

# St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Hitchin

## Inspection report

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117467
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326618
<b>Inspection date</b>	24 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ruth Frith

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	261
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Ravinder Theara
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Christine Cernik
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 February 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Benslow Lane Hitchin Hertfordshire SG4 9RD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462459160
<b>Fax number</b>	01462436443

<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection date</b>	24 March 2009
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## Introduction

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

- the quality of teaching and learning to ensure outstanding progress, particularly at Key Stage 2
- pupils' contribution to the community
- the richness of the curriculum and its impact on pupils' learning and progress

The inspectors gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation form, lesson observations, discussions with staff, governors and pupils, pupils' work, information that the school keeps on how well pupils are doing, the school development plan and an analysis of the parents' questionnaire responses. 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 this report.

## Description of the school

St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary is larger than many primary schools. Most children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage Nursery and then move into Reception. Many enter school with attainment that is lower than that usually seen in children of this age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average and the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is low. Almost 20% of the pupils come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds and most of these speak English as an additional language. Very few are at the early stages of learning English. Since the beginning of the current school year, four teachers have joined the school, including the deputy headteacher.

The school has achieved the Activemark for sports and Healthy School status in recognition of its work.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where the vibrant, friendly and supportive environment helps pupils to flourish. The school's success reflects excellent leadership and management that are focussed clearly on promoting pupils' personal development and well-being, and on raising standards. This results in exceptional care and personal development of pupils, an exciting curriculum and achievement that is, typically, outstanding. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school based on her high aspirations and commitment to the pupils, their families and the local community. She gives a clear lead to members of staff who, in turn, work as a very effective team sharing her sense of purpose and vision for the school. Staff take on a variety of management responsibilities very successfully as duties are well allocated, staff strengths are recognised and effective training given to keep them up-to-date with current initiatives. Staff enjoy what they do and are fully committed to improving their work. Morale is high and their work truly reflects the school's motto of 'Every Lesson Counts'.

Pupils, parents and governors thoroughly enjoy being part of the school community. Parents are very positive about the school and comments such as the following reflect this well: 'We think St Andrew's is an outstanding school in every way. The staff are excellent and the headteacher superb - very committed, very approachable and caring' and, 'As parents we could not be happier with the school.' Governors are very knowledgeable, which gives them confidence to ask questions both about standards and how these could be improved. Governors' work has improved significantly over the last few years both in committees and through their visits. They work particularly well with staff, by observing lessons to get a clear picture of what it is like to be a pupil in the school. Systems for checking how well the school is doing and identifying what it could do better are particularly good. These reflect the school's consistent drive for improvement and have been instrumental in its exceptionally good improvement since the last inspection; the school's capacity to improve further is outstanding.

Pupils are proud of their school and express this in the enthusiastic way they talk about their work and what they do. Gains in learning are never less than good and are usually outstanding, because teaching is frequently excellent and pupils respond extremely well to the challenges set. A focus on raising standards and improving teaching are bringing greater consistency to achievement and standards, but results in national assessments have varied. Following a trend of well-above average to exceptionally high standards over several years there was a dip in standards at Key Stage 1 in 2007 and in Key Stage 2 in 2008. On occasion, progress has been good rather than outstanding, particularly at Key Stage 2. Standards have risen and currently pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 are working at exceptionally high levels in English, mathematics and science. In Year 6, pupils are on course to meet the very challenging and ambitious targets set. There is no complacency amongst staff. They constantly strive to improve their practice in order to raise standards further. The school's excellent systems to check how well pupils are doing, and analysis of their work, highlight areas for improvement.

A key feature of the teaching is the way staff capture pupils' interest by using a good range of teaching styles and ensuring that learning is very active. For example, Year 3 pupils thoroughly enjoyed their French lesson as they tried to guess what was inside a present and waited in anticipation as the wrapping was unfolded. Their progress in learning new vocabulary and practising speaking unfamiliar words was undertaken within a stimulating environment where they felt confident to 'have a go'. Teaching styles and resources in Year 1 are used particularly well to ensure that pupils make a very smooth transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Throughout the school, the planning of lessons is of a high standard. Teachers have a very clear understanding of what they want pupils to learn and share this with them. Consequently, pupils know what is expected of them. Very effective assessment and recording procedures ensure that work is matched well to pupils' needs. Thus, pupils feel they can be successful and this helps develop their interest in learning and their self-esteem.

Pupils are extremely well looked after and their academic guidance is excellent. They are very clear about how to improve their work and learning. They benefit greatly from the support and guidance given in lessons, through comments in their books and the use of targets for the next steps in their learning. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their schooling and their future lives. The expertise of specialist teachers and teaching assistants is used extremely well to support those who find some aspects of learning difficult or need an extra boost to move them onto the next level. Specialist work with pupils who speak English as an additional language is very effective; it ensures their full involvement in lessons and their rate of progress matches that of others. The knowledge and understanding of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are celebrated well. Pupils who have a particular talent, or can work at a higher level than most, are challenged very well so they also make excellent progress. For example, in the current Year 6 many pupils are working at levels above expectations for their age in English, mathematics and science.

A key feature of the school's curriculum is the way in which it engenders excitement and enjoyment in pupils' learning. They arrive in the morning keen to start the day and attendance is high. Good links between subjects and the development of a curriculum to extend pupils' skills make learning easier and relevant to pupils. A wide range of popular enrichment activities such as clubs, visitors and visits widens pupils' learning and help them to develop new skills. Year 5 pupils confirm this as they took part in a 'Greek Day' and said, 'This is fun - we are doing so many things'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely strong. They develop a keen spiritual awareness through many areas of study and through thinking about themselves and their place within the world. They have a high level of understanding of Britain as a diverse society, celebrate a range of cultures and learn about a variety of faiths and belief systems. They gain a very good understanding of the global community by writing to pupils in France and Germany.

The particularly good focus on developing pupils' personal, social and health education results in their exceptional behaviour and relationships with staff and each other. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to live safe and healthy lives through, for example, plenty of energetic, but sensible exercise during playtimes and eating a good balanced diet. The pupils' contribution to the school community and beyond is also particularly well developed. Pupils care about others and realise the impact of their actions. These qualities help to create a harmonious community and caring school ethos. Pupils contribute to school improvements by putting their ideas to the school council, by taking on a range of responsibilities and caring for the environment. They take part in events in the local community and raise funds for a wide range of charities. The pupils' excellent contribution to the community, together with the school's very effective work in partnership with others, ensures the school makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

Outstanding leadership and management have created an excellent induction programme that ensures that children settle into school quickly and make an excellent start to school life in the

Nursery and Reception classes. Very effective links with parents begin with home visits prior to children starting school and are maintained through regular meetings. Children make outstanding progress in all areas of learning, particularly in their personal development. They greatly enjoy the exciting range of activities and work extremely well together. Relationships and behaviour are exemplary. Children use the space and good range of resources well to support their learning and develop their confidence and independence. They learn from their experiences to build on ideas and find out things for themselves. This was seen to very good effect in their own choices of follow-up activities, after visiting a farm and learning about new life. Teaching is outstanding. Teachers and their assistants quickly identify the needs of each child, observe responses and keep very detailed records of progress in all areas of learning. Basic skills are taught very effectively to meet the full range of children's needs. The indoor and outdoor areas are presented very well to encourage curiosity and to engage children's interests. Wide ranging and very good resources reinforce the enjoyable and challenging environment and extend children's knowledge and understanding exceptionally well. Very good arrangements are in place to promote children's welfare and ensure their safety, health and wellbeing. They follow routines which develop good hygiene practices and learn how to stay safe and healthy. By the time they enter Year 1, almost all children achieve the expected goals in all areas of learning with over half of pupils exceeding these.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Embed improvement in teaching to sustain outstanding progress in all years consistently over time.



**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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

<b>How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?</b>	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>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.



## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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?	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

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**Annex B**

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

25 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Andrew's C of E Voluntary Aided Primary School Hitchin SG4 9RD

You may remember that inspectors recently visited your school to talk to you about what you do and what you learn. Thank you for making us feel so welcome. You and your parents said that you go to a very good school. We agree and think St Andrew's School is outstanding. We really enjoyed our visit and if you read on further you will see some of the things we found out.

- You love learning, try very hard and usually make excellent progress. Consequently, by the time you leave school, you frequently reach standards that are much higher than those we often see in Year 6.
- You thoroughly enjoy school, attend regularly and arrive on time. Well done!
- You behave exceptionally well, get on with each other and make good friends.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and we are pleased to see that most of you exercise a lot and take part in a good range of sporting activities.
- Staff look after you well at school and you say you feel safe. We were also pleased to find out that you know what to do if you are upset or worried and want someone to talk to.
- You contribute a great deal to the school and wider community. Thank you to those of you who met with an inspector at lunchtime. You represented the views of others very well.
- Staff are all very keen to do the best they can for you. Teaching is exceptionally good and those of you who find learning difficult do very well because of the extra help you get.

Mrs Cernik manages and leads the school exceptionally well and staff and governors give her lots of help. You are currently making excellent progress, but sometimes this slows so they have all agreed to focus on ensuring that you make the best possible progress at all times. We know you will respond well to their efforts because you really like learning and we are sure you will all continue to try hard and do your best.

We left your school with many happy memories and wish you all well.

Yours faithfully

Ruth Frith

Lead inspector