress slows, particularly in learning to spell and write neatly. Planning of work for lessons is satisfactory but in practice, there can be too much teaching to the average ability, which can cause work to be too easy for more capable pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties are given satisfactory support during group work although, during lesson introductions, the work they are given is sometimes too hard.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum for children in Reception has been recently improved and is now satisfactory. It is practically based and gives satisfactory emphasis to teaching literacy and numeracy. In Years 1 to 6, curriculum plans show teachers how to build on what

pupils already know. However, there is still some variability in the adherence to these plans so that pupils' progress can fluctuate. Provision for reading has become more rigorous this year but it is too early to measure the full impact on raising standards. The curriculum for English, mathematics and ICT is satisfactory. ICT has improved since the previous inspection. Cross-curricular links are developing. However there is more to be done to make sure pupils consistently develop their writing through other subjects. The school is working for a 'Healthy Schools Award' and the curriculum is well planned for enabling pupils to develop good awareness of healthy lifestyles. A good range of after-school clubs and specialist curriculum weeks, for example in science, extend and enrich learning opportunities for pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are well cared for and staff know them well. The friendly atmosphere and strong sense of community within the school help pupils to feel safe. Pupils receive good guidance for their personal development through personal, social and health education lessons and assemblies. All necessary child protection and risk assessments are fully in place.

Systems to check how well pupils are achieving in Reception have been much improved this term and are now good. These assessments in the rest of the school are satisfactory and improving. However, the information gained from these is not used consistently in setting pupils' work and evaluating the impact it has on raising achievement. Teachers' marking is inconsistent in showing pupils how they can improve. Support for pupils with learning difficulties, whilst effective during catch up programmes, is satisfactory overall. There is now substantial extra help for lower attaining pupils in reading but the steps in their learning are too hard in writing in Years 1 and 2.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides good leadership with a clear direction for improving the school. The school evaluates its work accurately and this ensures that weaknesses are identified and action taken. As a result improvements, such as those to teaching, have been made. Well planned staff training and good management of the support received from the local authority are also making sure improvements take place, for example in mathematics and in Reception. The school is fully aware that in depth training for teaching writing is required and this has been planned for next term

The leadership team have developed effective systems for monitoring the quality of education but curriculum leaders are not fully involved in this process. Leadership of Years 3 to 6 is having a good impact on improving pupils' progress. However, weaknesses in management in Years 1 and 2 are causing inconsistencies for pupils in these years. The governors are fully supportive and take an active role in checking the effectiveness of the school's work. There has been a good rate of improvement since

the arrival of the headteacher. As a result progress since the last inspection is satisfactory and the school has a satisfactory capacity to progress further.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

As you know, we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed seeing you at work and play and talking with some of you. I am writing to you to let you know what we discovered about your school. The school gives you a satisfactory education and is improving.

These are some of the other things we found out about your school:

- You often make satisfactory progress in English and mathematics but do not make enough progress in writing in Years 1 and 2.
- You behave well and enjoy school although a few of you become restless when the work you are given is too easy.
- Teaching is satisfactory. It is really good in Year 6 but work in other classes does not always build on what you already know.
- The curriculum is satisfactory but you need better opportunities to practise your writing in different subjects.
- The school cares for you well and keeps you safe.
- Your headteacher is making good improvements to your school but better checks on your progress are needed in Years 1 and 2 and by teachers in charge of subjects.

Here are the ways we are asking the school to improve:

- Improve your progress in writing and make sure you have better opportunities to write in different subjects.
- Make sure your work is never too easy.
- Make better checks on how well you learn in Years 1 and 2.
- Give those teachers in charge of subjects better opportunities to check your progress in lessons.

You can help your teachers by making sure you improve your spelling and handwriting, by always trying your best and letting teachers know if your work is ever too easy.

Thank you again for your help and for being so polite and friendly.