



Church Cowley St James Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123139
Local Authority Oxfordshire
Inspection number 292593
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector John Earish

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Bartholomew Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Cowley
Age range of pupils	4–11		Oxford OX4 3QH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01865 778484
Number on roll (school)	458	Fax number	01865 774915
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Miss Lesley Williams
		Headteacher	Mr Tom Walker
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger-than-average primary school is situated on the eastern outskirts of Oxford. It has recently undergone re-organisation from a first to a primary school. The school admits pupils from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Just over a third of pupils are from minority ethnic groups of which a quarter are at the early stages of learning English. An increasing number are starting school after the end of Foundation Stage with very few skills in English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to that found nationally. When children start school, their skills and abilities are much lower than those expected of four year olds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities [LDD] is similar to that found nationally. The school has had difficulties in recruiting teachers and retaining staff in recent years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This improving school gives a satisfactory standard of education. The school has clear procedures to monitor its work and has correctly identified the main issues for development. Effective action has been taken by the new headteacher to increase the influence of senior managers on the quality of teaching and learning. The impact of recent initiatives, such as the 'Intensifying Support Programme', have been good and have been used well to make changes to the curriculum. Standards are rising, teaching is improving and underachievement is being tackled.

Children make a steady start to their learning in the Foundation Stage but few reach the expected goals by the start of Year 1. The school is rightly concerned that too few pupils have reached the expected levels in the national tests in recent years at the end of Years 2 and 6 in mathematics and English. It is working determinedly to rectify this underachievement. Standards are well below average but are rising. Almost all pupils are now making or exceeding the progress expected of them so that achievement is satisfactory overall. However, the school recognizes that there is still more to do, particularly at increasing the numbers of pupils reaching the higher levels.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The amount of good teaching is increasing but it is still not enough. Progress is good in lessons where teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. Older pupils remarked, 'We like the way we're taught - especially when we are given problems to solve which really makes us think - and you seem to learn more quickly'. However, in other lessons those pupils who learn quickly are not always sufficiently challenged and their progress slows.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good as a result of the high priority that the school places on them. This is helping to raise pupils' self-esteem, their enjoyment of school as well as contributing to the rising achievement. Most pupils attend regularly; although there is still a nucleus whose attendance remains erratic. The school takes good care of pupils and ensures their health and welfare. As a result, many pupils report they feel safe in school. Learning mentors are used well to help vulnerable pupils learn effectively by discussing their emotions and behaviour as well as supporting their parents with help and advice. This makes a significant contribution to the school's calm atmosphere and the pupils' good behaviour.

The curriculum is satisfactory. There is a good range of activities that capture pupils' enthusiasm and interest. Pupils' personal skills are prompted well and they have a generally good understanding of healthy lifestyles and staying safe. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with English as an additional language are supported well. However, there are weaknesses. Teachers do not always plan sufficiently well enough to ensure that children who find learning easy are given hard enough work.

The new headteacher has managed rapid change well and has developed a strong team in the face of significant staff turbulence, new building work and reorganisation. Despite the school's many challenges, measures to improve it are having a positive impact, and its capacity to sustain these improvements is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in mathematics and English.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching in order to improve progress and raise standards.
- Ensure that the curriculum for pupils who are identified as more able is well suited to their needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are well below average in English, mathematics and science, but achievement is satisfactory. The vast majority of pupils are now making the expected progress or better despite starting school at much lower levels than expected nationally. Children in the Foundation Stage are also making satisfactory progress but do not reach the goals expected of them by the start of Year 1. Standards are rising across the school because of a rigorous approach to tracking pupils' progress, and the work of the year group leaders in monitoring the 'Intensifying Support Programme'. The school has identified that some groups, for example, some older girls do not do as well as they should, and are successfully focusing on accelerating their achievement through more intensive support. A programme of support for science meant that results rose in 2006. The achievement of pupils speaking English as an additional language and those with learning disabilities is similar to other groups of pupils. However, planning for the needs of higher attaining pupils is inconsistent.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is good because the school has developed a strong community spirit where pupils show positive and friendly relationships towards each other. They behave well and pupils are confident that incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are dealt with well. The importance of making healthy eating choices and taking regular exercise is well understood. Members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously and are proud of their work as 'Sunshine' helpers and 'Playground Buddies'. Pupils nearly always try hard; concentrate well on their tasks and particularly enjoy their lessons when given practical and interesting ways of working. They like cooperating in small groups and pairs because, 'We can learn from each other and help one another'. Attendance is just below the national average and improving. The school has effective systems in place to raise parents' awareness of the importance of regular attendance. While basic skills are low, pupils work together cooperatively and leave the school as confident well-rounded individuals.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers generally plan activities that are interesting and contribute well to pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils praised the opportunities to solve problems because 'you can test your own ideas and discover for yourself'. Teachers have high expectations for behaviour and have established positive relationships with their classes. Pupils have good opportunities to discuss their learning with adults and know their targets. However, in other lessons, work is not closely matched to pupils' individual needs and lacks challenge, especially for those who learn quickly. On these occasions, teachers often ask them to do extra work when they finish early rather than plan sufficiently challenging work from the beginning of the lesson.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets requirements. It is kept under regular review and changes are brought in to ensure it remains relevant and stimulating for all groups. Pupils very much value the wide variety of clubs and activities that range from sports to hand-bell ringing. There are good opportunities for pupils to make a positive contribution to the school and wider community, and to learn about healthy lifestyles. Interactive whiteboards and computers are being used increasingly across the curriculum to engage and interest pupils in their learning. Activities in the Foundation Stage stimulate the children's imagination and creativity and are helping to extend their use of language. However, teachers do not always adapt the curriculum well enough for pupils that find learning particularly easy and this limits their progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are of good quality. Systems for supporting pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities and those at the early stages of learning English are good. A wide range of additional help, such as that of the Learning Mentors and teaching assistants, enables these groups to join in fully with all learning activities. Most parents support the work of the school. A number wrote expressing their appreciation of the support given by teachers and support staff. One parent commented that, 'My children don't like being off school ill'; another that, 'With the help of the Learning Mentors my son is now very happy to come to school'. A very small minority of parents expressed concerns over bullying but pupils themselves do not see this as a problem. The inspection evidence supports this view. The school works well with other agencies to support vulnerable pupils. All staff pay good attention to health and safety and regular risk assessments are undertaken. Child protection arrangements are secure and meet current government requirements. Academic guidance is good

although day-to-day assessment is not used consistently to guide the work of more able pupils. Pupils say that targets are useful at guiding them to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since his appointment eighteen months ago, the new headteacher has been effective in setting a clear direction for the school. He has managed a period of rapid change well and built on people's strengths creating a culture where team work is strong. The school's processes for evaluating its work are satisfactory and improving. The deputy and other leaders are beginning to take a more influential part in school development. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and how it can improve. The use of the Intensifying Support Programme, for example, has brought improvements in planning and assessment, and is helping to raise standards. The leaders are not complacent and they recognise there is still more to be done in securing greater consistency in teaching and accelerating pupils' progress. For example, the school has recognised that the achievement of more able pupils could be better. Governance is satisfactory. The recent work of the governors shows they are becoming much more involved in the long term development of the school and are increasingly effective at supporting and challenging performance.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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?	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?	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

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We were really impressed with your friendliness and good behaviour and your sensible and helpful attitudes towards each other. We believe your school provides a satisfactory standard of education, and is getting even better.

Clearly, you have strong opinions about your school. It was a pleasure to see how well you got on with each other and the contribution you make to school life. Your school has been through a lot of staff changes and some of you have found this unsettling but most of you are very pleased with the way you are taught and the opportunities you have to take part in extra curricular activities. All the adults are working hard to make sure that the school is safe and you are well cared for. Your teachers check your progress well and set targets for you to achieve which you say is very helpful.

However, the standards you reach could be better, but we know the school is working very hard to change this. We have asked the teachers to work on some things to make your school even better.

- Make your results better in all subjects by making sure that everyone in the class has work that is not too easy or too hard for them.
- Make sure that all your lessons are as good as the best ones in the school.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and to meet the targets set for you.

With best wishes

John Earish Lead Inspector