

St Nicolas Church of England Junior School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 110013 |
| Local Authority | West Berkshire |
| Inspection number | 325080 |
| Inspection date | 11 November 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Alison Grainger |

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

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| Type of school | Junior |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 7–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 247 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Stephen Wolak |
| Headteacher | Mr Keith Harvey |
| Date of previous school inspection | 20 September 2005 |
| School address | Link Road Newbury RG14 7LU |
| Telephone number | 01635 41282 |
| Fax number | 01635 582427 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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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.

- How well teaching, the curriculum and academic guidance meet pupils' needs in mathematics and whether good achievement is being maintained in English.
- The effectiveness of the school's evaluation of its provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, and how well it takes action to promote improvement.
- The quality of pupils' personal development and well-being.

Evidence was gathered from the school's data on pupils' progress; visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work; observation of an assembly; discussions with staff, governors, parents and pupils; and analysis of responses to the parents' questionnaire. 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 of these areas, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Most pupils are White British. A few from other ethnic backgrounds are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. These pupils' needs include difficulties with learning in literacy and numeracy, problems with speech, language and communication, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The present headteacher took over responsibility for the school in April 2008.

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: 2

This is a good school. It provides pupils with a friendly, calm and supportive environment in which to learn and develop. Parents are pleased with it and their children feel safe at school. Pupils enjoy school as seen in the very high attendance rate. They particularly appreciate the wide range of activities provided in lessons and through additional activities, such as clubs, visits and visitors. As one parent of a pupil who started in Year 3 this term observed, 'My child can't wait to get to school in the mornings. The transition from infant to junior school has been made easy by the wonderful and caring staff.' A good balance is achieved in the attention given to pupils' personal development and to their academic progress. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and their future lives.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Through opportunities to reflect on human experience and relationships, such as in an assembly taken by the parish priest on the Remembrance Day theme, pupils learn to value others. They respond well to the positive role models provided by staff and form good relationships not only with each other but also with the adults in school. They are proud of the 'friendship bench' on the playground that allows them to spot and befriend any fellow pupil who needs a friend to play with.

Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school, helping to make the school a safe place. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe, such as during practical activities. They adopt healthy lifestyles well through good diet and exercise and point out that they have many opportunities to keep fit through sport. Pupils contribute well to the school community by diligently undertaking many responsibilities. They also make a strong contribution to the wider community by raising funds for charities and, for example, entertaining senior citizens.

Pupils achieve well academically. From starting points that are slightly above average overall, they reach standards significantly above average in English and a little above average in science by the end of Year 6. These standards represent good progress, particularly in writing which is a relatively weaker area of attainment on entry. In mathematics, standards are broadly average and the gains made in this subject are less significant, although satisfactory. Over the years, pupils have made less progress and attained lower standards in mathematics than in reading, writing and science. The school has rightly identified pupils' performance in mathematics as a main area for improvement. Even so, it knows that its attention to English cannot be relaxed. There is some unevenness in the amount and quality of opportunities for writing at length in different year groups and classes this year, and this is being carefully monitored.

Over the last six months, as the school has renewed and intensified its focus on mathematics, pupils' progress in this subject has started to accelerate. The amount of good teaching of mathematics is increasing. The curriculum for mathematics is becoming more interesting and stimulating, with more practical and hands on activities. Pupils in Year 3, for example, enjoyed researching their classmates' favourite fireworks and presenting data on their findings in a variety of ways. Support for pupils with learning difficulties in numeracy and for those who need an extra push to reach the levels of which they are capable has increased, building on the good model of support already established in literacy.

Pupils achieve well because teaching is good. In all lessons, teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn. They ensure that this is communicated to pupils so that they know why each activity is being undertaken and what they are aiming to achieve. In the best teaching,

very good account is taken of the learning needs of pupils of differing ability to provide the right amount of challenge and support. Learning support assistants are very well deployed to assist pupils with learning difficulties. Not all teaching is as effective as this. A small amount of teaching, which is satisfactory rather than good, does not give sharp enough attention to pupils' different needs at each stage in the lesson.

Care and support for pupils are very effective. A high priority is given to pupils' health and safety. Sensitive support is provided for pupils at an early stage of learning English, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for pupils who are vulnerable. A lunchtime club, for example, meets the needs of pupils who find this part of the day challenging and gives extra help to those with behavioural difficulties. One pupil spoke positively of the way in which the school has ensured that she has a small group of friends to support her.

Academic guidance is less consistent and not as strong as the pastoral support. Targets are usually used well to support progress in writing. Pupils' individual target cards contributed a good deal to the particularly good progress last year's Year 6 pupils made in writing by the time they left the school. There is some particularly good marking in both English and mathematics in Year 6. This shows pupils clearly what they have done well and also identifies exactly what they need to do next to improve their work. However, not all marking is as good as this and the use of targets in mathematics is not yet guiding pupils to improve their performance well enough.

The school is well placed to improve because leadership and management are good. This is evident in the improvements since the last inspection in writing and in the recent focused and effective attention to developing the mathematics provision. The new headteacher has won the confidence of staff, pupils, parents and governors. Parents comment very positively on improvements in communication with them. A pupil, who is a member of the school council, commented that 'good changes are being made'. The governing body has recently reorganised its structure and become more focused on the school's strategic development. There is a real commitment of staff and governors to working as a team in taking the school forward and this is underpinned by good self-evaluation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress and raise the standards they attain in mathematics.
- Make sure that all teaching, activities and support in lessons are matched closely to pupils' differing learning needs.
- Provide all pupils with clear guidance through targets and marking to help them to improve their work.

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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? | 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 capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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/or disabilities make progress | 2 |

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good are 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 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| 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

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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 |

Leadership and management

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| 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 eliminated | 2 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 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**

20 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicolas Church of England Junior School, Newbury, RG14 7LU

Thank you for making me welcome and for helping me when I visited your school. I enjoyed visiting your lessons and looking at your work. I found out that your school is a good school. The adults look after you well. You get on well with them and with each other. Your behaviour is good and this helps to make the school a pleasant and safe place in which to learn. You know a lot about how to stay fit and healthy and told me that you have many opportunities for sport. Many of you told me that you enjoy school, so it is no wonder that your attendance rate is very high.

You make a good contribution to the school and wider community. You show how well you care for others in many ways, including when you raise funds for charities. Several of you pointed out the 'friendship bench'. It was good to know that so many of you look after other pupils if they need a friend to play with.

You are making good progress with your work because teaching is good. The curriculum is interesting as well with many visits, visitors and clubs. You are lucky to have the opportunity to go on two residential visits. Your new headteacher and the other adults are keen to make your school even better. To help with this, I have asked them to do the following things.

- Speed up your progress in mathematics. The adults are already working on this but know that they need to do more because over the years you have been doing better in English and science than in mathematics.
- Make sure that all teaching, activities and support in lessons are at the right level for each of you.
- Give you clear advice, through targets and marking, to help you to improve your work.

Thank you once again. You can help by always doing your best.

Yours sincerely

Alison Grainger

Lead Inspector