

St Nicolas' Church of England Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110470
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310322
Inspection date	5 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Keith Williams

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	214
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sonja Welford
Headteacher	Ms Lorraine Sutherland
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Rectory Road Taplow Maidenhead SL6 0ET
Telephone number	01628 603759

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	5 December 2008
Inspection number	310322

Fax number

01628 669754

Age group	4-11
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Inspection date	5 December 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. They investigated: the extent to which the personal development of children in Reception has improved; the impact of pupils' personal learning targets and the extent to which they are involved in assessing their own learning; and the impact of subject leaders on promoting improvement. Evidence was gathered from the analysis of pupils' progress, scrutiny of their work, observation of lessons, parents' questionnaires, and discussions with the headteacher, staff, two governors and pupils.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Most of the pupils at this oversubscribed, average size primary school are of White British heritage. The remainder are from a range of other backgrounds, although none is learning English as an additional language. Many pupils live outside the school's immediate area. A below-average proportion of pupils have been identified with learning difficulties relating, mainly, to specific learning needs. The proportion in receipt of a statement of special educational need is similar to that found in most schools. No pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has the Healthy School Award. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) join at the beginning of the Reception year. There have been a number of recent staff changes. The headteacher joined the school in January 2008 and she is currently supported by an acting deputy headteacher, pending a substantive appointment in January 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school in which a very strong emphasis is placed on promoting pupils' all-round development and providing them with high-quality care. As a result, pupils achieve well to reach above-average standards, and make excellent progress in their personal development. The headteacher leads the school very well and, during a period of staff changes, she has ensured that there is a strong emphasis on evaluating the school's work in order to raise standards. She has quickly gained an accurate understanding of what is working well and what might be improved. New systems, such as those for assessing pupils and monitoring their progress and the introduction of subject leadership teams, are contributing well to this process.

When pupils first join the school, they have skills and experiences that cover a broad range but which, taken overall, are typical of their age. A combination of good teaching and a broad and interesting curriculum ensure that pupils make consistently good progress across the school. The school's performance in the national assessments for pupils in Year 2 has improved steadily in recent years and standards are now above average. Efforts to improve pupils' writing have paid off and, across the school, there are many examples of high-quality writing for different purposes. In Year 6, standards have been consistently and significantly above average for many years. The provisional results for pupils who took the tests in 2008 indicate that these levels are likely to have been maintained. Good proportions of pupils reach the higher Level 5 due, in no small part, to teachers' high expectations of these pupils. The school's increasingly sophisticated tracking data show that most pupils, whatever their ability, make good progress. They are well prepared for their future lives. The school is equally intent on promoting creative subjects and is justifiably proud of the opportunities it provides to promote pupils' musical development. Pupils are often to be heard playing a wide range of instruments - and playing them well. Music also provides much of the focus of pupils' involvement with the local community and opportunities to take part in competitions further afield. Another strength of the curriculum is the promotion of pupils' personal, social and health education and this contributes, for example, to pupils' very good understanding of healthy lifestyles. The school provides a good range of activities outside of lessons.

One of the reasons why pupils do well is that the school takes every step to ensure that they are able to learn in a safe, supportive environment. Pupils report that they feel safe in school and they appreciate the care taken of them and the help they are given by staff. A careful eye is kept on pupils who are potentially at risk. Procedures to verify the suitability of adults to work with children are very robust, and comprehensive checks are made on the potential risk of activities in and out of school. Pupils with learning difficulties, including the few with specific learning difficulties, are supported well and this means that they are able to make good progress.

The school's calm, purposeful atmosphere is underpinned by a strong moral code that contributes to pupils' excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Pupils are eager to please and keen to learn. A noticeable feature of many lessons is the large number of pupils who put up their hands enthusiastically to join in the discussions. Outside of lessons, the active school council ensures that pupils' views are taken into account and it contributes well to school life. Pupils of all ages enjoy school very much and this is reflected in attendance rates that are consistently well above average.

For their part, teachers work hard to provide interesting and exciting lessons, a point noted by the pupils themselves. Teachers are clear about what they expect pupils to learn and they ensure that their planning is modified to meet the needs of different levels of ability. They make sure that pupils understand these objectives at the beginning of lessons, and they are reviewed thoughtfully during and at the end of the session. This contributes positively to pupils' understanding. Teachers question pupils skilfully, phrasing questions carefully to take account of pupils' capabilities, and they use their answers to check on their understanding. Teachers give good verbal feedback during lessons and written comments are provided in their books. This marking is carried out conscientiously, but there are missed opportunities to help pupils reflect on how well they have understood the specific objectives of the lesson. This has been identified by the school and plans are in hand to ensure that comments relate more closely to the intended learning and to increase pupils' involvement in assessing their own work. Pupils have a good understanding of the learning targets set for them by teachers. Staff are beginning to involve pupils in assessing their own progress towards their targets, and determining when they have achieved them. This is at an early stage and rightly remains a priority for the school.

Each subject is now led by a team of staff who work together to monitor and lead developments. This is already working well and is helping staff to share the headteacher's evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Governors contribute well to this process. They have a clear understanding of their strategic role and have a good range of methods for finding out about the school's work. Most parents are supportive of the school and are pleased with what it offers. One summed up their views by noting, 'St Nicolas has a safe and well-managed learning environment. In my opinion, the teaching and support staff team are dedicated and take a genuine interest in the children in their care. On balance, we would struggle to find fault with the school in any area.' A small minority of parents feel that their views are not taken sufficiently into account and would like the way in which the school communicates with parents to be improved. This has been recognised, rightly, by the headteacher and governors and there are plans, for example, to carry out a 'communication audit'. Taking account of the leaders' track record, they are well placed to secure further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Reception class has improved considerably since the last inspection. A combination of 'in-house' expertise and local authority guidance has ensured that children are offered a broad and varied EYFS curriculum. Teaching and planning are good and pupils have regular access to all of the areas of learning. Of particular note is the improved provision for children's personal development, a weakness noted in the last report. There is a very strong emphasis on promoting independence, while enabling children to develop their social skills. Staff provide a good balance between adult-directed activities and opportunities for children to make choices and decisions for themselves. Children respond very well, and this improved provision is a key factor in the excellent progress they make in their personal, social and emotional development. A close check is kept on their all-round development. Systems to assess and track their progress have been reviewed to provide an increased emphasis, for example, on assessing the child-initiated activities. This remains a priority for staff, who continue to review these processes to ensure that children's needs are met. Although small, the outdoor area is well resourced and is used well. Children's regular access to the climbing equipment, sand, water and other materials contributes positively to their good progress. Staff work together well to promote children's learning and welfare needs. As a result, children get off to a good

start to their education and very much enjoy their time in Reception. By the end of the year, most children reach the goals expected of them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase pupils' involvement in evaluating their own learning.
- Review and improve systems to liaise with parents.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

18 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicolas' Church of England Combined School, Maidenhead, SL6 0ET

Many thanks for the help you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you work and play. I am writing to tell you what we found out.

Many of you, your parents and staff told us that you go to a good school and we agree. There are a number of things that your school does well. Your headteacher and staff make sure that your school is a safe and exciting place to learn. You told us that your teachers make lessons interesting and we could see this for ourselves. We were pleased to see how hard you work and how many of you put up your hands to answer questions. Your behaviour, in class and around the school, is excellent. This is another of the reasons why you learn well and, because of this, your work is of a good standard. Well done, and please keep this up! Congratulations to the school council - you really make a difference.

Even though your school is good, your headteacher, staff and governors want it to be even better. They have decided on two areas that they are going to try to improve and we agree that they should do this. Firstly, they want you to be more involved in checking that you are learning well and reaching your targets. You will be able to help by carrying on working hard and thinking carefully about what you need to do to reach your targets. Secondly, most of your parents are pleased with the school, but a few would like the school to listen more to their views and to keep them better informed about what is happening in school. Your teachers are going to explore ways of improving this. You can help your parents by making sure that you always pass on messages and letters.

We know you will want to help your school become even better and we wish you good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

Keith Williams

Lead Inspector