



Ardeley St Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117420
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290830
Inspection dates 31 January –1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Florence Olajide

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	School Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Ardeley, Ardeley
Age range of pupils	4–11		Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 7AJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438 861284
Number on roll (school)	74	Fax number	01438860372
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Ian Denchfield
		Headteacher	Miss Christine Gibbard
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small Church of England school serves mainly the rural community of Ardeley, although some pupils come from the larger town of Stevenage. Nearly all the pupils have a White British heritage. About a fifth of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. None of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school is unusual in that, although deemed a primary school, very few pupils stay on until the end of Year 6, many preferring to transfer to middle schools at the end of Year 4.

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 in which effective provision has led to good achievement and outstanding personal development for pupils.

The headteacher provides good leadership and inspires the confidence, loyalty and commitment of all members of the school community. She and the staff, have a strong commitment to providing pupils with an education that helps them to grow into independent, sociable learners and responsible citizens. This aim is expressed in the good quality of care and the curriculum that the school provides. Parents and pupils comment on the happy, secure environment, which nurtures pupils and gives them a good start to their education. The curriculum, together with an extensive range of clubs and other activities, provide pupils with exciting learning opportunities which they greatly enjoy. The personal, social and health education makes a very strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Consequently, pupils are confident, articulate and friendly. They are very courteous. For example, in discussions with adults they go to great lengths to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak. They have a strong sense of what is right and wrong and are extremely considerate towards each other.

Although standards are satisfactory, pupils' overall achievement is good. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is also good. When children enter the school, their attainment is slightly below national expectations in most areas of learning except in their knowledge of sounds and letters, which is significantly lower. Good teaching in the Foundation Stage and beyond enables pupils to make good progress, especially in reading. By the end of Reception year, they reach standards that are in line with the national expectations. Similarly, by the end of Year 2, standards are in line with the national average. The majority of pupils continue to make good progress until they leave at the end of Year 4. The few who stay until the end of Year 6 make good progress and achieve standards that are broadly in line with the national average. Specialist teaching in art, music and swimming enables pupils to excel in these areas. However, some of the more-able pupils do not achieve as well as they could in mathematics and writing.

Until recently, staffing difficulties and a significant teaching commitment meant that the headteacher spent insufficient time on improvement initiatives. Recent additions to staffing have provided her with more time to focus on standards. The school is now taking effective action to improve standards in writing. Nonetheless, there remain some weaknesses in the use of assessment data to identify areas of underachievement. In addition, school improvement priorities do not focus sufficiently on measurable outcomes for pupils to help guide the monitoring of their progress. The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection. It provides good value for money and the increasing involvement of other teachers in leadership and management means the school has good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing and mathematics, and target areas of underachievement vigorously so that all pupils, particularly the more able, make good progress.
- Improve the rigour in the use of data to evaluate the school's effectiveness and ensure that targets for improvement take full account of pupils' abilities and prior attainment.
- Ensure that school improvement priorities are more strongly focused on appropriate measurable outcomes for pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in reading are good and represent very good progress from pupils' starting point. Nonetheless, there is a significant gap between pupils' attainment in reading and that in mathematics and writing, in which standards are satisfactory. This is because targets set for the more-able pupils in reading and writing have not been sufficiently challenging. In addition, until recently, the school has not given the same impetus to raising standards in writing as it has done in reading. This is now being addressed and the actions taken by the school are beginning to lead to improvements. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Pupils achieve well in music and swimming. All learn to play a musical instrument and, by the end of Year 4, most of them can swim well beyond 400 metres.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good, although their knowledge of the different cultures in modern Britain is not as strong as it could be. Pupils have very mature attitudes towards responsibility; they willingly carry out duties which help to create a harmonious atmosphere around the school. Attendance is very good and reflects how much they enjoy school. Pupils also have a great sense of humour which is displayed in the funny nicknames they give to various lunchtime dishes. Their knowledge of how to keep healthy and safe is excellent and they understand the importance of exercise. As one pupil explained, 'it's to keep the blood pumping'. Pupils of all ages play together happily. They organise extensive fund-raising activities for the school and charities; this helps them to develop good enterprise skills. Close links with a school in Kenya provide pupils with further opportunities to help those who are less fortunate than themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning throughout the school are good. Since the last inspection, teachers have improved the range of teaching skills they use, ensuring that these match pupils' preferred learning styles. As a result, pupils are highly motivated and enjoy the exciting lessons. Teachers use resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), effectively to support teaching and learning. Teaching assistants provide pupils with good support. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. In turn, pupils behave very well. They are attentive and have very good attitudes towards learning. In the best teaching, lessons are structured well so that no time is wasted and pupils make good progress. In weaker lessons, tasks are not always suitably matched to the needs and abilities of all pupils. The general movement of pupils to and from classes for specialised subject teaching on Wednesdays causes low-level disruption and slows the pace of learning in some lessons. Teachers involve pupils in the process of checking how well they are doing and provide them with useful feedback.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Pupils learn French in addition to the prescribed subjects of the National Curriculum. They enjoy the extensive range of clubs, sporting activities and residential visits on offer with great enthusiasm. They are proud of the several awards the school has achieved such as the Healthy Schools Status and the Activemark. As one pupil remarked, 'the school is a very sporty school'. Pupils have good access to computers and this helps to develop and promote their ICT skills. The curriculum is greatly enriched by strong links with parents, the Church, other schools and a range of external agencies. Although the school does not yet have specific programmes to meet the needs of pupils who may be gifted or talented, or those who need additional support in mathematics, it has already made plans to improve these aspects of its provision. Children in the Foundation Stage have access to a bright and attractive learning environment and a curriculum that develops their knowledge and skills in all areas of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's Christian foundation is reflected in the high quality of care that it provides. Pupils enjoy very positive relationships with each other and with adults who act as good role models. In turn, pupils respond by showing high levels of care for each other. This is reflected for example, in the way older pupils partner and look after younger ones on the short walk to the church hall for lunch. The school has appropriate policies and procedures that help it to safeguard pupils well-being. Its fruit and milk schemes

promote healthy eating habits. Pupils feel safe in school and, as one pupil explained, 'if you have a problem or you are stuck, there's always someone to come round and help you'. Pupils receive useful feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to improve. They say they particularly like it when teachers write comments, such as, 'well done, you've used Level 2 and Level 3 connectives' in their books. All pupils have individual targets. However, the overall targets set for higher-ability pupils in mathematics and writing are not high enough. The school works in effective partnership with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities receive good support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is largely accurate. The headteacher and other subject leaders are aware of the main strengths and weaknesses in the school. Involvement in the Primary Leadership Programme has led to a strong emphasis on improving assessment practices. As a result, pupils are better informed about the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. As a very small school, the bulk of leadership responsibility lies with the headteacher. Nevertheless, as the school develops their leadership skills, other teachers are becoming increasingly more involved in monitoring and evaluating standards across the school.

The school does not yet collate or aggregate its assessment data to form an overview of the progress of different groups of pupils in relation to their prior attainment and national expectations. This has led to slowness in identifying and dealing with areas where specific groups of pupils underachieve. School improvement priorities are focused on improving provision but insufficient attention is paid to identifying appropriate measurable outcomes for pupils.

Governance is good. Governors challenge and support the school effectively. They are committed and fully involved in the life of the school. School resources are managed efficiently and much has been done since the previous inspection to improve ICT resources. The excellent links maintained with parents and partner schools contribute positively to the school's overall efficiency.

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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?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	3
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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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	3
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

03 February 2007

Dear Pupils,

Ardeley St Lawrence Primary School, School Lane, Ardeley, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 7AJ

Thank you for the very warm welcome that you gave me when I visited your school and for the way you looked after me when we had lunch together. I had a wonderful time talking to you and listening to your views about your school. I promised in our discussion that I would write to you to let you know what I thought of your school.

Your school is good. I was greatly impressed by your confidence and by how seriously you take the responsibility of looking after one another. The teaching in your school is good and it helps most of you to make good progress. You told me you like the way teachers make lessons interesting and the feedback they give you, which helps you to know what to do to improve. You also told me how much you like being in school and how greatly you enjoy the clubs and other activities available. Your attendance is very good, you behave well and work hard. Most of you do well in your work although I think that some of you could do better in your writing and mathematics.

You, your headteacher, the staff, governors and your parents work very hard to ensure that there is a very nice learning atmosphere in your school. This makes it a good place to be. You are rightly proud of all the awards that your school has achieved. To make your school even better I have asked your teachers to think about the following three things:

- To help all of you, particularly those of you who can cope with harder work, to improve in mathematics and writing.
- To use the information about how well you are doing to set the right targets for you.
- To ensure that all their work to improve the school helps you to do better in your work.

Once again thank you for talking to me. I hope you will all continue to do your best and I wish you all well in the future.

Florence Olajide

Lead inspector