

St George's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118635
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313022
Inspection date	27 March 2008
Reporting inspector	David Collard

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brenda Hurd
Headteacher	David Jones
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	Old London Road Wrotham Sevenoaks TN15 7DL
Telephone number	01732 882401
Fax number	01732 884003

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller-than-average school serving the local population. There is a significant proportion of pupils entering and leaving the school other than at the normal time of entry. There is also a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties mostly relating to specific reading or writing difficulties but also some emotional and behavioural issues. Nobody has a statement of special educational need. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is low and all are able to communicate effectively in English.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: determining whether the achievement of pupils is good throughout the school and across subjects; establishing whether the personal development of pupils is as strong as the provision suggests in the school's self-evaluation; and establishing whether the right actions are being taken at all levels of leadership to ensure the continuing success of the school. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, interviews with the headteacher, senior leadership team and chair of governors, and discussions with pupils and staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but no evidence was found to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

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 pupils achieve exceptionally well to reach above average standards by the time they leave in Year 6. This is due in large part to the excellent leadership qualities of the headteacher who has set a very clear direction and ambition to improve the school. He, along with all the staff, has created an environment where outstanding support for pupils and their families helps all pupils to flourish, both personally and academically. The school has the wholehearted support of parents who see St George's CofE Primary School as being at the heart of the village. As one parent summed it up, 'My son goes to the big school in September and I wish he could stay here forever.' All this demonstrates the school's exceptional capacity to make further improvement.

The majority of children enter the Reception class with well below the expected standards for their age and with a significant proportion having poor basic skills. The very strong teaching ensures they improve these skills, although by the time they start Year 1 they are still below the expected levels. The secret of pupils' successful academic achievement throughout the school lies in the continuous progress that they make and the school's attention to ensuring that basic skills, particularly reading, are taught well from the outset. By Year 2, standards in national tests are still below average overall, mainly because attainment in writing is not as strong as in other areas. Through Years 3 to 6, the excellent foundations that have been laid in earlier years enable pupils to make accelerated progress. As a result, pupils in Year 6 achieve above average levels in English and science and exceptionally high levels in mathematics.

The school provides for its pupils a truly wide and exciting curriculum. This is why pupils enjoy school, behave very well and make excellent progress. For example, art and design and technology work around the school is of high quality. Work in information and communication technology shows pupils' in-depth knowledge of the subject. There are many opportunities to undertake intensive studies through themes such as multicultural understanding and weeks devoted to international study and citizenship. As one pupil mentioned, 'I like it when I can work on something for longer and don't have to stop to do another lesson. I really do understand it better.'

Success in academic skills goes hand in hand with pupils' extremely good personal development. Getting this balance right is a hallmark of the outstanding leadership. As the headteacher put it, 'This is a school where smiling is important.' Pupils are proud of their efforts to be eco-friendly. They have helped instigate recycling bins in every classroom, a litter sweep and a competition to fill up rubbish bags. There is an impressive list of pupils' responsibilities. For example, the school council helped design the play area and the playground buddies ensure younger children feel really safe and secure. There is a noticeable family atmosphere where all pupils take care of each other, such as pupils from different year groups chatting and playing together at lunchtime. The school is very successful at managing the few pupils who have very challenging behaviour. Pupils know exactly what leading a healthy lifestyle entails, for example through their choice of meals and attention to food labels. The success that pupils have achieved has recently been recognised in a renewal of the Healthy School status. This is reviewed annually by the school to make sure everything possible is being done.

Consistently strong teaching throughout the school is a key factor in pupils' outstanding progress. The school has correctly evaluated teaching as being at least good and a significant proportion of lessons have all the right ingredients for them to be judged outstanding. Planning

focuses on the key elements of each subject and is based on thorough knowledge of pupils' prior attainment, especially those who may need some additional support. Pupils build effectively on their skills and expertise as they move through the school so they can see a purpose for what they are learning. Work is tailored well to different levels of ability through the comprehensive assessment procedures that are in place. This might include setting, as in mathematics, or the very effective use of direct teaching of small groups by teachers or their assistants. This very successfully improves the achievement of all pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and makes sure that all work is as challenging as possible. Questioning is particularly helpful, as seen in one class where the teacher probed the answer given by a pupil to make sure the process had been fully understood. In order to raise standards further, teachers are developing opportunities for pupils to extend and practise their writing skills across a wide range of subjects.

The school liaises closely with pupils' families and makes an excellent contribution to all aspects of community life. This includes conferences with local councillors, the police and the appointment of a family liaison officer (FLO). The school works closely with the local high school to help pupils make a smooth transition into secondary education. Other initiatives include a breakfast club and the development of a family room where parents can talk in confidence about any problems they are encountering. Attendance rates are broadly in line with the national average. It is not better because, despite the school's best efforts, a very small proportion of pupils have long or irregular absences. An educational welfare officer is working very closely with various other agencies to improve this situation.

The senior leadership team has very good expertise to bring about school improvement. For instance, special needs procedures are extremely robust and include very effective links with outside agencies, providing an all round approach to improvement. Trends in assessment results are monitored to see how well the school compares with its neighbours and with the national picture. Careful checking of assessment records in each class helps senior managers to identify early signs of underachievement. Governance is good. Each governor is highly supportive and provides suitable challenge to the school's work. Nevertheless, some governors are not as involved as others in evaluating the school's effectiveness and this is partly the reason for the rather modest judgments in its self-evaluation about how well the school is doing. As one parent commented, 'This school should be promoted more!' Overall, though, this is a school that is doing a very good job of providing its pupils with the best possible opportunities to get the most from their early education. This is all summed up in one pertinent comment from a parent, 'We are sad to be leaving such a caring, successful and happy environment.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

A large proportion of children start school with very low social and personal development as well as weak language, literacy and mathematical understanding. Induction procedures are innovative, such as the four-week programme of visits before starting school. The excellent and friendly teaching, fully supported by knowledgeable and well-briefed assistants, means that children are given the right grounding to prepare them for what lies ahead. The classroom environment is stimulating with interesting and varied role-play areas, which give additional opportunities to develop speaking and listening, reading and writing skills. Even with this high level of provision to support the development of basic skills, standards by the end of the year are still very low in communication, language and literacy. However, the effectiveness of this high quality early work materialises as children move up through the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- While the following priorities, along with others, are fully outlined in the school improvement plan, the school should concentrate on:
- Raising standards in writing to bring them in line with those in other subjects
- Developing the role of governors so that all take an active role in evaluating the school's performance
- Raising the attendance levels for the small minority of pupils who have persistent absences.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
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 the 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

¹ 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.

Annex A

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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

28 March 2008

Dear Pupils Inspection of St George's CofE Primary School, Wrotham, TN15 7DL

Thank you for making me so welcome during my recent visit. I very much enjoyed talking to you all and seeing what you were doing at school. I was pleased the rain just managed to hold off long enough for those of you in the Reception class to enjoy your trip to see the lambs. I am sure you will not be surprised to hear that I think your school is excellent. As I promised some of you, I have written the main points of my report below.

- You told me how very much you enjoy school and I can see why. You behave extremely well and are not afraid to voice your opinions. Equally, you look after each other. I was impressed with what you told me about how the older pupils look after the younger ones.
- You make exceptionally good progress in your work. I know that some of you find learning more difficult, but you work very hard so that by Year 6 you reach above the average standards expected for your age. Those of you in the top class, and everybody else, have a lot to live up to, particularly with your writing!
- You are taught extremely well. Your teachers and their assistants know how to make your work challenging but, as you told me, the work is very interesting and exciting – especially when there are lots of practical activities.
- You are also looked after and cared for very well. I know this because of all the rigorous systems that are in place and also because of what you told me about how things have got better each year.
- Your headteacher and the rest of the staff know what to do to make your school even better. There are still lots of exciting things planned for the future, which you can play a part in achieving. You must make sure that you are attending school as often as possible to take advantage of them.
- I have asked that the governors make sure that they have all the right information so that they can tell everybody just how good the school is.

Well done to you all and keep up the good work so that school remains one of the best.

Best wishes

David Collard Lead inspector

Annex B

28 March 2008

Dear Pupils

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Well done to you all and keep up the good work so that school remains one of the best.

Best wishes

David Collard
Lead inspector