

Nash Mills Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117418
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312608
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev David Lawson
Headteacher	Mrs Rosemary Washford Mower
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
School address	Belswains Lane Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP3 9XB
Telephone number	01442 252972
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most of the pupils who attend this average-sized school come from the local area. About a quarter of them are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups, with a very small number who need help to learn to speak English. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties is below the national average. The attainment of the children joining the Nursery varies widely but, overall, is below the levels expected nationally for three-year-olds. The headteacher joined the school at the start of this term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Nash Mills School has improved over recent years and correctly judges that its overall effectiveness is currently satisfactory. There are strengths, most notably in the good standards of pupils' personal development, in the quality of care offered to pupils and in the high quality provision for the youngest children. It is a school with a distinctive Christian ethos that welcomes and includes pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and faiths.

Pupils' academic achievement is satisfactory but uneven. They do exceptionally well in Nursery and Reception. Standards reached at the end of Key Stage 1 have improved consistently over the past five years to an above average level. Results at the end of Key Stage 2 have been more erratic, indicating that, while pupils' progress has been satisfactory, the school has not always capitalised on the good start it gives them. By Year 6, standards in English are generally at least in line with national averages but in mathematics and science have varied considerably. In both last year's and the current Year 6, pupils have not built well enough on the mathematics standards they reached when they were in Year 2, especially the girls. In science, too few pupils are managing to reach the higher levels when compared with the national picture. These weaknesses result in them not always being well prepared for the next stage of education and their future lives.

The main reason that academic achievement has not been consistently good is that the amount of progress expected for some year groups has not been very challenging. While many elements of the curriculum and teaching are good, the overall impact on learning is often only satisfactory, particularly in Key Stage 2. However, the progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is better. Teachers and teaching assistants support these individuals well. The school has established well-designed systems for assessing and tracking the progress of all its pupils but does not use the systems well enough to ensure that learning builds quickly enough year on year. Too much is left to the teachers in Years 5 and 6 to make up any lost ground.

Pupils' personal development is good because of a good range of activities to support it and effective care and guidance from adults. Pupils show considerable enjoyment of school, improved attendance and good behaviour. Their considerate and sociable attitudes to others contribute well to the whole community. They are adopting healthy and safe lifestyles.

Leadership and management are satisfactory but the school needs to have higher expectations for the older pupils. The new headteacher has worked quickly and effectively with senior staff and governors to establish her clear view of current strengths and areas for improvement. Good relationships prevail at all levels. Parents are very positive about the school, especially its pastoral care, for example one wrote, 'The school has a great 'community' feel and the children are well behaved and polite.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The school has continued to improve the good provision for Nursery and Reception identified by the last inspection. Last year it opened an impressive new building for these age groups that provides a high standard of accommodation, both indoors and out. The quality of teaching is outstanding. The staff team provides very well organised activities that enable children to thrive from the day they start school. As a result, from a baseline that is often well below

average, children broadly reach the standards expected nationally by the end of Reception, although their literacy is not quite as strong as other aspects of their development. Their personal, social and emotional development is impressive. They rapidly learn to work together well, show enormous enjoyment and confidence in their work and are considerate to others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations of what pupils in Key Stage 2 can achieve by ensuring that the targets set for them are challenging and progress towards them is monitored rigorously.
- Improve the teaching of mathematics and the way that progress is monitored to ensure that boys and girls of all abilities do well.
- Ensure that lessons in science enable the more capable pupils to reach higher levels.

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

Building on a very secure start in the Foundation Stage, performance in reading and mathematics has improved well and is above average by the end of Key Stage 1. Writing standards have seen enormous improvement. Compared to the national picture, they have risen from below average in 2003 to exceptionally high in 2006 and 2007. Figures for the past three years indicate that the amount of progress made from Years 3 to 6 is not as strong. Compared with the results when they were in Year 2, pupils' achievement has been broadly satisfactory by Year 6. Progress has been best in English with standards at least average. However, in 2007, girls did considerably worse than boys in mathematics and only a very small number of pupils reached Level 5 in science. The school's tracking of pupils shows that similar trends have developed for the current Year 6. This has been tackled urgently by the staff. For example, the Year 5 and 6 pupils are grouped by ability for some of their lessons so that teachers can provide more challenge and support where they are most needed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and generally they enjoy their learning very much. The school has worked hard to promote high levels of attendance and this is now above the national average. Pupils' overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They show respect for the range of cultures and faiths in the school. Standards of behaviour are generally high, though occasionally in lessons where teaching is not so effective, they are only satisfactory. Pupils feel safe at school and say that occasional bullying is dealt with effectively. They share any concerns with staff through a 'worry box'. The school has been designated a Healthy School in recognition of the effectiveness of its work. Pupils also pursue healthy lifestyles by participation in a sports partnership, which provides specialist coaches for some activities. Pupils contribute effectively to their community, for example, through the school council, as play leaders and by the growing links with the local parish.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Inspection findings endorse the school's view that teaching is improving, although the improvements of recent times have yet to have a full impact on the performance of the oldest pupils. Throughout the school, relationships between teachers and pupils are good and there is effective support for those who need extra adult assistance with their learning, including those learning to speak English. Interactive whiteboards motivate pupils and teachers, and pupils make good use of computers as a learning tool. The school has itself identified the need for teachers' expectations to be higher, especially in Key Stage 2, and for learning to be monitored more effectively. The most recent 'setting' arrangements in Years 5 and 6 are aiming to provide additional challenge, especially for more capable pupils; inspection observations indicate that this is being successful.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The required curriculum is taught well in the early years and satisfactorily in Years 3 to 6. There is good provision in lessons and assemblies for pupils' personal development, with an excellent start given in the Foundation Stage. This provision is enhanced by a good range of extra-curricular activities, such as sports and music, which have a positive effect on pupils' health and their overall social and cultural development. Staff have reviewed the curriculum for the 'core' subjects to implement new national initiatives and to respond to the recent dips in pupils' performance. Provision is not yet equally effective in all age groups, especially in mathematics and science. However, pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good access to the curriculum in all age groups. Their individual needs are identified well, and activities are effective in enabling these pupils to make good progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is a harmonious and caring environment. Arrangements to safeguard pupils are in place. Pupils report that they feel they can confide in an adult if necessary. There is good support for any who need extra help in lessons. Staff meetings start with a discussion of how to support any pupil who is giving cause for concern. The headteacher has introduced 'Stars of the Week' awards, which have proved very successful in celebrating achievement and motivating pupils to continue their efforts. The school sets individual and group targets for its pupils and they are increasingly involved in reviewing their own learning. The school is currently focusing on improving the consistency and effectiveness of teachers' marking so that pupils can receive good guidance about their achievements. There are examples of effective practice in this area but too much variation between classes and subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has already started to build well on the school's previous successes. Staff and governors are working well together. Their self-evaluation is accurate and is being used

effectively to establish action plans for the future, based on more demanding targets. Initiatives are well focused, such as the setting arrangements made to improve performance in Years 5 and 6. Governors are determined to do their best for the school. This was demonstrated by their repeated efforts to secure a good new headteacher when recruitment proved difficult. Several subject leaders are relatively new to their roles and are being trained to play their part in school improvement. The headteacher has not had time to see the impact of her work so far. However, the improvements of recent years and the vision for the next stage of the school's development, shared by staff and governors, indicate a sound capacity to improve.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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?	2

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?	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	2
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	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

17 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Nash Mills Church of England Primary School, Hemel Hempstead HP3 9XB

I am writing to thank you for your help when Mr Groucutt and I visited your school recently. We really enjoyed our time with you. We were impressed by your good behaviour and by how much you obviously enjoy being at school. We saw from all your 'Children in Need Day' activities that everyone in your school cares a lot about each other and about other people who need some help.

We think you go to a school that has improved in lots of ways over the past few years. The children in Nursery and Reception get a super start to their time in school. Those of you who have been in Years 1 and 2 recently have done well, for example in literacy and numeracy. We would like to see the children in Years 3 to 6 doing just as well, especially in mathematics and science, so we have asked the teachers to keep working on that. You can help the adults who teach you by trying your best in all your lessons.

We think that you have a good new headteacher. You told us about how much you like the 'Stars of the Week' assemblies she has introduced. Mrs Washford Mower has already worked hard with the teachers and governors to find out a lot about you all and how you are getting on. All the adults work as a big team and have good plans to keep on improving how well you do in school. We think that if they set you even greater challenges, you will show them how just well you can do.

Best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Helen Ranger

Lead inspector