

St Ippolyts Church of England Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117440
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326610
Inspection date	17 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	144
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 Jane Thale
Headteacher	Mrs Maggie Nelson
Date of previous school inspection	20 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ashbrook Lane St Ippolyts Hitchin Hertfordshire SG4 7PB

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	17 June 2009
Inspection number	326610

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Age group 4-11

Inspection date 17 June 2009

Inspection number 326610

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated:

- provision and achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage (the Reception age group)
- how the school is making further improvements to provision and standards in mathematics
- the main features of leadership and management and how the school is planning for the future.

The inspectors gathered evidence from records of pupils' progress, observations of lessons and breaktime activities, examples of pupils' work, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, and questionnaires and letters from parents. The main documents used by the school in its monitoring and development planning were examined. 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 a smaller than average-sized school. It mainly serves families in the immediate area but about 10% of pupils come from further afield. Pupils come from a very wide range of backgrounds. The proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. About 15% of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and a very small number of these pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English. A broadly average proportion of pupils are identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most with moderate learning difficulties. Children start the Early Years Foundation Stage (the Reception group) with levels of attainment that vary considerably but, overall, are at the nationally expected standard for their age.

Over the past year, the retiring headteacher and her successor (the deputy headteacher working as an acting headteacher) have fully shared all main leadership and management roles.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

When the school was last inspected in 2006, it was judged to be outstanding. It is a testament to the commitment and expertise of staff and governors that this is still the case. The school has continued to work in extremely close partnership with the local community it serves. One parent, echoing the views of many others, described the school as 'a stimulating, safe, happy environment for children to develop'. The driving force for the school's continuing success has been the outstanding headteacher supported by the senior leadership team. Staff speak of her inspirational leadership. Systematic professional development arrangements enable all staff to contribute to the school's rigorous self-evaluation and to maintain high standards for pupils. The very close partnership arrangements between the headteacher and her successor have enabled the school to offer continuity of provision and to promote a smooth transition in the leadership changes. The acting headteacher this year has made her own excellent contribution to continuing the extremely good provision in the school.

One of the most significant ways in which the school excels is the exceptionally high academic standards that pupils reach. These provide pupils with an excellent preparation for the next stage of their education. Achievement and progress are excellent. Standards in the national tests at the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science have generally been much higher than the national average. Pupils' computer skills are also very good. Even in year groups which have a large number of pupils who find learning more difficult, pupils make excellent progress and almost all reach at least the levels expected nationally by the time they leave Year 6. Pupils who are in the current Year 2 and Year 6 are well on track to reach the very high standards targeted for them this year.

Standards are so high because adults focus extremely well on checking that all individuals build up knowledge and skills efficiently. Teaching and learning are outstanding and tailored very well to the mixed age classes, as appropriate. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. As a result, ambitious goals are communicated very effectively to pupils. Pupils in their turn know they are expected to work hard but, equally, that lessons will be enjoyable and purposeful. One summed this up saying, 'We don't just sit and write for ages - we do things!' Excellent examples of high quality learning were seen during the inspection, such as the oldest pupils compiling records of their recent exciting stay in Devon and completing challenging investigations in mathematics. Able pupils thrive because lessons interest and stretch them. The school does a great deal to encourage any pupil identified with a particular gift or talent. Typical of this is its high quality provision in music, drama and art.

A similarly important element of the provision is the very effective programme of activities planned for pupils who find learning harder and those learning to speak English as an additional language. For example, pupils with moderate learning difficulties have very effective individual programmes. The contribution of the teaching assistants to the success of these is substantial. It typifies the strong spirit of staff teamwork that is apparent in all parts of the school. The quality of teaching is supported very effectively by the detailed arrangements to track and analyse pupil progress and to set rigorous but realistic targets for all groups of pupils.

The school is determined to carry on improving provision in any way it can. Based on careful analysis of pupils' performance, an area that is rightly being considered at present is that not all girls achieve as well in mathematics as they do in English. To address this, staff have started to involve parents more in highlighting how mathematical learning can be supported at home.

They have accurately identified that this can usefully be extended further, especially through encouraging families to share practical activities that involve mathematics and problem solving.

As at the time of the last inspection, pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The school works with parents to build extremely well on the levels of maturity pupils often bring from home. They have an excellent understanding of how to live safe and healthy lives, shown by their commitment to physical activity and a good diet. Behaviour is first rate and pupils' great enjoyment of school is evident in enthusiasm for learning and consistently high levels of attendance. Pupils show extremely high levels of spiritual, moral and social understanding. Their cultural and multi-cultural awareness are mostly very good and are supported by strengths in their work in subjects such as the arts, humanities and personal and social education. A shining example of pupils' achievements is their recent work during 'Africa Week' which broadened horizons and produced high quality work in all age groups. Pupils already show a good understanding of their roles as young citizens through their school council and by a wide range of work in the local area and with charities. Projects such as these lead to a high level of awareness of national and global issues for their age.

The curriculum has improved and is excellent. Staff have continued to develop its breadth very well since the last inspection. Lessons in all age groups increasingly link subjects together, where appropriate, to make activities more interesting and relevant. At the same time, staff ensure that any topic work is underpinned by a secure structure of the skills needed for each subject. A wide range of clubs, visits and visitors enhances the curriculum significantly. The school building is brought to life by vibrant displays of high quality work that demonstrate the great breadth and depth of activities that are available.

The quality of care, guidance and support for pupils is outstanding. Parents' and pupils' views of these arrangements are highly complimentary. Child protection, safeguarding and other health and safety procedures are rigorous, promoting children's welfare extremely well. Pupils are given high quality academic support through the effective systems for setting targets, marking, pupil self-assessment and the excellent website. There are strong links with appropriate agencies where possible for pupils who need specialist support with learning.

Highly effective leadership and management at all levels underpin all that the school achieves. Teaching staff are well equipped with the skills needed to monitor standards and to evaluate and improve the quality of provision further. The school's building and grounds have been developed to a very high standard, helped by impressive fund raising efforts from staff, governors and parents. This has provided an excellent environment for pupils. While a few parents express the wish for the school to work even more closely with them, parents' views of provision are mostly highly positive and recognise the strong communication and links with the school.

Staff and governors are giving due attention to ensuring that the school plays its part in promoting wider community cohesion and has an impact on groups outside the school itself. To this end, they have a clear policy and action plans that are being systematically evaluated. Some of the actions are relatively new, including those that aim to reach out more effectively to some families and to work even more closely with community groups. As a result, it is too early to demonstrate their impact fully. The governors play a valuable and influential role in the school. They hold the school to account while being active, knowledgeable and supportive. Working with the staff, they have developed strong links that benefit pupils, such as those with the church, the parish council, local schools and sports organisations. They have planned very thoroughly for the major staff changes when the headteacher retires. Pupils commented that, while they do not want to lose their old headteacher, they are very happy with their new

one. The shared vision of staff and governors for the future, coupled with the excellent track record of recent years, mean that the school is extremely well placed to continue to offer a high standard of education to its community.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Since the last inspection, the school has made significant improvements in provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is now outstanding. The classroom has been developed well to further promote children's confidence and independent learning. The adjacent outdoor space is small but used to the full and staff extend outdoor learning to the main playground as needed. All activities are underpinned by a very careful system of observation and assessment so that learning can be designed to have maximum effect. As a result, children make rapid progress, including the youngest who have a relatively short time in Reception. Children reach standards that are consistently above national expectations by the start of Year 1. The children mix very well with the Year 1 children in the same class, who set them good examples. Activities are exciting and engaging, while being always focused on clear, relevant learning objectives. Children's welfare needs are fully met, so that they settle into school quickly. Their attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. The leadership of this age group is excellent. The dynamic class teacher receives extremely good support from a very able nursery nurse. Between them, they show an exceptional knowledge of the required curriculum and of how children develop and learn.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue the initiative to improve the consistency of girls' achievement in mathematics, including encouraging practical activities at home which consolidate and extend learning in school.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	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
The extent to which 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 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

18 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ippolyt's Church of England Aided Primary School, Hitchin SG4 7PB

Thank you very much for looking after us when we came to inspect your school recently. We spent a very enjoyable day meeting you and talking to so many of you.

We found that your school is outstanding. These are some of the best things about it.

- Children in the Reception class get an excellent start to school life.
- You told us how much you enjoy school and all it offers you.
- You make extremely good progress in your work and reach high standards.
- You especially like the clubs, visits and special events such as Africa Week.
- You are cared for and taught extremely well and have plenty of exciting and challenging activities in lessons.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives.
- You make an outstanding contribution to your community through activities such as the school council and your charity work.
- The teachers have set up really good systems for checking that you all achieve well and making sure you have extra adult help if you need it.
- The headteachers, staff and governors make sure your school keeps on providing an excellent education for you all.
- Your building and grounds have been developed extremely well so that you have an excellent setting in which to learn, and there are lovely displays of your work all around the school.

We have asked the adults to look at one area to improve your splendid school even more. In your school, some of the girls do not reach standards in mathematics that are as high as their English standards. We think they could be helped with this by doing some practical activities at home, such as handling money, weighing, measuring and solving problems that involve numbers or shapes. Girls, we are sure that you can meet any challenges your teachers and parents set for you and hope you will try hard and gain more confidence with this.

We send our very best wishes to all of you for the future.

Yours faithfully

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector