

St Nicolas CofE (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130975
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	315687
Inspection date	22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Callow

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	442
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marian Gunn
Headteacher	Chris Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2004
School address	Windermere Avenue Nuneaton CV11 6HJ
Telephone number	02476 382583
Fax number	02476 344853

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of work to improve achievement, particularly in writing across the school, in mathematics by the end of Year 6 and for those pupils identified as at risk of underachievement; the role of leaders in improving achievement; and the quality of the curriculum. Evidence was gathered from: discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, the chair of governors, parents and pupils; lesson observations; scrutiny of pupils' work; analysis of assessment data; and a review of the school's monitoring and evaluation records. 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 in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

The vast majority of pupils come from within the immediate area to attend this larger than average sized school. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is well below average. Over one third of the teaching staff has changed in the last two years and the senior leadership team was restructured in 2007. The school holds a significant number of national awards, related to the curriculum. These include the Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school was judged to be very good at the time of the last inspection, but it has continued to improve and is now outstanding. This is as the result of the headteacher and other leaders being determined for pupils to reach even higher standards, right across the curriculum. A Year 6 assembly at the start of the day, attended by a large number of appreciative parents, is a good example of the outstanding achievement of pupils at St Nicolas. Their high quality singing and dancing kept the audience enthralled. They interested younger pupils in well researched information about the history and geography of Egypt and fascinated everyone with their dramatic portrayal of the science of mummification. Their great enthusiasm and enjoyment in their learning was very evident and they demonstrated that they were confident, mature and responsible young people who are extremely well prepared for the next stage in their education.

The majority of children enter the Foundation Stage with levels of skills that are above those normally expected for 4-year-olds, except in writing, where they are average. They settle quickly because of a well planned induction programme, make excellent progress and start Year 1 with standards that are above average. This rate of progress continues for pupils of all abilities, so that by the end of Year 2, standards are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are frequently exceptionally high, because the vast majority of pupils continue to make excellent progress. Standards in other subjects too are very high, for example in art, music, physical education (PE) and information and communication technology (ICT).

Through thorough and accurate self-evaluation, the school has recognised that a few pupils do not always meet the very challenging targets that have been set, particularly in writing and in mathematics at Key Stage 2. The strong focus that leaders have had on improving standards in writing throughout the school, particularly of boys, has been highly successful in the last year. The introduction of 'Big Writing' has been a significant factor in this and enabled pupils to be much more confident and adventurous in their writing, as well as reaching higher standards. However, strategies to ensure that all pupils reach the standards of which they are capable in mathematics, by the time they leave in Year 6, have yet to have quite the same impact. This is due in part to some changes of teachers for older pupils, but also because the work to improve the quality of teaching of mathematics is much more recent. A comprehensive system that enables pupils' progress to be very carefully monitored has been introduced relatively recently, but is already helping to ensure that any pupil at risk of underachievement is quickly identified and supported.

Maintaining high standards of skills in literacy and mathematics has not been achieved at the expense of a breadth and richness to the curriculum. To the contrary, lessons are carefully planned to enable pupils to use and develop these skills in a range of different subjects. When asked what they enjoy most about school, pupils frequently respond with, 'fun lessons'. They recognise that teachers go out of their way to provide a curriculum that makes learning interesting and relevant. For example, one pupil in Year 4 had written in his book, 'I enjoyed the Greek soldier coming in and talking to us to help us know more about ancient Greece.' Currently there is tremendous enthusiasm amongst pupils in the developing links with a school in Uganda, which is adding a global and cultural aspect to their learning. All around the school, photographs, artefacts and information are helping to promote pupils' interest and understanding. Pupils of all ages, including those in the Foundation Stage, reach high standards

in ICT because every opportunity is provided for pupils to use their skills in all aspects of the curriculum.

Pupils are highly engaged and motivated in lessons because of the outstanding curriculum and the high quality of relationships between adults and pupils and the pupils themselves. Work is extremely well matched to pupils' abilities and what they know already, so that all groups of pupils, including the least able and the most able, are appropriately challenged and achieve very well. Teachers question pupils with skill, allowing them time to think carefully and develop their answers. Pupils generally get good oral feedback about how well they are doing in their work and teachers' marking, particularly in writing, has become much more effective in the last year. This is because it nearly always outlines what the next steps in learning are, but in mathematics, it happens a lot less frequently. There are good systems in place for the setting of challenging targets, but pupils' knowledge of these and how they can help to improve their work is a little inconsistent.

Despite the fact that the senior leadership team has recently been restructured, it is already demonstrating a much more distributed approach to leading and managing the school. This has resulted in individual teachers being far more accountable for the progress made by pupils in their class, for example in writing, and to be involved in deciding which aspects of the school need to be improved. The headteacher, with the good support of senior leaders and governors, successfully keeps the school strongly focused in pursuit of the development of well-rounded individuals who achieve excellence in all that they do. High quality pastoral care supports the outstanding personal development and well-being of pupils. They have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and keep safe because of outstanding provision. For example, a group of dedicated volunteers are helping pupils in Year 1 to be safe on the roads through a programme called Kerb Safe. Pupils' contribution to the community is worthy of special praise, not only because of what they do in school, such as acting as peer mediators, but also because of their involvement in local events such as the Nuneaton Arts Festival and a considerable amount of fund raising for charity. Pupils' great enjoyment of school is confirmed by attendance that is significantly above average.

The large majority of parents recognise the considerable strengths of the school and the impact these have on their children's achievements. One parent who said, 'Both children have blossomed at St Nicolas and it has been reassuring as a parent to know that both their education and social development have been at the highest level', summed this up. The strong track record of providing an excellent education for pupils, combined with very effective leadership, means that the school has the outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The outstanding leadership of the Foundation Stage results in a very careful evaluation of the provision, which although already of a high quality, is continually being improved to meet the needs of these young children. In the last year, considerable thought has been given to the way the learning environment is set up so that children can be more independent in their learning. Children thrive with the care and support they receive, making excellent progress, particularly in writing and in their personal and social development. They were seen confidently having a go at writing about a fantasy land with good attempts at spelling, because of a well taught understanding of sounds and letters. Children's enjoyment of their activities is very evident, particularly in the outside area. The school recognises, however, that more could be

done to make it even more attractive to children and to make better use of it for their physical development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide a greater consistency in the quality of the teaching of mathematics in Years 3 to 6.
- Ensure that all pupils have a good understanding of their next steps in learning through target setting and marking, particularly in mathematics.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

23 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Nicolas Church of England Primary School, Nuneaton, CV11 6HJ

Thank you for being so friendly when I visited your school recently. You were keen to talk to me, particularly about all the many good things that are going on. I agree with you, and I have judged your school to be outstanding because of the very high standards you reach, not only in subjects like English and mathematics, but also in areas like music, art, PE and ICT.

The excellent achievement of the vast majority of you was summarised for me by the wonderful assembly at the start of the day. The oldest of you demonstrated how much progress you have made since being at St Nicolas, not only in your work but also in the way that you are growing up to be confident, responsible young people who are very well prepared for going on to secondary school.

You get off to a really good start when you join the Foundation Stage because the adults are extremely good at knowing what will help you to develop important skills like writing. You told me that all of your teachers go out of their way to make your lessons fun and interesting. They also are good at making sure your work is not too easy or too hard. They plan it carefully so that you have lots of good opportunities to practise your skills of literacy and numeracy in other subjects.

You said that you feel happy and safe in school and know that peer mediators and adults will help you if you do have any problems. Some of you told me how helpful you find the 'worry box' in getting things sorted out in confidence. The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are extremely good at working out what is going well at your school and what needs to be improved. They knew, for example that writing needed to get better and it has, particularly through 'Big Writing'. They agree with me that the things that need to be improved now are:

- the progress that a few of you make in mathematics in Years 3 to 6
- your understanding of your next steps in learning, particularly in mathematics.

You can help by having the same excellent attitudes to your work that I saw when I visited.

With best wishes

Peter Callow Lead inspector

23 May 2008

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With best wishes

Peter Callow
Lead inspector