

St Nicolas CofE Aided Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125189
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315183
Inspection date	3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Hill

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Radley
Headteacher	Ms K Woodhouse
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	Portsmouth Road Guildford GU2 4YD
Telephone number	01483 561639
Fax number	01483 502970

Age group	4-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- pupils' achievement and personal development
- the quality of teaching
- how well the school keeps track of pupils' progress
- how well the school is led and managed, particularly in monitoring provision.

Evidence was gathered from observing lessons and break-times; talking to pupils and staff; checking the school's records of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and the results of questionnaires returned by parents and pupils.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a small infant school near the centre of Guildford. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage, although the current Reception intake has a high proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, many of them at the early stages of learning English. Pupils' economic and social circumstances vary, but are generally better than average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. Considerable disruption to staffing, including several changes of headteacher and the long-term absence of other staff, has affected provision in the last two years. The current headteacher took up post in May 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, whose success is based firmly upon very good pastoral care for pupils. Parents rightly praise the warm family atmosphere, in which pupils thrive. Parents' comments were overwhelmingly positive, such as the one who wrote that the school '...truly nurtures each individual child, making each feel special and important, celebrating their progress, and supporting through tough patches...a place that our daughter skips happily to and from each day.' Pupils themselves say how much they enjoy being there, exemplified by the two boys who said 'I'd give this school ten out of ten'...'Maybe eleven!' Pupils are valued and treated as individuals, and close liaison with their parents helps the staff to meet their social needs very well. All pupils, regardless of ability, gender or ethnic origin are fully included in the life of the school.

Pupils' personal development is good. Their behaviour is good, and is often excellent in lessons. Boys and girls work and play together happily. They have good relationships with staff and each other, and take a keen interest in all aspects of school life. They know how to stay safe and healthy, and staff consistently reinforce these aspects. Attendance is excellent. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a firm moral basis for their actions, reinforced through lessons and in assemblies.

Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and their own positive attitudes to learning. Standards are consistently and significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics. An important strength of all lessons is how well pupils are managed. This is based on clear expectations, well-established routines, praise for pupils' successes, and very positive relationships. As a result, pupils try hard and take a pride in their achievements, because they are keen to please their teachers. Teachers explain things well, often using the interactive whiteboards to illustrate ideas, so that pupils pick them up quickly. For example, pupils made good progress in learning about the difficult concept of 'rounding' numbers to the nearest 10 because the teacher made her points crystal clear through helpful diagrams. Teachers generally modify their lessons to provide different work for pupils of different abilities. This means that most make good progress, although occasionally work is too hard or easy for some pupils, and their progress slows. There is some effective use of strategies to ensure all pupils are involved in lessons, such as discussing their ideas in pairs, or writing their answers on small whiteboards to show the teacher. At other times, teachers miss opportunities to do this. A good curriculum provides pupils' with an interesting range of experiences. It is enriched by a wide range of visits and visitors, as well as by good provision for extra-curricular activities.

Provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is good overall. There are some outstanding aspects of pastoral care. Staff understand pupils' individual emotional and social needs very well, and work very effectively to meet them. They successfully boost pupils' self-esteem and give them a very clear framework for their behaviour and social development. However, there are weaknesses in academic guidance. For some time, teachers have kept useful class records of the progress of their pupils and used these well to help them learn. However, the thorough and systematic tracking of pupils' progress across the school is only just being established. This means that it is difficult to identify quickly and accurately just how well pupils are doing, and so intervene to meet their needs. Pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities are supported well, because the provision is well managed and their individual education plans monitor and address their needs precisely. The skilled teaching assistants provide them with good support in learning so that they cope well in class.

The school has gone through a period of considerable disruption to staffing, during which governors and established staff played a very positive role in keeping the school stable. The strengths in pupils' personal development and standards have been maintained. The new headteacher is now providing a very clear educational lead to colleagues, and staff are working well as a team to raise achievement further. In the last few years, the monitoring of teaching and learning has not been sufficiently systematic. Good work has been done in some aspects, such as raising girls' performance in mathematics last year. On the whole, most staff had not received sufficient feedback to help them improve their practice, either as individuals or as a school. The headteacher has made a very good start in improving systems to monitor the provision and to provide feedback to teachers. In just a few months, she has gained an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses. The school is managed very efficiently on a day-to-day basis. All staff work hard and effectively to ensure pupils stay safe and healthy. However, some administrative confusion has arisen about how this is recorded, and records currently do not meet government recommendations. Staff have commenced work to rectify this technical omission. Self-evaluation is satisfactory because, despite the improved tracking of progress, the system is new. The full impact of this is not yet apparent as the school has not collected sufficient data to ensure that the targets set are really challenging. The headteacher has set out a clear school plan for the next year, and in view of the good progress made to date, in such a short time frame, the school has demonstrated good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children have a very happy start to their schooling in the Reception class. After just a few weeks in school, they are comfortable and relaxed, playing happily and following routines well, because they already have good relationships with the adults. Their parents praise the thoughtful procedures to smooth their children's entry into the school. The school is developing good provision to help pupils who speak little English to settle in. They are learning English happily and quickly as a result. Teaching is good, and an interesting range of activities, firmly based on practical experiences, encourages pupils' enthusiastic participation. A good balance is struck between direct teaching by the adults, and opportunities for pupils to explore materials and to play purposefully together. They are making good progress as a result. Good use is made of the outdoor area to support pupils' learning, although some equipment is in need of renewal.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement the plans for a better system to track pupils' progress, and make use of the information recorded to meet pupils' needs more precisely and set challenging targets.
- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning, and use the information gained to improve provision and raise achievement.

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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	2
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	1
The attendance of learners	1
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	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	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?	No
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

12 October 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Nicolas CofE Aided Infant School, Guildford, GU2 4YD

Thank you for a very warm welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed watching you at work and talking to you. You and your parents have told me that the school is a very happy place and that you enjoy being there. I could see that you do, and I agree that St Nicolas is a good school. These are the things I thought were particularly good.

- The adults look after you really well and make sure that you are safe and happy in school.
- Your teachers are good at helping you in class, so that you learn a lot.
- Your behaviour is good and you get on very well with each other and with the adults.
- You have interesting things to do and you know a lot about how to keep safe and healthy.
- The adults are good at organising the school, and they are keen to make things even better.

I have agreed with the teachers that, to make your school even better, they should keep more careful notes about how everyone is getting on. This will help the adults to give you even more help when you need it. We have also decided that the teachers will spend more time working together in classes or looking at your work. This will help them to share ideas so they can give each other tips about how to help you all learn more.

You can help by carrying on behaving well, working hard and always doing your best.

Thank you again for giving me a lovely day.

Best wishes,

Steven Hill

Lead Inspector