



Countess Anne (VA) CE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117482
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290851
Inspection dates 31 January –1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Martin Beale

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		Hatfield
Age range of pupils	4–11		Hertfordshire AL10 8AX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01707262840
Number on roll (school)	203	Fax number	01707258505
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Michael Scandrett
		Headteacher	Mr David Lodge
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4–11	31 January –1 February 2007	290851

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized school with high levels of pupil mobility, which significantly affects each year group. Free school meal eligibility is broadly in line with most schools. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average, but the number learning English as an additional language is average. Attainment on entry is below that seen nationally, particularly in aspects of literacy. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is comparable with other primary schools but is rising.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Staff and governors are accurate in their assessment that Countess Anne is a good school. It is improving, has some outstanding features and gives good value for money. Parents are very much in support of all that the school is doing for their children. Its popularity is rising as shown by the increase in pupil numbers. Strong Christian values underpin its work and contribute considerably to the pupils' development. The school is becoming increasingly effective in its goal of encouraging the pupils to have high aspirations. Major factors in its success are good leadership and management. The school has a clear view of its qualities and uses this well to identify how improvements are to be tackled. Action taken has led to success and considerable improvements in achievement. This gives the school a secure platform for further progress.

The outstanding curriculum makes this an exciting place for learning. Pupils enjoy school and contribute greatly to its life and to the community at large. They talk enthusiastically about the wide range of enrichment activities such as 'Discovery Weeks' and 'Activities, Societies and Hobbies' afternoon. Pupils develop considerably as they get older because of the emphasis on their personal, social, health and citizenship education. They develop teamwork and other skills that prepare them well for their future learning. They understand how to behave safely and the importance of exercise and diet for a healthy lifestyle. Another factor is the good care, support and guidance they receive. Pupils feel safe and confident and report that there is always someone to turn to if they have a problem. Links with a wide variety of schools and other institutions greatly enhance the pupils' achievements and their well-being.

Strong relationships build firm foundations on which the good teaching leads to the pupils' good achievement, and average but rising standards by the end of Year 6. As one Year 6 pupil said, 'Teachers are kind and generous and help you if you get stuck.' Pupils make good progress, although this can be uneven because teachers do not always use information about rates of progress regularly enough to modify their planning. Pupils get a good start in the Foundation Stage. They build well on this in the rest of the school. In Years 3 to 6, they make rapid and much improved progress, particularly in reading, mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language are catered for well and they also make good progress; programmes are developing to stimulate and extend gifted and talented pupils.

Pupils make outstanding progress in science because of greater teaching of enquiry skills. The good progress now seen in mathematics is partly because more time is allocated to teaching basic skills. The focus on providing structured opportunities to develop reading is also showing benefits in standards and the pupils' attitudes to books. Writing has received less attention and standards have been low for some time. Basic skills have not been taught as effectively as they might to younger pupils, and opportunities for writing in other subjects not fully exploited. Writing is now a focus for action. There are clear signs that this is resulting in more rapid skill development, but there is some way to go before this leads to sustained improvements in standards.

The school sets pupils reasonably challenging targets but these are not consistently met in writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of writing by ensuring better teaching of basic skills to younger pupils and exploiting opportunities for pupils throughout the school to develop their writing in a wide range of subjects.
- Make more effective use of assessment data to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress from year to year.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in Reception from a low baseline on entry although several do not reach expected goals by the time they enter Year 1. Increasing numbers of pupils are reaching expected standards in reading, mathematics and science by the time they leave the school. Year 6 test results have improved over the last three years. They were average overall and above average in science in 2006. Pupils make slower progress in English than in mathematics and science largely because of shortcomings in writing. They do well in information and communication technology (ICT). Year 2 test results had been improving in reading and mathematics but fell slightly in 2006 to below average overall. This was because of significant mobility that weakened the attainment profile of the class. Year 2 assessments for writing are exceptionally low and have been for several years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and are very keen to participate in all that it offers. They are polite, confident and take their responsibilities seriously. Behaviour is good and improving. The pupils are becoming more independent, and more regularly prepared to learn by their mistakes. Attendance has improved considerably, thanks to the school's vigilance. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They reflect thoughtfully, and are becoming increasingly aware of their own strengths. They talk through issues of right and wrong, and genuinely care for each other in a happy family atmosphere of shared values. The school also provides many opportunities for the pupils to gain an understanding and respect for the customs of others as well as their own cultural heritage. Their good academic progress has particular strengths in reading, mathematics, science and ICT. These combine well with their strong social skills to provide good foundations for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. Several lessons seen in Years 3 to 6 had outstanding features. Here, teaching is brisk with high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and work rate. Teachers have successfully developed an atmosphere in their classrooms where pupils enjoy their lessons and work with confidence because they know their contributions are valued. They ensure that pupils know what they are going to learn and how they will judge their success. Teaching assistants are carefully deployed and make a considerable contribution to learning. Teachers make effective use of interactive whiteboards to enliven lessons. The basic skills to underpin writing such as letter sounds and sentence construction have not been taught as effectively as they might to younger pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The rich and highly stimulating curriculum meets pupils' needs and interests very well indeed. An extensive range of activities, special events, residential visits and other trips significantly enrich their experiences and considerably enhance their enjoyment and personal development. Time is used profitably for pupils to learn skills such as skiing, gardening and cooking. History is brought to life by visits and visitors during 'Discovery Weeks', and these weeks also provide time for pupils to sustain their model-making alongside experts in design. Many improvements have been introduced into the Reception class to make the learning environment more exciting and enjoyable. Increasing use is being made of new technology to support the pupils' learning in many subjects. There are other well-planned links between subjects, and these are increasingly being used to broaden opportunities for writing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All associated with the school are strongly committed to the welfare of the pupils. Art therapy is a good example of the school's continual search for ways to support pupils and their families further. Arrangements for safeguarding children meet the latest government requirements and thorough procedures for child protection are understood by all staff. Well-planned arrangements help children to make a smooth start when they join the school. Older pupils are also prepared well when transferring to secondary schools. The school's tracking system contains much assessment data, but this is not being used efficiently so that pupils make consistent and good progress as they move through the school. Pupils know what they need to do to improve their work, but their targets do not always challenge them to do even better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, with support from senior staff and governors, has kept the school firmly focused on raising standards and ensuring that all pupils can benefit from what it has to offer. Greater staff stability has helped the school approach its goals and enabled subject leadership to become more effective. The performance of all staff has been steadily improved by carefully identifying where strengths lie and where improvements are needed. Governors have supported the school's improvement by using funding to maintain high staffing levels, to provide modern resources and to improve the school environment. Systems have been established to enable them to become more effective in their role, but they have not taken sufficient 'ownership' of these to gain a more independent view for themselves of the school's qualities.

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	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	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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	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?	1
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	3
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

1 February 2007

Dear Pupils

Countess Anne Church of England (VA) Primary School, School Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 8AX

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school. You were all very kind and helpful and showed how proud you are of your school. We enjoyed talking with you and your teachers and watching you learn. There are many aspects of your school that we thought were good. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that you go to a good school.

You make good progress during your time at Countess Anne. Most of you achieve well, and many of you meet the standards expected by the time you move on to secondary school, particularly in science, mathematics and reading. Your progress in science in particular is excellent. Your teachers provide an extremely wide range of interesting activities to help you learn. You thoroughly enjoy school, attend regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. You settle in well when you join at whatever stage and are prepared well to move on after Year 6. The care and support you receive is good, particularly when you find learning difficult. You are learning the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a considerable contribution to the life of the school.

Your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. There are some areas where we think that improvements could be made. Your written work is improving but there is still more to be done if you are to maintain this. We also feel that you could be set more challenging targets for your test results. We are sure you and your teachers will work hard to make this all happen.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector