

St Andrew's CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122017
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314190
Inspection dates	20–21 November 2007
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

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	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Brett
Headteacher	Debra Cushing
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2006
School address	Ecton Brook Road Ecton Brook Northampton NN3 5EN
Telephone number	01604 406486
Fax number	01604 407295

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Andrew's Church of England Primary School moved two miles in September 2005 from a village to an estate on the edge of Northampton. This has changed its catchment significantly and there are areas of economic hardship in the locality. Attainment on entry to school in the Reception Year has been falling for the last few years. There have been a number of staff changes recently, with four new staff joining this term. The headteacher took up her post in September 2005. About a quarter of the pupils represent a wide range of black and minority ethnic groups and 11 different home languages are spoken by the pupils, although almost all cope comfortably with the demands of the curriculum in English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The recent move and staff changes have meant that the school has had a chequered recent past, but it has come through this well and is a satisfactory and improving school. In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The features that required this category last year were standards in science, raising achievement in English and mathematics in Years 3 to 6, and subject leadership. All of these show satisfactory improvement. Parents recognise the improvements, saying such things as, 'A great improvement at the school in the past year. Teaching has improved and our child is now being pushed.'

One of the key factors in the improvement is the team of teachers that the headteacher has built. The quality of teaching is now good through the school and most pupils are making good progress in lessons in all classes. However, pupils' progress over time and their achievement are satisfactory as many are still making up the ground lost in the past. Children start in the Reception class with levels of skills and knowledge that are well below those expected. Provision in this class is good and pupils start in Year 1 having made good progress but have still not quite reached expected levels. In the national tests in Year 6 in 2007, standards were broadly average in English, mathematics and science. Standards in science improved well from previous low levels.

Another major factor in the progress the school has made in the last two years is the clear vision and drive of the headteacher. A parent put it well when they said, 'The headteacher is very keen and motivated to do the best for our children. We definitely chose the best school for our child.' There is a shared desire by all staff and governors to take the school forward. A particular strength is the clear evaluation that leaders have made of the school's effectiveness. The accurate picture obtained has enabled clear plans to be made to achieve further improvement. The school has a strong leadership team and keen subject leaders. However, many of these are new to their posts and they are still developing the skills needed for their roles. This means that the impact of their plans has yet to be seen.

Pastoral care for pupils is excellent. Pupils rightly feel that they are safe and are cared for very well. They are very confident that there is always someone to listen to their problems. Parents also appreciate the care, saying such things as, 'The friendly and supportive staff provide good care and any issues have been quickly resolved.' This very high level of care results in pupils' good personal development and well-being. Pupils behave well, work keenly and enjoy school, especially the wide range of clubs and visits that enrich the otherwise satisfactory curriculum. A notable strength is the care that pupils show for each other. Academic guidance is not so well developed and is satisfactory. The school tracks pupils' progress very thoroughly and this is used well to ensure that those who are finding work difficult are supported well and make good progress. However, these systems are not being used to identify pupils of other abilities, for example the more able, who could benefit from extra help. Targets are being set for pupils to help them see what they need to learn next, but these are relatively new and are not yet having an impact in raising standards because they are not used consistently well in all classes. Teachers do not always refer to pupils' targets when marking work.

The school has set challenging targets for pupils' future progress. Bearing this in mind, alongside the improvements made over the last year, the school is well placed to continue on the upward path.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get a good start to their education and make good progress in the Reception class. They start school with well below average skills, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development. Staff work hard to build positive relationships with parents and carers with 'sharing a book' sessions and the 'Time for Tots' group. These involve parents in their children's education and benefit their learning. The leader manages and organises the class effectively and teaching is good. She knows the children very well; assessment procedures are clear and ensure that tasks are matched well to their needs. However, the enclosed outside area is not sufficiently developed to enable it to be used to extend children's progress across all areas of learning. Children behave well and enjoy being at school; they feel secure and are well cared for by an effective team of teachers and support staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that targets set for pupils to improve their work in English and mathematics are used consistently in all classes and that teachers mark to these targets.
- Make better use of information about pupils' progress to ensure that pupils of all ability levels are doing well enough and to identify any who need additional help.
- Strengthen the expertise of subject leaders so that they are more effective in raising standards in their subjects.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged 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

Pupils reach average standards by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. A backlog of underachievement is being tackled well and achievement is now satisfactory. Pupils' progress has accelerated recently due to improved teaching so that most are now making good progress in lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as clear plans are made for their learning and they are supported well by teachers and teaching assistants. There is generally little difference between the performance of boys and girls, although boys do not do as well in writing because they get too few opportunities to practise their skills in different subjects. The school has put in place strategies to improve this, but these are too new to have had an impact. The progress of pupils from Minority Ethnic groups is similar to that of their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Pupils adopt safe practices well. They have a good understanding of how to support and help each other as well as how to stay safe themselves. They play together well and feel happy and secure in school. Most pupils keenly adopt healthy lifestyles, although some older pupils do not always make healthy choices of snacks at playtime. Rates of attendance are broadly average, although pupils thoroughly enjoy school.

Pupils make a good contribution to the school and wider community. For example, they are encouraged to support a range of charities, including sponsoring two children in Africa. This has been linked to an African theme day. The pupils greatly enjoyed this experience and learnt more about Africa and themselves. Despite this, pupils still have a limited understanding of cultures other than their own. Playground friends willingly accept the responsibilities of their role and really care for other children. Pupils arrive in the morning with a smile on their faces. They are greeted at the gate by members of staff making a positive start to their day and showing them that they are all valued. The role of the school council is developing well. Pupils feel that they have a voice and they enjoy the responsibilities of being council members. Pupils run a healthy tuck shop and they are developing independence well, thus preparing them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

New teaching staff are having a positive effect on the quality of teaching and it is now good throughout the school. Consequently, most pupils are now making good progress in lessons. A particularly important improvement is the good engagement of pupils in lessons because of the range of interesting activities planned by teachers. Pupils enjoy the discussions and investigations that are a part of many lessons and these accelerate learning. Relationships are good and teachers are good at managing their classes, thus creating an orderly learning environment. Other adults play a strong role in supporting pupils' learning, not just those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but often supporting more able groups to extend their learning. Another strength in teaching is teachers' planning to provide work for a broad range of abilities. Occasionally, the introductions to lessons are too long, denying the pupils the opportunity to get involved actively in their learning quickly enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The coverage of the curriculum is satisfactory and pupils have a good variety of activities to develop their learning. However, different subjects are not always linked together well enough. This means that pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and improve their literacy, numeracy and speaking and listening skills in other subjects. The school is working to improve this. For example, teachers are beginning to use drama in subjects such as science and this is already having a positive effect. Pupils particularly enjoy the theme days, for example the African day, and appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Many clubs are taken by support staff who make a major contribution to the quality of provision for pupils.

Pupils enjoy a good range of educational visits to extend their learning, including a variety of residential experiences. These trips enhance the children's knowledge and learning by giving them opportunities to try out new activities. The school has rightly identified that more use could be made of visitors to extend pupils' knowledge of cultures other than their own and to bring subjects alive.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is excellent. All members of staff are fully committed to the pupils' welfare. The school works closely with outside agencies and parents to safeguard pupils' well-being. The pupils appreciate the care they receive and say such things as, 'All staff really look out for you.' The family support worker and the learning mentor are greatly valued by the pupils, particularly the ability to 'drop in' and discuss their worries with them.

Academic support is satisfactory. Thorough assessments are made of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers are setting targets for pupils' future learning. This is relatively new and not all pupils are clear about their next steps in learning. There is a good new 'two stars and a wish' system in teachers' marking. Pupils are clear what it means but it is not used consistently in all classes and is not always closely linked to pupils' targets. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Their needs are identified early and clear plans are made for their learning so they make good progress relative to their abilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has led a concerted drive for improvement well and this commitment is shared by all staff and governors. A particular strength is the accuracy of the picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses built up by leaders. This means that areas for improvement have been identified and tackled quickly. Particularly good use has been made of support from external agencies, such as consultants. Although there is a unity of vision, many of the management structures are new. For example, almost all subject leaders are new to their roles and have not had a big involvement in monitoring school effectiveness or putting in place action plans to raise standards in their subjects. Although very clear timetables have been set for their monitoring of provision and they have had training in how best to carry out these monitoring activities, they are still developing their expertise.

Governors are very supportive and have helped the headteacher considerably in the difficult decisions she has made to improve provision. However, they have not developed fully their monitoring role to give them good firsthand knowledge of what is going on in the school.

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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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	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	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 the learners' needs?	2
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	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	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	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

22 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Andrew's CE VA Primary School, Northampton, NN3 5EN

Thank you so much for welcoming Mrs Watson and me to your school when we visited. It was really good to hear you tell us all about your school and particularly about how much you enjoy it. You probably know that your school needed quite a bit of improvement when it was inspected last year. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that we think it has made good progress since then. Your school is still improving and now provides a satisfactory quality of education.

- We think the best things about your school are:
- you are now making good progress in lessons as teaching is good
- your progress over time has improved and you are now reaching the standards you should be
- your headteacher and teachers have good plans to make sure that your school continues to improve
- we agree with you that all staff look after you really well and that the learning mentor and family support worker are excellent. You particularly appreciate the fact that you always have someone to talk through your problems with
- you are developing well into responsible young people and we were impressed with the way you look after each other
- there is a good range of after school clubs and activities and the work planned in lessons is beginning to give you more opportunities to practise your literacy skills in other subjects.
- We have suggested that these things could be improved:
- you do not always know how the targets you are set can help you improve your work in reading, writing and mathematics also teachers do not always mention these targets when they mark your work
- the school keeps careful records of the progress you are making, but teachers do not always use this information to make sure that you always get the help you need
- many of the teachers who are responsible for subjects are new and they have not had time to put in plans that will help to raise standards further.

You can help by making sure you know what your targets are and how you can improve your work. Keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

John D Eadie Lead inspector

22 November 2007



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John D Eadie
Lead inspector