

St Gregory Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 124757 |
| Local Authority | Suffolk |
| Inspection number | 315046 |
| Inspection dates | 7–8 July 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Nick Butt |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 3–9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 265 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Lesley Ford-Platt |
| Headteacher | Mr Philip Knowles |
| Date of previous school inspection | 17 November 2003 |
| School address | Church Street Sudbury Suffolk CO10 6BJ |
| Telephone number | 01787 372418 |
| Fax number | 01787 312818 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves a residential community of mixed housing. Almost all of the pupils are White British. A third come from outside the immediate catchment area. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils who need additional help with their learning is below average. These include pupils with specific learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. The school houses a specialist support centre for up to 20 pupils with complex moderate learning difficulties in two classes. All these pupils have statements of special educational need and travel significant distances to attend. A new headteacher took up post in January 2008, following two terms when the deputy headteacher was acting headteacher. Children start school with a wide range of abilities but standards at entry are broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Gregory's is a satisfactory and improving school. The new headteacher has a clear vision for the school's improvement and is supported ably by the deputy headteacher. Together, they have identified the correct priorities to focus on, starting with ensuring that more of the teaching and learning is good or better. Much of the work to develop the school is at an early stage, with little time available to evaluate the impact of initiatives. Although these initiatives are beginning to lead to improvements in standards at Year 2, it is too soon to see their full impact across the school.

Standards are rising and by the end of Year 2 are now slightly above average. Standards in Year 4 are broadly average overall but better in reading than in writing and mathematics. Achievement is satisfactory, but the pace of progress is uneven throughout the school, because of variations in the quality of teaching. Teaching is satisfactory but there is insufficient challenge for more able pupils and this means that too few reach the higher levels by the end of Year 2 and Year 4. Staff have begun to develop the curriculum to make it more creative, and there are some good examples of thematic topic work in Year 4. There is a satisfactory level of enrichment, but only a limited range of clubs. Trips tend to be to local places of interest rather than further afield.

A parent spoke for many by writing, 'St Gregory's is a warm, caring professional school that encourages our children to believe in themselves and do the best they can while appreciating and respecting others.' This is evident through pupils' good personal development and well-being. They are happy at school and support one another well. During sports day, pupils cheered on their team-mates from the specialist support centre, even if they were not the fastest runners. A pupil said, 'No one is left out when we play. We're all a part of something.' Pupils play a role in improving the school through the school council and as play leaders. They are involved in the local community and join in with special events such as 'Visions of Sudbury', when they worked with an artist to create a montage of the town's mediaeval buildings.

The care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory with strengths in pastoral care. There is good provision for pupils who struggle with their learning and those who attend the specialist support centre are included well in school life. Academic guidance is inconsistent because of the many different approaches to marking.

The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection and has sound direction under its new leadership team. The role of subject leaders has been underdeveloped and although this is now improving, they do not yet have time to monitor the impact of teaching and learning on pupils' achievement and standards. Governors are more aware of the importance of using data to measure the school's performance, and are increasingly involved in strategic decisions.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Good practice in the Nursery ensures that children enjoy an engaging curriculum that stimulates them and promotes their independence. They settle quickly into their routines, and effective modelling of language by staff helps them to develop their speech, often an area of weakness at first. In Reception, activities do not always promote children's learning sufficiently well, especially for the more able. The Foundation Stage leader has expertise and experience but

has not had the opportunity to work with Reception teachers during class sessions to foster stronger consistency of practice. Careful written records are kept of children's satisfactory progress, but little use is made of photographs to record children working or their achievements. By the end of Reception, most pupils are attaining the expected early learning goals.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teaching is consistently good by providing sufficient challenge for all pupils, especially the more able.
- Raise standards and achievement in writing and mathematics, especially at the higher levels.
- Monitor regularly and rigorously the impact of changes to improve provision and outcomes for pupils.

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

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards have risen in Year 2 because of good teaching although few pupils are attaining the higher levels in writing. By the time pupils leave school standards are broadly average but there remain too few pupils reaching higher levels in writing and mathematics. This is because work does not sufficiently challenge the more able pupils. The school's new tracking system is beginning to show differences in progress so that pupils at risk of underachieving can be identified and supported. The school has tended to set unambitious targets for pupils to reach but is now more aspirational. Pupils from the specialist support centre make satisfactory progress against their individual targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. They know the Christian values that underpin the school's work and act as good Samaritans to one another. A pupil said, 'Friends look out for me when I'm upset.' Pupils take plenty of exercise, including morning 'activate' sessions, and eat healthily. They say they feel free from bullying. Their behaviour is good and they understand the risks of traffic and railway lines. Their studies of other cultures give them a good understanding of how people live in different parts of the world, and they have links with Burmese orphans in Thailand. Pupils regularly visit the elderly and take part in civic events, such as turning on the Christmas lights. Attendance is above average as pupils enjoy coming to school. They leave the school with average basic skills and are satisfactorily prepared for middle school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are good relationships between staff and pupils. In some lessons, learning is active and fun, as when Year 1 pupils had to wire up Snow White's house for Doc. At other times, the pace of learning is too slow and tasks do not sufficiently challenge the more able pupils. Teachers often make good use of technology to engage pupils and adopt a range of strategies that

involve pupils working alone, with a partner, or as part of a group. This adds interest and variety to lessons. The work of staff from the strategy group, set up by the new headteacher to model good practice, is benefiting a small number of teachers, but is at an early stage of development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum allows pupils to make satisfactory progress, as it meets statutory requirements and is broad and balanced. At present, it is mainly based on individual subjects with limited links across them, although there are some special projects that are more imaginative. For example, work leading up to a multicultural day with the theme 'The World in Harmony' gave some opportunities for pupils to be more creative in exploring different cultures, traditions, art and music. Pupils have opportunities to visit places of local interest and there are a few, mainly sporting, clubs for them to take part in. However, pupils do not have the opportunity to experience many more wide ranging visits, adventure activities or develop their independence through a residential visit.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

A parent wrote, 'I have always found the school to be very friendly and staff approachable,' which echoed the views of many, who are united in believing their children are safe and well cared for. The school has a caring and inclusive ethos based on its Christian values and pastoral care is good. Pupils are known as individuals and there is good support for those who struggle with their work or are vulnerable in other ways, which enables them to make satisfactory progress. There are good links with external agencies to provide additional support and advice to staff in meeting pupils' needs. Arrangements for tracking pupils' progress are new this year and the guidance given to pupils through marking and setting targets is inconsistent. As a result, teachers are not always able to match tasks to pupils' abilities to ensure suitable levels of challenge for all.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The vast majority of parents support the work of the school. A typical comment ran, 'The new headmaster is very friendly, always gives his time to parents and has put forward fresh new ideas.' There is a clear vision for improving the school and some impact through improving standards at the end of Year 2 and the elimination of unsatisfactory teaching. Much still remains to be done, especially in ensuring consistency of approach in teaching, learning and assessment. The school's self-evaluation is not searching enough and has led to judgements in some areas that are too generous. This is partly because leaders and subject coordinators do not have sufficient time to monitor their areas of responsibility regularly and rigorously. The school development plan is at an early stage of composition. Effective management of learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables pupils in the specialist support centre to achieve their targets. Governors have begun to hold the school to account more in the past year and often visit to help or to see what is going on. In view of the school's satisfactory progress, and the fact that it is too soon to see the full impact of changes introduced by the new headteacher, capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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 | 3 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| 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 | 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

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|--|---|
| 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? | 3 |

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

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| 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 | 3 |
| 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

9 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Gregory Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2BJ

Thank you very much for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed talking with you. Your school is satisfactory and is getting better all the time. Mr Knowles has brought some fresh new ideas and all the staff are working very hard to improve things. Here are some things that we think are good.

- You behave well and are caring towards one another.
- Your attendance is good.
- You know all about keeping healthy and staying safe.
- You are well involved in your local community through helping people and taking part in events.
- You have good attitudes to learning and work hard in lessons.
- The staff care for you all and give good support if you find learning a struggle.
- The school is good at working with people from outside to help you even more.

We have asked your teachers to make sure those of you who find work easy are given plenty to do that really challenges you. We think more of you could reach the higher levels in writing and mathematics especially. We would like teachers to have more time to check how things are going, so that they can help one another to make the school even better. We know that they would value your views about how well you think you are doing.

Many thanks once again for your help. We agree with the parent who said, 'Thumbs up to Mr Knowles, he seems to be moving the school in the right direction!' Our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr N Butt

Lead inspector