



Barkway VA Church of England First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117422
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280071
Inspection dates 4 May 2006 to 4 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. John Paull LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	High Street
School category	Voluntary aided		SG8 8EF
Age range of pupils	3 to 9		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01763 848283
Number on roll	44	Fax number	01763 849777
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Tom Luckock
Date of previous inspection	11 January 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Jenny Heinzelmann

Age group 3 to 9	Inspection dates 4 May 2006 - 4 May 2006	Inspection number 280071
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Barkway First School serves a small village near Royston. The school's pupils, nearly all of whom are of White British heritage, are drawn from a fairly wide area and from a broad range of social backgrounds. A lower than average proportion has learning difficulties or disabilities. Attainment on entry is broadly average although, in the context of small year groups, it varies considerably. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has a Healthy Schools Accreditation (2005), an Artsmark Silver Award (2004), a Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark and a local authority Quality Standard (2004) in recognition of what it provides for children in the early years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The inspection confirms the school's view that it provides a good quality education. Its effectiveness is based on good teaching, so pupils of different backgrounds and abilities achieve well. Standards are usually above average, although the results of Year 2 national tests vary considerably from year to year. Differences in pupils' abilities when they begin school are accentuated in the context of the school's small size. Even good teaching cannot realistically make up such differences in achievement by the time national tests are taken at the end of Year 2. Pupils' progress is assessed thoroughly. The use of assessment, however, is not always refined sufficiently to indicate slower progress of specific groups, such as the youngest pupils in each year. For this reason, the school cannot always be sure that measures to boost performance are introduced early enough. Quality of provision and standards in the Nursery and Reception years are good, based as they are on careful planning. From the Nursery on, pupils' personal development is strong, with good provision leading to good attitudes, and strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leadership and management are good, including realistic procedures for evaluating the school's work that led to the discovery of weaknesses in boys' writing and understanding of shape, space and measures in mathematics and a focus on the teaching of each. Issues carried forward from the last report, related to the consistency of teaching and learning and the planned uses of finance, have been addressed successfully. The school is well placed to make further improvements and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further refine procedures for assessment to ensure that learning programmes to boost the performance of specific groups and individuals are introduced early enough to maximise effectiveness. - Complete all planned improvements of what is taught in writing and shape, space and measures to raise standards even further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well. Standards are often above average, which is reflected in recent Year 2 national test results and assessments. In 2003 and 2005, results exceeded national averages overall. They were particularly good in 2003, when all pupils reached the nationally expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics, and many exceeded them. Most pupils read very well. They readily absorb information out of books or from their classroom's electronic whiteboard. This competence contributes much to other subjects, where displays through the school indicate that nationally expected levels are often met well. Most children progress well during their Nursery and Reception years and achieve the expected goals for this age. Use of assessment to analyse progress is not always sufficiently refined to produce early information and action. For example, a pattern in which the youngest pupils in each year are not progressing as fast as others is beginning to emerge. However, this has not been

identified soon enough to intervene in time for the Year 2 national assessments. That said, three years ago, good analysis indicated a tendency for boys to achieve less well in writing than reading and less well in shape, space and measures within mathematics. A dip to below average in the school's 2004 national test results, a year group that was all boys, reflects this pattern. Successful teaching strategies were introduced to remedy the situation and have begun to have some effect. Targeting, based on challenging predictions of what pupils can attain, is a feature of how the school keeps track of its pupils' progress. Records indicate that progress at the expected rate is nearly always achieved and frequently exceeded by higher and middle attaining pupils. Those with learning difficulties progress effectively towards their own individual targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Records indicate that nearly all children in the Nursery and Reception years reach the expected goals for personal, social and emotional development. Pupils' positive attitudes are shown by the way that they respond well to learning, concentrating in lessons and cooperating effectively. Many agree that school is enjoyable, which is reflected in their good attendance and good behaviour and confirmed in parents' responses in questionnaires. One typical remark came from a boy who said, 'I like school because you learn good things here.' All those asked felt that they get on well with each other. Several pupils were reflective about 'our nice field where we can play at lunchtime'. Pupils express positive views of other countries and cultures. Their involvement in and enjoyment of the arts is evidenced in the school's silver Artsmark. Pupils take a full part in drawing up rules for their classrooms and further contribute ideas through a school council. They contribute well to the school and wider communities. Older pupils were quick to volunteer to walk with a younger partner when they went to the field. Pupils also contribute to village activity through strong links with the church, support for charities and participation in the local fete. The school provides clear guidance to pupils on staying safe and eating healthily, and pupils' response is satisfactory. The development of pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) is on course to support them in later years as they grow up.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching is leading to good rates of progress. Since the last inspection, emphasis has been successfully placed on improving the consistency with which good quality teaching occurs. The inspection confirms that good leadership, offering observation and professional development, has contributed much. For example, in Years 1 and 2, lower attaining boys received carefully focused support when they were writing, thereby

meeting the requirements of one of the school's main targets for improvement. A good mathematics lesson in Years 3 and 4 featured lively questioning that kept pupils involved and helped them to achieve well. Good planning is a feature of what is provided for children in the Nursery and Reception years, so their learning is focused clearly on the required areas of learning and what they need to do to take each new step. Much of the school's good teaching occurs because planning is based on good assessment. Thus, aspects that pupils find difficult are revisited and addressed effectively. However, the headteacher and subject leaders recognise that further refinement of such procedures is necessary to ensure that programmes of support are introduced as early as possible. Throughout the school, provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good and these pupils progress well towards their own individual targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of learners of different prior attainments and aptitudes. All subjects of the National Curriculum are planned imaginatively to include strong cross-curricular features. Examples are visits to a local stud farm, a residential journey, and innovative uses of music and art that enrich lessons and raise pupils' interest and understanding. Physical education takes a prominent place. Its quality is enhanced by the specialist knowledge of visiting coaches. In the early years, good planning includes all areas of learning and ensures a smooth transition between the Reception and Year 1. Pupils are offered and attend an impressive number of school clubs that include varied sporting and creative activities. Pupils also benefit from visits, visitors and learning based on themes. A recent example was when a rabbi helped with pupils' understanding of aspects of Judaism. Personal development is well catered for, both in planned lessons and informally as situations arise. Links with the local church are also strong.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Procedures are good. Systems to assess learning and track individual pupils' progress are thorough, but are not always refined sufficiently to evaluate the progress made by specific groups of pupils. Further delegation of their use and interpretation by subject leaders has been identified as a priority. Links with outside agencies are strong, so advice on meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and other disabilities is good. Child protection and arrangements to secure the building and ensure safety are robust. Careful, effective checks are kept on attendance. In the context of small year groups, teachers and other staff know pupils very well and support and guide them strongly. Information about their children's work is offered to parents on a regular basis. In their responses to pre-inspection questionnaires, parents expressed overwhelming support for the school's friendly, open approach towards them. Behaviour and matters of personal development are monitored, and awards for pupils' good attitudes and work are celebrated in a weekly assembly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are of good quality. One parent, whose views are typical of the overwhelming majority in letters and questionnaires, commented about his child's increasing maturity, knowledge and confidence. He gave the credit to the school's positive leadership and the quality of teaching. Nearly all parents feel that they are consulted and informed about the work of the school and that it takes account of their own and their children's views. The inspection confirms this view. The headteacher, staff and governors work together well in evaluating the school's work realistically. Governors support the school well and have a sound understanding of strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement. The headteacher and staff consult frequently with outside agencies, especially the local authority, and put measures into effect that address areas that require improvement. The school improvement plan is a clear, well constructed document, indicating how further improvement is set to occur. Subject leadership in the main core subjects of English and mathematics has improved well since the last inspection. The literacy leader's evaluation of provision represents a good model on which to base similar development in other subjects. The good management of provision and planning for children in the Nursery and Reception years and for pupils with learning difficulties has been maintained.

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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?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	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?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	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?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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	2	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	3	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	Yes
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 being so polite and helpful when I visited your school. I thoroughly enjoyed spending the day with you and coming to your lessons. I think that your work is progressing well and reaches a good standard. I particularly enjoyed our chats on the school field at lunchtime. I was very pleased to hear so many of you tell me that you like your school. What I like most about your school - You are achieving a good standard of work and many of you read very well indeed. - Your behaviour and attitudes to school are good. - You learn well because your teachers teach you well and they help you to feel safe and sound. - Your learning is made interesting by visits to places of interest, visitors to the school and the school clubs that you attend. - Your headteacher is good at leading your school. What I have asked your headteacher, the staff and the school's governors to do next - Use records of your progress better, so that different types of work for those of you who need it can start sooner. - Introduce more ideas to help you to make your writing and mathematics even better. I hope that you will always be proud of your school and I wish you well in the future.