



Puller Memorial, Church of England, Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117453
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280083
Inspection dates 9 February 2006 to 10 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Helen Ranger LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	High Cross
School category	Voluntary aided		SG11 1AZ
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01920463178
Number on roll	66	Fax number	01920463178
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Debbie Morley
Date of previous inspection	18 September 2000	Headteacher	Ms. Liz Aitken

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a much smaller than average school. Many pupils live nearby, but a significant minority come from a much wider area because their parents choose this school. All pupils are from White British backgrounds and a lower than average proportion are identified as having learning difficulties. On admission, their attainment covers a very wide range, but is average overall. The school has had a succession of acting headteachers over the past few terms and there have been several other changes to the teaching staff. The difficulties in recruiting a suitable headteacher have only been resolved this term and the new head started in the school last month.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school judges its overall effectiveness as satisfactory at present and the inspection agrees. The turbulence caused by many staff changes over the past two years, and especially the absence of a permanent headteacher, led to a lack of continuity and leadership. This had an unsettling effect on the pupils and staff alike. The school is now in a sound position to improve following the arrival of its new headteacher. Although she has not had time to have a great impact on standards, she has quickly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and has acted well to deal with the most urgent priorities. Pupils currently make adequate progress, supported by a sound curriculum. They are on track to reach the levels expected nationally by the end of Reception and Year 2, and above average levels by Year 6. However, the teaching they receive, while generally satisfactory, is of an inconsistent quality. It is securely satisfactory in the Foundation Stage, of a variable, but a broadly satisfactory standard in Years 1 to 4 and good in Years 5 and 6. Most pupils enjoy school and are positive about learning, although the presentation of their work is often untidy and does not always reflect the quality of their ideas. A small number of pupils in the two classes covering Years 1 to 4 have significant emotional and behavioural difficulties. Because staff do not always deal with these pupils effectively enough, other pupils are affected by inappropriate behaviour and sometimes join in. At times, pupils do not show enough kindness or respect for each other. This is at odds with the school's Christian ethos. This is the most urgent area for improvement and one that the headteacher is already tackling effectively. The new headteacher is experienced and energetic and parents and pupils agree that she has already brought stability to the school. She is working closely and successfully with staff and governors to provide the leadership that has been lacking in the school. She knows that the systems for self-evaluation and development planning need to be more rigorous and consistent and has already started to work on this. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the standards of behaviour, respect and tolerance of the pupils in Years 1 to 4 in line with the school's stated aims and ethos. - Improve the quality of teaching in Years 1 to 4 by establishing effective strategies for managing pupils' behaviour and raising teachers' expectations of how pupils present their work. - Improve the arrangements for school self-evaluation and development planning so that the school has a more accurate view of how well it is doing and what its next priorities should be.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall. It is good in Years 5 and 6, but the quality of teaching is not consistent enough across the school as a whole for pupils always to make securely good progress. From an average starting point at the age of three, pupils make sound progress in the Foundation Stage towards reaching the expected

goals in all areas of learning. In recent years, the overall standards reached in the Year 2 assessments of reading, writing and mathematics have been significantly above the national average. They are currently average and represent satisfactory progress. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are making good progress. They are on course to reach above average standards this year in English, mathematics and science, as they have done for the past few years. They meet the challenging targets set for them. While there is no significant underachievement by pupils, including those with learning difficulties, all but the pupils in Years 6 have been affected to some extent by the changes in staffing of the past two years. This has led to a dip in pupils' academic achievements. The inspection did not examine progress in all subjects, but checked standards in information and communication technology (ICT) which were too low at the time of the previous inspection. They are now in line with expected levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory overall, but not as strong as at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy school. Attendance is broadly average. The youngest children are quite boisterous, but are settling well to school routines. The oldest pupils are sensible and are considerate young adults who are a credit to themselves and the school. In the other age groups, most pupils form good relationships and behave well. However, a small number of pupils in Years 1 to 4 do show challenging behaviour. This sometimes disrupts the learning of their classmates or gives encouragement to others to behave badly. Some parents and pupils are rightly concerned about this. These pupils do not always show enough respect either to each other or to the adults in the school. This is partly because there has not been clear leadership in this aspect of school life in the recent past and partly because some of the less experienced teachers lack expertise in managing challenging behaviour. The new headteacher is dealing with this weakness firmly and effectively and this action needs to continue for standards to reach the good levels achieved in recent years. Pupils are clear about how to keep themselves safe, for example, when they go swimming or use the internet at home. They know what to do when occasional incidents of bullying occur and trust the adults in the school to help them. They take advantage of the many opportunities to keep fit and eat healthily. Pupils take on responsibilities around the school as they get older. They are happy that the school council represents their views. They work well in teams, helping to organise projects that they initiate, such as a toy sale and the purchase of a goat for an African family. The oldest are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life by their good standards in literacy and numeracy and their sound computer skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but inconsistent. Teaching in the Foundation Stage class has improved well since the last inspection when it was a weakness. The provision in the Foundation class is now well balanced and relevant. Teaching is best in Years 5 and 6 where well organised, purposeful lessons ensure all pupils do well. In the other two classes, expectations of what pupils can achieve are rising, but more still needs to be done to settle pupils' behaviour and ensure that learning is consistently effective. The teaching assistant gives valuable support to pupils with learning difficulties in these two classes. Across the school as a whole, teachers' written planning includes clear objectives for what pupils of all capabilities will do. The small class sizes ensure that teachers give high levels of individual attention to each pupil, offering feedback regularly and setting the agenda for the next stage of learning. Expectations of how pupils present their work are sometimes too low, a weakness at the time of the last inspection that has still not been fully remedied. As a result, poor handwriting and layout mean that the finished written work does not reflect well enough the quality of pupils' thinking and discussions. Teachers have recently begun to track pupils' longer-term progress rigorously and use this information to set regular learning targets for all individuals. The information gained from this tracking now needs to be used even more effectively to inform the overall school strategies for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and covers all the subjects it should. The range of activities and resources for the Foundation Stage in particular are better than at the time of the last inspection. All subjects are planned to take account of the needs of the mixed-age classes, although some time is wasted in delivering these plans, for example, by overly long snack times. The support planned for pupils with learning difficulties is adequate, but the headteacher has rightly identified the need for further improvements to their individual education plans and how these are shared with these pupils and their parents. There is good provision to ensure that pupils do not miss out on opportunities that larger schools can provide, including a breakfast club and after-school activities. The school works closely with others nearby to make up sports teams and to offer a wider range of activities that it can do alone. There is particularly good provision for swimming. Teachers regularly plan lessons that promote pupils' personal and social development, but these are less effective than they should be because of the failure to eradicate all examples of disruptive or unkind behaviour.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care is satisfactory overall. The day-to-day pastoral care of pupils is good, for example, if they are unwell. Pupils say they are looked after well and have adults they can turn to if they have any problems. However, the weaknesses in managing behaviour, means that the overall quality of care provided by the teachers is no better than satisfactory. Child protection arrangements are in place. Disruptions to the leadership of the school and changes to the governing body led to a lack of continuity in how the full range of health and safety arrangements were checked. The new headteacher and recently appointed chair of governors have quickly identified areas of weakness in formal health and safety procedures and have swiftly set about improving the school's systems to good effect. During the inspection, for example, a very efficient fire drill was carried out that fully met all safety requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the school is now satisfactory after a period of instability for the past two years. Staff, pupils, parents and governors have welcomed the new head's arrival and comment that she is already having a positive impact. After the former upheavals and uncertainties, all these interested parties are becoming more involved in deciding how the school will move forward. With no permanent headteacher for some time and the retirement or promotion to other schools of several experienced staff, it had been difficult for the school to work systematically through its plans for improvement. The existing written development plan is very comprehensive, but does not focus clearly enough on what is currently most urgent or important. The school has not had an accurate enough view of how well it was doing, for example, in relation to other schools, and needed a clearer and more manageable statement of priorities. The new head quickly assessed the current position and identified a good timetable for the action necessary to boost standards again. The quality of governance is satisfactory. Governors have supported the school well during the unsettled period and provided some necessary continuity. They have worked closely with the local authority's advisers for the past few months to support the remaining staff and to encourage better provision for pupils; this action is continuing while the headteacher establishes her position. The subject leaders have benefited from this support and are checking standards and provision effectively. In spite of its difficulties, the school has managed to keep pace with the national improvement in academic standards and has acted successfully on most of the areas identified as weaknesses by its last inspection in 2000. The appointment of its new headteacher and the determination by all parties to do the best for the pupils put it in a sound position to improve in the future.

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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?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	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	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	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 welcoming me to your school and helping me to find out about it. This letter is to tell you about some of the most important things I saw. Many of you have had many changes of teacher and headteacher in the last two years and I hope that Miss Aitken's arrival makes things more settled for everyone. There are many good things about your school. It values your ideas and gives you opportunities such as the school council to have your say. Your teachers make sure that, although your school is small, you have plenty of activities to enjoy, including clubs, visits and sports events. The oldest children in your school reach high standards in their work and behaviour and are a good example to the younger ones. Your new headteacher knows what is needed to make your school even better and she is working hard with the other adults in the school to do this. As well as these good things, some things in your school need to be improved. In particular, I was sad to see that a few children do not behave well in lessons or treat other people with enough respect or kindness. I hope you will all work with the adults to make this better. Everyone has a part to play in improving this. Miss Aitken has already worked out how your school can be a better place to learn and you and your teachers will need to help her achieve this. Finally, you all think hard about your work and discuss it well in class, but many of your books are too untidy and your handwriting needs to be better. I know that you can improve this if you try. I enjoyed visiting your school and meeting you all.