

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Hatfield Broad Oak

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115178
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311866
Inspection date	25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Patricia Cox

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)	96
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	Mr Paul Donovan
Headteacher	Mrs L Stephenson
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hatfield Broad Oak Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM22 7HH
Telephone number	01279718267
Fax number	01279 718113

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector in one day. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress being made on raising standards in mathematics; how well the school develops pupils' independence and responsibility, particularly through target-setting, and their contribution to the school and wider community; and how good leadership and management are at all levels in bringing about better achievement and staff's full involvement in, and commitment to, improvement.

Evidence was gathered from classroom visits, discussions with staff, governors and pupils, scrutiny of parents' questionnaires and examination of school documents, especially assessment data. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector 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

This small school serves children mainly from the village but some come from further afield. Many come from affluent backgrounds. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and all have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals and of those identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities are below average. There are more boys than girls, but this varies considerably from year to year, as do year-group numbers. While the proportion of pupils who leave or join during their school career is average, this is far more evident in some year-groups than others. Therefore, in some years, few pupils in Year 6 started this school in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) or Key Stage 1. The attainment of the children who start in Reception is somewhat above national expectations, although this varies considerably from year to year.

The school has gained the Activemark, the Healthy Schools Award and is working towards the Artsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school has the overwhelming support of its parents and pupils. On entering the building, the immediate impression is of calm and purpose. Pupils settle extremely well and grow in confidence into mature and thoughtful individuals. There is a shared set of values, based firmly on respect for others and oneself, pervading the school's life and work. Pupils behave extremely well, with a keen sense of fairness, and take care of others as a matter of course. They are lively and eager to take the initiative and responsibility. The Year 6 pupils organise lunchtime clubs for the younger ones and take their duties as 'playground leaders', helping others to play, very seriously. Some organise the recycling system and ensure that others follow the rules. However, the school council are not as involved as they could be in organising themselves. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and secure. They are keen to eat healthily and take part enthusiastically in the wide range of sports activities on offer.

The school is at the heart of village life and there are close links with the local church. Pupils make a very good contribution to the wider community through, for example, their involvement in raising money for charity. Their knowledge of other faiths and the impact of belief on life is secure and relationships throughout the school are excellent, whatever their background and heritage. Pupils have a good understanding of their own and other cultures, although their awareness of life in a multicultural society is satisfactory. The pupils are exemplary ambassadors for their school because adults set an extremely good example. Pupils feel very safe because they know that if they are upset they will be cared for immediately. All risk assessments are carried out and there are very good levels of supervision. All staff have child protection training and the school plans to update this further.

Pupils' thorough enjoyment of school is partly the result of the rich and varied curriculum the school provides. There is a good range of activities outside the school day, visitors and visits to places of interest. The curriculum is planned well to cater for the mixed age-groups in each class and to help children from Reception to adjust to Year 1. There is a good emphasis on developing links across subjects and pupils' skills through them. The topics focus well on extending pupils' understanding of life in other countries, and giving them a good basic grounding in French. However, a considerable amount of additional time is spent on English, without evaluating whether all of the activities that take place are effective enough. The good programme for personal, social and health education ensures that pupils are well prepared for the possible pitfalls of teenage and adult life.

The strengths of the school are due to the headteacher's good leadership and management. She checks the work of the school well and has a good knowledge of where improvement is needed. The staff support her with enthusiasm and commitment, with a good understanding of their roles. Through such measures as the careful checking of pupils' attainment and progress, staff are alert to most shortcomings and take the initiative to tackle them. Effective action has been taken to bring about necessary developments, particularly in raising standards in English and reinvigorating provision for information and communication technology (ICT). Planning for school improvement is good and involves all staff in developing their subjects. However, it does not have sufficient clarity about how the impact of initiatives will be evaluated. Governors carry out almost all their roles with commitment and expertise, with a good knowledge of the school's strengths and areas where improvement should be made. Governors have met their responsibility for carrying out checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) for all school

staff and are in the process of carrying out these checks for governors who visit the school regularly.

The use of good classroom resources and stimulating displays help to spark pupils' interest. Teachers continue to promote involvement through their own enthusiasm and the range of teaching strategies they use. They plan their lessons well and make it plain to pupils what they are to learn from the session. They often refer to these aims during the lesson to keep them in pupils' minds. Activities are usually planned well to cater for the range of age and ability in the class, although there are occasions when these are too difficult for the less able or not sufficiently challenging for the more able. While the pace of lessons is, as a rule, brisk, it sometimes drops and pupils' attention slips. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to most lessons, particularly in enabling those who need support to make the same good progress as the rest of the class. However, there are occasions when staff help pupils too quickly instead of asking them to persist or think through the question again. Academic guidance is good. Pupils have targets in writing and mathematics, which they know and are involved in measuring their progress towards them. On occasion, they are asked to assess their own and others' work to see how well they have met the aims of the lesson. Marking helps them to know what they need to do to improve.

As is often the case with small schools, standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 vary considerably from year to year. In Year 2 in 2008, standards were well above average and all pupils reached the expected level, with a high proportion above this. In Year 6 in 2006, they were exceptionally low; by contrast, in 2007 they were well above average. The teachers' assessments indicate that standards in 2008 were average. These assessments and test results at the end of each year demonstrate that pupils throughout the school make good progress from their starting points, particularly in English, but that achievement is not as strong in mathematics. It is good in science. By Year 6, pupils are extremely articulate, with very good speaking, listening and reading skills. They usually meet the school's challenging targets. In spite of the imbalance between the numbers of boys and girls, there is little difference in progress between them. The school has already identified the shortcoming in mathematics and begun work on remedying it. Pupils' abilities, along with their increasingly good use of ICT, their good achievement in physical education (PE), and their personal qualities, ensure that they are prepared well for the next stage of education and their future lives.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school works closely with the playgroup on the site to ensure that children make a smooth and happy transition to the Reception class. They settle into the consistent routines rapidly and behave extremely well inside and out, building very good relationships with each other and adults. Very close links with parents help to ensure that children develop confidence and thoroughly enjoy their experiences. Staff provide a good range of indoor activities and, on occasion, use some particularly stimulating resources to engage them. Children were enthralled by a lesson about the skeleton, with a life-size model, and spent considerable time in related, challenging activities. The role-play area is well linked to this topic and children develop their language well through 'driving the ambulance' and being the 'patient'. Staff focus well on developing their independence so that, for example, children choose the resources they need or the area they will be involved in. They respond very well to stimulating activities; for example, some were inspired by a session about minibeasts to take the magnifying glass outside to search diligently for them.

Adults take extremely good care of the children and ensure that they are safe moving on the stairs from classroom to outside area. They emphasise hygiene and the safe way to move around when outside. However, outside activities are not always planned to the same high standard as those inside. Occasionally, the purpose has not been designed sufficiently. Nevertheless, children make good progress in developing their skills, particularly their personal and social abilities. Standards when they enter Year 1 vary; in 2008, they were above average, demonstrating good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics so that pupils' achievement at least matches that in English
- Extend pupils' understanding of life in a multicultural society
- Ensure staff receive the most up-to date training in child protection and all governors who visit the school regularly have thorough background checks.

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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?	3
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?	1
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	3
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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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 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	1
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	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

26 September 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's CofE VA School, Hatfield Broad Oak, CM22 7HH

Thank you so much for welcoming me to your school yesterday; I really enjoyed meeting you all and was sad that I couldn't have talked to more of you - you certainly had a lot to talk about. You are a credit to your school because of your excellent behaviour and the way you want to get things done. You pay attention and concentrate in lessons and you work neatly.

I thought you'd like to know what I found out about your school. You told me that it's a good one and you're right. Your teachers help you to do well, especially in English, so you talk about what you've been doing, and you read really well.

- The school is doing well because Mrs Stephenson and the staff work hard, trying to make it as good as it can be. They look after you well and make sure that everyone gets on together. Teachers make activities interesting and support you when you need it. There are three things I have asked your school to do to make things even better:
- teachers need to help you to do a little better in maths, and you can help by doing your very best;
- they should also make sure that you know as much as possible about other places in Britain and how other people live;
- the teachers need to do some training that was missed and governors just need to make sure that some checks are carried out.

Thank you once again for your help, it was a pleasure visiting your school and meeting you. I'm sure that, if you carry on working hard and doing your best, you'll all do extremely well.

Best wishes

Pat Cox

Lead inspector