



St Christophers Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109497
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288400
Inspection dates 31 January –1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Gillian Smith

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Gorham Way
School category	Community		Dunstable
Age range of pupils	4–9		Bedfordshire LU5 4NJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582 703300
Number on roll (school)	193	Fax number	01582 703301
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs B Howard
		Headteacher	Mrs J Jeffery
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2001		

Age group 4–9	Inspection dates 31 January –1 February 2007	Inspection number 288400
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Christophers is an average-sized primary school. Pupils come from a range of home backgrounds and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above the national average. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils whose home language is not English, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational need are below the national average.

The school also provides full day care, including before and after school care, and holiday provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils of all abilities achieve well; it has some outstanding features but also some areas for development. The school thinks it is an effective school and inspectors agree. The headteacher provides good leadership and has assembled a strong team. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and all staff share a common desire to improve the school further. The good curriculum ensures that pupils of all abilities are able to develop their individual talents and provides pupils with a good education. The sound range of additional clubs and activities develop pupils' learning well. Effective links with community organisations also support the curriculum and help adults to provide good care, guidance and support. This stimulating environment helps pupils to develop into confident and articulate young people. Their behaviour and personal development are outstanding; attendance is good. Pupils are proud of their work and most are keen to contribute during lessons. They enjoy learning and understand exceptionally well how to stay safe and healthy. They become increasingly independent learners and readily use their initiative. Pupils' impressive personal qualities, coupled with their good basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), stand them in good stead in their later lives.

Provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. This helps children to make particularly good progress from the moment they arrive and, by the time they enter Year 1, their skills are above average in all areas. At the end of Year 2, overall standards have been above average for the last five years and have been consistently strong in reading and writing. Standards in mathematics have been broadly average in recent years. By the time they leave at the end of Year 4, pupils' work is above average in the core areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Although the standard in writing is above national expectations, the standard of boys' writing is closer to average than girls and the gap between them is wider than usual.

Leadership and management are good and systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work are accurate and systematic. All adults are constantly seeking to improve and this underpins the school's success. Governors are committed and experienced and provide effective support and challenge. They are fully involved in monitoring the school's performance. This school provides good value for money, and strong and mutually supportive teamwork underpins its good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standard of mathematics by Year 2 so that it more closely and consistently matches the standards reached in reading and writing.
- Develop strategies to raise the standard of boys' writing so that it more closely matches the very high standard reached by girls.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well as they move through the school.

Children join the reception class with average skills and the exceptionally rich learning environment helps children of all abilities to achieve particularly well. By the time they join Year 1, the standard of their work is above average with particular strengths in their personal and social development and in physical development. At the end of Year 2, overall standards continue to be above average. Reading and writing have been consistently above average in recent years. Standards in mathematics are average. Pupils achieve well in Years 3 and 4 and, by the time they leave, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics, although the difference between boys' and girls' writing was wider than that found nationally. Standards in art and information and communication technology (ICT) are also above average. The school sets challenging targets that it often reaches.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils develop into mature and sensible individuals and have a very strong appreciation of right and wrong. Supported by close links with the local church, pupils' spiritual and cultural development has improved since the last inspection and these are now outstanding. Pupils value each other highly and get along very well. They say that there is little aggressive behaviour and no bullying; they are also confident that any such incidents would be dealt with rapidly. They feel safe and secure and know that there is always someone in whom they can confide. There is excellent racial harmony throughout the school. Pupils behave extremely well and are polite and cheerful. They have very good attitudes and thoroughly enjoy school. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. Initiatives such as the school council help pupils to develop their confidence and become more independent. For example, pupils organise many fund-raising activities and make a valuable contribution to the on-going development of the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning throughout the school are good and teachers provide activities that match pupils' interests and abilities well. They have high expectations and encourage pupils to become more independent. Marking of pupils' work is good; it helps pupils to improve and provides clear feedback on their self-evaluation. This focussed and very positive learning environment makes a strong contribution to pupils'

good achievement and outstanding personal development. Relationships are warm and pupils thoroughly enjoy learning; they listen carefully and eagerly undertake the work provided. Teaching assistants support pupils well and teachers provide plenty of opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence in speaking and listening. They also provide regular opportunities for pupils to work on their own or in groups. At times, however, teachers allow the pace to slacken and do not spot pupils who have become too passive. As a result, occasionally a few pupils do not do a lot of work and do not make effective progress.

The school recently introduced a system of self- and peer-assessment in which pupils are learning how to review their own learning and that of others. In addition, a new assessment system is helping the school to strengthen its procedures for tracking pupils' progress. This is helping to ensure that individual pupils receive additional support, or challenge, as and when it is needed. It is, however, too early to gauge the full impact of these new arrangements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is adapted well to meet pupils' needs and interests and provides a wealth of rich and varied experience. Within the Foundation Stage, the curriculum has a good balance between activities led by adults and those which children choose for themselves.

A wide range of visits and visitors and 'theme days' enliven the curriculum very well and make a considerable contribution to pupils' progress, personal development and enjoyment. Topics are organised well so that skills and knowledge taught in one subject, particularly in English, are practised and extended in other areas. Good planning ensures that pupils in mixed-age classes receive a similar experience to others in their age-group. Pupils have opportunities to use ICT in many other subjects. A learning mentor provides good support and makes a significant contribution to the well-developed artwork around the school. The good programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education makes a very positive contribution to pupils' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This school knows its pupils well and high quality care, support and guidance contribute much to pupils' good progress and outstanding personal development. Procedures for health and safety and child protection are rigorous and staff recruitment procedures meet national requirements.

The school liaises closely with the out-of-school childcare club and this helps to ensure that pupils are happy and well looked after at the start and end of each school day. Regular visits to the school and use of shared play areas ensure that the pre-school children's induction into the reception class is seamless. Parents are confident about the school's commitment to their children's safety and well-being.

Teachers provide good educational guidance for pupils of all abilities. They set clear, short-term targets and pupils regularly refer to them during lessons. These targets are reviewed very regularly and this guidance is helping pupils to improve their work. The school is strengthening its procedures for identifying and supporting individual pupils, some of whom are at risk of underachievement. It is, however, too early to judge the impact of these new arrangements on pupils' achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school well and staff work as an enthusiastic and very cohesive team.

The school knows itself well and priorities for improvement are appropriate. Financial management is very good, ensuring that resources are plentiful and additional accommodation has been provided. Members of the senior management team carry out their roles effectively. The established subject leaders lead and manage their areas well and those who are relatively new to the role are receiving good support to develop their proficiency. A committed team of governors, confidently led by the chair of governors, provide good support and challenge. There are accurate methods for monitoring the effectiveness of the school's work and evaluating its performance. This is having a positive impact on the overall quality of education and pupils' achievement. Although the overwhelming majority of parents are positive about the school, a few are not satisfied with some of the policies that have been approved by the governors.

Planning for school development is satisfactory; a new format has been trialled but found to be less manageable than its previous counterpart. The school has appropriate plans to revert to the original format. Plans are drawn up carefully, with criteria against which to evaluate success, although these are less specific than they could be, particularly in terms of targets for completion. Nevertheless, action taken to bring about improvement has been effective.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

2 February 2007

Dear Children

St Christophers Lower School, Gorham Way, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 4NJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. You were quite right when you told us that yours is a good school. We think your school gives you a good education and all of your teachers and governors are working very hard to make it even better.

What we think your school does well:

- Children in the Reception class get off to a really strong start because the teaching is really good and there are so many exciting things to do.
- You work hard and make good progress because your teachers make learning so enjoyable.
- You behave exceptionally well.
- You have a really good curriculum with lots of interesting activities.
- The teachers and staff take good care of you while you are in school.
- Your headteacher leads the school well and knows what should be done to make it even better.

There are two things your teachers could do to make your school even better. These are:

- Help children in Year 2 to improve their mathematics.
- Help boys to improve their writing.

With very best wishes for all of you at St Christophers Lower School.

Gillian Smith

Lead inspector