

Northchurch St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117424
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326605
Inspection date	12 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Cosway

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	176
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Rosemary North
Headteacher	Mrs Eloise Haezewindt
Date of previous school inspection	25 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	New Road Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3QZ
Telephone number	01442 389040

Age group	3–9
Inspection date	12 May 2009
Inspection number	326605

Fax number

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Age group 3-9

Inspection date 12 May 2009

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress made by pupils throughout the school; the quality of teaching across the school; the provision for the Early Years and Foundation Stage children, and the effectiveness of leadership. They gathered evidence from observations of lessons, discussions with staff and pupils, analysis of parents' views and scrutiny of school documentation and policies, as well as scrutiny of pupils' work. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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 this report.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized first school, educating pupils from the ages of three to nine. Almost all pupils are White British and there is none at an early stage of learning English. Attainment on entry is slightly above national expectations. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below similar schools. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, is below the national average. Most of these pupils have specific learning difficulties. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is made for children aged three to five years in the school's Nursery and Reception class.

The school has received a number of national awards, including Healthy School and Activemark.

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 because pupils progress well in their learning and their personal development and well-being are good. It has a strong Christian ethos that promotes care and concern for others and a clear understanding of right and wrong. The Victorian building in its delightful grounds is filled with historical artefacts that fascinate and delight the children. This contributes much to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is outstanding.

By the time they reach the end of Year 2, assessments for seven-year-olds indicate exceptionally and consistently high standards. The proportions of pupils reaching above the normally expected level for their age in English and mathematics are well above the average nationally. Almost all make good progress from their levels of attainment on entry to the Nursery, through the Reception Class to the end of Year 2. Attainment at the end of Year 4 is well above that expected for nine-year-olds, with just over a quarter reaching standards that match those of 11-year-olds in reading and writing. In mathematics, more than half reach such standards. As standards are already very high when pupils enter Year 3, this represents satisfactory rather than good achievement in Years 3 and 4. The school is working to raise the levels of challenge for these older pupils so that they will make even better progress. Teachers are being made more aware of their pupils' current levels and are being set targets to try to ensure that expectations are higher. Pupils' progress is being tracked effectively now that new systems have been introduced. Where pupils fall behind, increasingly effective intervention programmes are being put in place to support them, including those with specific learning difficulties, who also progress well.

Attitudes to school are very positive. Pupils are keen to learn and work enthusiastically in class. They enjoy their lessons immensely, respect and like the staff and make many friends. All this contributes to the school's good attendance figures. The progress pupils make in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, along with many opportunities to collaborate, ensures that they are prepared well for the future. They learn about economic well-being in effective and practical ways. For example, they are growing plants in the garden that they will sell to raise money for the school. They have excellent knowledge of the importance of healthy living and understand well how to stay safe. Their behaviour in class and around school is good. Pupils determine their own class rules for behaviour and this ensures that they understand the rules and the reasons for them. Older pupils have many responsibilities, such as distributing registers, and even young pupils take turns at devising and leading prayers in assemblies. Pupils also contribute to the school community as members of the school council. Many take an active role in the local community, taking part in church services, country dancing and fund raising. This is one of the ways that the school acts, along with the church, as a focus for the whole community, bringing together people of different backgrounds and faiths. They learn about the wider world community by studying other cultures, raising money to support children in other parts of the world and studying French.

The curriculum is good, with a strong emphasis on the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. The provision for information and communication technology is effective and pupils progress well as a result. There are many trips and visitors to enhance the curriculum and the pupils both enjoy and benefit from these first-hand experiences. On the day of the inspection, a representative from a professional rugby club was leading an assembly on health and fitness and a class was visiting St Albans cathedral as part of their work in humanities. These exciting, first-hand experiences help to explain pupils' great enthusiasm for learning. Another factor is

the good teaching. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They plan lessons well to ensure that the work they set is appropriate for the different needs and abilities of the pupils in their classes. They seek interesting ways to present information and make tasks fun. In Years 3 and 4, however, pupils do not always receive enough information about how they could improve their work. This is partly because marking of work does not always pick out the key areas for improvement; it is also because pupils have relatively few opportunities to review and improve their work themselves. Some aspects of academic guidance need improvement and so, although other aspects of support, care and guidance are outstanding, it is good overall. All the children are known and cared for very well. Links with families are close and supportive. Links with external agencies give effective help to those pupils who need support. As a result, pupils with difficulties learning make good progress. Child protection procedures and safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

The new headteacher had been in post for just over four months at the time of the inspection, but had already made significant changes that have begun to raise standards. She is sharing performance data with class teachers and making them more accountable for the progress that their pupils make. Along with the deputy, she is using data effectively to initiate and monitor additional teaching to support pupils who are falling behind. Leadership and management are good and clearly focused on raising attainment. Leaders and governors rightly judge the school to be good. However, they are far from complacent and aim to improve it further. Improvement since the last inspection is good, as is the capacity to improve further. Governors contribute well, challenging the staff to continue improving, and are involved in all aspects of the school's performance. The school gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children achieve well and make good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage, reaching standards generally above average. Children's personal development is very good and they greatly enjoy learning. They approach the varied and stimulating activities the staff provides for them with zest and enthusiasm. They are able to focus and concentrate so that they do not flit from one activity to another, but persevere and learn. Their social skills are good and they play well together. Teachers and adults plan effectively and there is good teamwork. Adults' relationships with children are very good and help to foster children's confidence. Language is developed particularly well because adults are skilled at engaging children in talking about their work. Teaching is good. Teachers keep a close eye on the progress of all children and ensure that learning is on a broad front when children choose activities for themselves. Very effective use is made of the excellent outdoor area. There have been recent changes of staff and approaches, but the new leadership and management are effective. Much of the current good practice is relatively recent and needs embedding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to refine assessment processes to ensure that the older pupils' progress is tracked effectively and that teachers intervene quickly when pupils are falling behind.
- Ensure that pupils are helped to make the next steps in their learning by giving feedback that identifies clearly what they need to do to improve their work.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/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

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
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 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

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

13 May 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England (VA) First School, Northchurch, HP4 3QZ

Thank you very much for making us so welcome at your school. It was a pleasure to talk to you. A special thank you to the children we met at lunchtime, who talked about what it is like to be a pupil at your school. You were very well behaved in assembly. You showed how well you understand how to eat healthily. The two children who led the prayers were excellent and we know that many more of you do this equally well.

You said how much you like your school. We liked it too. You enjoy many of your lessons and have kind and helpful teachers. Your school gives you a good education and so you make good progress. You feel safe and cared for because the school looks after you well. By the end of Year 4, you have made good progress. You are better at reading, writing and mathematics than many children in other schools. You behave well. You help each other and do much to help people in the local community and beyond.

The teachers in charge of the school are leading it well. Your headteacher and all the staff are working hard to help you succeed. We have asked the teachers to make sure that they track your progress carefully and provide speedy support if you fall behind your targets. We also want them to give you more guidance on how you can improve your work.

Once again thank you for a lovely day.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Cosway

Lead inspector