

St Laurence Church of England (A) School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123199
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	292608
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Graham Lee

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	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr B Newey
Headteacher	Mrs N Townsend
Date of previous school inspection	27 May 2002
School address	Thame Road Warborough Wallingford OX10 7DX
Telephone number	01865 858270
Fax number	01865 858270

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is much smaller than most and serves a relatively advantaged rural community. Very few pupils are entitled to free school meals. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average. There are significantly more boys than girls in the school. There has been almost a complete turnover of teaching staff in the past two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Laurence is a good school with a strong Christian ethos at the heart of its work. Staff know all the children and their families well and ensure that they are well cared for and supported. Most parents support this view and one commented 'I believe that the school is a very caring and supportive environment.' The school has a family atmosphere and older pupils take good care of the younger ones. Pupils are confident and very friendly and generally enjoy their learning. As a result they achieve well. Behaviour is satisfactory. Most pupils behave well in class and around the school. However, some of the younger pupils, in particular, find it difficult to sustain concentration and present challenging behaviour.

Pupils' achievement is improving and standards are now above average by the time they leave. From broadly average starting points children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Progress is inhibited to some extent by the difficulties of meeting the needs of four to seven year olds in the same class. Currently, provision for the Foundation Stage children is satisfactory overall but improving. The teaching is now good and the school is beginning to develop its curriculum for these children in its new early years unit in conjunction with the pre-school. However, plans are at the early stages of development and children currently have too few opportunities to explore the world around them. Pupils' progress accelerates in Key Stage 2 where the teaching is good and a creative curriculum challenges all pupils to achieve well. Together with their generally positive attitudes to learning, this ensures that pupils are well prepared for secondary school and the world beyond.

A strength of the curriculum is the forging of strong links between different subjects, including information and communications technology (ICT), which allow pupils to see the relevance of their learning. The school looks after its vulnerable children well and works with a range of outside agencies to meet their needs. This is illustrated by the very effective support given to pupils with a range of learning difficulties and disabilities which allows them to achieve well. Provision for pupils' personal development is also good and underpinned by the school's Christian values. As result, pupils become responsible and caring young people and have a good understanding of how to stay safe and adopt healthy lifestyles. The school tracks the progress of individual pupils carefully and sets challenging targets for improvement. However, these are not always translated into targets that help pupils to improve their work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has led the school successfully for many years. She is supported by an enthusiastic staff and a committed governing body. Recent changes in staffing have meant that leadership roles could not be widely distributed and much of the burden for the school's development has fallen to the headteacher. Her heavy teaching commitment has, therefore, inhibited school improvement and strategic planning. Self-evaluation is not sufficiently incisive to be used as a tool to bring about improvements to the quality of education in the school. The picture of improvement from the last inspection is mixed. However, recent improvements in pupils' achievement and the drive of the staff team give the school good capacity to get better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the Foundation Stage curriculum to ensure that the youngest children have good opportunities to explore the world around them.
- Use tracking information to set challenging targets for pupils to provide a shared understanding of what they need to do to improve.

- Develop leadership and management at all levels to ensure that self-evaluation is rigorous and leads to improvements in the quality of education for pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Children enter the school with skills and understanding that vary considerably from year to year. They make satisfactory progress alongside pupils from Years 1 and 2 and many meet the goals set for children of that age by the time they enter Year 1. Standards at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly average overall although, inevitably, they fluctuate from year to year because of small numbers involved. For example, they were well below average in 2006 because a significant number of pupils had learning difficulties and disabilities. This year, however, pupils' attainment is much better. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 has improved markedly in the past two years and pupils are on course to meet the challenging targets that have been set for them in 2007. Standards are above average by the age of eleven in English, mathematics and science. Last year it was clear that pupils were doing much better in reading than in writing, particularly boys. Strategies to improve their motivation to write have resulted in much improved attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including the social, moral, spiritual and cultural dimensions, are good. They are very reflective and have a well developed sense of right and wrong. They have a good awareness of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. They talk knowledgeably about the importance of a good diet and exercise and conduct themselves safely around the school. Pupils' attendance is good and they are generally enthusiastic in lessons. However, their enjoyment of their education is satisfactory overall. Older pupils, in particular, feel that opportunities for additional activities and responsibilities are limited. Pupils take their roles on the school council seriously and point to improvements that they have helped to make to the school meals and to the buying of equipment for the playground, for example. Pupils also have close links with the parish church and raise money for a variety of charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and high expectations of their work and behaviour. Consequently, most pupils apply themselves and behave well. Teachers deal well with any challenging behaviour. Teachers present activities in interesting ways which make lessons enjoyable for pupils. For example, in a Key Stage 1 literacy lesson, the pupils retold the story of *The Smallest Giant in Town* through acting out scenes from the story in dramatic fashion. Teachers use interactive technology well to engage and motivate pupils and use questions effectively to consolidate their understanding and develop their thinking. Teaching assistants are highly effective and make an important contribution to the quality of education, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Marking is regular and supportive but does not always give pupils a clear idea of how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum provides well for the development of pupils' basic skills and means that they achieve well. It gives opportunities for particularly able pupils to work with older groups to provide additional challenge. Pupils also use their skills effectively to support their learning in other subjects. For example, the older pupils produced lively newspaper front pages as part of their research into Britain since the 1940's. These showed good historical background as well as a sophisticated understanding of the features of journalistic writing. Provision for ICT is much improved from the last inspection and pupils use it effectively to support their learning in other subjects. The school is aware that the distinctive features of the Foundation Stage curriculum have not been sufficiently developed to provide the full range of learning opportunities for the youngest children. The brand new early years centre is providing a good opportunity for the school to improve its provision in this area. The curriculum is enriched by visits and visitors to the school and the annual performance. A highlight mentioned by pupils is the annual residential visit to Wales. Whilst additional activities are currently limited, the school does give pupils the opportunity to take part in a range of sporting and other events through the local partnership of schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. The close knit family atmosphere of the school means that all staff take a personal interest in the welfare of all the children and take very good care of them. Vulnerable pupils are well provided for. Arrangements for the safeguarding of children are in place and fully understood by staff. However, governors do not currently have a member responsible for this area and their policies and procedures need updating. The school uses its tracking information effectively to identify potential underachievement and to put in place additional support for those in danger of falling behind. However, many pupils are not clear about how their targets will help them to improve. The school enjoys a positive relationship with most parents and one expressed the view that 'The school is open and responsive if we have any issues or concerns.' The new early years unit is ensuring that the school becomes a central focus for care and education in the village.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has created an ethos of teamwork in which all members of staff feel valued. Consequently, they work well to provide a good level of pastoral care and to improve the quality of education for pupils. The school is now close to realising its vision of providing high quality care and education on one site with the recent completion of the new early years unit. However, the headteacher is well aware that her heavy teaching commitment in recent times has meant that her remaining energies have been taken up with this project and day-day-management rather than the strategic development of the school. Consequently, the school's monitoring and evaluation of its performance are not incisive enough to plan effectively for improvement where weaknesses are identified. This is recognised in the new staffing structure for September which provides more time for leadership and opportunities for it to be more widely distributed

amongst staff. Governors are committed and enthusiastic about the school but lack rigorous strategies for holding it to account for its performance.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	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	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	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	2
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	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?	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?	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?	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	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

27 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Laurence Church of England (A) School, Wallingford, OX10 7DX

You may remember that I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed my two days at St Laurence and you all helped by being so friendly and keen to talk to me about your school. I thought you would like to know what I found out.

St Laurence is a good school. Most of you make good progress in the school and by the time you leave reach standards in English, mathematics and science that are above average. This means that you are well prepared for secondary school. You do well because the teaching is good and most of you are keen to learn. Some of you who find things a bit more difficult are given lots of help.

Most of you behave well in lessons although some of you younger ones need to try a little bit harder at times. You all seem to enjoy lessons and I enjoyed your performances of *The Smallest Giant in Town* in Class 1. Some of you older ones say that you do not enjoy school as much as you used to because there are not enough additional activities and chances to take responsibility in a small school. Your teachers are aware of how you feel about this.

Your headteacher has worked hard for many years to make the school successful. She gets lots of help from the other staff and governors. They are determined to make the school even better for you. I have asked them to do a few things that I think will help.

- The new early years unit is an exciting move for the school. I want teachers to use it to give the youngest pupils more chances to play and explore.
- Some of you told me that your targets do not really help you to improve. We want the school to use the information they have to set targets for all of you that help you to improve your work.
- Finally, the headteacher has spent a lot of her time teaching in recent years. We have asked the governors to give her more time to develop the school.

Yours truly

Graham Lee
Lead inspector