

St Nicholas CofE Primary School, Henstridge

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123760
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314709
Inspection date	30 April 2008
Reporting inspector	David Curtis

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	37
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Norman Symcox
Headteacher	Graeme Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Ash Walk Henstridge Templecombe BA8 0QD
Telephone number	01963 362308
Fax number	01963 362308

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small two-class primary school. Most pupils are White British. It has an above average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities mostly with speech, language and communication or social/behavioural needs. Since the last inspection, the school has been through a period of significant instability, which resulted in numbers on roll dropping to 27 at one point. A high number of pupils join or leave the school other than at the normal times. Since 2000, 19 teachers, including different headteachers, have worked in the school. The current headteacher has been in post for two years. With such small year groups, attainment on entry varies significantly from year to year, but the trend shows attainment is below expectations for 4-year-olds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school, which is improving rapidly. It has a number of good features. Following the last inspection, the school went through a period of significant turmoil. This resulted in a very low point in 2006 when standards were exceptionally low and achievement across the school was inadequate. In addition, documentary evidence provided by the school shows that there were significant behavioural issues, with pupils and parents losing confidence in the school. On his appointment, the headteacher recognised that the key priority was to rebuild pupils' trust and parents' support for the school. Through his strong and effective leadership and management and the support of staff, he has achieved this. The school has turned around and has made significant progress in two years.

The success of leadership and management is seen in pupils' good personal development and well-being and their willingness to learn. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils' relationships with each other and all adults are good. Whilst attendance is satisfactory, the school does everything it possibly can to encourage good attendance. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and there are strengths in the way older pupils support younger ones, for example in the 'Easter Egg Treasure Hunt'. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are confident in expressing their feelings and the strong Christian ethos of the school is evident in their day-to-day lives.

Good teaching and learning contribute successfully to pupils' positive attitudes to school. Pupils are ready to learn and feel secure in school. This, coupled with strengths in teaching and learning, has contributed strongly to the satisfactory achievement and broadly average standards seen across the school. Good provision in the Foundation Stage gives children a positive start to their education. Whilst improvements to teaching and learning are good, teachers are not consistently meeting the needs of more able pupils. As a result, these pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Inconsistencies remain in teachers' marking which does not always tell pupils how to improve their work. The curriculum is satisfactory, with pupils saying how much they enjoy the new 'hands-on' approach, which is starting to make learning more meaningful.

Good care, guidance and support underpin the improved attitudes to school amongst pupils. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly strong, with teaching assistants making an invaluable contribution to the good progress made by these pupils. The school has introduced targets for literacy and numeracy for pupils, but these are not firmly embedded so that pupils fully understand how such targets can help them improve their learning.

Since the last inspection, governance has improved considerably, with governors now firmly holding the school to account. Whilst the school development plan is rightly focused on raising standards, it does not provide sufficient quantifiable detail to effectively monitor progress. A very high number of parents returned questionnaires and all were supportive of the school, which reflects their confidence. A common theme amongst the written comments is summed up by one who wrote, 'My daughter is doing exceptionally well in class, all thanks to the staff and their knowledge.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Significant improvements to the Foundation Stage since the low point in 2006 mean that children make good progress and are on course to meet the goals expected by the time they start Year 1. Good teaching and learning are at the heart of improvement. Learning is planned carefully, with the teacher and teaching assistant working effectively as a team to support children. There are strengths in the teaching of key skills, especially recognition of letters and sounds and early writing skills. Children can match words to the letter 's' for example. They have moved on from making marks to forming recognisable letters and, in some cases, writing a simple sentence. Assessment is good, with day-to-day assessment a strength in all six areas of learning. Leadership and management are good, with staff having a very good understanding of the needs of young children. Outdoor provision has improved since the last inspection, with a covered area now enabling children to extend their learning beyond the classroom. During the inspection, children developed their knowledge and understanding of the world through, for example, planting seeds and discussing life cycles of plants and animals.

What the school should do to improve further

- In addition to maintaining the focus on raising achievement and standards, the school should:
- improve the consistency of challenge for more able pupils
- improve the quality of marking so that all pupils are clear about what they have to do to improve their work
- further develop the use of pupil targets in literacy and numeracy
- ensure that the school development plan includes clear quantifiable success criteria.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. There has been a significant improvement in reading where standards were exceptionally weak. Good teaching of letters and sounds gives pupils a good start in reading. This is subsequently developed through effective group reading sessions to improve pupils' comprehension skills. Evidence from displays of work and pupils' books shows much better standards in writing, although a small number of older pupils find writing still to be a challenge. This links very much to the significant legacy of prior underachievement. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are good, with pupils in Years 3 to 6 presenting very good 'slide shows' of information on countries they study in Europe. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress against the targets in their individual education plans because of very effective support from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and the importance of a good diet and regular exercise. They act sensibly and safely, for example when organising and using the equipment for playground games. Pupils show great care and respect for animals, taking the

school's guinea pigs for walks is an example of this. They feel safe in school and are confident that adults will help them with worries and concerns. Pupils take their roles as 'play leaders' seriously and enjoy serving on the school council. A few older pupils lack enthusiasm for school and motivation to learn. Pupils make a good contribution to the community, through participation in church services and the choir singing at the village fete. Pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory and improving as they become more confident in their key literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are planned carefully and adapted successfully to meet the needs of most pupils in mixed age classes. Lessons begin with teachers sharing the lesson objectives with pupils so that they know what is expected of them. Whilst the more able pupils are set challenging activities in the main part of the lesson this is not the case at the start of lessons where the pace slows for these pupils. Teaching assistants support pupils' learning extremely well, particularly those with learning difficulties. A particular strength in Years 3 to 6 is the use of teaching assistants to work with groups in the mental/oral part of numeracy lessons so that activities are matched closely to individual needs. The effective use of first-hand resources allows pupils to enjoy learning and make good progress. In Years 1 and 2, for example, pupils observed live snails to develop understanding of their lifestyles and also their vocabulary to describe them. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly but do not always tell them how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is being revised to provide more first-hand experiences for pupils. Pupils say how much they enjoy this approach although it is still not fully embedded across the school. There are good opportunities for pupils to use their ICT skills in other subjects, and to raise their awareness of other countries and cultures. The religious education curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. The curriculum does not meet fully the needs of more able pupils. The social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme has a significant impact on pupils' good personal development and well-being. Work in this area has also led to their much improved attitudes to school and learning. Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular provision, including sports club, arts and crafts club and the school choir. They enjoy going on educational visits and benefit from the school's policy of not charging for such trips.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school complies fully with all statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils and child protection. There are significant strengths in the quality of support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to meet their varied and complex needs. The school makes very effective use of outside agencies to support pupils and parents. Following his appointment, the headteacher started a nurture group to address significant concerns around pupils' behaviour and attitudes. This has contributed significantly to much improved behaviour and learning. The school has set targets for pupils in aspects of writing and for their multiplication tables in

numeracy, which pupils know and use. However, these targets need to be embedded and developed into more areas of literacy and numeracy in order for pupils to be fully aware of how they can progress in these areas.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a very clear vision for the future of the school and a genuine commitment to provide stability for pupils and parents. School self-evaluation is thorough and accurate with identified priorities focused on raising standards and achievement. The headteacher has built a very strong staff team that supports him totally in the drive for school improvement. The school sets challenging targets for pupils, which are now within sight of being achieved because of effective leadership and management and good teaching and learning. Whilst much still needs to be achieved, improvements made in the last two years have given both pupils and parents much greater confidence in the school and its work. The school has good capacity for further improvement. Currently, the school development plan does not include quantifiable indicators of improvement. As a result, it is not clear whether or not it has met such targets.

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	3

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?	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	3
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**

1 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas CE Primary School, Henstridge BA9 0QD

Thank you very much for the welcome you gave me when I visited your school. In particular, thank you to those in Year 5 and Year 6 who met me at lunchtime. I enjoyed being in your assembly where I thought you sang very well. I am pleased to tell you that yours is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. There are a number of things that are good.

- You make much better progress in lessons than you did in the past.
- Your behaviour is good and you get on well with each other.
- You work hard in your lessons.
- You like the 'hands-on' approach to learning.
- Staff look after you well and you know they are there to help you.
- All those who lead and manage your school are determined to make it even better for you all.

I think that there is still a need for your work to improve and I have asked the school to help you by doing four things.

- Making sure that all of you are challenged to work hard in lessons, particularly if you are quick to learn.
- Making sure that marking tells you how you can improve your work.
- Giving you more targets in literacy and numeracy to help you improve your work.
- Making sure that those who lead and manage your school can measure how well they are doing in improving it.

Would you please thank your parents because so many of them kindly filled in the questionnaires for me to read? Keep working hard and enjoying school.

Yours sincerely

David Curtis Lead inspector