

St Stephen's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130327
Local Authority	Bury
Inspection number	293628
Inspection dates	26–27 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	198
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr H Martin
Headteacher	Mrs J Rowlands
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2001
School address	Colville Drive Bury Lancashire BL8 2DX
Telephone number	0161 7641132
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Stephen's is a voluntary aided Church of England school. It is located in an area of mixed local authority rented and owner occupied housing where there is considerable social need, but also attracts pupils from a wider area because of its Christian mission. An above average number of pupils are eligible for a free school meal. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above average. An increasing number of pupils starting the school do not speak English as their first language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Stephen's is a welcoming school. The overwhelming support it gains from parents and its many activities within the community are a measure of its popularity and inclusiveness. It provides a satisfactory education for pupils and there are strengths in pupils' good personal development and well-being and the level of care provided.

Pupils are happy to come to school and their improving attendance is currently about average. They respect adults in school and are very caring towards one another. Older pupils are always on hand to look after younger ones and the school and playground councils are adamant that there is no bullying or racism. The healthy fruit trolley is a major feature of break times because pupils know how important it is to eat sensibly and are working hard to achieve the Healthy Schools Award. Pupils feel that they are in safe hands and have very trusting relationships with adults in school. They are keen to get involved in the numerous environmental projects undertaken and are equally enthusiastic about the many activities on offer at lunchtimes and after school.

By the time pupils leave Year 6, they attain broadly average standards and make satisfactory progress overall in relation to their starting points. Those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or other additional needs are supported well and their progress is good. Currently, children enter the Foundation Stage with below average attainment and make satisfactory progress, although standards remain below average by the end of the Reception. In Years 1 and 2, standards have declined over time and progress has not been good enough. The school has recognised the need to rectify this. Staffing has recently been strengthened and assessment is more rigorous. Although this action is positive, the full impact on standards and achievement is not yet evident.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It enables pupils to achieve satisfactorily and promotes pupils' personal development well. Teaching overall is satisfactory. Although there are some good features, it is not consistent throughout the school. Relationships are good and lessons are planned thoughtfully to interest pupils but sometimes activities are not pitched at the right level and marking is not as effective as it could be in raising achievement.

Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is the driving force and vigorously leads initiatives to move the school forward. After an unsettled period, she has secured a committed staff team and provided necessary training and support to help tackle standards and achievement. A corporate view of the school's development process is set out in the comprehensive school improvement plan. Although focusing on the right priorities, it does not state the intended outcomes for pupils so it is difficult for managers to evaluate any actions taken in terms of their impact. Senior leaders support the headteacher in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's work but there has not been sufficient rigour at all levels in terms of evaluating standards. Procedures to assess children's attainment when they start school also lack rigour and do not give a secure view of their starting points from which progress can be measured. This has resulted in leaders having a less accurate view of the school's overall effectiveness. The school has adequately dealt with previous inspection issues. Strategies, although promising, have not yet produced significant improvement particularly in Key Stage 1. This demonstrates the school's satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1.
- Increase the effectiveness of teachers' marking in raising achievement.
- Ensure that measurable outcomes for pupils are included in the School Improvement Plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children start the Foundation Stage with below average knowledge and skills for their age. They make satisfactory progress towards the expected targets but are still below average, especially in the areas of communication, language and literacy at the end of Reception. Recently, the increasing number of children who enter the school speaking English as an additional language has influenced the overall picture of attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage; consequently, it has fallen from average to below average.

In the national assessments in 2006, standards at Key Stage 1 were below average in mathematics and well below average in reading and writing. Standards have shown a steady decline over the past four years. Progress is beginning to gather pace in Years 1 and 2, as a consequence of stronger teaching. There is an energetic focus on boosting early reading and writing skills and pupils make satisfactory progress. Nevertheless, standards at Key Stage 1 are not yet as high as they should be.

Standards and achievement for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 show some improvement over time. In the 2006 national tests, the school attained its highest ever standards in English and science and the overall performance shows an upward trend since 2004. Pupils' average attainment, however, is broadly consistent with their prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 1. The school's recent data analysis confirms that most pupils made the expected progress from Years 3 to 6 and achieved satisfactorily overall.

Throughout the school, there is good intervention and support for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who learn English as an additional language as well as other vulnerable groups. As a result, most progress well and often achieve better than others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are friendly and welcoming. They like talking about their school because there is so much for them to enjoy. They are very enthusiastic about the range of sports activities on offer and other clubs such as Faith and Beyond (FAB) are well attended. Satisfactory attendance is beginning to improve further this year. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils behave well because they know how to respond to each other and adapt to different situations such as attending an assembly. Most pupils enjoy lessons and usually work hard but some do not show as much enthusiasm as they could, for example, over the presentation of their written work or contributing to class discussion. Pupils are well aware of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. When parents presented the school with a calendar of seasonal healthy foods, the school council followed it up by organising a 'healthy lunchbox' competition.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to their school and local communities. For example, the school and playground councils have successfully improved facilities inside school and in the playground. There are very strong links with the church and local schools and colleges and the extent of fundraising for charities is exceptional. Recycling schemes and work with the

British Conservation Trust is a small sample of activities which help pupils acquire some of the life skills they need to secure their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with some strengths. It varies widely and good teaching is not consistent throughout the school. Over time, teaching has not effectively resolved declining standards in Key stage 1. Good relationships between adults and pupils create a positive climate for learning. Pupils know that their contributions to lessons are valued so they feel confident about sharing ideas and enjoy what they do. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and they use resources well to motivate pupils and make learning interesting. In a mathematics lesson, pupils in Year 4 were excitedly engaged in folding paper in order to make two-dimensional shapes. They enjoyed the challenge and their success and were more able to describe shapes accurately as a result. Where interactive whiteboards are available, they are used well. Planning builds satisfactorily on pupils' prior learning. However, there are occasions in lessons when too much is expected of pupils and resources are not at hand to help them so they do not achieve the learning objectives fully. The quality of marking is a weakness and there are significant differences in the use of marking across subjects. It does not consistently inform pupils about their progress towards targets, or how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum for all pupils, including the Foundation Stage, meets requirements and enables pupils to achieve satisfactorily. It is enhanced by the inclusion of French. There are some good strengths, for example, the provision for personal, social and health education. Outside agencies are used well to inform pupils about substance abuse and other potential hazards so pupils are prepared well to help them make sensible choices about their personal safety and well-being. Enrichment through visits and visitors is good and teachers capitalise on these experiences to plan more stimulating lessons and promote better writing. There is a very good selection of clubs and activities ranging from sports and crafts to cheer leading, which pupils enjoy and use to nurture their skills and interests outside of lesson time. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage meets most of their needs adequately but outdoor provision is not planned well enough to enable children to develop physical skills alongside those in other areas of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Parents agree overwhelmingly that their children are well cared for in school. Pupils feel safe and know that there is always an adult who they can talk to and share their concerns. There are friendship groups and del-time where pupils can receive counselling and support and have self-esteem restored. Good News assemblies celebrate individual successes and raise aspirations. Pupils who need additional learning support are provided for sensitively so they make best progress and achieve alongside others. In one such group, pupils were rehearsing a mini play to perform to their class because they had gained so much self-confidence through their language development programme. All necessary procedures

for safeguarding pupils are in place. Academic guidance is satisfactory and not as strong as the pastoral care provided. A new system for analysing assessment data has been introduced and is helping teachers to track individual progress and set learning targets. Pupils know their targets but do not always know when they have achieved them because there is little reference to them in teachers' marking. Opportunities to assess how well children in the Foundation Stage are progressing are missed. Consequently, this makes it difficult to measure day-to-day progress and identify the next steps in children's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. With enormous energy and commitment, the headteacher has established a happy, caring school which pupils are proud of and enjoy. Her inclusive approach means that staff, governors and pupils contribute to the school's mission and drive for improvement. There has been some restructuring of the senior leadership team to strengthen the strategic overview of the school. With local authority support, the school is tackling standards and achievement and improving performance at Key Stage 2. Although there is now a strengthening picture in Key Stage 1 due to better teaching and more rigorous assessment, action in the past has not had enough impact on standards at the end of Year 2. Subject leaders are becoming established in their roles following a time of changing circumstances. New initiatives are in place, for example, to boost skills in sports and link subjects more purposefully to improve learning. It is too early to assess the full impact of these developments.

Governors are very supportive of the school and are watchful over finances to ensure satisfactory value for money. They are committed to increasing its profile within the community but their role in evaluating the school's effectiveness and the impact of their decisions has not been robust enough. The improvement plan is helpful in that it focuses on the actions the school needs to take but does not link the actions to outcomes for pupils.

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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?	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	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	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	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	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?	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.

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	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, Mrs Davenport and I visited your very friendly school recently to see how well you are learning. I have to say we were delighted by the welcome you gave us so thank you for talking to us and telling us how much you enjoy all the things you do.

We were very pleased to learn that your attendance is improving and that you are making steady progress. It was also nice to see such good manners. You are well behaved and take good care of each other and that is very important. We also found out how much the adults in school care for you, and how they are always there for you when you need that little bit of extra help. That's very important too! You are all amazingly healthy, thanks to all that fruit and those splendid school lunches!

We came up with some ideas about how to make your school even better. We have asked your teachers to help pupils get better at reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave Year 2. We have asked school leaders to keep a closer check on the progress you make. When your teachers mark your work, we have asked them to tell you exactly what you need to do next to improve.

You can help by continuing to be polite and helpful.

Good luck everyone and best wishes for the future.