



St Thomas' Church of England Infant School, Woolton Hill

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116328
Local Authority Hampshire
Inspection number 279792
Inspection date 2 October 2006
Reporting inspector John Earish

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Woolton Hill
School category	Voluntary controlled		Newbury
Age range of pupils	4-7		RG20 9XF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01635 253431
Number on roll (school)	134	Fax number	01635 254933
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Steve Smith
		Headteacher	Mrs Gillian Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2000		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves the parishes of Woolton Hill and Highclere. It is a very popular school with about a third of the children attending from the nearby towns of Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford. The school admits pupils from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Almost all are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is also below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. On crossing the threshold of St Thomas', you are instantly struck by the calm and purposeful learning environment where each child is made to feel special. Throughout the school, there is a relentless and purposeful focus on raising pupils' achievement by all members of the staff team. This is acknowledged by the parents who are overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school. One parent wrote 'the school values respect, kindness and honesty....I am a very happy parent!'

Leadership and management are outstanding. The foundations of the school's success are built upon a rigorous approach to evaluating every aspect of its performance and the accuracy of its judgements. Consultation and collaboration are used to great effect to ensure that all staff, pupils and governors share a common sense of purpose and direction. Links with a range of agencies ensure that the best possible support is provided to promote pupils' academic and personal well-being. High standards have been sustained for several years and boys and girls of all backgrounds and abilities make excellent progress. Outstanding provision in the Foundation Stage helps young children settle quickly and effortlessly into school life. This is an excellent preparation for future life and learning.

This high achievement is rooted in the outstanding quality of the teaching and the excellent range of interesting and challenging tasks which motivates and inspires children to work hard. Teachers convey enthusiasm, optimism and belief in the children's capacity to learn and view mistakes as opportunities for new learning. At the heart of this success lies the skilful use of assessment information to set work that is well matched to the pupils' varying needs and abilities. This has a very positive effect on pupils' behaviour, motivation and achievement which are outstanding. Pupils are very clear about what they are to learn and settle quickly to individual and cooperative tasks as the occasion demands. They enthusiastically solve problems in mathematics and science, although, these skills are not used as widely in other subjects.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding because they are very well cared for at school and as a result feel secure and happy, a view endorsed by the overwhelming majority of parents. They enjoy coming to school and take great pride in all that they do. Pupils treat each other with respect and willingly respond to opportunities to accept responsibility. As a result, they feel happy, secure and quickly become confident, independent learners.

This is indeed an outstanding school with an outstanding capacity to make further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Capitalise on pupils' skills at problem solving in mathematics and science in other subjects and activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding. Children start school with skills and abilities that are similar to those expected of four year olds. They make exceptional progress in all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum and by the end of the Reception year most have achieved and exceed the standards expected for their age.

Taken overall, standards at the end of Years 2 are high and have been significantly above the national average since 2001. Challenging targets are set and often exceeded. Pupils are helped to make very good progress regardless of background or ability. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils and more able pupils attain the higher level in national tests as a result of outstanding teaching and high expectations. However, there is no complacency. For example, the recent focus upon improving pupils' writing has successfully extended the range and quality of pupils' work. This has resulted in a further increase in the numbers achieving the higher levels in 2006.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils behave very well and show remarkable care and courtesy. They attend school very regularly. From an early age children learn to cooperate with each other and can be trusted to complete tasks on their own because they have a strong sense of personal responsibility. Pupils are very aware of those who find themselves in less fortunate circumstances and raise considerable sums of money for local and national charities.

Pupils greatly value having extra responsibility and they enjoy helping others. For example, they act as playground buddies and help the very youngest children cut up their food at lunchtime. They are able to participate in a very good number of extra-curricular activities despite the small size of the school. This is further evidence that they are happy and content. They are very well informed about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and staying safe. They speak authoritatively about healthy eating and are very aware of the importance of drinking plenty of water and taking regular exercise. One pupil added 'You must drink lots of water to keep your brain thinking...not lots of fizzy drinks...that does bad things to your body!' Pupils rapidly acquire literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills [ICT] that will equip them well for later life and learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The high achievement of pupils reflects the high quality of teaching and learning at the school. Teachers have high expectations and know their pupils very well. They plan work that is very closely matched to pupils' individual abilities to ensure the maximum progress during lessons. Assessment is used very successfully to identify, track and support pupils' learning needs, and to set group and individual targets.

Teachers use praise very effectively so that pupils feel confident and want to learn. As a result they behave exceptionally well and have very positive attitudes to learning. As a parent commented, 'All the teachers are approachable and friendly and my child is always happy to go to school and enjoys it.' Teaching in the Foundation Stage is also of high quality and prepares children well for their start in Year 1.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum that motivates the pupils and promotes their enjoyment of learning. As a result, they grow into confident and competent learners. Basic skills are taught most effectively. There are many opportunities to solve problem in mathematics and science, although, this is not used as extensively in other subjects. The quality and range of the planned activities in the Foundation Stage are rich and varied. There is a very good balance between the work chosen by the teacher and activities selected by the children.

The school ensures that all pupils have the opportunity to participate and enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities and school clubs. Visitors from the community and outings to places of interest all add to the pupils' enjoyment of learning. Such experiences, together with learning in personal, social and health education, and the emphasis on staying safe and healthy, teach skills that contribute to their future economic well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school gives its pupils outstanding care, guidance and support, a view endorsed by the overwhelming majority of parents. The pupils like their teachers and rightly appreciate their efforts to help them feel safe in and out of school. A close check is kept on their well-being and the pupils are taught how to take care of themselves and how to make healthy and safe choices. Health and safety procedures are effective and are reviewed regularly. Child protection procedures are rigorous and there are good systems to support any pupils who are particularly vulnerable. The headteacher works very effectively with parents to allay their anxieties and concerns during individual interviews before their children start school. There are very effective methods for

keeping track of pupils' progress and these are used perceptively to set challenging targets. Pupils know what they must improve because of the helpful guidance they receive from their teachers. The systems also identify any individual pupil who is not making as much progress as they should so that action can be taken.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Excellent leadership and management contribute significantly to pupils' outstanding personal development and academic achievement. The effect of the exceptional leadership of the headteacher is that all pupils and staff feel valued and strive to do as well as they can. Team work is a strong feature of this school and all staff are fully committed to playing their part in raising standards and achievement.

The school's self evaluation is of very good quality, although judgements about overall effectiveness are modest. Nevertheless, the teachers and governors have a very clear understanding of what the school does well. They have maintained the many strong features identified at the time of the last inspection and continued to seek improvement. For example, recent work on improving writing has been successful. The introduction of 'talking partners' have enabled pupils to gain confidence at discussing and developing their ideas before committing them to paper. The governors are conscientious in discharging their duties, offering strong support and thoughtful challenge. The budget is managed effectively and ensures that the school is well resourced.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

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

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Following my visit to inspect your school I would like to tell you what I think about how well you are getting on and how well your school is helping you to learn. The inspection found that your school is outstanding. There are lots of things that I liked, and some of them are:

- Children in the reception class settle in quickly and make a very good start because everyone is so friendly and helpful. They enjoy the many interesting and challenging activities that are organised for them.
- You make excellent progress in your work because you are thoughtful and work very hard in lessons. You help and support each other in all that you do.
- You are able to learn in a very friendly and caring school. Your behaviour is excellent and you get on very well with each other.
- You listen very carefully to what your teachers have to say and try very hard in your lessons. You work very well on your own and also in groups.
- Your teachers spend a lot of time looking at what you have done in class and working out how to help you to make your work even better.

You are very good at problem solving in mathematics and science. I have asked your teachers to find more ways for you to use these skills in other subjects and activities.

I enjoyed being in your school. I hope that in the future it is even more successful in helping you to do as well as you possibly can.

Yours sincerely,

John Earish

Lead Inspector