

Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115187
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	331583
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Best

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)	127
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 Caroline Page
Headteacher	Mrs Sophie Massey
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Tollesbury Road Tolleshunt d'Arcy Maldon Essex CM9 8UB

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller-than-average primary school serves the village of Tolleshunt D'Arcy and the surrounding rural area. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. About 10% of pupils are from Traveller families and, although settled in the area, travel during the course of the school year. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national average and includes a range of needs. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is broadly similar to other schools.

Children at Early Years Foundation Stage usually join the school in the September following their fourth birthday. On entry, their skills and experiences are broadly similar to those expected for children of this age, but vary from year to year as numbers in each cohort are relatively small.

The school was given a notice to improve when it was inspected in March 2008. It was visited by an Ofsted inspector in November 2008 to monitor its progress. The school was led by an executive headteacher until December 2008 when the current headteacher took over. The number on roll is lower than at the time of the last inspection but is now rising.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is an improving school whose overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Improvements, notably in pupils' achievement, have been secured by the strong and effective leadership of the new headteacher. Working with the staff, governors and the local authority, she has successfully built and accelerated the progress made under the executive headteacher. Parents are supportive of the school and pleased with its development. The school has a sound capacity for further improvement.

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average at the end of Years 2 and 6. Pupils in Year 6, supported by individual and small group tuition, have worked hard this year to improve the standards of their work from a low base and have exceeded the suitably challenging targets set for them this year, other than in writing. There has also been a dip in this year's writing results at the end of Year 2. Although pupils across the school are often imaginative in what they write, their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling is not consistently accurate enough to secure the higher levels. Furthermore, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length or for a wide enough range of different purposes in English or in other subjects. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Good practice is developing but this is not yet consistent across the school because of the variability in teachers' expectations and pupils' understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. Although teachers regularly plan work for pupils of different abilities, their lesson introductions do not always make clear the goals they expect these different groups to reach. Pupils have individual targets but they are not fully aware of these in practical terms because the language is not easy for them to understand. As a result, pupils' progress is satisfactory rather than good.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Attendance has improved and is similar to the national average. Pupils' enjoyment of school has improved and is now good. They have a good understanding of keeping safe and continue to demonstrate an appreciation of healthy lifestyles. Behaviour is satisfactory, with the vast majority of pupils responding well to the school's expectations. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community and are appropriately prepared for the next stage of their education. These outcomes reflect the satisfactory provision for pupils' care, support and guidance: the quality of the school's pastoral care and support is good, with all necessary safeguarding procedures and training in place. Academic guidance is satisfactory.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is highly committed to raising standards and is successfully leading the development of the school's vision and the planning for its achievement. Good progress has been made in developing links with other providers, outside experts and parents, particularly those who do not visit the school on a regular basis. The roles of subject leaders are developing and they, along with governors and other managers, are taking an increasing part in monitoring and evaluating aspects of the school's work. However, much is newly in place and systems have yet to acquire the full rigour required to ensure that challenging targets are consistently met.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a good start to their school life in this welcoming and effective setting. They make good progress and, by the start of Year 1, most

meet or exceed the early learning goals. Staff provide children with a good balance of child-chosen and adult-led activities. Very good use is made of the large classroom and easily accessible outdoor areas, with children making decisions about what they are going to do. They successfully sustain their interest and concentration under the careful supervision of staff who provide the right balance of help and guidance. This ensures that children's learning is purposeful and that they develop and master important skills. Good resources, especially in the outdoor area, are well used to give children plenty of practical experiences that form the basis of their understanding, for example, by counting and recording information from a traffic survey. The development of reading and writing skills is well integrated into the daily routines and many of the current cohort show much imagination and a good grasp of interesting vocabulary. The staff team is well led and works closely together. They know their children well and accurately check on how well each individual is progressing to identify what they need to learn next. Staff maintain good records of children's achievements.

What the school should do to improve further

Raise standards in writing in English by:

- developing pupils' accuracy in the use of grammar, punctuation and spelling
- providing them with regular opportunities to write, at length and for a range of different purposes, in English and in other subjects.

Improve the match of planned work to meet pupils' needs by setting clear learning goals and actively involving them in understanding the next steps in their work.

Develop the role of subject leaders and other managers in monitoring and supporting improvements in standards and provision to enable pupils to consistently meet their challenging targets.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards at the end of Year 6 are broadly average in mathematics and science but below average in English because standards in writing are much lower than in reading. The weaker aspects of writing lie in pupils' use of accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation and their ability to compile extended pieces of work. This represents an improvement in standards in both mathematics and science compared with the previous two years. In English, standards in reading have benefited from the school's efforts to promote wider reading, especially for boys. At the end of Year 2, standards in mathematics are above average, average in reading and below average in writing. Overall, standards have been maintained at a broadly average level.

At Key Stage 1, differences in standards and progress between boys and girls are not significant. However, although improved this year, there remain important differences in the standards and progress of pupils in English at Key Stage 2. The school has worked closely with the county's Traveller service to successfully support pupils and their progress is satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from the extra support they receive and make satisfactory progress. Although more able pupils make satisfactory progress overall, they are not challenged consistently enough in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils say that their enjoyment of school is now good because of the steps taken by the leadership to improve the quality of learning and standards of behaviour, and this is endorsed by their parents in their responses to the inspection questionnaire. The school's emphasis on helping pupils develop a good understanding of keeping safe has strengthened their confidence and self-esteem. The vast majority of pupils behave well in lessons and around the school but there remain a few older pupils whose behaviour, while acceptable most of the time, is still occasionally challenging. Pupils' contribution to the community is satisfactory: having focused on building up the school community, pupils are now well placed to take a greater part in local community affairs. Their understanding of healthy lifestyles continues to be good, supported by their keen participation in a range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils have a sound understanding of their own cultures but their knowledge and understanding of global faiths and cultures is less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils are willing learners and respond positively to the different styles of teaching being developed in the school. The increased emphasis on practical activities that challenge pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills is successfully helping to maintain their interest and concentration and reduce incidents of disruption. At the start of each lesson, teachers share the learning intentions and the criteria by which they will judge pupils' success. However, practice varies and, at times, too much emphasis is placed on lesson content. Consequently, although the needs of pupils who learn at different rates is planned for, the success criteria are not closely enough linked to what pupils are likely to achieve. As a result, pupils are not involved closely enough in checking and improving their work, and teachers' expectations of what they can achieve are not sufficiently challenging.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's provision for the curriculum and other activities is satisfactory. The school has adopted a common planning format that emphasises the importance of teachers taking account of the needs and abilities of pupils in mixed-aged classes, although this does not always follow through in practice. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed in a satisfactory manner but opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across different subjects are not yet embedded. A range of additional programmes for pupils at risk of falling behind in English and mathematics are also provided. French is taught as a modern language, with regular opportunities provided for pupils to practise and develop their spoken and reading skills.

Visits and visitors support the curriculum and the school makes effective use of the rich resources of the locality. Links with a school in China have recently been established to help pupils develop their wider understanding of global cultures. Pupils take part in a good range of extra-curricular sporting and other activities. The involvement of outside providers, as well as the school staff, provide variety and interest to pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Procedures for safeguarding children reflect current requirements and staff training is up-to-date. The school has all the necessary policies in place and maintains the required records of any incidents. Pupils say they are happy to turn to adults for support, should they need it. There is good support for specific groups of pupils that draws well on outside expertise and services. Pupils' work is regularly marked. Written comments sometimes include advice as to how work can be improved but pupils are not always clear about how they are to achieve this. Pupils have personal targets which are set by their teachers. However, these are not always sufficiently challenging, easily recalled by pupils or consistently referred to in marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is actively developing the role of staff and governors in evaluating the school's work and identifying priorities for improvement. Pupils voice their ideas and opinions informally through discussions and more formally through the school council. Parents are being involved, for example, through their membership of a working party on implementing the school's action plan for community cohesion, the provision for which is satisfactory. A comprehensive analysis of the school community and learners' needs has been completed and an action plan drawn up which is now in the process of implementation. The school has worked closely with officers from the local authority to monitor and support teaching and learning in order to improve pupils' progress and raise standards. Subject leaders and other managers continue to benefit from the support of outside expertise in developing their role. However, this is at early stage of development in terms of their impact on improving standards and achievement. Support staff are generally well deployed in supporting pupils' specific needs and there is a greater link developing between spending decisions and pupils' achievement. The governing body is now better informed, particularly about target setting, in order to more rigorously challenge and hold the school to account.

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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?	3
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	3

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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
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	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas Church of England VA Primary School, Maldon, CM9 8UB

Thank you very much for making me welcome when I visited your school last week. You were all very busy with the district sports, visiting your new school and preparing for your end-of-term performances so I was particularly grateful to all those of you who made time to speak to me. When your school was inspected in March 2008, the standards of your work were not high enough and many of you were not making satisfactory progress. I am pleased to say that, through your hard work and that of the staff and governors, the school has improved. Well done, everyone!

You have a good understanding of keeping fit and healthy, and how to keep safe. Many of you told me how much you now enjoy coming to school and, in their reply to the questionnaire, your parents agree. Your attendance has improved and so has the behaviour, both in lessons and around the school. The vast majority of you behave well at all times but a small number of older pupils still find it hard to maintain their good behaviour all the time - do keep trying hard.

Mrs Massey helped me to decide the most important things for the school to do now. First of all, the standard of your writing needs to be improved. You often have good ideas but your use of grammar, punctuation and spelling is not always accurate and many of you do not regularly write at length and for different purposes in English and in other subjects. Second, I have asked your teachers to make sure the work they give you is challenging and that you can be more involved in improving what you learn by having clear goals to achieve. Third, Mrs Massey needs help from key staff and managers in keeping a close eye on how well you are doing and making sure you can meet the challenging targets you are being set. They need to learn how to do this so that they can all help each other. You can help by working hard and always trying to do your best.

I send my good wishes to those of you leaving to move on to your new schools.

Yours faithfully

Mike Best

Lead inspector