

St Nicholas C of E Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115090
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311826
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Drew

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Collins
Headteacher	Mrs Carol Bright
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Priory Chase Rayleigh Essex SS6 9NE
Telephone number	01268 786874
Fax number	01268 786415

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average and serves pupils from the village of Rawreth and the western edge of Rayleigh in south Essex. Attainment on entry is below that expected for pupils' ages. The great majority are White British with a very small number coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is average, but this varies widely from year to year. In 2006 the school moved to new premises and reorganised its senior leadership structure.

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. It is well led and managed and much of its work has improved significantly in recent years. The headteacher and governors have, for example, brought stability to staffing, raised teaching quality, created a better curriculum and established stronger management. The overwhelming majority of parents are very supportive of the school and one commented, 'Our children are happy and settled, making fantastic progress!'

Pupils show an excellent enjoyment of school. This consistently enhances lessons, play and all other aspects of their experience. Pupils' overall personal development is good, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Attendance levels are above average and pupils' attitudes to study are very positive. The great majority of pupils behave well and many show a good awareness of the needs of others. They contribute well to school life and the wider community. A few lack self-discipline, but respond well to guidance from adults. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to stay healthy and safe. They are well prepared for the next phase of education.

Standards are rising partly because of pupils' positive attitudes. Attainment broadly matches the national averages in both key stages. Mathematics has improved most strongly across all year groups, with standards in both key stages now marginally above average. Science standards, while a little below average in Key Stage 2, are higher than last year. Standards in writing are average in Key Stage 2 and have risen due to recent changes in the curriculum. Not all areas have improved sufficiently however, and the school is rightly seeking further improvements in writing in the Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 1, where sentence structure and vocabulary show limitations. Nevertheless, achievement between entering and leaving the school is good overall.

Teaching and learning are good and there is evidence of outstanding practice. This indicates a stronger picture than at the time of the previous inspection and reflects the positive impact made by monitoring, training and an effective recruitment policy. Lessons are typically encouraging, full of praise for pupils, with good relationships and extensive participation by pupils. The very best lessons have exceptional pace, clear expectations from the teacher and very effective paired and group work by pupils. In the minority of lessons that are only satisfactory, the pace is too variable, pupils are less actively involved and expectations are adequate but not demanding.

The schools' good curriculum is varied, engaging and adapted to meet specific needs. For instance, grouping pupils by ability has led to a rapid rise in standards. Extra support for Year 3, after a period of staffing instability, has quickly resulted in a return to good progress. Other subjects have a relatively prominent place and are carefully assessed. Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education, for instance, are particularly well organised and help promote high standards. The school has an impressive programme of visits.

Pupils' good personal development and academic progress stem from effective care, guidance and support. Staff know their pupils very well and identify individual needs quickly. Recently, tracking systems have improved to give more accurate and frequent assessment of pupils' progress. This has directly helped to raise standards across the school.

The headteacher's clear vision and calm but firm approach is supported by colleagues who bring a good mix of expertise. Collectively, they apply energy and skill to school improvement. Governors and subject leaders also contribute well to the leadership of the school so that

capacity for further improvement is good. Links with parents are very positive and there is valuable liaison with local secondary schools and the wider community.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage offers good provision. This is because it is well led and managed and has effective teaching and learning. Staff show a detailed awareness of each child. They skilfully encourage children's learning, making them feel secure whilst stimulating their interests. The curriculum effectively mixes guided activities with children's own choices. Children's progress in the past was too limited, but better tracking of progress and structuring of lessons is having a beneficial impact. On entry, pupils show significant limitations in some skills, especially emotional development, language for communication and thinking, and calculation. By the time they leave the class, these areas are considerably stronger although still a little lower than nationally, especially in writing. Nevertheless, this amounts to good progress overall.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by extending the strategies used to improve sentence construction and vocabulary development in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that uses swift pace, high expectations and the involvement of pupils, as seen in the very best lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement across the school is good. It has improved significantly over the previous three years and pupils' current work shows the trend is continuing. Overall, standards match the national averages at both key stages in English, mathematics and science. Progress in lessons is good. These encouraging trends reflect improved teaching and learning, more effective tracking of progress and a range of other specific strategies. For instance, changes in the Key Stage 2 curriculum have begun to lift writing standards, while pupils' progress in mathematics has increased since the introduction of grouping pupils by ability. However, although pupils' writing in Year 1 shows significant improvement due to a focus on 'letters and sounds,' this has not fully affected standards in Year 2. Pupils with learning difficulties are making good progress, because staff keep a close check on their work and provide help as soon as it is needed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have good self-esteem. Their positive attitudes to school are a real asset and support their learning well. In lessons and around school pupils are lively and well behaved. The level of enjoyment is excellent. For instance, pupils are eager to offer good ideas in lessons and to tell visitors about special events at school. They play with enthusiasm and are extremely proud of their school. The great majority show consideration for others and many are very good at looking out for each other, especially supporting younger pupils. This willingness to contribute is also shown in fund-raising for charities, visits to elderly peoples' homes and participation in school councils. Pupils respond well to the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and strategies for personal safety. Good progress in literacy and numeracy and good skills in ICT mean pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and life in a secondary school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching has improved since the last inspection. Good lessons now predominate. Pupils enjoy lively teaching that is briskly paced and has ample opportunities for their active participation. In the best lessons impressive attention is paid to the varied needs of different pupils and very skilful timing of tasks so that enjoyment remains high. Where teaching is satisfactory, pupils make sufficient progress but not the rapid gains seen in the best lessons because the pace slows and pupils' attention dips at times. Planning is consistently good and teaching assistants work particularly well with teachers and pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is undergoing major changes in order to create a greater focus on skills, but already it provides good variety and challenge for pupils. Good French provision is offered to all year groups and their experience of music, dance and drama is enhanced by good use of extra-curricular activities and some timetabled lessons. Other subjects have a more significant place in the curriculum than in many similar schools and they make a good contribution to overall standards. Additional benefits come from the wide range of visits built up by the school over the last few years. Visitors to the school enhance provision, with orchestras and assembly leaders especially appreciated by pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils rightly feel well cared for and valued. They know there are adults and other pupils they can turn to for support. Consistent application of policies on behaviour, anti-bullying and child protection, as well as secure safeguarding measures, contribute to pupils' positive views. All statutory requirements are fully met and clearly understood. The monitoring of academic progress has improved significantly in the last two years. It now gives good guidance to pupils, staff and parents on the standards reached and how pupils can improve. Links with external agencies are effective. Good care, guidance and support currently lead to good progress and personal development, with some aspects of tracking new and not fully embedded.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher and senior colleagues have shown clear vision and strong commitment in changing many aspects of the school's work in recent years. They have for instance, modified the curriculum, made academic monitoring more rigorous, stabilised staffing and re-organised senior leadership. These factors have raised standards and improved achievement, especially in Key Stage 2. While recent changes have yet to show their full effect, they have already had a good impact and demonstrate the school's good capacity for further improvement. This is underpinned by the school's accurate and realistic self-evaluation. Governors show a clear knowledge of their school and provide good strategic

advice and support. Subject leaders are effective; they are aware of their accountability for standards and take steps to ensure improvement.

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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	3
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	1
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?	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

2 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas C of E (VC) Primary School, Rayleigh, SS6 9NE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school last week. You are in a school which is good and getting better.

These are the things that I was particularly pleased to see.

- Standards are rising and you make good progress.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding.
- The headteacher and her colleagues lead and manage the school well.
- There are a lot of interesting activities for you, such as visits, clubs and events.
- You behave and attend well and show excellent enjoyment at school.
- The vast majority of your parents are pleased with your school and support its work strongly.

To carry on improving, the school needs to do the following things.

- Make sure that the improvements made in pupils' writing skills in Reception and Year 1 continue into Year 2.
- Ensure that even more lessons have the lively pace and good paired work I saw in the very best ones.

You can help by continuing to work hard, especially in writing. Best wishes for the rest of your time at St Nicholas.

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew Lead inspector