



Northchurch St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117424
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280073
Inspection dates 25 May 2006 to 26 May 2006
Reporting inspector Dr. Anna Coyle LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	New Road
School category	Voluntary aided		HP4 3QZ
Age range of pupils	3 to 9		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 389040
Number on roll	177	Fax number	01442 390589
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr.Ray Cox
Date of previous inspection	12 June 2000	Headteacher	Miss. Denise Kaye

Age group 3 to 9	Inspection dates 25 May 2006 - 26 May 2006	Inspection number 280073
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a moderately sized First school, with a Nursery, situated in the village of Northchurch. It has a separate Kindergarten class for three year olds. Most children are of White British background. Attainment on entry is above average. The number of children with learning difficulties or disabilities is lower than that of other schools. These children have a range of needs, including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, autistic needs and visual impairment.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree that this is a good school. It is a welcoming, friendly place in which children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and their behaviour is exemplary. Happy, smiling faces greet visitors cheerily, as children politely inquire about visitors' well-being. Teaching is good in Years 1 to 4 and children do well. They achieve high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science by the time they leave at the end of Year 4. All staff work well together as a lively team and organise plenty of exciting activities to help the children enjoy lessons and learn new skills. Art is particularly well used to link subjects effectively across the curriculum. However, the provision for children in the Foundation Stage is only satisfactory overall because the quality of teaching is inconsistent, ranging from outstanding to inadequate. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has established good procedures for self-evaluation, though the governors' strategic role is not yet fully developed. The school has good links with parents, the local community and the church, which it uses to benefit children's learning, and the inspection findings agree with the school's own assessment of itself. It has improved well since the last inspection and successfully dealt with the issues that were identified in 2000. It provides good value for money and is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching in the Foundation Stage to spread the best practice and make sure that every lesson is of good quality. - Continue to develop the strategic role of the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Children do well from the time they enter the school in the Nursery until they leave when at the end of Year 4. They begin with better skills than most children of their age and make rapid progress in the Nursery because they are very keen to learn and absorb information readily. They attain high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science by the time they reach the end of Year 4. Most children do well, particularly at the higher levels. This is borne out by the results of the annual assessments in Year 2, which have been consistently high over the last few years, although the results for writing dipped a little last year. The school has analysed the reasons for this and tackled the weaknesses in boys' writing successfully. Children work hard, and many achieve the challenging targets the teachers set for them. The few with learning difficulties also achieve well because they are closely supported by teaching assistants during lessons. The school's strong focus on linking creative activities and artwork with other subjects has a significant effect on children's successes because all are encouraged to do their best and take pride in their finished work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good, with some outstanding features. The children really love coming to school. They feel valued and enjoy the exciting range of learning opportunities provided. Behaviour is exemplary. Happy, polite children are attentive and speak confidently with adults about their work, for example, in a Year 2 lesson the children listened intently and knew exactly when to contribute. Children have a good understanding of how to remain safe. Attendance is above average. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Children learn to think quietly about life and the world around them. They develop a very clear sense of right and wrong. They enjoy taking responsibility, such as being members of the school council. Each class is provided with a 'Suggestion Box' to voice their opinions about issues, such as the need for more equipment in the playground, and children's ideas are taken seriously. Most children contribute effectively to the community. They are well prepared for the world of work, with good literacy and numeracy skills and well-developed social skills. Children develop an excellent understanding of the need for healthy eating. The school cook works closely with staff on dietary matters and lunchtime is a calm and happy experience.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. They are consistently good in Years 1 to 4. Teachers have a good rapport with the children in their classes and they use a good range of methods to inspire them. For example, they make very good use of interactive whiteboards to stimulate learning and they deploy competent teaching assistants to help children make good progress. Most teachers have high expectations and provide good opportunities for children to learn through practical activities. Literacy and numeracy are used well in all subjects. As a result, most children are eager to learn and do their best. However, teaching varies from outstanding to inadequate in the Foundation Stage. The best teaching is lively and imaginative, and activities are based on exciting themes, such as Irish 'Leprechauns'. Lessons are occasionally tedious, however, when the content is uninspiring and learning is not effectively organised. Teachers generally inform the children of how well they are doing and tell them what they need to do to improve. Consequently, children know what they are expected to learn and respond energetically to the challenges set for them. For example, the school's focus on 'Culture Week' during the inspection meant that learning was geared to topics about various countries, such as America, Japan, France and Peru, as teachers moved around the different classes from Year 1 to 4. In a lesson with Year 3 on 'Japanese Numbers', the work was really challenging as the children learnt to count up to 10, sing rhymes and complete sums in Japanese. Similarly, in a geography activity in Year 4, the teacher's high expectations and excellent rapport with the class ensured good learning about American States.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum and other activities are good. The school's thematic approach has a significant impact on learning because the subjects of the curriculum are linked very effectively. A wide range of opportunities is planned in English that includes a strong focus on creative writing. There are clear strengths in children's ability to write imaginatively, especially in poetry lessons. Mathematics work develops children's basic skills well and they learn how to solve complex problems. Science work is well linked to practical activities, which allow the children to develop their key skills of recording and interpreting data. Educational visits to places such as the Science Museum further enhance children's learning. A variety of focus weeks, such as 'Cultural Week' and 'ICT Week' are enjoyed very much by all children. Computers are used well across the curriculum. This means that children have many opportunities to develop their skills in other subjects. All legal requirements are met and a good range of visits and visitors enriches the curriculum. There is a very good range of well attended clubs to extend children's involvement and enjoyment; for example, in football, cricket, French and Maypole dancing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff effectively ensure that children feel secure and cared for within a community where they are valued. Health and safety procedures are regularly reviewed and communicated to all staff. Arrangements for child protection are well established, and adults throughout the school are made aware of their responsibilities by the efficient office staff. Children have confidence in their teachers and enjoy all aspects of school life. Close monitoring and analysis of performance provides very good information for teachers, which is used effectively to plan lessons and pinpoint individual support for children. This process has enabled the school to set clear targets for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher works closely with the deputy headteacher and staff to set clear direction for the school and promote a welcoming, friendly ethos. The governors meet regularly and manage the finances well to make sure that the school achieves good value for money. However, the strategic role of the governing body is not sufficiently developed and this is acknowledged by the school as an area to improve. The school has effective systems for evaluating how well it is doing and identifying what could be improved. It consults regularly with parents to gain their views and has good links with the local community and church. Monitoring procedures for checking on the quality of teaching and learning are well established and the recent introduction of 'Curriculum Teams' and 'Team Leaders' has proved successful. The school has dealt with the issues from the previous inspection

successfully by developing its provision for children with special educational needs and improving teachers' marking of children's work. In addition, lunchtime arrangements are now suitable and attendance registers are completed correctly. Based upon its previous track record, the school's capacity to make further improvements is good.

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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	3	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	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	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 talking to us and making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed listening to you and hearing about the things you enjoy. Here are some of the things we found out: Your behaviour is excellent. You are very polite and cheerful. We particularly like the way you smile and help each other during lessons and at playtimes, and know right from wrong. You all work very hard, which means that you do well in the tests you take at the end of Year 2 and you achieve high standards by the time you leave at the end of Year 4. You know a lot about other countries of the world, and your paintings and drawings are super! All of the adults in your school take good care of you and encourage you to do your best. Most of the teaching is good and some of it is outstanding. You told us that you like coming to school and enjoy learning because the teachers and teaching assistants are so friendly and helpful, and we agree with you. They give you plenty of exciting things to do and help you if you go wrong. The headteacher works very hard to make sure that everything runs smoothly. The deputy headteacher and office staff help her a lot. We think that your school is a great place to learn, but the teaching could be even better, and so we have asked your teachers to try to make sure that every lesson is good. We have also asked the governors to do a bit more work. We hope that you will continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now.