

Countess Anne Church of England (VA) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117482
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339016
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2009
Reporting inspector	John Laver

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Scandrett
Headteacher	Mr David Lodge
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons and two assemblies, held meetings with staff, governors, groups of pupils and parents and observed other activities such as after-school clubs. They observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books and a variety of documentation, including 17 parental questionnaires and 51 pupil questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- Pupils' progress, especially in writing
- How well pupils develop as individuals, and how their personal development underpins progress
- How effectively developments in teaching and the curriculum have impacted on standards and progress
- How well children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making progress and carrying this progress through to the next stage of their education
- How well the school's leadership is driving through improvement.

Information about the school

The majority of pupils in this slightly smaller than average primary school are from White British backgrounds, although a substantial minority are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest proportion of these pupils is from Black or Black British-African backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, mainly relating to emotional or behavioural issues or weaknesses in numeracy or literacy, is close to average. The percentage of pupils whose first language is not English is slightly above average. A higher proportion of pupils than average joins or leaves the school other than at the usual times. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its Reception class.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

Countess Anne Primary is a good school. It has built on successes evident in the previous inspection. In particular, although standards are broadly average by the time pupils leave the school, their progress has improved. At the same time, the school has been very successful in nurturing pupils' personal development. This is much appreciated by parents and the pupils themselves. They talk of the school being a caring, welcoming place. Although attendance, which is improving, is below average, most pupils enjoy coming to school, behave well and have a positive attitude towards learning, partly because of the outstanding curriculum. The school is very inclusive, successfully integrating the substantial proportion of pupils, sometimes vulnerable ones, who join the school at different times. Particular strengths are pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which has led to improved behaviour, and the school's outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Pupils are very active in the school and local community as well as having a well developed perspective on cultural diversity in Britain and other parts of the world.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in their learning and personal development. Until recently the school had variable success in building on academic skills when these children joined the main school. Standards in key skills, particularly literacy, were below average for seven year-olds. Standards were also below average for eleven-year-olds in 2008. This was partly because the school had to absorb a substantial proportion of pupils from elsewhere and had to work hard to integrate them at the top end of the school. The unvalidated test results for 2009 show a recovery in standards, with most pupils making good progress. The inspection confirmed that nearly all groups of pupils make equally good progress. Pupils with particular learning needs, those whose first language is not English, those from various ethnic backgrounds, and those identified as being gifted and talented, are all making good progress. Previous differences in the rate of progress of boys and girls are now less pronounced. Although progress in writing has improved since the previous inspection, it remains, along with speaking skills, an area of relative weakness, so that not all pupils are as well prepared for the next phase of their education as they might be. Some inconsistencies in the level of challenge in teaching mean that a very small number of higher attainers do not always make as much progress as they should in lessons, despite better planning for their needs. Teaching is good, and sometimes it is outstanding. The most effective teaching makes good use of assessment to boost learning and shows pupils clearly how to move to the next level. This use of assessment has improved since the previous inspection, although the school recognises it is still used inconsistently in lessons.

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Pupils develop as responsible citizens who get on very well together, enjoy taking responsibility and participate enthusiastically in charity work. They also greatly appreciate the range of clubs and trips, including residential visits.

The leadership knows the school well, evaluates most aspects of its performance accurately and has implemented appropriate plans for improvement. There is thorough monitoring, leading to success in improving progress and furthering pupils' personal development. This success builds on developments in teaching and learning since the previous inspection, and shows that the school has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise standards and improve progress in spoken English and writing in a wider range of subjects by:
 - ensuring that the pace and challenge of teaching more consistently matches the needs of all higher-attaining pupils
 - using assessment to more consistently create opportunities which would enable pupils to build on their learning and move to the next level.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Lessons observed by inspectors and the work scrutinised showed that pupils have a positive attitude towards learning and make good progress. Nearly all groups of pupils share in this progress, although occasionally a small minority of more able pupils do not achieve as well as they could because of insufficient pace and challenge in the tasks set. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Excellent spiritual development is evident both in assemblies, which give good opportunities for reflection, and in pupils' projects on the school's Malawi link. Excellent provision in music and art contributes strongly to pupils' cultural awareness. Strengths in social and moral development are very evident in the way all pupils relate well to each other both in and out of lessons.

The results of recent national tests and the inspection confirm average standards and good progress. Some gifted and talented pupils make good progress, helped by extra activities such as workshops run in conjunction with other local schools. Teaching assistants work well with vulnerable pupils, who share in the good progress made by other groups, including those whose first language is not English.

Pupils enjoy the responsibility of helping each other through the school council and other roles. They have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, and there is a good take-up of sports activities. Pupils stay safe and older pupils are confident that any behavioural issues will be resolved promptly by the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

There are several strengths in the quality of teaching. In the most successful lessons, the teaching is briskly paced, enthusiastic and challenging. Teachers use pupils' targets and other means of assessment very effectively to show pupils how to improve their learning and build on their skills. Teachers are skilled in setting up active learning opportunities, so that, for example, pupils routinely share ideas and learn with their partners. There is very little unsatisfactory teaching. On the very few occasions where the teaching is less effective, the pace is too slow, activities are insufficiently challenging to move higher attaining pupils on quickly enough, and some pupils are passive for too long. Pupils appreciate the outstanding curriculum, talking enthusiastically about their projects on other countries. They love the residential trips and other visits, and benefit from specialist provision in sport and particularly music, exemplified in the school choir. There is very good provision for vulnerable pupils, especially those with particular learning or emotional issues. They are very well supported within school and by outside agencies. The school also works hard to improve attendance, although it remains below the national average. The school's tracking systems identify pupils at risk of underachieving and they receive well targeted support, as do gifted and talented pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The head teacher and other staff have worked successfully since the previous inspection to build on existing successes, and they are supported well by knowledgeable and active governors. One of the notable successes of the school is its promotion of equality of opportunity and ensuring lack of discrimination for pupils from all backgrounds. There are robust systems to ensure pupils' safety. There are good links with other local schools. These provide opportunities for more sports provision and joint curriculum projects, for example in science.

Almost all teaching staff have responsibilities such as leading subject areas. Along with the senior leadership, these subject leaders monitor teaching and learning, and this has helped to develop effective links between different subjects and has begun to encourage more opportunities for writing in different contexts. Planning for further improvement is relevant, based as it is on accurate self-evaluation which involves all staff. The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Pupils have a high profile in the local community, for example through their work in musical performance and charity work. They also develop a good awareness of the nature of Britain's diverse society. They are knowledgeable about the implications of the school's link with Malawi, and their excellent understanding of sensitive issues such as race relations was very evident in their imaginative multi-media work on the American civil rights movement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's standards on entry to Reception are quite variable, although overall they are just below expectations, particularly in language and other communication skills. Children are more developed in some aspects of personal development. Whilst in the Reception class, children make good progress in all areas of learning. By the time they join Year 1, many have skills and knowledge above expectations for their age. This is the result of good teaching and good leadership and management, evident in the planning and the progress observed in lessons. For example, numeracy sessions were observed which involved active number-counting activities which children enjoyed and which led to good progress. There is a bright and attractive indoor learning environment. The school recognises the desirability of developing more resources in the outdoor learning area. Parents are involved well in children's learning, and they are very appreciative of the good care and guidance provided for their children. Children feel secure and enjoy school, partly because there are well established routines which help children to settle quickly. There is some good use of assessment when planning for most activities inside and outside of the classroom. However, there is less effective use of prior assessment in helping children to progress in their language and communication skills. Occasionally children spend too long sitting on the carpet and this is when progress slows. They make more progress when engaged both in child-initiated and adult-initiated activities.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

There were relatively few questionnaires returned, but those parents that did respond were positive about the impact of the school on their children's well being. Most parents are very confident that their children are well looked after and enjoy school, especially the enrichment activities which take place towards the end of the week. Typical of the response were statements such as 'the school has a strong sense of community' and it is a 'very friendly, welcoming school.' A small minority of parents believe that the very few

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instances of unsatisfactory behaviour could sometimes be managed more effectively. Inspection findings support parents' positive views of the school, particularly about the good level of support and care. The inspection team acknowledges parental recognition that very occasionally there could be more challenge in the teaching to help a small minority of pupils progress more quickly. However, the inspection team believes that the school works hard and successfully to manage behaviour and that the great majority of pupils make good progress in lessons.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Countess Anne Church of England (VA) Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 17 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 197 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	71	5	29	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	65	6	35	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	11	65	6	35	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	76	4	24	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	14	82	3	18	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	65	6	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	71	5	29	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	11	65	4	24	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	71	5	29	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	53	7	41	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	41	8	47	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	14	82	3	18	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	76	4	24	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



16 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Countess Anne Church of England (VA) Primary School, Hatfield, AL10 BAX

Thank you for greeting us so enthusiastically when we visited your school recently. You were very polite and friendly when telling us about your school. We enjoyed seeing you working in lessons and enjoying yourself in other activities like singing.

You get a good education. Teachers teach you well and you make good progress, whatever your background. Your standard of work is similar to that of pupils in many other schools. You are all treated fairly and get on very well together. You are now doing better in your writing. We agree with you when most of you tell us that you are safe in school and that you behave well. You told us about the very successful trips which the school organises. We know that you like the topics you learn. The school cares for you very well, and gives you lots of help when any of you have problems which affect your work or enjoyment of school. However, some of you still do not attend school as regularly as pupils do in many other schools.

Your head teacher leads the school well, and all staff work hard to help you learn. You have good opportunities in music and sport. You also have an excellent understanding of how people think and act in other countries such as Malawi. You take on responsibility well, for example when you serve on the school council.

In order to make your good school even better, we have asked that:

Teachers learn more from each other on how to teach you really well and make even more progress, especially in improving your writing and speaking skills

Teachers make more use of your targets so that you understand more clearly how you can improve your work to the best level.

If you continue to work hard, you will help your teachers get even better results for you. Thank you again for two interesting days in your school.

Yours sincerely

John Laver

(Lead inspector)

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