



St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117462
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290845
Inspection date 9 November 2006
Reporting inspector Gill Broadbent

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Brewhouse Hill
School category	Community		Wheathampstead, St. Albans
Age range of pupils	4-11		Hertfordshire AL4 8AN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582832106
Number on roll (school)	249	Fax number	01582832824
Appropriate authority	The local authority	Headteacher	Mr A Emeny
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves a large village community. Forty pupils start school each year, therefore half the classes are of mixed age. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. Below average numbers of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities and few are entitled to free school meals. Most pupils start school with better skills than those expected nationally for their age. There have been recent changes of leadership, staff and job shares.

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 accurately assesses itself to be a good school. Parents are right to value its family values and Christian ethos, which ensure that the care of their children is outstanding.

In 2006 pupils achieved well and reached exceptionally high standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6. The standards pupils reach prepare them extremely well for the next stage of their education. In the Reception class children achieve well based on their individual starting points. Teaching is good and pupils make good progress overall by the end of Years 2 and 6. There have been recent staff changes. Pupils' progress is uneven because throughout the school there are pockets of satisfactory teaching that occasionally lead to pupils' slower but nevertheless satisfactory progress. The school responded positively to parents' concerns about some teaching. Regular checks on teaching and swift action are improving the quality and consistency of lessons. In each key stage some teaching is outstanding. Recently, teachers have set pupils challenging targets and they check pupils' progress weekly. These checks enable the school, for example, to support those pupils who are at risk of falling behind effectively.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They thoroughly enjoy the enormous range of additional activities offered which develops their social skills and encourages them to take part in sport and keep fit and healthy. The curriculum is good and recent changes ensure that subjects such as art and music add to their enjoyment of learning. Pupils feel safe and secure because they know staff will always help them if they are worried or in trouble. Several parents commented how well staff helped their children to settle in new mixed age classes or with new teachers.

Attendance and behaviour are outstanding, so learning is uninterrupted and pupils make good progress. Pupils become mature, responsible young people who are a credit to their parents, the school and themselves. Older pupils are sensitive towards the needs of others, which is appreciated by younger ones who look up to them. Pupils have a good understanding of other cultures and religions. As a result the playground is harmonious as pupils from all backgrounds and cultures play happily together. The school council plays an active part in helping pupils to contribute well to the work of the school.

Leadership and management of the school are good. The school values and acknowledges the outstanding contribution of governors and parents. Governors and parents work in close partnership with the school and provide constructive criticism and support to improve the quality of pupils' education. For example, parents contributed to the school improvement plan and provided a stunning computer suite and interactive whiteboards that teachers use effectively to enhance pupils' learning. The strong leadership of the new headteacher, with the support of governors, staff and parents is successfully building upon the school's existing strengths and taking the school forward. The newly formed senior management team is already working well together to bring about improvement. New members have not yet had the time

to contribute their outstanding expertise to school improvement. The school has taken effective action to resolve issues identified in the last inspection report. It provides good value for money and has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the evenness of teaching so that pupils make consistently good or better progress in all classes.
- Enable new members of the senior leadership team to contribute their outstanding expertise to support school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In Reception, children are taught well and all make good progress in relation to their starting points. Standards are above those expected and a significant proportion of children begin work on Year 1 tasks. In the 2005 national tests at the end of Year 2, pupils made good progress to reach well above average standards in reading and mathematics. In writing almost all pupils reached the level expected for their age and an average proportion of pupils reached the higher than expected Level 3. The school took immediate action to improve standards and in 2006 pupils' writing standards rose to above average. Standards have been consistently high over the years in national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6. In 2006 results were even higher than in 2005 and were outstanding in all three subjects. Currently standards are well above average in Year 6. All pupils including those with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress and achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This is outstanding and so is pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. One parent explained that, 'The school teaches children to become good people who have strong moral values and social skills.' Pupils become delightful, responsible young people who show care and concern for others. Staff are consistently good role models. During lessons in writing pupils develop an outstanding ability to express their feelings and empathise with a child or person in distress. Pupils' cultural development is good. Through links with a Muslim school and special celebrations, pupils develop respect for other cultures, religions and beliefs. Pupils' understanding in this area of work is growing. Attendance and behaviour are outstanding because pupils enjoy their learning, especially when teachers make it fun and challenging. They know how to keep themselves safe, for example, by requesting more shade for the play areas. They develop healthy eating habits exceptionally well, which the school encourages by providing daily fruit and exceptionally high quality meals.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are well planned by teachers who take care to ensure that work is at the right level to meet the needs of pupils of different ages and abilities. They check pupils' progress each week to ensure that it is at least good. Teachers make effective use of open questions to check pupils' learning and adapt lessons accordingly to ensure good learning. Occasionally, the pace of a lesson slows because questions asked of pupils lack rigour and depth. Pupils' progress becomes satisfactory rather than good. Some lessons are outstanding, such as when interactive whiteboards are used to enhance lessons. Teachers present work in different formats that are highly stimulating. They capture pupils' interest and engage them actively in their learning. Outstanding lessons inspire pupils to write imaginatively and they develop pupils' knowledge of their learning by showing them how to assess their work and how to improve it. Learning is then highly effective and pupils' progress is exceptional.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is enriched by the outstanding provision of activities outside the school day. As a result, pupils respond enthusiastically and develop excellent social skills. The school organises the curriculum well on a two year cycle so that all pupils have equal access to all subjects and make good progress with their work. This system caters well for the arrangement of mixed age classes and job shares. Since 2005 the school has incorporated more creative elements into the curriculum by linking the teaching of subjects. Teachers capture pupils' interest and provide opportunities for them to study subjects in greater depth. For example, work in art and English is used to enrich a history project. This approach is already showing signs of improving the quality of pupils' work and is an area for the school to develop further. There are good quality pastel drawings and clay work on display.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Governors fulfil their responsibilities and ensure that there are good systems for ensuring the protection of children which meet the latest guidelines. The school pays excellent attention to ensuring pupils are healthy and safe. Pupils know that through the school council they play a full part in making improvements. For example, they requested more shade in the school grounds. The school agreed and parents, supported by their children, raised funds to help provide trees and a pergola. Pupils often receive good guidance during lessons and through homework to help them improve. The school assesses each pupil's needs and checks their progress regularly, which enables them to make good progress towards challenging targets. The school has adapted and

reorganised its provision of pupils with learning disabilities or difficulties extremely well to ensure their needs are met very effectively. The school's liaison with other agencies and providers is outstanding. These links give pupils access to a wide range of activities that support the outstanding personal development of all.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher appointed in September 2005 was previously the school's deputy headteacher. Several parents accurately described the transfer of headship as 'seamless.' He has set a strong and clear direction for the work of the school. It is thoughtfully building upon the good position he inherited, where pupils make good progress and reach high standards in their work and personal development. He has created a new management team which includes the new deputy and some existing staff. They form an effective team with many complementary, outstanding skills, some of which have yet to be utilised.

The school's self evaluation is accurate and actions taken, such as monitoring of teaching, pupils' progress and developing a creative curriculum are already showing signs of improving the quality and consistency of the school's good provision. Governance is outstanding. The governing body is experienced and very well informed. Governors are very aware of national initiatives and are proactive in identifying and preparing the school strategically and financially for future developments.

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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	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	1
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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	2
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.

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	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

10 November 2006

Dear Pupils

St Helen's Church of England Primary School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL4 8AN

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school. You were very helpful during the day and told me all about your school and how much you enjoy learning. Here are some of the most important things that I found out.

Your school is a good school that does some things exceptionally well. Staff, governors, parents and pupils work well together. They care for you, guide you and look after you outstandingly well. So the school really helps you to become mature, responsible and courteous young people. You show respect, kindness and consideration for others, especially those from different cultures. The playground is a fun place to be as everyone plays so well together. Younger pupils look up to the older ones who set them such a good example when they help or play games together. Your behaviour and attendance is outstanding, which helps you to make the most of your time at school. You develop healthy lifestyles by taking part in all the activities provided and by eating healthily. You all achieve well no matter what your age or ability. You reach outstanding standards in English, mathematics and science by the time you finish in Year 6 and younger pupils do well too.

You make good progress and teaching is mostly good too. Sometimes it is really exciting and your progress is very fast. Occasionally teaching is satisfactory and then your progress is slower. So,

- the school is working hard to make sure that teaching and your progress are good or better all the time, and
- the school's new leadership team are going to help the school improve even more.

I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning at St Helen's.

Mrs Gill Broadbent (Lead inspector)