

St Lawrence VA CofE Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109628
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310045
Inspection dates	10–11 January 2008
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Caroline Walker
Headteacher	Mrs Mary Haynes
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Manor Lane Wymington Rushden Northamptonshire NN10 9LL
Telephone number	01933 353530
Fax number	01933 316950

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school serving families in Wymington and surrounding villages. Most pupils are White British; there are a few pupils from minority ethnic groups and no pupils are learning English as an additional language. The school's intake is mostly advantaged in terms of socio-economic conditions and only a small percentage of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. During 2006, and for some of 2007, there was considerable staff turnover due to statutory leave and illness. Girls considerably outnumber boys in most year groups. In recent years, the attainment of children entering the Foundation Stage is fairly typical for their age, although in past years attainment has been above national expectations.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school where pupils are happy and enjoy everything about it. They say 'it's like a big family' and are positive about the school's satisfactory programme of activities, which interests and motivates them. As a result, their attendance is good. Their behaviour and relationships with each other are also good. They grow into mature, sensible children who are well prepared for the next stage of education. The school's pastoral support for them is good. The school's ethos, firmly aided by its Christian values and underpinned by excellent relationships between staff and pupils, provides strong emotional security and support for such pupils.

Improvement since the last inspection has been adequate and leadership and management are satisfactory. Systems to aid the school's understanding of the quality of its work have improved. These are satisfactory and the school now has a better knowledge of what needs to be done to improve things further. Except with regard to English where it is good, the work of coordinators in monitoring and evaluating their subjects is underdeveloped. This is because many are relatively new to their roles and staff turbulence has somewhat slowed this development.

Standards and achievement have varied over the past few years. This is because there have been several staff changes. The staffing is now much more stable, teaching is satisfactory and the school is improving steadily. As a result, achievement is satisfactory and standards have improved. The school's data shows that children generally make good progress in the Foundation Stage and their attainment entering Year 1 exceeds expectations. Thereafter, they make satisfactory progress to the end of their time in the school, and reach above average standards. Girls' attainment is considerably higher than boys. During lessons, when pupils are asked questions in lessons, boys sometimes remain passive. While in most lessons teachers match work to pupils' needs, they do not always make explicit what each group will learn.

Many parents are positive about the school's work. However, not all feel this way and a small number have concerns over the headteacher's management, the significant reorganisation of the Foundation Stage and staff relationships. While there is room for improved communication with parents, this is a headteacher and staff team who care passionately for the pupils and who want the school to be a better place. The Foundation Stage is well organised and has the right emphasis on children's learning. Appropriate action is being taken to strengthen relationships among some staff and improve communication with parents. For instance, the headteacher and the senior teacher are regularly on duty to receive children and parents at the beginning of the school day. Although the school, governors and local authority are working hard to resolve some of these issues, they find some of this is difficult when parents do not approach the school directly with their concerns.

The school's academic guidance is satisfactory. Support, through the links with the local network of schools, is strong. The headteacher has put in place a much needed system for tracking pupils' progress in English and mathematics. However, this does not yet extend to other subjects such as science and information and communication technology (ICT). The tracking is having a positive effect and staff are now able to identify where pupils are making the progress expected. For instance, the response to the tracking of pupils' writing levels has resulted in 'big writing' lessons in Year 2 and Year 4, which are a big hit with most of the boys and standards are rising. However, this has highlighted that staff require more guidance on how to judge

levels and to meet with colleagues to accurately assess pieces of pupils' work. Some of this has now begun.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The changes made over the past year to the Foundation Stage have done much to support children's independent learning, in line with government requirements. The Nursery and Reception groups work well as a whole and the unit is a vibrant learning environment. There is a good emphasis on children initiating their own activities, with adequate systems in place to track the activities they have undertaken and to record what they have achieved. Targets are set, appropriately, based on children's starting points. The quality of the guidance by adults and their interaction with children is good, especially supporting children's language and thinking skills. Support for those with learning difficulties and disabilities is also good because activities are well focused on their needs. Although the teaching of the more formal activities during the inspection was satisfactory, the whole package of experiences children get from all adults is good and supports their good achievement. The development of the Foundation Stage, led by the headteacher and the teacher in charge of the unit, is adequate and there is a clear plan for development. The teacher in charge is relatively new and aspects of assessment and tracking are still to be fully developed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve communication with parents.
- Ensure that the tracking of pupils' progress is extended to include other subjects; increase the accuracy by which pupils' work is assessed; and ensure what different groups of pupils will learn in lessons is clearly identified so that assessment can be even sharper.
- Ensure that subject coordinators take a full and active part in monitoring and evaluating performance and provision in their subjects.
- Raise boys' attainment and take action to improve their responses in lessons.

A small proportion of the 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

Pupils currently make satisfactory progress from Year 1 to Year 4 in reading, writing and mathematics and reach above average standards in these subjects by the time they leave. This is also the case for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Standards have varied over recent years. Following a period of underachievement, the current Year 4 pupils are now on track to attain above average standards and make satisfactory progress.

In most years, girls' attainment outstrips that of the boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Their self-esteem is strong and they are self-confident individuals, always ready for the next challenge. They enjoy all aspects of school life. They have a well-developed moral sense and through the links with the local

community and further afield, they learn about the plight of others. They have a genuine care and concern, shown through raising funds for those less well off than themselves. They have a good understanding of the multicultural nature of the United Kingdom. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to keep healthy and safe and make a positive contribution to the school community through the school council. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Occasionally, the very small number of pupils with specific behaviour difficulties affects the learning of others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory, although there are examples of good teaching where lively, and thorough questioning probes pupils' minds. Relationships between staff and pupils across the school are excellent. Work is planned adequately, although what different groups of pupils in a class will learn is not always identified sharply enough. The steps and stages of learning are often put together well so that pupils build on what they have learned before. Pupils are generally well focused in lessons and have high powers of concentration but sometimes they lose their focus when introductions are too long or the pace wanes. The use of computers to enliven lessons or for demonstrations is underdeveloped. Sometimes teachers respond to the keenness of girls to answer questions, rather than ensuring they also probe the understanding of boys in the group.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The programme of activities is satisfactory. French is greatly enjoyed by all and many are enthusiastic about the sports activities after school and about taking part in charitable events. Strong links are made in lessons with literacy and numeracy. Links with ICT are less strong. After several months, the new computer suite is still not up and running because there are long-standing and unacceptable technical difficulties. Despite these difficulties, pupils are still taught skills in the subject by using the limited provision the school has for its classrooms. Support for pupils' personal development through the school's personal, social and health education and its social and emotional aspects of language programme, is strong. The school does not yet have a programme for gifted or talented pupils, despite the high academic levels that a few of the pupils display.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Procedures for safeguarding pupils are satisfactory. Pastoral support is good and academic guidance is satisfactory. Some classes have personal targets so that pupils know specifically the next steps they should be working to. Pupils see the value of these and can say, where they are in place, how they help them. Satisfactory systems are in place to help pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but not all individual education plans are up to date. While most of these pupils make satisfactory progress, those helped by the designated support assistant for literacy do well because of the expertise and consistency of approach. However, the school finds the management of the very few pupils with severe behaviour difficulties quite challenging

and has sought appropriate advice. A particular strength is the network of support the school is able to call upon and the positive links it has with external agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has prioritised work appropriately and has responded adequately to the issues raised from the last inspection. The areas for improvement in the school's development plan are accurate, although the plan is for one year only and outcomes planned are not always as sharp as they ought to be. Challenging school targets are now set and based on more reliable information. The work of the senior teacher has been enhanced through the primary leadership programme. She actively monitors her areas of responsibility and supports the headteacher well. The staffing is much more settled this year, with a mostly full staff complement. This puts the school in the best position it has been in for some years to develop key areas and build capacity further.

The pace of change is now beginning to accelerate and teamwork is being strengthened through the aims and values work the headteacher has instigated. The senior team, staff and governors have demonstrated through recent actions that there is satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

The work of governors is satisfactory overall and is strongest with regard to health and safety and financial matters. The vice-chair of governors has a good understanding of the workings of the school and especially its standards. However, governors' minutes show that little attention is given to this very important area. Whole school policies have recently been put in place.

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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
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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 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	2
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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

12 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Lawrence VA CofE Lower School, Wymington NN10 9LL

Thank you for meeting with me during the inspection and telling me what you thought of your school. It helps you care for each other and those further afield; this is especially through your fund-raising and the links with the church. I was impressed with your enthusiasm for school and for learning. Your behaviour is good and you grow into mature children who are well prepared for your next school. Your skills in English and mathematics are usually good for your age and you generally make satisfactory progress throughout the school. During the inspection, you were always polite and you spoke positively about each other and how the school has helped you. I thought that your relationships with each other were good and with your teachers were excellent.

St Lawrence's is a satisfactory school. Mrs Haynes has worked hard to keep the school organised and running but some of its work has been affected when your usual teachers and support staff have been absent. Some parents have not been happy about this and about a few of the changes that have been made. The staff and governors are going to work extra hard to keep your mums and dads better informed. The school also has a bit of catching up to do to ensure that the staff in charge of subjects take a full part and that the school tracks your progress more fully. Staff are also going to discuss the levels you reach further and agree on these more accurately. The girls do better than boys in all sorts of ways at St Lawrence's. I have asked the school to try and even this out so boys do as well as girls. The boys sometimes leave it to the girls to answer the questions in lessons - please try hard to make an equal contribution.

I really enjoyed being at the school. The climate for learning is certainly a good one. You are clearly interested and motivated children, and the staff are committed to making things better for you.

Good luck and best wishes for the future.

George Derby

Lead inspector