

Norton St Nicholas CofE (VA) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117442
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312615
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	221
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steve Parker
Headteacher	Mr Gareth Linwood
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003
School address	Norton Road Letchworth Hertfordshire SG6 1AG
Telephone number	01462 623322
Fax number	01462 623355

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a popular voluntary aided Church of England primary school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage with minority ethnic backgrounds is a bit below that in schools nationally. Although English is an additional language for a number of these pupils, none is at early stages in learning English. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities has risen sharply from below average in 2006 to well above average. They have mostly have moderate learning difficulties; a small proportion have communication or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Attainment on entry is average. The school has gained the Activemark award.

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. Most parents are positive about its work and say that it is 'wonderfully caring' and 'a happy, vibrant school where children are encouraged to be individuals'.

Pupils achieve well and standards are above average as a result of good teaching and a curriculum that is matched well to pupils' learning needs and interests. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, where provision is good, and most meet the Early Learning Goals by the end of the Reception Year. Attainment has been consistently above average at the end of Key Stage 1 in recent years and in 2007, test results were well above average. Attainment at Key Stage 2 has been just above average and most pupils who left in 2007 achieved well during their time at Key Stage 2. However, test results show that progress has not been as good at Key Stage 2 as that at Key Stage 1. In addition, standards in writing are lower than those in other areas in the Foundation Stage and too few pupils reach the higher levels in writing at Key Stages 1 and 2. The school has improved the quality of teaching at Key Stage 2 and put in place a number of support programmes to prevent pupils underachieving. Although there is more work to be done to ensure all pupils do as well as they could in writing and to a lesser extent in science, progress is good overall at Key Stages 1 and 2.

Throughout the school, effective assessment systems are in place and teachers at Key Stages 1 and 2 set predictions for what individual pupils should be able to achieve. Pupils are generally well informed about what they need to do to improve and pupil progress interviews contribute to their understanding. Although the school does not yet analyse assessment information to see how well groups of pupils are progressing, it does use test results to judge its overall effectiveness and monitors the progress of individual pupils. In the Foundation Stage, assessment is good but there is no system in place for tracking children's progress or for setting individual targets to move their learning on.

Personal development is good. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and enjoy school. They are co-operative and prepared to work hard. They understand the importance of healthy living, say that they feel safe and respond well to opportunities to take responsibility. Pupils are well cared for, guided and supported and the staff are fully committed to their well-being. A good number of parents and volunteers help in school, and as one parent said, the school has 'a wonderfully caring and happy environment.'

The school is led and managed well. The headteacher has high expectations and has set a clear vision for the school. He has put in place effective systems to raise achievement, and standards are improving. The school is accurate in judging its own effectiveness: leaders are open and honest about what needs to be improved. Development planning is thorough and priorities are linked well to raising achievement. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection and it is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make very good progress in communication and language, in gaining early reading skills and in their knowledge of numbers. Teaching is good overall. Sessions are planned well to provide a good balance of adult directed and free choice activities. The learning environment is attractive and well resourced. However, those who completed the Foundation Stage in 2007 did less well in writing and in emotional development than in other areas. This is mainly because

the staff's expectations for the way children apply themselves and relate to one another are not always as high as they should be. Parents are appropriately involved in their children's learning and the school provides some very helpful resources for them to use at home. The school has, rightly, identified the need to improve the outdoor area for children in the Reception class although they do have access for some of the time to the area outside the nursery.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in writing in the Foundation Stage and for higher attaining pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Make greater use of assessment information in the Foundation Stage to track children's progress and to set individual learning targets, and use existing data to analyse the progress of different groups of pupils throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In 2007, pupils at Key Stage 1 did slightly better in reading and mathematics tests than in writing, and the school has found that boys did less well than girls in writing. Attainment at Key Stage 2 has been just above average in recent years. Individual subjects have fluctuated from year to year, however, with well above average results in English in 2006 dipping to average in 2007, whilst results in mathematics rose to well above average. Standards in most subjects are above average and information and communication technology (ICT) supports pupils' learning well. Speaking and listening skills are above average and pupils readily explain their thinking. There is no significant overall difference between the progress made by different groups of pupils. Those with moderate learning difficulties, communication difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are supported well and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour is generally good, but there is a small number of pupils who do not show sufficient consideration for others. Links with the church are strong and contribute well to pupils' spiritual development. Opportunities for pupils to visit places of worship of other faiths are limited, however, and their understanding of cultural diversity is only satisfactory. Pupils make good use of the opportunities provided for physical activity through physical education lessons and the wide range of extra-curricular clubs. They are confident that there is an adult they can turn to if they are in difficulty and that rare instances of bullying are dealt with effectively. Attendance is above average and parents say that their children are keen to get back to school after the holidays. Pupils feel very much part of the school community and believe that their views are listened to via the school council. Older pupils take responsibility for younger children through the buddy system and they are represented on interview panels for new staff. Pupils make good progress in basic skills and gain in confidence as they move through the school. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to demonstrate new concepts and engage pupils' interest. They make clear what pupils are expected to do and use questioning well to check their understanding. High expectations are evident in the work that is set and tasks are matched well generally to the needs of different groups of pupils. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' achievement, and closer liaison between class teachers and staff who work with pupils of minority ethnic background has brought about an improvement in the way these pupils are supported. Staff generally manage pupils' behaviour well but they do not always insist that pupils show consideration for others, for example, when they move around the class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is greatly enriched by themed days and special events, such as arts week, and literacy and ICT skills are promoted well in other subjects. Separate residential trips for pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 contribute well to their personal development and learning. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is good, for instance with master classes in mathematics and ICT through partnership with a nearby secondary school with specialist status. Pupils with other talents are encouraged to take up local opportunities in sport and dance. There is a good range of after-school clubs, including sporting and musical activities, and pupils have opportunities to take part in inter-school competitions as well as participating in annual school productions. The time allocated to teaching in Years 3 to 6 is below that recommended, however, and the school has not yet made any provision for teaching a modern foreign language in these years.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school works well with outside agencies to support pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language. All requirements for safeguarding, risk assessments and child protection are met, and attendance is promoted well. The school uses Makaton signing in the Foundation Stage and throughout Key Stage 1 to support pupils with communication difficulties. Those pupils with moderate learning difficulties are also supported well in class. The progress of individual pupils is tracked through termly assessments and pupils have good opportunities to evaluate their own performance at the end of lessons. They know their targets in English and mathematics and can explain what they need to do to improve their work. Staff are now working to develop targets for science. There are satisfactory assessment procedures in other subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Although the senior leadership is currently working at reduced strength, leadership and management are, nevertheless, good. Effective self-evaluation has been undertaken in subjects and clear actions are being taken to raise achievement. Teachers and teaching assistants have

good opportunities to undertake training to increase their effectiveness. The headteacher takes on board the views of everyone involved in the life of the school and has the confidence of most, but not yet all, parents. There have been a number of changes to the governing body and governors are working to develop ways of gathering information for themselves to check the school's effectiveness. Governance is therefore satisfactory overall although the chair and a core of experienced governors are knowledgeable about the school and provide good support to the headteacher.

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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	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	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

19 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Norton St Nicholas C of E (VA) Primary School, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 1AG

Thank you for welcoming us when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit and now I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school.

It is a good school and you make good progress to reach standards that are above those found in many other schools. This is because teaching is good and you have opportunities to learn interesting things through special events like arts week and trips like the recent one when the whole school went to the seaside. We were pleased to hear that you enjoy school and that you feel safe and know that the staff are always ready to help you. The teachers are good at sharing information with you about what they want you to learn and you usually work hard and do your best. Behaviour is good but a few of you are sometimes insensitive to other people's feelings, for instance pushing people out of the way in class or in the playground. We would like you to think very carefully about how you would feel if someone did that to you. Apart from that, your school is happy and it has a relaxed friendly atmosphere.

The headteacher runs the school well and he and the other teachers want to make it as good as possible for you. We have asked them to do this by:

- helping you to do as well in writing as you do in your other subjects
- looking very carefully at how much progress you are making and using what they find out about it to help you to learn even better.

Enjoy the rest of your time at Norton St Nicholas and keep working hard.

Best wishes

Ms M J Goodchild

(Lead inspector)