

All Faiths' Children's Community School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 118532 |
| Local Authority | Medway |
| Inspection number | 312977 |
| Inspection date | 26 November 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Carole Skinner |

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.

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 132 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 33 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Derek Morrison |
| Headteacher | Heidi Taylor |
| Date of previous school inspection | 27 September 2004 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Gun Lane Strood Rochester ME2 4UF |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
| Age group | 3–11 |
| Inspection date | 26 November 2008 |
| Inspection number | 312977 |

Telephone number

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Age group 3–11

Inspection date 26 November 2008

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Following a period of uncertainty and proposed closure, the school, previously known as St Mary's Primary School, changed its name in September 2006. Smaller than average, it is situated in an area of very high social and economic deprivation. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is much higher than in most schools. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage but there are a higher than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small minority speak English as an additional language, and a few of these are at an early stage of language acquisition. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very high. The school offers specialist provision for up to 18 deaf pupils. At the time of this inspection, there were 15 deaf pupils on roll. These pupils are fully integrated in mainstream classes for most of the school day. They also receive tuition from specialist teachers of the deaf. There are very high levels of mobility as pupils join and leave the school at different points during the year. There has also been a very high turnover of staff over the past four years. The school first offered Nursery provision for children from the age of three in 2006. These children are taught alongside Reception children in the integrated Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school also opened a children's centre, which offers a range of services to the local community, on site in April 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

All Faiths' is a good school that has made dramatic and far-reaching improvements over the past two years. The headteacher's outstanding vision and determination have inspired governors, staff, pupils and parents to overcome the many barriers to raising the school's performance. As a result, pupils are now making good progress. Standards are steadily rising, though still below national averages due to the complex needs of many of the pupils. There are two fundamental principles that underpin the school's success: high aspirations for every pupil, regardless of background, race or disability; and a deeply held conviction that learning must be 'hands-on', enjoyable, relevant and challenging. Most parents think highly of the school and several wrote in praise of the way it cares for and supports their children. One spoke of 'remarkable improvement', and several commented on how much their children enjoy coming to school.

Pupils achieve well and their rates of progress have accelerated since the school established a stable staff team and very rigorous systems for assessing and tracking how well they are doing. This has particularly helped the pupils in Years 5 and 6 to make up lost ground and achieve their potential. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilful at tailoring learning to pupils' individual needs, interests and capabilities. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and most behave well. There are effective strategies for managing the challenging behaviour of a few pupils to avoid disrupting others' learning. The outstanding integration of deaf and hearing pupils enriches every pupil's experience and has a marked impact on their personal development. Specialist teaching ensures that deaf pupils' needs are expertly met. Very well planned support for the many pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties helps them to overcome significant obstacles.

The curriculum is thoughtfully designed to meet pupils' needs and to enrich their experiences and expand their horizons. Still developing, it is becoming increasingly effective in equipping pupils with the skills they need for their future lives. The school recognises the need to accelerate pupils' progress in developing writing skills, which still lag behind other areas of learning. Recent initiatives are already beginning to bear fruit, especially in the EYFS where children are now developing their knowledge of sounds and letters at a faster rate. Pupils' personal and social development is good because adults nurture their confidence and self-esteem. Praise and recognition are effectively balanced with firm expectations of self-discipline. High quality care and support for all pupils help them to feel safe. The school values and celebrates pupils' different faiths and languages. As a result, pupils develop a very good awareness of social and cultural diversity, both within school and in the wider community. Despite the school's efforts and excellent links with parents and external agencies, attendance rates are not as high as they should be for a few pupils and this affects the progress they make.

The leadership, management and governance of the school provide very clear strategic direction for its development and monitor its performance rigorously. Their relentless striving for excellence and very good track record of improvement place them in a strong position to raise pupils' achievement even further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children enter the EYFS at the age of three, their knowledge and skills are well below expectations for their age. By the time they enter Reception, standards are still below expectations in reading and writing but significantly higher than they were before the school provided Nursery education. Standards at the end of the EYFS were slightly above national averages in 2008. Children make exceptionally good progress in their personal and social development and good progress in all other areas of learning. High standards of care and support for children's safety, health and welfare ensure that they settle quickly and feel happy and secure at school. Excellent systems for observing, assessing and recording children's progress provide a very clear picture of each child's needs and capabilities. As a result, the teacher plans activities that build effectively on children's previous learning. The introduction of a new programme for teaching sounds and letters has paid dividends in terms of improving children's reading skills. This is now beginning to have a greater impact on their early attempts at writing, although this is still recognised as an area for improvement. Children enjoy a good balance of play, exploration and activities that are led by adults. Their learning is enriched by a wide range of visits and visitors. Carefully planned topics and themes encompass all areas of learning and make effective use of both indoor and outdoor spaces. The school has plans to improve and extend the outdoor area in order to enhance its provision further. Good leadership and management have been instrumental in improving both the learning environment and the range and quality of resources.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress in developing writing skills, both in literacy lessons and through other areas of the curriculum.
- Fully embed the systems for checking and improving pupils' attendance through close collaboration with parents and external agencies.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The standards pupils achieve in national tests are steadily improving but do not reflect their good achievement. This is because test results are adversely affected by the high proportion of pupils with significant learning difficulties and disabilities and high levels of mobility. The school's very detailed tracking of each pupil's progress clearly demonstrates that the vast majority are now achieving well in relation to their starting points and capabilities. They are doing better in reading, mathematics and science than in writing. This is largely because recent initiatives to develop writing skills have not yet had their full impact. Nevertheless, signs of improvement are evident in the quality of pupils' work and the progress they have made in the current and previous academic years. Deaf children achieve well because they receive high quality support, both in mainstream classes and when taught by a specialist teacher in small groups. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in the early stages of learning English also make good progress. This is because teachers and support staff meet their needs effectively through a range of well planned and carefully targeted activities. Able pupils make consistently good progress and reach above average standards in all areas of learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils respond well to the many opportunities on offer to participate in physical activities, whether programmes such as Skip2BFit, regular lessons or after-school sports clubs. Their understanding of what makes for a healthy diet is increasing, helped along by growing their own vegetables in a class plot. Significant improvements in pupils' behaviour reflect their greater moral awareness and self-discipline. This has resulted in a calm working atmosphere throughout the school and very positive attitudes to learning. However, there are still a few pupils who find it hard to meet the school's high expectations. Pupils are sensitive to the needs of others and most show respect for both adults and other pupils. There is a high degree of racial harmony and acceptance of each other's differences. The successful integration of deaf and hearing pupils greatly enhances all pupils' personal development. It was particularly uplifting to observe the whole school singing and signing a song in collective worship. Pupils play a full and active part in the school as well as contributing to local community projects and developing an excellent understanding of their place in the world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers' high expectations of every pupil are evident in the way they tailor learning to their particular needs, building in a degree of challenge that extends their knowledge and understanding. Skilful questioning encourages pupils to think for themselves and explain their reasoning. Lessons move at a good pace and incorporate a good range of practical 'hands-on' activities that suit the different ways that pupils learn. Effective use of regular assessments helps teachers to keep track of pupils' learning and to ensure each lesson builds methodically on the last. Teachers explain clearly to pupils the purpose of each lesson and are beginning to involve them more effectively in assessing their own progress. Many pupils know and use their personal targets, although these are not always expressed in language they can fully understand. There are some very good examples of teachers' marking that clearly shows pupils how to improve their work, but this is not yet consistent in all classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school is continually refining and enhancing its curriculum to meet the diverse needs of its pupils. Recent changes in staffing and organisation mean that this is still work in progress. Carefully planned cross-curricular themes interest and engage pupils in learning through a wide variety of first-hand, practical experiences. There is a major focus on enhancing pupils' speaking and listening skills in order to improve their writing. Role-play areas in every classroom are designed to help pupils write more imaginatively. Some Year 6 pupils explained how dressing up helped them to 'get inside and think like' the characters. Their written work had clearly benefited from this approach. Pupils enjoy a good range of popular lunchtime and after-school clubs. The school broadens their horizons through visits to places many have never been to before, such as a trip to France for older pupils who were studying the Second World War. Teachers make effective use of the local area to make learning relevant to pupils' lives. The curriculum reflects the cultural diversity of the school and local communities through celebrating festivals and encouraging pupils' appreciation of a wide range of art, music and literature.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

High staffing ratios and small classes provide very good levels of support for both deaf and hearing pupils and are an important factor in their successful integration. The school has robust procedures for ensuring pupils' health, welfare and safety. A recent initiative for tackling persistently poor behaviour amongst a minority of pupils has been successful in reducing the number of temporary exclusions. Homework and programmes to ease pupils gently back into full-time school help to minimise the risk of gaps in learning when they are temporarily excluded for poor behaviour. Excellent partnerships with parents and external support agencies enrich the care and guidance given to all pupils. The recently established systems for improving attendance have not yet had their full impact. Figures are often skewed by lengthy absences of a few pupils, for example those who are travelling with their families and pupils with medical conditions. Pupils are given effective guidance on how to improve their work and reach their targets and are becoming increasingly involved in assessing their own and each other's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Despite the high turnover of staff and recruitment difficulties in recent years, the leadership and management have gone from strength to strength. The headteacher's outstanding vision and dedication have helped the school to grow and thrive in the face of considerable difficulty. Senior leaders' and governors' very high aspirations for the school mean that they are constantly striving for excellence. Their rigorous self-evaluation and relentless focus on raising pupils' achievement have brought about rapid improvement in the past two years. They have successfully built an almost completely new staff team who share their goals and aspirations for the pupils. Despite being relatively new to their roles, two staff have already become leading teachers for the local authority. This illustrates the quality of professional development that teachers receive. Some new subject leaders are still getting to grips with their roles but all are taking responsibility for driving up standards and ensuring consistency across the school. Celebration of diversity and equality of opportunity are very high on the school's agenda and central to its outstanding ethos. They have also helped to secure its place at the heart of the community it serves.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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? | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 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

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 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

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| How good are 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 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| 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 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

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| 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? | 1 |
| 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**

27 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of All Faiths' Children's Community School, Strood, ME2 4UF

We very much enjoyed meeting you and watching you at work when we visited your school. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful and talking to us about your school. Many of you and your parents told us that All Faiths' is a good school and we agree with you. We were particularly impressed by the way you all work together and learn sign language so that you can communicate with each other.

Here are some of the good things we found:

- You make good progress in your learning because the teachers keep a close eye on how well you are doing and give you work that makes you think hard.
- You enjoy being at school, behave sensibly and take part in lots of interesting activities.
- The school helps you to become confident and independent and you learn to be responsible for your own actions.
- All of the adults take very good care of you and help you to feel safe and keep fit and healthy.
- The teachers plan an exciting range of activities to help you learn, not only in lessons, but at lunchtime and after school. Sometimes, you get the chance to go on very interesting visits and take part in festivals and celebrations.
- The adults who run the school are always looking for ways to make your learning more interesting and challenging so that you can make even better progress.

The school is working very hard to help you all to make faster progress in writing. You are now doing better than you used to but you are still not doing as well as in reading. We have asked your teachers to make sure that you develop good writing skills more quickly as you move up through the school. A few of you miss out on important learning because you are away too often. We have asked the school to make sure you take as little time off as possible. You can help by trying very hard to come to school every day.

Yours faithfully

Carole Skinner Lead inspector