



St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Hitchin

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117467
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280087
Inspection dates 7 February 2006 to 8 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Marina Gough LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Benslow Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		SG4 9RD
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462459160
Number on roll	260	Fax number	01462436443
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Julian Barnard
Date of previous inspection	3 July 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Christine Cernik

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 11	7 February 2006 - 8 February 2006	280087

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves the local area and draws children from a wide mix of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. About 10% of children have English as an additional language and just over 20% of children have learning difficulties. Most children attend the Nursery before transferring to the Reception class. On entry, the children's attainment is very mixed, and tends to be lower than average, especially in terms of language and personal and social development. The school is part of several strategies, including the Accelerated Mathematics programme, where the school works closely with counterparts in America, and the local Network for Learning. The school has recently received a county award for its excellent practice in the Reception class.

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 extremely effective school which provides an outstanding quality of education for all children. Since the last inspection the school has made excellent progress, and has addressed all of the issues that were identified. The school has exceptionally high expectations, and in its self-evaluation has made a very accurate assessment of its strengths and areas for development. Standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are exceptionally high in relation to the national average, and children of all abilities make excellent progress. The provision for children in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. From a below average starting point in the Nursery class, children achieve extremely well so that by the end of the Reception class, their attainment is at least at the level expected for their age. Teaching is excellent, and as a result, children thoroughly enjoy their learning. They are highly motivated and enthusiastic. Children of all ages appreciate the very wide and stimulating range of activities that is available to them, especially visits to places of local interest, and the Year 4 summer camp. The school is exceptionally well led by the headteacher, who works very closely and effectively with the leadership team to bring about improvement in a well paced and consultative manner. Governors are knowledgeable and very supportive, but at times they rely too heavily on the headteacher and staff for information, rather than seeking it out themselves. Because of the tremendous commitment of staff and governors, and the strong partnership with parents, the school is very well placed for further and continued improvement. The school gives exceptional value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the monitoring role of governors so that they take more responsibility for finding out about the school's life and work themselves, in order to fulfil their role of 'critical friend' more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The children's attainment when they join the Nursery class is below the level expected for their age. During their time in the Foundation Stage children make exceptionally good progress so that, when they transfer to Year 1, they are attaining at least the age expected level in each area of learning, and often beyond. There are particular strengths in the way in which the school develops the children's independent learning skills, and promotes their personal, social and emotional development. Key Stage 1 children make outstanding progress, and by the end of Year 2, their attainment is exceptionally high in reading, writing and mathematics. As they move through Key Stage 2, children continue to make very good progress, and as a result they attain exceptionally high standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. The school sets very challenging targets for the children, which are usually met and sometimes exceeded. Throughout the school, children show a very good capacity for problem-solving, and successfully use and apply literacy, numeracy and information

and communication technology (ICT) skills in their work in other areas. The school makes excellent provision for children with learning difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language. As a result these children make outstanding progress towards their targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The children's personal development is outstanding. Behaviour in class and in the playground is of a consistently very high standard and children get on very well with one another. Children of all ages are extremely enthusiastic about their work, and are highly motivated. Children love coming to school, and attendance is good. A very strong emphasis is placed on ensuring that the children understand the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and how to keep themselves safe. There are many excellent opportunities for the children to contribute to the community of the school through the school council, where they learn to manage a budget, and schemes such as that to develop the school grounds, in which Year 2 have been involved. Because children have such excellent basic skills of language and number, and are highly independent, they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life. The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Children have an excellent understanding of different cultures, and their interest in the lives and beliefs of others is promoted very effectively. Children reflect on their own lives and have excellent social skills. Throughout the school children have a strong sense of fairness and justice and a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding and lead to children of all ages making significant gains in their learning. Throughout the school, a particular strength of teaching is the way in which staff encourage the children to think for themselves, to solve problems and to make choices and decisions about their learning. As a result many children are highly independent and creative learners. Teachers present activities in a very lively manner so that the children are highly motivated and keen to find out more. In the Reception class, play is used in a superb way to capture the children's interest, to motivate them in their learning, and to enable them to practise newly learned skills. In the infant and junior classes, teachers go to a great deal of trouble to use resources such as the interactive whiteboards to enliven learning. In all classes, teachers use questions very effectively to prompt children, to probe their thinking, and to extend the higher attainers so that they are fully stretched. Support staff work very unobtrusively with children who have learning difficulties and English as an additional language so that they can take a full and active part in all activities. The school makes excellent use of assessment data to measure and track the children's

progress and attainment. Assessment information is used very well when planning the next steps of the children's learning so that activities are very closely matched to the needs of individuals. The school has made a very good start in involving the children in setting their own targets for improvement. The children appreciate the feedback they receive and say that it helps them to 'get better and better'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The Foundation Stage curriculum is outstanding. As a result the Nursery and Reception children have an excellent start to their education, and their perception of learning as 'fun' is firmly established. Teachers and support staff go to a great deal of trouble to make activities stimulating and interesting and relevant to the children's needs. There is an excellent balance of activities the children choose themselves and those that are led and directed by an adult. The curriculum for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 children is excellent. The school very successfully promotes subjects such as music and art, whilst not losing the focus of extending and improving the children's literacy and numeracy skills. The use of ICT to support learning is well embedded so that there are regular and planned opportunities for children to use computers as 'tools for learning'. The school provides a very extensive and imaginative range of additional learning opportunities including lacrosse, lace-making and gardening, and discussions with the children indicate that they are very appreciative of the extra work staff put in to providing such as wide range of clubs. Many children take up the opportunity of learning how to play a musical instrument, and there are frequent performances so that children can share and celebrate their achievements. The school offers residential visits for older children which are very popular. Themed days, such as 'pirates' day' and 'mothers' day', involve parents very well and foster close links between home and school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The health, welfare and care of children are the shared concern of the staff and governors. Robust procedures ensure pupils are very well looked after during the school day. The children say they feel safe and know that they can go to any adult for help. Procedures for child protection and first aid are comprehensive and the school has established excellent links with external specialist agencies which impact very positively on the children's learning. Children with learning difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language receive excellent support in class, so that they can make the same outstanding progress as their classmates. This high level of care ensures that pupils feel very positive about coming to school and are in a very good frame of mind for learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher provides exceptional leadership, which is focused on continuously raising standards at the same time as providing a very high level of care for all pupils. The headteacher enjoys the full support of staff and governors, all of whom share her vision for taking the school forwards in an imaginative way. Subject leaders have a very positive impact on teaching and learning through the rigorous monitoring they carry out within their individual areas. The leadership team plays a very good role in setting and following through initiatives for improving aspects of provision. The school evaluates its own performance very thoroughly, identifying ways in which the already outstanding provision can be improved even further. Parents, children, staff and governors are fully involved in the self-evaluation process so that their views can be considered and, where appropriate, acted upon. The school knows itself very well, and the findings of the school's own evaluation process closely mirror those of the inspection. The governing body is very supportive and well informed. However, although governors receive a great deal of comprehensive information, they are only just beginning to take responsibility for collecting information themselves so that they can more effectively fulfil their role as 'critical friend' to the headteacher and staff. The quality and effectiveness of self-evaluation is outstanding. The school has made excellent progress in addressing the issues arising from the last report. Because of the excellent team spirit, and the commitment and energy of staff and governors, the school is exceptionally well placed for continued and further improvement.

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	1	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	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

I am writing to thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently, and to let you know what we found out. You were quite right when you told us that this is an excellent school, and we totally agree with you. You work very hard in lessons, and really enjoy your learning. By the time you leave school at the end of Year 6, you are doing extremely well in English, mathematics and science. We are also pleased with the way you are starting to use computers much more to help you with some of your work. Your teachers do an excellent job, and so you find your activities interesting and exciting. They provide excellent support for those of you who sometimes have difficulties with your work, and really stretch those of you who find the work easy. You behave very well, and when occasionally there are problems, you know who to go to so that the difficulties can be sorted out. We were really impressed with the work the school council has done, and the plans that Year 2 children have for painting the bottom of the swimming pool, we hope they remember to empty the water first! We very much agree with you that there are many excellent activities that you can take part in after school and at lunchtimes. We were pleased that a good number of activities help you to keep healthy, such as the 'keep-fit' club we saw during the inspection, and we like some of the unusual activities, such as the lace club. Your headteacher and all of the staff and governors work very hard to make the school a safe and happy place so that you can do your best. We are pleased that the governors know so much about how the school works. However, most of the time they get the information from the teachers and the headteacher, and we would like them to find things out for themselves a bit more. We have talked to them about this, and know this was something they had already thought about. I hope you enjoy your half term holiday and come back ready for more hard work.