

Holy Apostles' Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115679
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	290297
Inspection date	17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Linda McGill HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine M Brooker
Headteacher	Gareth Davies
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2003
School address	Battledown Approach Charlton Kings Cheltenham GL52 6QZ
Telephone number	01242 526858
Fax number	01242 230128

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. During this one-day visit, she met with the headteacher and other senior staff, the chair of the governing body and a group of pupils. She also observed four part-lessons, in partnership with either the headteacher or assistant headteacher. Informal discussions were held with pupils and staff during the day. The school's perceptive self-evaluation, together with a high number of responses to the parents' questionnaire, helped shape the inspection and inform the final judgements.

Description of the school

Holy Apostles' Church of England Primary School is smaller than many schools. It serves a relatively advantaged area and the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties is lower than average. Attainment on entry to the school is generally above average. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage. The school has close links with the local church, and admits pupils from Christian and other faiths, as well as those from non-religious backgrounds. Since the last inspection, the school has experienced an unprecedented period of turbulence in staffing. The situation has now stabilised.

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 outstanding school. When asked what she liked most about Holy Apostles' School, one school council member said, 'Everyone gets on with each other and there's lots of friendliness'. The school's positive, Christian ethos enables this to happen but the school also does much more for the pupils. By the time they leave at the end of Year 6, the pupils are mature and confident individuals who have reached high standards in their work and are very well placed to take the next steps in their educational careers.

From the time they start in the Reception class, pupils make excellent progress. The pupils reach, and many exceed, the goals that are expected for their learning. Results of assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 have risen steadily since the school was last inspected. This has posed the school the challenge of making sure that the swift pace of learning is maintained across Key Stage 2 so that pupils exceed, rather than reach, the levels expected when their prior attainment is taken into account. The school has been very successful in doing this.

A number of factors combine to account for the pupils' outstanding achievement. The pupils themselves have a good deal to offer, and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their attitudes to learning are excellent; they are keen and show a thirst for knowledge. They work well together in pairs or small groups, and persevere with their tasks when working independently. Their behaviour is excellent and appropriate for the occasion; assemblies are rightly respectful occasions, lunchtimes are sociable and friendly, and at breaktimes the pupils readily show the exuberant sides of their characters.

The teaching is good, with some outstanding features. The teachers are very skilled at asking questions which challenge the pupils to think, help them to express their ideas and opinions and enable them to justify their responses. Information and communication technology is used well to present information, engage the pupils' interest and enable them to participate. Teachers have excellent relationships with their class and expect everyone to do their best. They make sure that pupils are given tasks that match their learning needs and which challenge them appropriately. A few children and parents expressed the wish for still harder work! Occasionally, the pace of learning is a little too slow for the pupils but this is a relatively minor weakness. The curriculum is outstanding because it meets pupils' needs very well and contributes to the high standards they achieve.

The care, guidance and support the pupils receive are also outstanding. Procedures for keeping pupils safe are robust and the school promotes pupils' welfare very well. In addition, the pupils are given excellent guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and reach high standards. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about their targets and their eagerness to reach the most challenging ones. They had a good understanding of what they needed to do to get there.

This all happens because of the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, chair of governors and other senior staff. They have established a good climate in which the pupils not only thrive but the teachers and other staff are helped to improve their practice and develop their careers. The school has had to manage significant changes in staffing in recent years but has risen well to the occasion and has continued to improve. The school is not content to rest on its laurels, but through its rigorous processes of evaluation accurately identifies those areas to be targeted for further development. Parents' and pupils' views are regularly sought, for example, by means of questionnaires and the school council. The findings show how much the pupils enjoy their time at school and how much parents support its work; however, a small number of parents

were not sure about the procedures for canvassing and responding to pupils' and parents' views. The school has rightly recognised that this is an aspect of its work which needs a higher profile. There are no significant weaknesses that the school should address and appropriate priorities are set out in the school's management plan.

The school has improved very well indeed since its last inspection and gives excellent value for money. Its capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that the ways of seeking and taking account of pupils' and parents' opinions about school are well known.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The pupils' achievements and the standards of their work are outstanding. From the Reception class onwards, the pupils make excellent progress. Most start school with skills and abilities that are higher than those of a typical four-year-old, but the rate of progress across the school means that pupils build very well on what they know and can do already. This leads to very high standards by the end of Year 6. For example, two thirds of the pupils gained the higher Level 5 in the national tests in English, over half did so in mathematics and nine out of ten gained this level in science. These proportions are around double that which is found nationally. Pupils who have learning difficulties also make excellent progress and reach standards that are much higher than those of similar pupils nationally.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Attendance levels are very high, pointing to how much the pupils enjoy coming to school. The high level of enjoyment was echoed by the parents, one of whom said, 'Our child has never once suggested that she doesn't want to go to school'. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Older pupils play enthusiastically with younger ones at breaktimes and look out for them in the playground. Pupils said that there is always someone to turn to if they feel troubled and they were sure that their teachers kept them safe. The pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and take part enthusiastically in physical activity, both in lessons and after-school activities. The school council members are proud to represent their classmates and take their responsibilities very seriously. Some of them assiduously took minutes of their discussion with the inspector so that they could report back to their class. The school provides many other opportunities for pupils to contribute both to the school community and the wider world. Pupils are prepared very well for the next steps in their educational careers, both in terms of their confidence and ability to work co-operatively and the high standards that they achieve.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school accurately evaluates the quality of teaching as good, overall, with some features that are outstanding. Some teachers are exceptionally skilled at asking pupils questions which

probe their understanding and encourage them to express opinions or explain their reasoning with confidence. Skilled teaching in the Reception class helps the pupils develop and extend their vocabulary. In a music lesson, for example, they learned the word 'timbre' and showed that they already understood what 'pitch' means. Teachers take care to plan their lessons so that the tasks meet the pupils' learning needs appropriately and give thought to the deployment of teaching assistants. These assistants work very well with small groups of pupils. Pupils who have learning difficulties receive support of a high quality. The school recognises that there are occasional minor weaknesses in teaching, and is working to make sure that teaching becomes consistently outstanding.

The pupils are well disposed towards learning. They often respond gleefully to challenges set by their teachers and apply themselves well to their tasks. They are good listeners who work well in co-operation with one another.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets the pupils' needs and aspirations very well and enables them to make excellent progress, both academically and in their personal development. There is a wide range of activities for pupils to take part in after school, including many sporting clubs. The pupils spoke with pleasure of plays and productions that they had been involved in. Visits to places of educational interest, visitors to the school and special events such as 'themed weeks' add variety and richness to the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The procedures for keeping children safe are robust and the fostering of children's welfare is as central to the school's work as is the promotion of their academic progress. Relationships between pupils and adults are warm and friendly. The pupils trust the staff to look after them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Strong leadership from the top has enabled the school to keep on improving since its last inspection. There is a strong drive to keep going and to bring further improvements, for example, by enhancing the provision for music. Working relationships between senior staff and governors are excellent and there is an open and honest culture. The work of the senior team, which includes the chair of governors and the school's finance officer, is clearly focused on improving outcomes for the pupils. Procedures for evaluating the school's performance are rigorous, and the school takes account of the views of parents and pupils when deciding its priorities. Governance is excellent. Skilfully led by the chair, governors play a full part in monitoring and evaluating the impact of initiatives. They have achieved a good balance between supporting the school and challenging it to continue to move forward.

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Annex A

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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
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	1

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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

23 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holy Apostles' Church of England Primary School, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
GL52 6QZ

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed meeting and talking to some of you, and watching you at work and in the playground. I'd like to give a special thanks to the school council members who gave up some of their lunchtime to meet me.

I'm sure you know that I was inspecting your school so that I can write a report about what your school does well and things that it could do better. It was easy for me to find many things that are excellent about Holy Apostles, but a bit of a challenge for me to find things that need to be improved!

I found that your school is a friendly, happy place where everyone is expected to do their best. You and your teachers work very hard. This is helping you to make excellent progress and to reach really high standards in your work. Your headteacher, the chair of governors and other staff are always looking for things which could be done better, and this has meant that the progress you make has improved every year. There is a good plan to make sure that this continues.

A few of your parents were not sure about how the school finds out what they, and you, think about your school, or what they do with the information. I have asked that the procedures are made clearer to everyone. You can help by telling your parents about the discussions that happen at the school council meetings.

Wishing you good luck for the future,

Best wishes,

Linda McGill Her Majesty's Inspector