

Stoke Bruerne Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121992
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314181
Inspection date	7 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Geoff Cresswell

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrea Downhill
Headteacher	J Zakis
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Bridge Road Stoke Bruerne Towcester NN12 7SD
Telephone number	01604 862872
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Stoke Bruerne Church of England Primary School is much smaller than most primary schools. The school draws its pupils from the village of Stoke Bruerne and from the surrounding area. Almost all of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are fewer pupils with learning difficulties than are found in most other primary schools.

The headteacher was new to the school as acting headteacher at the start of the autumn term 2007 and became the substantive headteacher in January. Of the four teachers, one was new to the school in September 2007 and a further two in January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Whilst the overall effectiveness of Stoke Bruerne Church of England Primary School is satisfactory, the school is rapidly improving. The improvement has its foundation in accurate self-evaluation by the governing body and recently appointed headteacher. This evaluation rightly identifies the need to improve the quality of pupils' writing throughout the school. The subsequent changes to the way lessons are planned and the introduction of some exciting activities, such as the visit of an author, typify the positive response of all staff to making improvements work, although the changes have not been in place long enough to see sustained raising of achievement. The achievement in English overall as pupils move through the school is satisfactory, the slower progress in writing contrasting with good progress in reading. Pupils' achievement during their time in the school is satisfactory. Children arrive in Reception with skills and abilities broadly similar to others of their age. Progress through the Foundation Stage is good so that most pupils have achieved or exceeded the early learning goals on entering Key Stage 1. Satisfactory progress through Key Stages 1 and 2 means that pupils maintain above-average standards year by year. Although small year groups result in some fluctuations, pupils generally attain above-average standards in English, mathematics and science in the Year 6 national tests.

The main hindrance to pupils' more rapid progress, and to lifting standards even higher, centres on the need for teachers to give clearer guidance to pupils on how to improve. When planning lessons, teachers do not always make sure that they build on what the pupils have achieved in the previous lesson. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Good relationships with pupils and effective deployment of teaching assistants are strengths in teaching throughout the school.

A striking feature of the school is the exemplary behaviour of the pupils at all times in the school day. A supportive, affirming ethos pervades the school, to quote one pupil, 'My school is a place where I feel comfortable because it's a small school and everyone is nice to each other.' Staff know the pupils well and provide excellent pastoral care. Pupils consequently feel safe and have a good understanding of how to stay safe. They also have a good understanding of healthy living – they eat and exercise well during the school day. Attendance is above average and pupils show a good enjoyment of school life. However, pupils rarely link their enjoyment of school to the content of lessons, and the school recognises the need to make the currently satisfactory curriculum more motivating. Pupils with learning difficulties take a full part in lessons, aided by the skilful support of teaching assistants, and these pupils' achievements mirror the general strengths and weaknesses of all pupils.

The school works from an accurate assessment of its needs. The pace of subsequent change has been slowed by the need to establish staff in leadership roles. Good progress has been made in setting up monitoring procedures for subject leaders, and whilst the capacity for the school to improve is building rapidly, it is currently satisfactory. Parents recognise recent improvements and particularly appreciate the good contribution the school is now making to village life. As one said, reflecting the views of others, 'Our village school is a credit to the community.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good and consequently children make good progress. Children benefit from the regular focused attention of adults. Good teaching ensures they have plenty of first-hand, motivating experiences, with skilful direction from teaching assistants. Staff work well as a team and create a positive ethos where children are relaxed, happy and attentive, growing in confidence as independent learners. The curriculum is good and makes effective use of the environment, such as the use of the village and canal for recording observations.

Good leadership is having an impact on improving children's learning. An analysis of how well children are doing has identified writing as an aspect where progress is slower. Good opportunities are provided for independent writing, along with stimulating activities, such as writing a recipe for a witch's cauldron. Assessment of writing has begun, but assessment of children's independent writing is not used enough by teachers to identify the next step for improvement. Progress is relatively slower in children's physical development than in the other areas of their learning. The school makes good use of the site to provide opportunities for this development, but limited suitable space restricts the activities undertaken by the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the teaching of writing provides pupils with motivating experiences that develop relevant skills that pupils understand and have opportunity to use.
- Ensure that day-to-day assessment of writing makes it clear to the pupils how to improve and is used by teachers to plan subsequent lessons that build on what pupils have achieved.
- Ensure that all subject leaders are equipped and given opportunity to evaluate the pupils' learning, using this knowledge to plan further improvements.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Whilst standards are above average at the end of both Key Stage 1 and 2, representing satisfactory achievement from the starting point of above-average attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage, there is a mixed picture for different aspects of English and mathematics. Progress in reading is good throughout the school. Pupils make satisfactory progress in speaking and listening skills, but progress in writing is weaker. The strengths and weaknesses in English are common to both Key Stages 1 and 2. Whilst basic skills in English are developed well in isolation, including writing skills, pupils have limited experience in applying these skills to other subjects. This is particularly true in writing.

Pupils develop good basic skills in mathematics, particularly in number work, but progress is only satisfactory in mathematics overall because, again, pupils do not use or apply the skills sufficiently. The progress of pupils in science is satisfactory, with good progress where a more practical approach is used. Pupils develop good skills in information and communication technology, preparing them well for future learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils show good appreciation of the importance of quiet moments of reflection, treating such occasions with respect. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong behaviour and keep to the accepted standards. Pupils have a good sense of being part of a community and contribute to it well in school and in the village. They relate well to one another, with older pupils looking after younger pupils well at playtime and during lunchtime. One pupil describes the school as a place 'where there are cooperative children'. Pupils throughout the school are diligent in carrying out a range of duties, for example, collecting and returning the class register, or setting up a classroom for the daily act of worship. Pupils' understanding of multicultural issues tends to be limited. They are considerate of those less fortunate than themselves and speak enthusiastically of whole-school projects to raise money for charity. Pupils' good social skills and above-average academic skills prepare them well for their future education and the later world of work, although the development of independence and initiative is not as strong.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The positive, affirming atmosphere created in lessons makes for a stress-free learning experience for the pupils. There are high expectations of behaviour and the pupils respond very well. Teachers' planning takes account of the different abilities of pupils, but this is not always successful in accelerating their progress because plans are not always based on what the pupils have achieved to date.

Lessons are structured well to include an introduction focusing on a learning objective, and a review of pupils' learning at the end. The pace of lessons sometimes slows when the whole class is together with the teacher talking. This is because responses are limited to individuals. Opportunities are missed to allow all pupils to have their say, for example, by discussing a question briefly with a partner. Teachers' planning for writing activities, whilst showing recent improvement in providing more stimulating activities, still tends to give pupils experiences that lack a clear purpose or application. This affects the pupils' motivation to write.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum makes good use of the environment around the school to encourage the pupils' interest. Visits enrich the pupils' experiences, for example, a visit to a Victorian house that resulted in some vibrant writing on life as a Victorian. Whilst the school teaches all of the subjects required by the National Curriculum, not enough thought is given to how different subjects relate to one another or how basic skills of literacy and numeracy can be developed and consolidated through all subjects. This limits the pupils' involvement and sense of purpose in activities undertaken. Whilst pupils clearly enjoy the experience of being in school, very few talk enthusiastically about subjects that capture their imagination. This is in contrast to extra-curricular activities. These are greatly appreciated and enjoyed by pupils, in particular, the wide variety of sporting activities offered by the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Adults take a keen interest in the pupils and are available at all times during the day. As a consequence, pupils feel confident that they can approach an adult and that any problems will be dealt with. Staff are good role models in the way that they relate to each other, and the whole ethos of the school communicates that children are respected and matter. Good care and attention is given to pupils with learning difficulties, particularly through the help of some of the support staff. Arrangements to safeguard and protect pupils meet requirements.

The academic guidance given to pupils is satisfactory. Whilst some work is marked well, particularly in Years 5 and 6, marking throughout the school is not always complete and does not give pupils an understanding of how they can improve. Pupils are given targets in numeracy and literacy, but pupils struggle to remember what they are or to appreciate their importance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The governing body and headteacher have set a clear direction for the improvement of the school based on an accurate assessment of the current situation. The governing body is well informed about how well pupils are doing and takes an active role in visiting the school to monitor what is actually happening. The headteacher has the confidence and appreciation of the vast majority of parents in the changes he has instigated. One parent's comment was typical of those made, 'His heart is also very clearly for the children.' Most of the new initiatives have not been in place long enough to see an impact, but the priority to blend the staff into a team has already been successful, resulting in a very positive ethos amongst the staff. Teachers with responsibility to lead a subject have set to the task with a will. Monitoring and evaluation is at a very early stage of development and this is not yet raising the achievement of pupils.

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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?	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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 Stoke Bruerne Church of England Primary School, Towcester NN12 7SD

I would like to thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. Your school is giving you a satisfactory education and has many good plans for making the school better. These are the main things that I found.

- Your behaviour is excellent.
- Those of you in Reception do particularly well.
- You enjoy school and are rarely away.
- You make satisfactory progress in your work as you move through the school.
- You make good progress in reading but not enough progress in writing.
- The staff know you well and take very good care of you.
- The teachers' marking does not always show you how you can improve your work.
- You know what you need to eat and do to keep yourselves healthy.
- You also know how to keep yourselves safe.
- The staff work well together when they teach you.
- Your governors and your headteacher understand what needs to improve.
- You join in well with special events in the village.

In order to help the school to get even better, I have asked the staff to do three things.

- Give you more exciting lessons in writing and more chances to do interesting writing in other subjects.
- Make it very clear to you how you can get better at writing and to give you the chance to try what has been suggested.
- Make sure that every teacher who is in charge of a subject has the chance to find out how well you are doing in that subject and then make the lessons better.

You can help your school to improve by developing a lively interest in learning. I wish you every success and happiness in your future education.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Cresswell Lead inspector



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Lead inspector