

St Andrew's CofE VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109595
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310033
Inspection dates	29–30 November 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 controlled
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	381
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr George Dilley
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Rolfe
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2005
School address	Brunts Lane Biggleswade Bedfordshire SG18 0LY
Telephone number	01767312311
Fax number	01767600531

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This well-above-average sized school has an attached Nursery. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and most are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties is below average. However, the number of pupils with statements of special educational need is high because the school has a unit for pupils with speech and language or communication difficulties. Currently, pupils in Years 3 and 4 are taught in five mixed-age classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Staff and governors are accurate in their view that this is a good school. Pupils are well cared for and happy. There is a strong sense of purpose and staff work well together to help pupils achieve as well as they can. The team spirit seen at the last inspection remains strongly evident. Parents are largely in support of the school, although a small but significant number are concerned about whether the staff and governors listen to their views, particularly over the recent move to mixed-age classes in Years 3 and 4.

A major factor in the pupils' good achievement is their enjoyment of school, particularly the 'Fun Fridays' when they sample activities in a wide range of areas. Pupils mainly behave well. In most lessons, they are completely involved and eager to answer questions, because teachers give them confidence by showing that they value each pupil's contribution. Pupils know how to keep safe and by the time they are in Year 4, most are responsible, confident and independent individuals. The members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously. They are thoughtful and sensible when considering ideas for using their budget in the school's best interest. Pupils have a good understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle, and enjoy nutritious school dinners and regular exercise.

From attainment on entry that is slightly below that typical of three-year-olds, pupils make good progress and reach above-average standards at the end of Year 4. They are prepared well for the next stage of their education by their good academic progress and the maturity they display. Their good progress and personal development are consequences of effective teaching and a good curriculum that largely meet the learning needs of pupils in all classes. However, more pupils could reach levels above those expected for their age if expectations of what they might achieve were even higher. The school is already taking action on this issue and that of the lower achievement of boys compared with that of girls in reading and writing.

The school's commitment to all pupils is shown by its success in how it caters for pupils with learning difficulties, especially those with speech and language needs whose provision is very effective. Individual needs are carefully identified and programmes put in place that balance support in class with more intensive withdrawal sessions to enhance pupils' fluency in speaking and confidence in reading. Consequently, they make good progress towards their individual targets.

Subject leadership has improved considerably since the last inspection. Several leaders are new in post, but their contribution to pupils' achievement is very significant. Strong teamwork from an enthusiastic group of staff, who are led well at all levels, ensures that the school is continually striving for ways to improve. It has improved well since its last inspection and continues to give good value for money. The headteacher and governors have a clear picture of what the school does well and where improvements can be made. This gives a strong platform for the school to move forward with confidence in the future in its drive to become even better.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress during their time in the Nursery and Reception classes. All adults work well as a team, planning topics and activities that link well together and cover all aspects of the Foundation Stage curriculum. The area is led well, although strategies are not sufficiently rigorous to identify how children's attainment on entry and their progress compare with national

expectations. The new accommodation is well designed for this age group and displays are set up well to interest and motivate children. Adult-initiated and independent activities are balanced to ensure that children have access to a full range of learning opportunities. Adult interventions are thoughtful and ensure that children develop language and other skills during their chosen activities. Children make good progress in developing personal qualities and in speaking and listening skills, and these are higher than usually found nationally by the time they enter Year 1. The children's physical and creative development is well advanced. Progress is slower and attainment lower in writing and calculating, both of which are current priorities for development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure more pupils achieve even higher standards by challenging and engaging every pupil in all lessons.
- Raise the standards of boys' reading and writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school builds well on the children's good start in the Foundation Stage throughout the other school years. National assessments of Year 2 pupils fell slightly in 2007 and were close to the national average, from a group that included a large number of pupils with learning difficulties. The pupils with speech and other communication difficulties made good progress and achieved well. Boys do not achieve as well as girls, particularly in reading and writing. This is a current priority for improvement, although it is too early to see if the action taken is having the intended impact. Standards are above average by the end of Year 4 and represent good progress for pupils from their results in Year 2. The school is conscious that it is not fully successful in helping all pupils to reach above-average levels of attainment, and so it is setting higher targets for its more able pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good behaviour and sensible attitudes contribute to their enjoyment of school. Their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development gives them a good understanding of right and wrong and of fairness. They develop an understanding of their own and other cultures in art, music and literature and in visits to religious centres, such as the local Gudwara and places of worship for other religions. They enjoy the celebration of St Andrew's Day at the local church. The school is successful in ensuring that those with behavioural difficulties rarely disrupt the learning of others. Relationships are good and pupils report that there is very little bullying but, if it occurs, it is sorted out rapidly. Pupils learn to adopt healthy eating and understand how to follow a safe and healthy lifestyle, shown by their responsible behaviour in and out of classrooms. The regular opportunities for parents to share a school lunch with their children are calm, social occasions that are valued by all. Pupils contribute to the local and wider community through recycling, the close connections with the church and their collections for charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers are coping well with the mixed-age classes in Years 3 and 4 by pitching work carefully to move pupils on from their current levels of work. Occasionally, teachers do not use assessment information about pupils' prior attainment enough to fully match work to pupils' abilities. In these situations, progress slows to be satisfactory rather than good. The careful deployment of the effective team of support staff makes a major contribution to learning, particularly when they are working with pupils identified with learning difficulties. Teachers use interactive whiteboards increasingly creatively, and pupils use other technology well to support their learning and add interest to lessons. Pupils greatly enjoy learning in the large majority of lessons and find the work interesting. Some lack of concentration only occurs when teachers do not challenge or engage them fully.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets both the academic and personal needs of pupils well. Consequently, they develop an enthusiasm for learning by recognising and exploiting links between subjects. Year 2 pupils talked excitedly about their project on toys, and one said, 'It's really fun, and we're even learning about axles!' Visitors to the school bring additional expertise. For example, in the Year 1 topic on houses and homes, the visit of a builder effectively linked work on science, geography, history and technology. The provision of information and communication technology is especially good and many children are becoming confident users of computers in class. Personal, social and health education has a high profile within the school and contributes well to pupils' understanding of how to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. Pupils take part in regular physical exercise and have the opportunity to join a good range of after-school clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Procedures to safeguard pupils are understood and fully implemented. Pupils say that they feel safe and know that there is always an adult to turn to if they have a problem. The school's very close contact with outside agencies and the work of speech therapists give very helpful support to pupils with specific learning needs. This contributes significantly to their progress and inclusion in the school. Regular assessment of pupils' academic progress is used well to tailor programmes to help those who have fallen behind the school's expectations of them. Marking is helpful and enables pupils to understand how to improve their work. Pupils are generally clear about their personal writing targets and the steps they need to take to improve, but are less sure in other subjects such as mathematics.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and the deputy headteacher work closely together to ensure that pupils make good progress in a caring and stimulating environment. Targets are usually achieved, but leaders have recently set more ambitious targets to raise the achievement of the more able pupils.

Subject leaders manage improvements in their subjects and areas with enthusiasm. They keep teaching and learning under careful scrutiny, and give guidance where necessary to help teachers do better. Strategies are effective in evaluating how well the school is doing, and identifying areas where improvement is needed. Planning for school improvement is based on thorough monitoring by senior staff and subject leaders. Although planning for improvement is thorough, it does not always show how success is to be evaluated. The governing body is self-critical and keen to improve its skills by taking up training opportunities. Governors are involved well in the life and work of the school. They are regular visitors and have a good understanding of its strengths. They challenge managers to ensure improvement in the areas where it is needed.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	2
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

1 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Andrew's CofE VC Lower School, Biggleswade, SG18 0LY

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to see how well you are learning. It was a pleasure to spend two days at your school. You were very helpful and showed how proud you are of it. You and your parents told us that you enjoy school, and we found that you all work hard and behave sensibly. We think that the school is good because the adults care about you, teach you well and look for ways to help you to achieve more.

You make good progress at school. Almost all of you reach the standards expected of you by the time you move on to middle school. Many of you do better than this. You have a good understanding of the importance of diet and exercise. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a significant contribution to the life of the school. Those of you who find learning difficult are looked after very well and given every opportunity to take part in school activities.

Your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school better. We think that there are things that can be even better so we have asked your teachers to:

- help those of you who find the work easy to learn more quickly in all subjects;
- give all of you, especially the boys, more opportunities to improve your reading and writing.

You can also help your school to improve by continuing to try your best and help each other.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector