

Sir Robert Hitcham Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124774
Local Authority	SUFFOLK LA
Inspection number	315053
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	David Herbert

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	215
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Anne Humphrys
Headteacher	Mrs Barbara McElroy
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
School address	School Corner Debenham Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 6PL
Telephone number	01728 860201
Fax number	01728 860201

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The majority of the children come from the village, with almost all of the others coming from other villages in the immediate area. All pupils speak English as their first language. Most children enter the Nursery with attainment above national expectations. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sir Robert Hitcham is a good school where pupils enjoy their learning and often reach high standards. The good leadership of the headteacher provides clear direction to ensure that the school runs smoothly and successfully focuses on promoting pupils' well-being and good achievement.

Pupils make good progress and achieve well, attaining standards that are above average by the end of Year 2. By the end of Year 6 pupils reach standards that are always above average and have usually been exceptionally high, especially in mathematics. In 2007, standards were above the national average in English and science, though broadly average in mathematics. This represented good progress overall from the pupils' starting points. The school has established good procedures to check on how well pupils are achieving. Leaders know that one factor contributing to a slight decline in mathematics was the lower attainment of girls. This matter is now being addressed.

Pupils work hard in their lessons because they want to succeed. One pupil commented that 'lessons are fun and enjoyable.' They take part in an extensive range of clubs and activities that give them a rich experience. One parent recognised that the staff have a real 'commitment to creating well-rounded individuals'. Teaching is good. Teachers know their pupils well and provide good personal care and support. Most use assessment information well to match activities to pupils' differing needs. Most teachers set specific targets for pupils over time and in lessons. Some mark pupils' work against these expectations and give specific guidance on how they can improve their work. A few teachers encourage pupils to assess their own work to help them understand what they need to do better. These good practices are not yet consistent across all classes and subjects. The curriculum is good because there is a strong emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy, knowledge and skills so that pupils make good progress.

Pupils' personal development is good, as shown in their good relationships with each other and with adults. They steadily learn to take more responsibility for themselves and to care for one another. Pupils make a good contribution to the community through their links with the Church, organising events for charity, planting trees and participating in recycling projects.

The purposeful leadership of the headteacher, rapidly developing leadership roles and good teamwork set the school up well for further improvement. Leaders monitor regularly to check on how well the school is doing. They carefully track the performance of each pupil, class and group, and are beginning to use challenging targets to raise standards further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Nursery and Reception classes provide a good start to children's schooling. Teaching is good, with teachers asking children appropriately challenging questions. This prompts children to try hard in their work and enjoy their successes. A good mix of indoor and outdoor activities ensures that all areas of learning are covered. Children participate well, sharing their experiences and explaining what they have done. Adults support the children well, ensuring that they are independent in their work whilst giving them good encouragement and feedback. Good opportunities for children to talk together lead them to be articulate and demonstrate skills that are above those expected for their age.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of girls so that standards are at least comparable with those of the boys.
- Ensure that pupils in all classes know what they have to do to raise the standard of their work further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and most exceed national expectations by the time they enter Year 1. This good progress continues in Years 1 and 2. Although standards at the end of Year 2 declined in 2005, they have recovered steadily since then and are now above average in all subjects. Achievement is good in Years 3 to 6, although boys do better than girls, particularly in mathematics. Pupils make good progress because teaching across the school is good and engages pupils well. Standards at the end of Year 6 are consistently above average and have usually been exceptionally high in recent years, particularly in mathematics and English. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from good planning for their needs and effective support leads them to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Older pupils support and care for younger pupils well, especially when they have formal opportunities to take responsibility for them. Pupils volunteer willingly for positions of responsibility across the school, such as the school council. Behaviour in lessons is good and pupils listen well, think carefully and work hard. They respond well to challenge and enjoy receiving feedback on their achievements. Attendance is above the national average. Spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good. Pupils say they feel safe in school and are confident to share any concerns they have with adults.

Pupils lead healthy lives by taking part in an extensive range of sporting and other activities that the school provides. One pupil enthusiastically recognised that, 'There's a huge range of things we do'. They look after the kitchen garden that they designed and manage the sale of fruit each day. Above average standards in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) are preparing them well for the rest of their education and the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In all classes, adults and pupils relate well to each other so that pupils take an active part in lessons and make good progress. Teachers' planning is good; this leads to a good level of challenge in most lessons. In a few lessons, assessment information is not used as effectively to fine tune activities to match the needs of all pupils. A few teachers use questioning particularly effectively to extend pupils' level of understanding, such as when they prompt them to reflect on the different points of view of characters in stories. In the Years 5 and 6 classes, teachers mark pupils' work against the intended outcomes of the lesson and indicate what they need to do next to improve their work. This is not yet

consistent across all classes. Skilled teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, particularly those pupils who lack confidence to complete tasks independently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The provision for ICT has improved substantially since the last inspection and teachers are using it with increasing effect in pupils' learning. Links between subjects are beginning to be developed although these are not yet fully established. The school is working with other local schools to create opportunities for pupils with particular gifts and talents to develop their skills and broaden their understanding. For example, through writing, art and music, pupils developed an animated film. Curricular enrichment is outstanding. The school organises a wide range of visits and visitors and provides an extensive number of club activities which are very well attended. A significant number of pupils have instrumental music tuition.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All staff are strongly committed to pupils' welfare and demonstrate a genuine concern for their health and safety. There are good procedures to safeguard pupils. Rigorous child protection arrangements and risk assessments are in place. Classroom management is fair and consistent so that pupils behave well. Measures for introducing new children into the Nursery and Reception Classes are good and ensure that they settle quickly. Transition arrangements with the local High School are very good. For example, pupils use email to get to know a Year 8 'buddy' for personal support. More rigorous tracking of pupils' progress in English and mathematics has recently been developed. Teachers are now using this accurately to identify those pupils who are not progressing as well as they might, those who might fall behind or need specific help. Effective 'catch-up' programmes support these pupils well. The school works effectively with a range of external agencies to help vulnerable pupils and those with particular needs. Teachers use this information effectively to create detailed individual education plans for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A new policy for assessment and marking is providing pupils with a range of targets in their work but has not yet had time to become a routine part of teachers' everyday practice.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership focused clearly on ensuring that all pupils are happy, cared for and achieving as well as they can. She is supported by an effective governing body who share this vision and the determination to achieve it. Working closely with her deputy, the headteacher has extended the management role of subject and key stage leaders, involving them in the analysis of performance data to identify areas for further improvement. Rigorous self-evaluation has accurately raised specific issues for improvement, such as the lower attainment of girls compared with that of boys in some subjects and age groups. Across the whole staff team there is an evident commitment to achieving and maintaining high standards.

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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	1
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	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	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

15 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Sir Robert Hitcham Primary School, Debenham, Suffolk, IP14 6PL

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you about what you do in school, looking at your work and watching you learn in lessons. We agree with you and your parents that Sir Robert Hitcham Primary is a good school.

We were pleased to see that you behave well and enjoy being together. This means your teachers can get on with helping you to learn well in your lessons. As a result, you make good progress. One of you said that 'lessons are fun and enjoyable,' and we think that the rest of you show that you agree. You also told us that you like all the different activities that you do in school, in lessons and in extra clubs, and especially the different visits and visitors.

We think that your learning is good. Your teachers make your lessons practical and interesting and you try hard to do what they ask. Some of you understand how to improve your work so that you can achieve your learning targets. We have asked your teachers to make sure that all of you know exactly what you need to do to keep on improving.

All the staff and governors are working hard to make your school even better. With your hard work and help, we think that you can achieve this together.

Thank you again for helping us find out about Sir Robert Hitcham. Keep on doing your very best and enjoy your time at the school.

Yours sincerely,

David Herbert

Lead inspector