



St Nicolas Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123166
LEA Oxfordshire LEA
Inspection number 281416
Inspection dates 18 October 2005 to 19 October 2005
Reporting inspector Steven Hill AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Abingdon
School category	Voluntary controlled		Boxhill Walk
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		OX14 1HB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01235 520456
Number on roll	423	Fax number	01235 530323
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R. Dix
Date of previous inspection	22 May 2000	Headteacher	Mr R E Fell

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 18 October 2005 - 19 October 2005	Inspection number 281416
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school near the centre of Abingdon. Most pupils are of white British origin, with a small number from a range of other ethnic heritages. Virtually all are fluent in English. Pupils' social circumstances cover a wide range, and are slightly better than average overall. Attainment when pupils start in reception also covers a wide range, and varies from year to year, but is broadly average. The number of pupils with special educational needs is a little below average. There have been significant staffing changes in the last few 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 school's own evaluation indicates that it does a good job, and inspectors agree. This is a good school that gives good value for money. Standards are high and pupils make good progress. Standards are consistently above average in English, mathematics and science. However, standards in writing, speaking and listening, while still strong, are not as far advanced as reading standards. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are very well behaved, work hard and take a pride in the school. Children get off to a good start in the two reception classes, where they make rapid progress because of the effective teaching and lively curriculum. Good systems are in place for the care and guidance of pupils. The high academic and pastoral standards have been maintained despite recent major changes in staffing. This is because of the good management systems that are in place, and the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. Parents strongly support the school and greatly appreciate what it does for their children. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, particularly in the better provision for children in reception. Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) has also improved, although there is still a need to make more use of ICT in lessons in other subjects. A key element in the school's consistent success is a lack of complacency among staff, and a desire to be continually improving. Plans are rooted in the outstanding, rigorous procedures for self-evaluation. This means the school is well placed to improve in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to build further on its success, the school should:* Provide more opportunities for pupils to use ICT in lessons in different subjects. * Continue its current emphasis on writing, speaking and listening, to raise standards even further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school attains consistently high standards because pupils make good progress throughout the school. The school sets challenging targets and pupils generally meet them. The vast majority of children in the reception class are on course to meet the expected standards by the time they go into Year 1, and many will exceed them. Pupils achieve well throughout the school so that by the time they leave the school standards are high, particularly in reading, mathematics and science. Standards in writing, speaking and listening, while above average, are not quite so high. The high standards in these 'core' subjects are not at the expense of work in the wider curriculum. For example, good standards were observed in music and in design and technology lessons during the inspection. High-fliers do well, with large numbers exceeding the expected levels by the time they leave school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because they are supported effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils develop high levels of self-respect and respect for others, within the school's secure, positive ethos. They know that they are valued and listened to. Pupils develop a keen sense of responsibility, for themselves and others, and for the environment. This is because of the school's emphasis on positive attitudes, and the strong role model provided by all adults. Pupils enjoy school very much because, as a six-year-old said, 'we do fun stuff!'. Attendance is well above average. Pupils' behaviour is very good. They work hard and they have very positive attitudes to learning. The school is successful in including all its pupils and helping them all to feel empowered to do their best. Inspectors were very impressed by pupils' enthusiasm when they talked about the school. Pupils have a keen awareness of healthy lifestyles and positive attitudes to physical education, and they make healthy choices. They join in enthusiastically with the extensive extra-curricular programme of sports and arts. Pupils make full use of the good opportunities to show initiative and to influence decisions taken in school, for example, in the School Council or taking the lead in fundraising events. Pupils' spiritual and moral development and their awareness of other cultures are good. Pupils' social development is outstanding. They have good collaborative skills and are very independent. The school is at the heart of its community and children are proud to invite people in to enjoy concerts or to take their performances out into the community. Pupils' strong social and academic skills stand them in good stead for their future lives, both in school and elsewhere.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, and this is the main reason for the high standards achieved. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and make clear their high expectations. Pupils respond positively by working hard, and behaving well. Teachers prepare interesting things for pupils to do, and make good use of practical work to enthuse them. Pupils work together effectively and enthusiastically, in pairs or in small teams. The current push to improve pupils' speaking and listening skills is already leading to improvements. Good links between different subjects ensure that learning is meaningful. Teachers make skilled use of the interactive whiteboards to help pupils to understand new ideas. Pupils themselves learn ICT skills effectively in the computer suite, but do not have enough opportunities to practise these skills in lessons in other subjects. Teachers are good at planning work which is carefully matched to different pupils' needs, based on the thorough assessments they make. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to progress, particularly for pupils who struggle with their work, through the skilled help they give them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is very well planned to meet the needs of all pupils effectively. It is regularly updated, after careful analysis of its impact on learning. Teachers adapt national guidelines imaginatively to meet the particular needs of individuals and groups. They plan work that is interesting and enjoyable, and that links different subjects well. For example, pupils drew on their good scientific understanding, and greatly enhanced their speaking and listening skills, during an outstanding design and technology lesson. Good use is made of practical activities, and visits out and visitors to school enhance pupils' learning well. Although the planning for ICT has recently been revised, so that it is starting to be used more as a tool for learning in other subjects, this needs to improve further. The good range of cultural and sporting activities supports pupils' learning well, and enables them to share their talents with the local community. For example, the school choir helps to raise funds for the local Church and Christian Aid. These activities improve pupils' self-confidence and sense of community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has created a safe and caring environment in which pupils are very well supported in their academic learning and personal development. Almost all statutory requirements are met. The headteacher manages child protection systems very well, with good support from all other staff. Training is up to date. The school provides high quality care for the most vulnerable pupils and liaises well with their carers. Pupils feel safe in school, and they know to whom to turn if they are troubled. Year 6 prefects provide good support for younger pupils and the school is a very supportive community for all its members. Pupils enjoy school and are proud of what they do. Pupils know how well they are doing as a result of teachers' careful marking and detailed analysis of their work. The school welcomes all new pupils through a careful introduction to school life. New arrivals are well supported well by the 'buddy' system, and this is particularly effective for pupils arriving with different language and cultural needs. The school buildings, contents and surroundings are kept safe, even when a good deal of building work is being carried out on the site.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. This has been central to the improvement since the last inspection, and leaves the school well placed to improve further. Good achievement and high standards of personal development have been maintained. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, and very good management systems, ensured that these were sustained through various recent staffing difficulties. The partnership between the headteacher and deputy provides clear leadership to all staff, who work very effectively as a team. The school has responded well to recent changes by modifying and improving its management structure, to draw more effectively on

the expertise of all staff. Co-ordinators, even those recently in post, have a good grip on their subjects and clear plans for further improvements. The impact of this is exemplified well by the current effective work on improving speaking and listening skills. Governors have a good understanding of the school's work and take a full part in decision-making. They fulfil their responsibilities well. Parents and pupils each have a significant voice in how the school is run. Central to the school's success is its outstanding self-evaluation. There is extensive and rigorous monitoring of teaching, and thorough systems are in place to assess pupils' progress. The information gathered is used very well to maintain strengths and to identify and deal with weaknesses. The school's formal self-evaluation document was generally accurate in assessing the school's performance. Its judgements only differed from those of the inspection team on two counts. It was too modest about pupils' excellent personal development and the good leadership and management.

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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	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?	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?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	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	1	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	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	NA
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 all the help you gave us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you at work in your lessons. You told us that St Nicolas is a good school and that you enjoy your work, and we could see why.

Children get off to a good start in reception, and carry on doing well all through the school. You learn a lot, and you are particularly good at reading, maths and science. You are not quite so good at writing, speaking and listening, and your teachers are working hard to help you get even better at these. In lessons, your teachers explain things to you really well, especially when they use the interactive whiteboards. If some of you struggle with your work, you get very good help from the teaching assistants. Teachers give you lots of interesting things to do, and I particularly enjoyed watching Year 5 try out different flavourings for bread. You learn how to use computers well in the suite, but you don't have enough chance to use computers in other lessons. You work hard and are very well behaved, and we were impressed by how well you work together in pairs or in small teams. All the children get on well together and help to take care of each other. The School Council does a good job and makes sure that the adults in the school know what you all think. All the adults take good care of you, so that you feel safe and happy. The headteacher and deputy do a really good job in organising the school, and all the other adults work hard together to make sure everything runs smoothly. The staff and governors are always checking up on how things are going, and trying to make them even better.

To make things even better, you need to keep practising your writing, and talking to each other and listening carefully. You also need more chances to use computers in different subjects. Thank you again for your help.