

St Giles' CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117564
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290872
Inspection dates	22–23 March 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 category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Grice
Headteacher	Mrs Sally Bishop
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2002
School address	Blanche Lane South Mimms Hertfordshire EN6 3PE
Telephone number	01707 642170
Fax number	01707 663437

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school has quite high levels of pupil mobility, which significantly affects the characteristics of each year group. Attainment on entry fluctuates but is generally close to the national average. Free school meals entitlement is low. A small number of pupils is from minority ethnic backgrounds and a few of these is at an early stage of learning English. The school operates with one Reception class and another three classes for pupils in Years 1 to 6. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above the national average. In spite of this the number of pupils on roll has increased.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Staff and governors accurately assess the school's effectiveness as satisfactory. The period of considerable changes of teaching staff has adversely affected the pupils' achievement and the school's ability to sustain its efforts to improve. Thanks to the headteacher's strong and determined leadership and the increased effectiveness of a new group of governors the school has emerged from this period intact. Parents have stayed loyal to the school and recognise all that the headteacher has done in trying circumstances. As one parent said, 'There has never been a day when my children haven't wanted to go to school. They love St Giles.' Leadership and management are good. A more stable staffing situation since the start of the year and effective management systems are leading to rapid improvement and place the school in a strong position to make further progress. It provides satisfactory but improving value for money.

Pupils' progress has suffered through the uncertainty caused by having several different teachers each year. Some legacy of this remains for older pupils, but teachers' stability and better teaching are leading to much improved progress. Achievement is satisfactory; standards are average and rising. The youngest children make good progress in Reception. Most meet and many exceed national expectations by the time they enter Year 1, although this varies with the differing characteristics of each group. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving rapidly, although teachers do not consistently challenge more able pupils or teach them how to learn by their mistakes. Pupils' writing is the weakest of the basic skills because of insufficient opportunities for extended writing. The progress of more able pupils is slower in science than in English or mathematics because of insufficient teaching of enquiry skills.

One benefit for pupils of this small sized school is that teachers know them well as individuals. Their needs are carefully identified and sharply focused support is provided, with the help of external agencies where necessary. Pupils with learning difficulties are catered for well and are making good progress. The very few pupils at early stages of learning English also make good progress.

Pupils are a credit to themselves and the school. Their personal development and well-being are good. The good curriculum does much to excite and enrich their experiences. The pupils participate with enthusiasm in the various activities provided, particularly those of a sporting nature. They benefit from good care, support and guidance and say they feel safe and secure. A strong Christian ethos of care and respect for others underpins all that the school does. Pupils report how happy they are in school. One said, 'It's like one big family, problems are quickly resolved and we all soon become friends again'. Pupils know what is expected of them and their good behaviour in lessons and around the school helps to make it a happy place in which to develop. They learn the skills needed to work together as part of a team, which, along with their rising standards places them in a position for success in the next stage of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing at length across a wider range of subjects.
- Develop scientific enquiry skills by allowing pupils to plan and record their own investigations.
- Challenge more able pupils more consistently and help them to understand that they can learn through the mistakes they might make.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

There is a considerable difference between recent performance in national tests and the better current standards and progress in the school. Test results fell during the period of staffing instability and were close to the national averages in 2006 at both Year 2 and Year 6. Furthermore, both year groups had high proportions of pupils with learning difficulties. These results represented satisfactory progress for the Year 2 pupils but slow progress for Year 6 pupils from their earlier Key Stage 1 test results. Standards and the pupils' achievement are rising rapidly now that there are permanent teachers in three of the four classes. School tracking data show that pupils have made good progress this year and are meeting and in several cases exceeding the challenging targets they have been set. Writing is the least well developed of the pupils' basic skills, and more able pupils are not doing as well as they could in science. Both are areas identified as priorities for improvement, with some evidence of the beneficial effect of action taken.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Strong relationships between pupils of all ages underpin their enjoyment of school. Older pupils look after younger ones as their 'buddies', and they all take seriously the responsibility of caring for each other and helping newcomers settle into the school. Attendance has improved and is now good. Pupils show that they clearly understand the benefits of exercise and diet in helping them to adopt a healthy lifestyle through the choices they make. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They learn to respect the customs and cultures of others and to reflect on their feelings. Pupils are proud of the impact their contributions have made to many recent developments around the school. They take their positions as representatives on the school council seriously, and several are keen to take the initiative when raising funds for charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There is much to indicate that teaching is much improved this year. Increasing numbers of lessons are well taught as the new teachers become established. There is a constructive atmosphere in each classroom, built on the positive way teachers encourage pupils to participate in lessons. Pupils' contributions are valued, whether working in groups or discussing ideas with a 'talk partner'. Interactive whiteboards are used creatively to make lessons interesting and engage pupils in their learning. Pupils also use their skills with new technology well to support their learning in many subjects. Teaching assistants are briefed and prepared well. They provide valuable support for individual pupils in class or when they take small withdrawal groups for more focused literacy work. Planning within mixed-age classes generally ensures that lessons meet pupils' identified needs. However, teachers do not ensure that more able pupils are consistently challenged or encouraged to investigate problems.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is carefully planned so that it is relevant to the pupils' needs and interests. It promotes their personal development well and is having an increasing impact on their academic progress. Opportunities to take part in physical activity are plentiful. A wide range of popular clubs and other activities enriches the pupils' experiences and helps to broaden their horizons. Teachers develop basic skills in many subjects, although pupils have not had sufficient opportunities to extend their writing skills other than in English lessons. Scientific enquiry skills have also not been developed consistently. Programmes are carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and those at early stages of learning English. Pupils identified as having particular talents are extended increasingly through links with local schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents are happy that their children are safe and secure in school. Systems to ensure their health and safety are much improved and applied rigorously by staff. Child protection procedures are understood by all and welfare arrangements mean that pupils are cared for well. The progress of pupils is carefully assessed and monitored, enabling pupils who are falling behind to be identified and action taken to help them to get back on track. The youngest children are supported well when they enter Reception, and later arrivals are given a smooth transition into school. Pupils are receiving increasingly effective guidance to help them to be successful and achieve more. They know their individual targets and are being given focused guidance from their teachers about the steps to take for these to be achieved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

This is a school that knows itself well and recognises where improvements are needed. Staffing changes since her appointment have hampered the headteacher in fulfilling her vision of how she wants the school to develop. To counter staffing instability, she has introduced very robust management systems to support staff and enable their performance to be monitored and improved. This has enabled the new group of teachers to become effective quickly and has helped to develop a strong sense of teamwork. This is also starting to take the burden from the headteacher for leading every aspect of the school, although there is more to be done to develop the leadership roles of other staff. Test data are carefully evaluated to identify the major priorities needed to improve achievement. The relatively inexperienced governing body has made great strides forward in the way in which it fulfils its responsibilities. Governors are closely involved in identifying what needs to be done to improve the school. They monitor carefully how well the headteacher and staff are implementing their plans. Funding has been used well to improve considerably the accommodation and resources while eliminating a small budget deficit and enabling plans to be prepared for a further extension of the premises.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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.

Annex A

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	3
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

23 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Giles' CofE Primary School, Blanche Lane, South Mimms, Hertfordshire EN6 3PE

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

Many of you have been taught by several different teachers, which has not always been easy for you. This has changed now since the start of the year and many of you are now making good progress. Most of you meet the standards expected by the time you move on to secondary school. Your teachers provide a 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 are good, particularly when you find learning difficult. You have a very good understanding of 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 all think that improvements could be made. Your written work is improving but there is still more to be done. You also need to be given more opportunity to undertake your own investigations in science. I also feel that the more able of you should be challenged more in lessons. I am sure you and your teachers will work hard to make this all happen.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector