

New Christ Church Church of England (VA) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132109
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	293946
Inspection dates	23 - 24 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Mr Mike Thompson

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 on roll	
School	131
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Wallis
Headteacher	Ms Maria Soulsby
Date of previous school inspection	04 November 2002
School address	Milman Road Reading RG2 0AY
Telephone number	0118 9015437
Fax number	0118 9015438

Age group	4-11
Inspection Date(s)	23 - 24 April 2007
Inspection Number	293946

(c) Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector

Description of the school

New Christ Church CE Primary was established as a 'Fresh Start School' in May 2000. It is smaller than most other primary schools, and all of its pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. The school population is culturally and socially diverse. A high proportion of pupils either joins or leaves the school during the course of each year. Many of these are newly arrived from overseas and live in temporary accommodation. The proportion of pupils in the early stages of learning to communicate in English is more than twice the national average. The proportion identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities is well above average. Until recently, there has been a high turnover of teaching staff.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

New Christ Church Primary provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. It has a number of strengths, mostly relating to pastoral care and welfare and pupils' personal development and well-being.

Inspection questionnaires relating to well over a half of the pupils were returned, and almost without exception these were overwhelmingly positive. In some cases, comments were added, and most of these referred to the strong sense of community which the school is good at promoting. One sums up the views expressed in many others when noting, 'There is a real family atmosphere, with lots of opportunities for parental involvement and a good "open door" policy.'

Children are given a sound start to their education in Reception. When they begin school, their levels of attainment are most often below what is expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress, but generally fall short of most of the goals expected of children by the time they transfer to Year 1.

The school is receiving intensive support from the local authority to help raise standards. It is making good use of this and has now succeeded in halting a decline in standards at the end of Key Stage 1. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are also set to rise. However, at the end of both key stages, standards are currently below the national average. In Year 6, this is because almost half the pupils have specific learning difficulties.

Overall, pupils achieve satisfactorily and make steady progress. In Years 1 to 6, the school manages the high turnover of pupils well and ensures that the individual needs of all newcomers are quickly identified. It has rightly focused on giving extra help to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language as these two groups comprise the majority of the number on roll. However, in doing so it has too often overlooked the needs of its more able pupils.

The standards of pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils generally behave well. Most pupils get on well with one another and show good social skills.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. There is some good teaching, but practice is inconsistent. So far, the improvements in attainment have mostly been achieved through focused, small group work in which pupils benefit greatly from the individual attention they are given. The curriculum is satisfactory, and is enriched with many extra activities which help make learning more interesting. The quality of care, guidance and support provided for pupils is satisfactory overall. There are strengths in day-to-day care, but these are offset by inconsistencies in the quality of educational guidance provided for pupils resulting from the staff changes in recent years.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The leadership has created a welcoming environment for the pupils in which they all feel safe, well cared for, and valued. One pupil summed this up well when saying, 'What I like best is the teachers. They are always there to help you when you need it.' The headteacher monitors the work of the school closely and gives a clear lead. However, the management skills of other staff are under-developed. This means that teachers do not have enough of an overview of the impact of their work on pupils' achievement. Overall, the school has a satisfactory, rather than a good capacity to improve because of the need to develop the management skills of the staff.

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.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching by sharing and adopting the good practice to be found in some classes.
- Ensure that more able pupils are given more consistently challenging work.
- Develop the leadership and management skills of all teachers. In particular, ensure that they are involved in raising standards through the rigorous monitoring of pupils' achievement and progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

There is considerable year-on-year fluctuation in the attainment of year groups because of the small numbers of pupils involved. For example, the attainment of the Reception year group in 2006 was below average in reading and calculation, but close to or above average in all other areas of learning. However, this was an exceptionally good year. Data relating to the groups assessed in the previous two years shows that attainment was below average in almost all of the areas assessed.

Although standards in Year 6 are currently below average in English, mathematics and science, there has been a significant turnaround in the school's performance. This is due to the clear focus placed on improving pupils' achievement together with the recent period of stability in staffing. However, the school recognises that it still has much to do, but is encouraged by its most recent success in addressing a backlog of underachievement. For example, a high proportion of pupils in Years 3 to 5 receive daily, focused support in improving their skills in reading and writing. The school's records show that almost half of these pupils have made outstanding gains in learning, and all others have made good progress. Through this initiative the school intends to get as many pupils as possible to the national average level 4 by the time they leave Year 6. However, too few pupils exceed level 4. In previous years, initiatives undertaken by the school have not been effective because of the inconsistency in teaching and learning caused by changes of class teachers.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because of the good quality individual attention they are given. Those with English as a second language make rapid progress in acquiring essential skills in communication and satisfactory progress once they have reached this basic level.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Behaviour in lessons is generally good, but standards occasionally slip when pupils are not challenged well enough. In these situations, some pupils become restless and are inattentive. In closely supervised situations, such as when they come into the hall for assembly, behaviour is impeccable. Members of the school council are proud of their school community and say that bullying is not an issue. One pupil commented, 'This is a school where you make friends quickly and everyone knows everyone else.'

A particularly noteworthy feature of the school is the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. In particular, pupils' good spiritual awareness is evident in the respect they show for one another. Their ability to reflect on how well they are doing at school, which is another aspect of their spiritual development, is inhibited when they do not have clear enough targets to achieve.

Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of how to keep safe and about the importance of diet and exercise in leading healthy lifestyles. They make a good contribution to their school community by carrying out responsible jobs. Fundraising for charities, organised by the school council, helps give pupils an understanding of the needs of others. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for the next phase of their education and to become life-long learners.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers relate well to their pupils, give clear explanations and instructions, and organise their classes effectively.

A weakness in otherwise competent teaching is that work is not always pitched at the right level for all pupils within the mixed-age classes. This particularly disadvantages the more able pupils because work is too often targeted at the middle ability range. The good quality help given by skilled support assistants to pupils who have specific learning needs helps them to keep up.

Inconsistencies in teaching are due to the recent changes in teaching staff which have affected all year groups. At present, teachers do not have enough opportunity to observe one another and share expertise. For example, the quality of teachers' involvement of pupils in their own learning, through self-assessment, varies considerably between classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum offered for the Foundation Stage children in the Reception and Year 1 class covers all of the required areas of learning. However, there is too much formal teaching for the Reception children as the school attempts to accommodate the needs of the Year 1 pupils in the class.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, teachers do not always make enough use of information from on-going assessment to inform future planning. This means that sometimes lessons do not provide sufficient challenges to meet the needs of all pupils within the mixed-age classes, particularly the more able.

The school provides a good range of additional activities to help enrich the day-to day curriculum. For example, a recent visit to the school by a mobile farm was greatly appreciated by pupils, who spoke enthusiastically about their experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of the school's pastoral care is good. The school is vigilant about health and safety and child-protection matters and keeps good records of the checks made on the background of the staff and other adults who have contact with the pupils. The weakness in this area of the school's provision is the quality of academic guidance provided for pupils. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is inconsistent, and corrections are not always used to help pupils improve. There are good systems for tracking the progress made by pupils. However, these are not used well enough to set and monitor challenging targets for each individual to achieve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and staff work well together as a team. Together they have created an orderly and calm environment for learning. They are clearly committed to raising standards. At present most of the monitoring is carried out by the headteacher. This is because most other staff are relatively new and are inexperienced in having responsibility for leading aspects of the school's work. The headteacher has astutely ensured that staffing has been carefully focused on the areas of greatest need. The policy of giving targeted pupils a lot of individual attention has made a real difference to their learning and has provided a secure platform for work in raising standards.

The school's evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate. Key priorities for improvement have been identified and are being tackled through a clear school development plan.

Governance is satisfactory. The governors are committed to and supportive of the school. However, they sometimes rely too heavily on the headteacher for information.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-------------------

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

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 interest 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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

2 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of New Christ Church Church of England (VA) Primary School, Milman Road, Reading, RG2 0AY

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when I came to inspect your school. I am writing to you to tell you what I think about how well you are getting on and how well your school is helping you to learn.

I think that your school is satisfactory overall, with some things that are good. In the past few years some of you were not doing as well as you could because you had so many changes of teachers. You are now lucky that you have a group of teachers who want to stay at your school and are determined to help you do your very best. They deserve your help, and I know that you will work hard for them.

Here are some of the things I liked best about your school.

- It is a happy place to be in. Everyone is friendly and welcoming. You get on with each other and you behave well.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are safe and are really well looked after.
- Whenever you need help, there is always someone there for you.

Your headteacher and all of the other people who help run your school want it to be even better. Here are some things I have suggested that they should do.

- I would like your teachers to make sure that they find out more about the different ways that they could help you learn by visiting each other's lessons. Then they can share the good things that they see with their own class.
- I would like your teachers to plan their lessons so that those of you who sometimes find your work a bit easy always have to think really hard. I'm sure that you are ready for this challenge!
- I would also like your teachers to find out more about being in charge of different subjects. I would particularly like them to find out more about the different ways that they could check on how well you are doing. This will help them to make your work even better than it is already.

Yours sincerely,
Mike Thompson (Lead inspector)