

St Nicholas Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132829
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	316031
Inspection dates	5–6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	348
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Gallagher
Headteacher	Elizabeth Caudwell
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2003
School address	Fairfield Road New Romney TN28 8BP
Telephone number	01797 361906
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Nicholas CE Primary School is a large school serving an area of some social deprivation, recognised in the local authority plan to open a Children's Centre by September 2008. A private nursery and out-of-school care is already provided on the school site. A higher than average proportion of pupils join or leave the school at other than usual times. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. A few pupils, mainly from Eastern Europe, are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, with a higher than average proportion holding a statement of special educational need. The school is emerging from a difficult period during which there has been a high turnover of staff, mainly because of serious illness. The school's recent awards include the Extended Schools Code of Practice, the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Healthy School, Quality in Study Support (QISS), Arts Mark and Active Sports.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Nicholas is a satisfactory and improving school, with good features to its work. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and particularly value its family orientated Christian ethos. One parent reflected the views of many in saying, 'The school has a warm feeling to it.' Many parents of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities made particular reference to the way in which the school understands their children's needs in comments such as, 'Everyone is friendly and fulfils much more than might be expected.'

All pupils are well known to staff and cared for, helping them to develop personal qualities well. They enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. They approach the wide range of school activities with enthusiasm, such as the daily 'Wake up and Shake up' session which gives pupils a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The school works very closely with a number of external agencies, ensuring that pupils with medical, emotional and learning needs are well supported.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and throughout the school because of sound teaching, although standards remain below national averages. This foundation gives pupils a satisfactory basis for their secondary education and the future world of work. The strength of leadership and management is shown in the action taken to avoid disruption to pupils' learning while the school had a number of temporary teachers. The pace of change has now picked up, showing the school's good capacity for ongoing improvement. Teachers are successfully developing their practice to raise pupils' achievements and aspirations further. For example, mathematics standards have improved this year. Further developments are planned, such as making more relevant links between subjects. However, opportunities are missed for pupils to practise and develop their literacy and numeracy skills through work in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Good strategies, including opportunities for pupils to evaluate the quality of their work against success criteria, are helping pupils to understand of their own learning well. However, pupils' improvement targets are not always clear enough and are not updated with sufficient frequency. The systems to check how individual pupils are doing are used well and additional support is provided for those who are not doing as well as they should. The information from all assessments is not used effectively enough to plan work that is always precisely matched to pupils' needs.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children join the Foundation Stage from a number of local nurseries and some children have not attended any formal pre-school setting. The friendly and calm atmosphere in the school and the good links developed before starting school help children to adapt quickly and develop positive attitudes to learning. Many children have much lower levels of attainment than are expected of this age, particularly in their language and social development. Staff focus well on developing pupils' language skills but do not provide enough imaginative experiences to stimulate a wider range of vocabulary. Children make sound progress across all their areas of learning, although many do not reach the levels expected for their age by the time they enter Year 1. Progress in number work, social development and pupils' understanding of themselves and their own safety is good. For example, without prompting, children pointed out the need

to put on their coats to go outside in the rain. The school has a good understanding of how provision can be improved further, including development of the outside area to give children a wider range of activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and the progress pupils make by matching pupils' work more closely to their individual needs.
- Raise pupils' aspirations of what they can achieve by setting clearer targets and reviewing them more regularly.
- Give pupils more opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.

A small proportion of 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

From a below average start in Year 1, pupils improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills satisfactorily through the school so that the gaps between school and national performance levels are reduced between Years 2 and 6. However, overall standards were still significantly below average in the national tests in Year 6. Standards in the Year 2 assessments have improved over the last few years, partly as a result of the start pupils have in the Early Years Centre, which is giving pupils a secure foundation for the future. As staffing has become more stable, pupils have gained a momentum in their learning and the school's data show that more pupils are making better progress now than in previous years. However, the school recognises that pupils need to make faster progress to raise standards to national levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils say they enjoy coming to school, supporting one pupil's view, 'I'll never forget this school.' Attendance is average and improving as a result of the school's emphasis on reducing unauthorised absence. Pupils behave well in lessons and around school and they demonstrate a good awareness of others. They say that pupils are usually friendly, whilst recognising that, occasionally, a few pupils can be unkind. Pupils are safe in school although some said that they do not feel as comfortable on the school bus. They are clear what to do if they have any problems and appreciate that incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively. Members of the school council take their role seriously and are rightly proud of their contribution, such as helping to increase the range of clubs so that there is something for all interests. The positive contribution made by pupils to the community is reflected in the Year 6 'community award scheme', with pupils regularly taking part in events, including music festivals and sponsored events in the locality.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Sound teaching across the school is enabling pupils to make satisfactory progress. Pupils say that teachers make learning fun and they particularly enjoy 'hands-on' lessons. Good

relationships are at the heart of teaching and learning. During the inspection, nearly all lessons seen were good. Teachers are gaining more confidence with experience, but this has not had enough time to impact more on pupils' achievements. Work is planned with a clear picture of how teachers will challenge the different ability groups within the class. However, pupils' books show that different challenges are not provided consistently. Teachers make very good use of their interactive whiteboards. This not only captures the interest of pupils but also makes lessons much more exciting for them. Teaching assistants give good support, ensuring that pupils in their care achieve in the same way as their classmates. Marking gives pupils a sound understanding of the quality of their work but does not always give them enough guidance about exactly what they have to do to make it better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has not succeeded fully in implementing its aim for subjects to be seen as complementary. In some classes, for example, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. In a few cases, the use of worksheets requires too many one word answers, again limiting opportunities for pupils to develop their writing for different purposes.

A parent commented, 'The school offers a huge range of clubs: something for everyone.' The exceptional range of outings and extra-curricular activities makes a very effective contribution to learning, recognised in the school's recent QISS award. The residential visit to a twinned school in France and links to pen pals give pupils a very clear European dimension. Enrichment within the curriculum is outstanding, with music as a particular strength. Pupils gain greatly from activities including 'Write an Opera' and taking part in choirs and musical ensembles. The school makes very good use of special days and weeks of learning activities, such as Health Week and Smart Days, to broaden pupils' experiences. Swimming was not taught at the time of the last inspection. It has since been added to the curriculum. The strong emphasis on developing pupils' personal and social skills contributes well to their understanding of safe and healthy lifestyles.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The strong pastoral support for pupils, particularly vulnerable pupils and those arriving in the school part-way through their primary education, is evident in the good safeguarding procedures and the very effective focus on individual pupils' well-being. The school has a productive partnership with parents, who positively support the school and their children's education. The school works closely with a wide range of outside agencies to ensure that all pupils, and especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have the support they need to make sound progress. The rigorous systems to track pupils' progress are used well to identify pupils who are not making the expected rates of progress and a wide range of additional programmes are in place, successfully improving pupils' achievements. Pupils have individual targets for writing, reading and mathematics, although these are not all updated frequently enough for pupils to be clear about exactly what they have to do next to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and guidance provided by the headteacher are very good. Her clear vision is very well promoted by other senior managers. This high quality leadership has enabled the school to cope with significant staffing changes. Self-evaluation is well informed and accurate. The school improvement plan is detailed, understood by all and provides a good basis for further improvement. The school is open to new ideas and maintains a very flexible approach to innovation and new strategies, for example it operates a setting system which changes according to current needs. However, in spite of its efforts, raising achievement has been slow. Currently the school monitors teaching but, until recently, has not placed enough emphasis on monitoring its impact on pupils' learning and achievements. The governing body gives good support and is well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It has already taken decisive action to improve facilities and opportunities for pupils, as in the development of the Early Years Centre. The school works well in partnership with the local authority, local schools and other agencies to broaden opportunities for pupils, for example in the provision of sport and secondary transfer liaison.

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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?	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	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	3

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?	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?	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	3
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**

7 February 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Nicholas CE Primary School, New Romney TN28 8BP

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited recently to see how you are getting on at school. I would like to thank the school council and Year 6 pupils for giving up part of their lunchtime to talk to us.

- We agree with you that there are a number of good things about the school and that you have a satisfactory education. I thought that you would be interested to know what I am saying in my report.
- The school council does a good job to let adults know what pupils think and what you want improved in the school.
- You have good attitudes and we are pleased that you enjoy school and learning in particular.
- You behave well and this helps to make the school a happy place.
- Many of you enjoy the wide range of clubs and the sports activities that help you to keep fit and healthy.
- You know what to do to stay safe and that you always have an adult to talk to if you have a problem.
- The headteacher and the staff think very carefully about how well the school is doing and are making improvements to make learning more enjoyable and to help you do even better.
- We agree with your teachers about the most important things to do next.
- To make sure that you always have work which is neither too easy nor too hard.
- To help you understand exactly what you have to do next to improve by making your targets clearer and reviewing them more regularly.
- To give you more opportunities to practise your writing and numeracy in other subjects. You can help them by making sure that you understand your targets and by remembering what you have to do next to improve your writing. Maybe you can think of other ways to help them too.

We wish everyone at St Nicholas every success in the future.

Yours sincerely Mrs H Hutchings Lead inspector

Annex B



7 February 2008

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- The school council does a good job to let adults know what pupils think and what you want improved in the school.
- You have good attitudes and we are pleased that you enjoy school and learning in particular.
- You behave well and this helps to make the school a happy place.
- Many of you enjoy the wide range of clubs and the sports activities that help you to keep fit and healthy.
- You know what to do to stay safe and that you always have an adult to talk to if you have a problem.
- The headteacher and the staff think very carefully about how well the school is doing and are making improvements to make learning more enjoyable and to help you do even better.

We agree with your teachers about the most important things to do next.

- To make sure that you always have work which is neither too easy nor too hard.
- To help you understand exactly what you have to do next to improve by making your targets clearer and reviewing them more regularly.
- To give you more opportunities to practise your writing and numeracy in other subjects.

You can help them by making sure that you understand your targets and by remembering what you have to do next to improve your writing. Maybe you can think of other ways to help them too.

We wish everyone at St Nicholas every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs H Hutchings
Lead inspector