

Church, St Nicholas Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119447
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313297
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Shirley Herring

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	189
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Neville Ashton
Headteacher	Mr J N W Walker
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	St Nicholas Road Dill Hall Lane Church Accrington Lancashire BB5 4DT
Telephone number	01254 381875
Fax number	01254 350084

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves two parishes in an area of social and economic disadvantage. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British background and about 5% are of Pakistani heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has good links with the churches, clusters of local schools and the Sure Start Nursery.

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 pupils make good progress in a supportive, Christian environment. Several parents praised the caring ethos of the school which develops 'all round good character in its pupils' as one said.

Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school and are extremely enthusiastic about all it has to offer. Many parents report that their children are very reluctant to miss school even when they are ill. Pupils feel safe and are confident that help is at hand should they have a problem. There is a good range of sports activities on offer which encourages pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle. They make a good contribution to the community through membership of the school council and participation in Church and community events. Pupils develop good basic skills and have many opportunities to work together. This prepares them well for the future.

Pupils make good progress and achieve well. After several years when standards were below average in Year 6, improvements in teaching and the curriculum led to an improvement in standards. In the 2007 Key Stage 2 national tests, standards were above average. The school's assessments for the current year indicate this improvement is being maintained. More pupils are now working at a higher level in mathematics because of the increased opportunities to explain their thinking and to solve problems. Above average standards in Year 2 in past years fell to below average in 2007. This was partly due to the high number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in this group. Assessments for the current Year 2 indicate an improvement to broadly average standards. Not enough pupils achieved the higher level in mathematics partly because of an over-reliance on worksheets which limits pupils' opportunities to devise their own ways of working things out.

Teaching is good and pupils learn well. Interesting activities, such as 'Mad maths minutes!', build on pupils' enthusiasm and help improve their arithmetic skills. The varied and effective curriculum is well suited to pupils' needs. They clearly enjoyed their week's work on China and the Olympics, and produced good quality work across all subjects. Care, guidance and support are good with some outstanding elements. Learning mentors provide excellent support to less confident pupils. This helps improve their self-esteem and has a positive impact on their progress. There are good systems for assessing pupils' progress in each class. The school's development of a more rigorous system to track the progress of individuals through the school is at an early stage.

Leadership and management are good. There is a strong sense of all adults working together. This, together with effective self-evaluation, contributes well to bringing about improvements and has moved the school on positively since the previous inspection. Governors play an active part in school life and provide good support. The school has good links with other professional agencies to obtain specialist advice when needed.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage (Reception Class) is good and children achieve well. The vibrant learning environment and the strong emphasis on improving children's personal and social skills help children develop good attitudes and an enjoyment of learning at an early age.

Children enter the school with a range of skills that are often below and sometimes well below what is usual for their age. Consistently good teaching, which takes full account of children's individual needs, helps all to make good progress. They reach levels that are just below those expected for five-year-olds by the time they enter Year 1. The curriculum is good. It is firmly based on suitable and challenging practical activities, which show a good understanding of how young children learn. There are good procedures for assessing children's progress. The teacher is currently enhancing these further. The Foundation Stage is well managed and there has been a good improvement in facilities for extending learning outdoors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce the use of worksheets in some classes so that pupils can develop their own ways of setting out their work.
- Ensure there is an effective system to track pupils' progress through the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress and achieve well, although there have been some variations in the recent past. After several years of above average standards at the end of Year 2, standards in the 2007 national tests were below average. The high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in that group affected standards adversely but school assessments show they made satisfactory progress. Most recent assessments indicate an improvement for the current Year 2 with better progress, and standards that are broadly average, though the number achieving the higher level in mathematics is low.

Following a prolonged period when standards were below average in Key Stage 2, improvements in teaching and a more varied curriculum led to a good improvement in results in 2007. Standards were above average, particularly in English, and pupils achieved well. The school's assessments for the current Year 6 indicate the maintenance of good standards. Improved opportunities for pupils to use their skills in solving problems have resulted in a greater proportion of pupils reaching the higher level in mathematics. Pupils are on track to exceed their challenging targets. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good level of support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school and attendance is good. One pupil commented, 'We should have summer school here so we can come in the holidays as well'. Behaviour in lessons and on the playground is good. Pupils collaborate well and benefit from the regular opportunities to share ideas with their 'talk partners'. The school council is actively involved in helping to improve the school. Its impact is seen in the new outdoor benches and playground markings installed at their request. Pupils feel safe at school. They know who to go to if they have a problem and they have confidence in the staff, who care for them well. Pupils know how to live healthy lives and a good proportion regularly enjoy the nutritious school lunches.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; well planned assemblies and lessons provide opportunities for reflection and co-operation. The school is in the process of extending its work to prepare pupils for life in a culturally diverse society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good because teachers know their pupils well and lessons are interesting and well planned. Teachers ask probing questions which encourage pupils to think hard. This helps learning to move forward at a good pace. Pupils have good relationships with each other and with their teachers. Classrooms are calm and purposeful with stimulating displays of work which demonstrate the high expectations that teachers have of their pupils. Work is well matched to the different abilities of pupils in each class and, as a result, children are appropriately challenged. Most are well motivated and keen to succeed. Classroom assistants provide good levels of support to pupils and this helps all learners to make progress. In a few lessons, teachers rely too heavily on printed worksheets. This limits the amount of independent thought that pupils put into organising their own work and the pace of learning slows.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and improving. The introduction of themed weeks, such as those on China and the Olympics, helps pupils make links between different areas of learning. This makes learning more interesting and helps pupils transfer their skills from one area of learning to the next. Older pupils have been involved in choosing the topics they would like to study and some of their work on World War 2, Fairgrounds and France is of a high quality. However, at present this approach can be seen as work in progress and the school is keen to build on these early successes. Pupils and their parents value the good range of additional activities the school offers, increasing still further pupils' enthusiasm for school. This year the school has placed a strong emphasis on practical, investigational and problem solving activities in mathematics. This work, combined with a continued focus on improving reading and writing skills in English, is contributing to a steady improvement of standards by the time pupils leave the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has effective systems for ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils. Parents and pupils confirm that teachers and other adults look after them well. The school successfully promotes an ethos of caring for each individual child. This contributes strongly to pupils' good progress and their enjoyment of learning. One parent wrote, 'I think the school is outstanding with the support and help they provide for my child and we couldn't wish for a better school'. Learning mentors make a significant contribution to pupils' education. Their role in supporting vulnerable pupils and their families is extremely well developed and their positive impact in raising self-esteem and building pupils' confidence for learning is outstanding.

All pupils have their own personalised learning targets and this helps them to focus on improving their own work. Work is well marked and older pupils are routinely asked to initial teachers' comments as a sign that they have read and understood them. The school has good systems for assessing pupils' progress in each class. However, procedures for tracking pupils' progress through the school are under-developed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The strong Christian ethos and the good level of support the school provides contribute well to pupils' personal development and care. The school's evaluation of its work is accurate in all respects and the results are used well to plan improvements. For example, a greater emphasis on using and applying basic skills has resulted in higher standards in mathematics in Key Stage 2. It is too soon to judge the full impact of more recent developments in the curriculum. The experienced headteacher treats all the adults and pupils with respect, listens to their views and allows them to develop their strengths; as one teacher remarked, 'He lets managers fly!' He is ably supported by a good leadership team who also provide good models of teaching, helping to raise standards. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards are rising and the more able are making better progress. Governance is good, they are well informed and give good support to the school. Effective allocation of resources provides good value for money; for example, learning mentors are making an excellent contribution to pupils' confidence, behaviour and self esteem. Improvements to outdoor provision in the Foundation Stage and to standards in Year 6 indicate the school has a good capacity to improve further.

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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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

7 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Church, St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Lancashire, BB5 4DT

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We can understand why you enjoy school so much by looking at the interesting work on the wall and joining you in lessons. I shall remember your good work on China and the Olympics when I am watching The Games in the summer holidays.

We agree with you and your parents that St. Nicholas is a good school. All the adults are helpful and friendly, and take good care of you all. You play your part by coming to school regularly, working hard and behaving well. The young children have a good start to school life in the bright and exciting Reception class. Your lessons are planned well and a lot of time and care is spent marking your work so that you know what you need to do to improve. This helps you to reach a good standard by the time you leave Year 6.

It is part of my job to look at how even good schools could be better. I have asked the school to do the following things to improve your learning further:

- Reduce the number of worksheets used in some classes so that you learn to set out your own work.
- Develop a system to keep an eye on your progress through the school.

Good luck for the future.

Shirley Herring

Lead inspector