

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118643
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	313026
Inspection date	7 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Randall
Headteacher	Anne-Marie Hutton
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	London Road Strood Rochester ME2 3HU
Telephone number	01634 717120
Fax number	01634 724626

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. He evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and looked at the following specific aspects: the progress made by higher attaining pupils and similarities and differences between boys' and girls' progress; the pupils' awareness of other peoples' backgrounds and cultures; how senior leaders, including governors, use self-evaluation to help the school to improve. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, looking at pupils' work and school documents. Parents' questionnaires, discussions with pupils, three governors, some parents and staff also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were justified in nearly all areas, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average. When children enter the school, they have ability levels that are broadly typical for their age. Slightly more than usual are entitled to claim free school meals. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. During the inspection, all Year 1 pupils were on a school visit to a local museum.

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 where happy and enthusiastic pupils make good progress because they are well taught and well cared for. Pastoral and physical care are excellent. Some outstanding features include the way in which pupils are encouraged to enjoy learning and relate really well to their classmates. Parents, pupils, staff and governors are rightly confident in the quality of education on offer. 'In the several years my children have been here, I have been extremely happy with the care, support and education they have received' was a typical parental comment. This reflects the overwhelming support and the close links that there are between home and school. 'It feels like a village school in an urban setting', one parent told the inspector. There is very effective teamwork, clear educational direction and a determination to seek improvement.

Children start school with skills and experience that overall are typical of this age group, although there are weaknesses in some elements of communication, language, literacy and their social development. They get off to a good start in the Reception classes and build on this systematically to make good progress throughout the school. Standards are above average at the end of Year 2. Pupils do particularly well in their reading, writing and mathematics. Science is in line with national expectations but pupils' problem solving and investigative skills do not always develop well enough. Pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved since the last inspection due to upgraded facilities, including a new computer suite. Pupils also make good progress in art and music. The school has worked effectively to improve the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in their writing and mathematics. Past results have indicated some differences between the performance of boys and girls. However, a range of initiatives designed to reduce the gender differences and ensure the higher attaining pupils achieve well are working. Support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well managed and makes sure such pupils achieve well. The use of target setting in English and mathematics is prompting improvements, but while some pupils readily recall their targets, others are not so clear about what they are. Staff use a mix of whole school and individual pupil targets to measure progress and make suitable adjustments to their teaching.

Teaching is typically good. Highlights are the very good relationships that are promoted between pupils, the practical nature of the activities set for them and good planning to make sure that lessons are fun and interesting. Behaviour within lessons is very good and frequently outstanding. In some lessons, explanations or activities led by teachers are a little long, which causes some pupils' attention to wander. Some outdoor activities or learning experiences for the reception children are not as well promoted as those inside the classrooms.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. There are strengths in the spiritual, moral and social aspects, with pupils showing excellent levels of consideration for others so they work very well together. Pupils enjoy being part of the school 'Forum' and in being special helpers or 'buddies' to other pupils. Through its good curriculum, which includes special theme weeks such as 'big art week', enrichment activities for very able pupils and visits to local places of interest, the pupils are involved and excited by their learning. They love to tell visitors about their experiences. The school caters well for the mixed ages found in some classes. Extra-curricular clubs help extend the pupils' experiences. The school actively promotes pupils' awareness of how to keep fit and stay very safe and healthy, which pupils respond to very well. Pupils are well prepared for their transfer to the junior school and life in general. A recent initiative to raise money through designing a logo for a reusable carrier bag, helped them develop simple selling and marketing skills. Opportunities for pupils to learn about local history, how to develop their

artistic skills and their own customs are particularly effective. The pupils' understanding of living in a multi-faith and culturally diverse society is not well developed, although their fund raising efforts to support a child overseas gives them some insight into different cultures.

The school is well led and managed. The senior leadership team and the governors are clearly focused upon improving any areas that their rigorous self-evaluation identifies. This takes into account the views of parents and pupils as well as staff. It has accurately identified the school's strengths and areas for development. The school's successful track record in improving the quality of information and communication technology work, combined with the quality of school development planning, underpins its good capacity to improve. Good management ensures that school improvement is evaluated and that planning focuses on appropriate priorities. Governance is good. Governors are well informed, as their visits to school give them a clear overview of how well it is progressing. They are keen to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good teaching and excellent pastoral care ensure that children are happy and are very successfully introduced to school life. Even those with little experience of mixing with other children quickly settle into the Reception classes. Progress in personal, social and emotional development is good with children understanding that taking turns and sharing is important. This provides a good base for the very effective way pupils work together in Years 1 and 2. Children make good progress in nearly all aspects of their learning. Teachers skilfully present them with a good balance of activities in the classrooms that they can choose for themselves and those to which they are directed. The children enjoy learning and in gaining first-hand experience. They respond with very positive attitudes and their behaviour is excellent. Record keeping identifies what children need to do to build on what they already know, understand and can do. This ensures that children develop good basic communication skills, such as speaking, listening and counting. The school has developed its outdoor spaces and facilities for the Reception classes since the last inspection. However, the small dedicated outdoor areas are not particularly inviting or well used and limit the scope for some activities which would promote children's physical and creative development better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more opportunities for problem solving and investigative work in science to raise their confidence levels and abilities.
- Review the use of the outside activity areas for Foundation Stage children so they have better opportunities to enrich their physical, cooperative and creative skills.
- Develop opportunities to improve pupils' awareness and understanding of people from different cultures and backgrounds.

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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?	1
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	1
How well 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 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

8 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Nicholas CE Infant School, Strood ME2 3HU

I liked visiting your school recently. Thank you for showing me around at playtime. Yours is a good school that is trying hard to be even better. Here are some of the things that I thought were particularly good. The school does some things brilliantly.

- You all really enjoy being at St Nicholas and you help make it a very happy place to be.
- Children in the Reception classes have a good start to school, although the outside areas for them to use are a bit small and not that interesting.
- You said you feel extremely safe and all the adults are good at helping you.
- You know that getting exercise, drinking water and eating certain foods are good for you.
- You behave brilliantly in class, in the playground and in worship time. (You sing really well in worship time too!)
- Teaching is often fun and teachers try hard to make lessons exciting.
- The activities planned in lessons, along with extra help for those who need it, make sure you do not feel left behind.
- Your special activities like your 'big art week' you do are really fun and help you to learn about lots of things.
- You make good progress in your work and reach above average standards by the time you leave; you could be a little better in working out problems in your science work.
- Your headteacher, governors and other staff are leading the school well and know what needs to be done to make it even better.

There are three things we have asked the school to do to help improve it some more.

- Give you more activities in your science work that will really help you think how to solve simple problems.
- We have asked the school if the outside activity area for the Reception classes can be a bit more exciting, perhaps by having some better equipment and more things to use.
- Give you more opportunities to find out about different peoples' lifestyles in your local area as well as other parts of our country. Best wishes

Kevin Hodge Lead inspector