

Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117490
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326627
Inspection date	20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

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)	371
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 Dilys Manoy
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Witchell
Date of previous school inspection	19 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	15 London Road Welwyn Hertfordshire AL6 9DJ
Telephone number	01438714169
Fax number	01438716472

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). In addition, the following issues were investigated:

- How good is the progress of the current Year 6 pupils and are they achieving well?
- What are the key improvements in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection?
- How well do teachers with subject responsibilities contribute to the school's monitoring and evaluation procedures?

Evidence was gathered from the school's analysis of pupils' progress, a scrutiny of samples of their work and observations of pupils in lessons. Discussions were held with staff, governors and pupils. In addition, the responses of parents' questionnaires were analysed and their comments taken into account. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the 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

St Mary's is much larger than most primary schools. The EYFS currently consists of a single Reception class. In January a further Reception class will open to provide for the younger EYFS Reception Year children. There is an after school club that is managed by the YMCA.

A large majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. There are a few pupils from a number of other ethnic backgrounds. There are no pupils who are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Most of these pupils have either specific learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Welwyn St Mary's is a good school. The headteacher has maintained the many strengths found at the time of the previous inspection and has effectively steered the school's improvement, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning, since that time. Standards are above average and pupils make good progress academically and outstanding progress in their personal development. The school has a friendly and very supportive atmosphere where, as one parent described it, 'there is a real sense of community spirit'.

A whole school focus on strengthening pupils' involvement in their learning has paid off. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection where some was satisfactory. This is not now the case and teaching and learning are good with some lessons being outstanding. In all classrooms, teachers manage the pupils exceptionally well and relationships are excellent. Classes have a calm and purposeful atmosphere in which pupils learn happily. In all lessons, pupils know what is to be learned. In the best lessons, teachers make the success criteria clear to pupils. As a result, progress here is stronger because pupils know what they have to do to meet the objectives.

Children's attainment on entry to the EYFS varies each year and currently children's skills are similar to those expected. Progress is good and, by the time they enter Year 1 most children attain the expected goals and a minority exceed them. Progress is good in the infant classes and standards by the end of Year 2 are above average overall, though in writing standards are close to the national average. In reading, standards are much above average and occasionally, as in 2007, exceptionally high. This is due to the good and focused provision for reading. Progress continues to be good in Years 3 - 6 and, by the time that they leave school, standards are above average. In English, in 2007 and 2008, standards have been much higher in reading than in writing. The school is keenly aware of this, and good improvement procedures have been put into place to accelerate learning in writing. For example, there has been a refining of the way that spelling and grammar are taught, and in addition, more opportunities are provided for pupils to write extended pieces. There are indications from pupils' books that this is boosting progress and the current Year 6 pupils are on course to attain higher standards in writing and to achieve well in other subjects too.

Pastoral support is excellent and this is recognised by parents who were almost unanimous in saying that their children enjoy school and that they are safe in school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and pupils become confident, articulate young people who are prepared well for their move to secondary education. They are extremely knowledgeable about how to stay healthy, and are enthusiastic participants in the many opportunities for physical activities, including during lunch playtimes. Pupils thoroughly enjoy being at school. 'We look forward to meeting our friends and to our lessons', as one school councillor commented. Attendance is good. Behaviour is excellent in lessons and good overall because there is some occasional boisterous behaviour. However, the school council were unanimous in saying that there is no bullying. 'We don't let that happen and we look after other children'. Pupils of all ages are keen to raise money for charities and, particularly as they get older, take on a wide range of responsibilities including being 'yellow banders' who encourage younger pupils to eat well, lead play for Key Stage 1 pupils and act as 'Fix-it Friends' who are trained to mediate and help other pupils in the playground. Pupils have a good understanding of their targets, particularly in literacy and they are given good guidance both by teachers' marking and also by checking progress towards targets in literacy and numeracy.

However, as yet, there are not systems in place to review and record pupils' progress in science and information and communication technology (ICT).

Although parents are almost unanimous in their support of most aspects of the work of the school, a number raised the issue of communication and opportunity for parents to be consulted. This matter was investigated and no evidence could be found to support this view. The school provides weekly newsletters to parents that are uploaded regularly onto the school website. There is an annual questionnaire to check parents' views, regular consultation evenings and also many opportunities for parents to meet with staff to find out how the school operates. These include workshops for new approaches taken by the school such as helping with reading and writing and how letters and sounds are taught. In addition, there is a very good induction programme for parents and their children on entering the school in the EYFS, such as the meeting, which took place during the inspection. In addition, and unusually, the school has recently introduced a parent council. The purpose of this is to canvas parents' views and also to help to promote further understanding of the school. Taken together, these processes exceed those found in most schools.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher continues to provide good leadership. She is ably supported by all the staff and the recently reviewed senior leadership team also provide good leadership and management. Because the management of the school is based on teams of teachers working together, teamwork is strong and staff morale high. There are good systems in place to monitor and evaluate the school's provision and pupils' progress and this has resulted in a good quality improvement plan that has accurately identified the key areas for improvement and is a useful tool to secure further improvement. Teachers with subject responsibilities fulfil their role well. They are closely involved in checking both the school's provision and pupils' progress, particularly in English and mathematics. There has been added rigour brought to the accountability processes since the previous inspection. There has been a whole school focus on making teachers more accountable for pupils' progress. Team leaders check pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics on a termly basis and this helps to ensure that any pupils in danger of slipping behind are quickly identified and good plans put into place to address this. Governors are well informed, know the school well and provide good support and challenge. This, and the consistent improvements in provision and continuing good achievement, demonstrates that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the EYFS is good. Children achieve well in all areas of learning because of effective teaching. They are happy, well behaved, secure and well motivated. Close links with parents, and with local nursery schools, support them in their early development, and in settling in to school. Children's personal and social skills are good because staff support them well in a safe environment. They learn to share, take turns and listen. They are confident to engage and to explain what they are learning to visitors, and they develop responsibility and independence through making choices. Children enjoy lessons and learning because teachers provide a good range of opportunities to learn through practical activities both indoors and outdoors. In addition, they assess children's achievements well and this helps to ensure that activities are set to match children's interests and to provide challenge. Teaching rightly focuses particularly on developing pupils' communication, language, literacy and numeracy skills. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate progress in writing throughout the school.
- Extend the good arrangements for tracking pupils' progress to include science and ICT.

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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	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

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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Welwyn
AL6 9DJ

On behalf of the inspectors, I would like to thank you very much for making us so welcome when we came to your school. We enjoyed our visit and we particularly enjoyed listening to your orchestra at lunchtime and hearing you sing so well in assembly! Yours is a good school and we agree with what you told us about your school being a fun place to learn. Here is a list of some of the things that are good about your school:

- You make good progress in your learning and achieve standards that are above average.
- All the adults look after you really well and make you feel safe in school.
- The teachers make sure that you have interesting activities to do and help you to enjoy school and learning.
- Your personal development is outstanding. Your behaviour is good, you have very positive attitudes to each other and the adults and you have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy.
- There are plenty of exciting things for you to do both in school and on visits and in clubs.
- Your headteacher leads the school well and she is supported well by the staff and governors who also do a good job.

All schools can do even better, and we have asked your staff to do two things. Firstly, to make sure that you make as good progress in your writing as you do in reading and numeracy. Secondly, for your teachers to check your progress in science and ICT as well as they do in reading, writing and mathematics.

Finally, we would like to thank you once again for all your help. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Sadler

Lead inspector