

St Barnabas CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118724
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291227
Inspection date	5 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Gulshanbir Kayembe

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	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edward Tomlinson
Headteacher	Teresa Anderson
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Quarry Road Tunbridge Wells TN1 2EY
Telephone number	01892 522958
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is located in the centre of Tunbridge Wells and serves families drawn mainly from a local housing association area. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is well above average as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry is very low and many pupils start school with poor basic skills. Over two thirds have no nursery or formal pre-school education. An above average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Over the last year, the school has had a sudden and noticeable increase in pupils who speak English as an additional language. Many of these pupils are beginners in English. The transient nature of the local population means that pupils come and go fairly regularly.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and their achievement is satisfactory as a result. Most pupils make satisfactory progress from their very low starting points on entry to the school and so standards in most year groups remain exceptionally low. Pupils currently in Year 6 have made good progress to reach standards that are close to average, especially in English. Lack of nursery or pre-school education places pupils at a significant disadvantage compared to children nationally. In the Reception Year, children do not catch up quickly enough because, although the teaching is satisfactory, the curriculum is not lively or creative. This means that pupils are still struggling to reach the expected standards as they move through Years 1 and 2, although they do continue to extend and develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills. It is not until Year 4 that pupils begin to make more accelerated progress and narrow the gap between the very low standards they begin with and national expectations. The headteacher and governors are working hard to raise pupils' achievement from satisfactory to good. Having successfully achieved good provision at the top end of the school - that is, in Years 4 to 6 - their most pressing concern has been to improve the provision in the younger classes.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and best in Years 4 to 6, especially in literacy. Pupils in these year groups have made some tremendous strides in their written work and the best writing in Year 6 is of a very high standard. Teachers now use data well to set targets and to monitor pupils' progress. However, assessment information is not always used effectively enough to match work to pupils' needs. In some lessons, activities are not as well structured or as interesting as they could be.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They enjoy school and participate enthusiastically in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Behaviour is good but many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Pupils understand what they need to do to adopt healthy lifestyles. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school and the wider community. Pupils' personal development reflects the school's overall satisfactory care, guidance and support. Pupils are well cared for and looked after and hence feel safe. Support for pupils with learning difficulties is effective in enabling them to make satisfactory progress. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum. It has been quick to establish effective support for pupils with English as an additional language so that they make satisfactory progress overall and often good progress in developing basic communication skills in English.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection in 2005, with good improvements in the teaching of literacy in Years 4 to 6, the ethos of the school and relationships with parents. The improvements secured are down to the good leadership of the headteacher who has established good teamwork and a common purpose amongst staff. However, as the school itself has identified, further work remains to be done to improve standards. Accurate self-evaluation supports the school's sound capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve standards of work in the Reception Year and in Years 1 to 3, especially in literacy and numeracy
- help children to get off to a better start by improving the curriculum in the Foundation Stage

- improve teaching by providing pupils with work and feedback that helps them to take the next steps in their learning and activities that are well structured and interesting, especially in the Reception Year and Years 1 to 3
- raise attendance so that it matches the national average.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although pupils' achievement is satisfactory, standards are exceptionally low. The results of national assessments and tests in 2006 were exceptionally low at the end of both Years 2 and 6 in English and mathematics. Standards remain exceptionally low by the end of Reception and Year 2. However, current standards in Year 6 are much better. They are broadly average in English and only slightly below average in mathematics. A much higher proportion of pupils gained the higher levels in the current Year 6 than in previous years. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Reception and across Years 1 to 3. It begins to accelerate from Year 4 onwards and is good across Year 6. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress, and often good progress in behaviour-related targets. Beginners in English make good strides in learning to communicate in English. As a result, they are able to participate well in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils are proud of their school, stating that 'it is nice to you in a time of need' and 'it is the best school I have been to'. Pupils make good progress in their personal development as they move up through the school. Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory amongst younger pupils but improve to good as they get older. In Year 6, attitudes and behaviour are often outstanding. Pupils from all backgrounds want to work hard and be successful in their learning. They live up well to the school's motto for perseverance. Pupils get on well with one another. Incidents of bullying or racism are few and well managed. Pupils are aware of the need to keep safe and are safety conscious in the playground, for example.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' moral and social development enables them to become good citizens. Pupils are thoughtful and reflective because of the good provision for their spiritual development. They develop a sound understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Most pupils exercise regularly and enjoy eating healthily. Their participation in the community outside school is satisfactory. Despite the school's efforts, about one pupil in four has poor attendance which hinders their learning and more needs to be done to encourage these pupils to attend regularly. Pupils' satisfactory academic achievement and good personal skills mean that they are satisfactorily prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers have established good relationships and so pupils cooperate well in lessons. Behaviour, including some challenging behaviour, is well managed. Lessons have a clear structure and are usually well introduced. Effective use is made of teaching assistants to support individuals. Pupils learning English as an additional language are included in whole-class discussion, which helps their English language learning. Teaching is best in older pupils' classes, where it is good. It is satisfactory in Reception and Years 1 to 3. Younger pupils are not always given work that challenges them enough. Teachers ask useful questions and, in the best lessons, lively discussions extend pupils' ideas well. However, there are not always enough opportunities for pupils to speak in the youngest class. Marking is regular and errors are corrected but advice to pupils on how to improve is limited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has addressed the issues from the last inspection and the curriculum is now satisfactorily planned for mixed age classes and there are regular opportunities for practical work in science. The strong emphasis on English is helping pupils to improve their speaking and writing skills, particularly so in Year 6 where a vibrant and creative approach is paying dividends. Provision for numeracy is satisfactory. The good resources for information and communication technology (ICT) are beginning to have an impact on work in other subjects. The Foundation Stage curriculum is not creative or rich enough to meet the needs of children who start school with very limited skills, knowledge and understanding. The school is responding well to health education and healthy eating initiatives and there are good opportunities for pupils to participate in physical education. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities provide much-needed support for pupils' personal development, especially in helping to improve their confidence and self-esteem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is well focused on the community it serves and has successfully engaged the large majority of parents in an effective partnership. One parent wrote: 'My child has been nurtured at St Barnabas and will leave the school a confident and well grounded child'.

Health and safety and child protection procedures, including checks on staff backgrounds, are rigorous in keeping children safe. The school receives good support from outside agencies and the local authority in promoting pupils' personal and academic development. The school has not had much success in improving the attendance of a significant minority of pupils. A growing range of initiatives, such as reading recovery, are helping pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to improve their performance. The use of targets in literacy and numeracy and whole-school targets for presentation and perseverance has helped to improve pupils' progress in the last year, particularly in Year 6.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has provided good leadership to improve the provision in the school. Whilst much good practice is now evident, especially in teaching, the school recognises that standards are still not high enough in younger pupils' classes. The headteacher is well supported by her leadership team and governors. Governors are now beginning to be more challenging and questioning about the school's performance. Monitoring of performance is regular and monitoring systems well established. One of the key achievements of the leadership team has been to establish a robust system for tracking pupils' progress and to establish a culture within which staff are aware of pupils' standards and the ongoing progress they are making. Regular analysis, however, of the progress of different groups of pupils is not yet in place. The school has focused on developing leadership roles in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT. Subject leaders in these areas are involved in checking the quality of teaching in their areas but have yet to be incisive enough about what needs to be done to improve standards in their areas.

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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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
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	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	3
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	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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Barnabas C of E VA Primary School, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2EY

We enjoyed our time at your school very much and we particularly liked visiting your classrooms and talking to you. We would like to thank you very much for making us feel welcome.

The school is providing you with a satisfactory education. You make steady progress because the teaching and the work planned for you is satisfactory. The school is run satisfactorily and you are given sound care, guidance and support. In spite of this, the standards most of you reach are not as high as those of other children of your age.

We saw a number of things that were good, including ways in which you help to make the school a better place:

- you get on very well with one another and with your teachers
- those of you in Year 6 have done well in your work, especially literacy
- You are well cared for and looked after and, as a result, you feel safe and happy at school
- your headteacher leads the school well and makes sure that it keeps improving
- your parents are well involved in the work of the school and they are happy with the quality of education you are receiving.

There are some things that could be better. These include:

- improving standards of work in Reception and by the end of Year 3
- ensuring that all lessons are planned so that they focus well on your individual needs and work is interesting
- improving the work planned in the Reception class
- making sure all pupils come to school regularly.

You can certainly help by making sure you come to school regularly, continuing to work hard and, in particular, focusing on developing your literacy work.

We wish you all well in the future.

Gulshan Kayembe Lead Inspector