

St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113446
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	338172
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2010
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	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Croker
Headteacher	Kim Baker
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, observing seven teaching staff. They also saw an assembly, observed activities at breaks and lunchtimes, held meetings with pupils, staff and governors, and talked with parents. They looked at plans, policies and records which tracked pupils' progress in school. They also analysed 65 parental questionnaires, 11 staff questionnaires and 101 pupils' questionnaires.

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

- the progress and attainment particularly of older pupils
- how well children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are provided for and make progress
- how much progress pupils make in their personal development
- how well teaching and the curriculum help pupils to make progress
- how effectively leadership and management are monitoring progress and driving improvement forward.

Information about the school

Almost all pupils in this smaller than average primary school are of White British origin. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, which include a range of language and emotional difficulties, is below average. Until recently, the proportion of pupils who joined or left the school other than at the usual times was above average. Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class which also includes some Year 1 pupils. The school is currently having to come to terms with the recent death of a member of staff.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St. Helen's Primary School provides a satisfactory standard of education. It is an improving school, as the leadership, supported well by all staff, has implemented measures to address previous underachievement, especially amongst older pupils. Parents greatly appreciate what the school provides for their children, particularly the good level of care and support. Typical was the comment of one parent that 'We are very proud to be part of the school and appreciate the hard work of the staff.'

Because of the good provision in the Reception class, these children make good progress, which continues in the lower years of the main school. Pupils then make satisfactory progress as they move up through the school, and their attainment is broadly average by the time they leave. Test results for 2008 and 2009 showed significant underachievement by older pupils, particularly in English. Attainment and progress have improved for most pupils, and they are now on track to meet appropriately challenging targets, although some more able pupils are making rather slower progress than they might. The improvements have come about for several reasons, the most important being increased attention paid by the leadership and class teachers to strategies to improve writing and to provide additional support for pupils where necessary. The school is beginning to make more use of assessment data to plan better for the needs of pupils in large mixed-age classes. It has also adapted the curriculum, for example to provide more opportunities for writing in subjects other than English. Pupils themselves talk enthusiastically about 'fun lessons' when they do active tasks which help them to learn both independently and collaboratively. Teaching is satisfactory but improving, with teachers generating positive attitudes towards learning. Where achievement is still not high enough, it is because teachers have insufficiently high expectations of what more able pupils can achieve, and do not consistently provide appropriately challenging work. Also, although teachers use a range of assessment strategies, their marking and use of pupils' targets are not consistent enough to show pupils clearly how they can improve their work.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for, and enjoy coming to school. They particularly appreciate the range of extra activities provided by the school, such as music and sports clubs. The school's leadership is satisfactory. Supported well by governors, it is committed to improvement, whilst coping with additional pressures caused by the tragic death of a member of staff. Monitoring is satisfactory: although the leadership and some subject coordinators analyse performance, have made good use of external support, and are implementing strategies for change, the monitoring is not

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yet systematic or rigorous. The result is that improvements, for example in the use of assessment, are not yet fully embedded, which is why there are still inconsistencies in teaching and learning and only a limited sharing of good practice. Issues arising from the previous inspection have been partially addressed. The school's self-evaluation is accurate in most key areas, and the resulting planning, strategies for improvement and evidence of improved progress mean that the school has a satisfactory, and developing, capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve standards and progress by raising teachers' expectations, particularly in setting work which is appropriately challenging for more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of learning by making better use of assessment data and pupils' targets in teaching so that they have a clearer idea of how they can improve their work.
- Make monitoring of teaching and learning more consistent and rigorous in order to improve teaching so that it all matches the best practice in the school.

About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Performance in English and science has lagged behind mathematics, but recent improvements mean that standards and progress are now better for older pupils than in recent years. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls, and pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils, although they sometimes achieve well in individual lessons when well supported. Extra support for particular groups of pupils, for example that provided by specialist teaching from a partner school, has had a positive impact on learning, whilst gifted and talented pupils are provided with opportunities for challenging and enjoyable experiences outside school. Pupils respond well to opportunities for independent learning. This was seen to good effect during the inspection when pupils composed free-verse poems based on travel postcards. Pupils enjoy most lessons, and are benefiting from attempts to incorporate skills across subjects, for example with older pupils developing their writing skills through history projects on seventeenth century England.

Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as they reflect meaningfully on significant events which have affected their school, and they enjoy very good relationships with each other and with staff. Many pupils have a limited understanding of issues affecting society elsewhere in Britain and the world, although they enjoy serving the community, for example through raising money for charities. They have a good understanding of health issues, and can talk about the importance of exercise and a balanced diet. Pupils behave well, feel safe and believe

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that they are well cared for and can turn to adults for support. They are confident that they are well prepared for the next phase of education, partly because of strong links with neighbouring schools and because of their good personal development, although their standards in key skills such as literacy and numeracy are average.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	2
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	2

How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons, teachers plan well for the range of abilities and ages, and deploy additional staff and volunteers well, so that pupils who need it get additional support. In these lessons, teachers also use questioning skilfully, encourage pupils to develop their ideas fully, and engage them in a range of practical tasks. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than better, the learning is less briskly paced, and sometimes the teacher is too controlling, so there is less opportunity for all pupils to be involved or to learn actively. Sometimes more able pupils are not introduced to higher-order skills or activities quickly enough. Most pupils know their targets, but they are not used constructively enough to help pupils move forwards in their everyday learning.

The school enhances its curriculum in various ways. For example, it uses the local secondary school to provide extra teaching expertise for gifted pupils. There is strong provision in music. Although the curriculum has several strong features, currently it does not completely meet the needs of some more able pupils, who are not always given appropriately challenging work in lessons. However, some pupils who were previously underachieving are increasingly benefiting from extra support, for example in mathematics. The school has good relationships with other agencies, such as

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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social services, which help to support vulnerable pupils. Teaching assistants are also used well to support these pupils. A particular strength is the success of the school in smoothly integrating the substantial number of pupils who have joined the school other than at the usual transition points. The school has good procedures to encourage attendance, and there are few persistent absentees.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's leadership is supported by a governing body which is active and knowledgeable but is only now beginning to really hold the school to account. The leadership has a good understanding of what the school needs to do to secure further improvement. Planning for improvement is realistic and appropriate, although some of the strategies are only recently in place, and monitoring has not been systematic. The leadership has developed an extensive system to track pupils' progress, informed by regular assessments, although there has been limited analysis and evaluation of the progress of particular groups of pupils. Subject coordinators are now more involved in monitoring.

St. Helen's is an inclusive school, promotes equal opportunities well and tackles discrimination. The school's success in this area is evident in the positive and friendly ethos commented upon extensively by pupils, parents and staff. Safeguarding procedures are robust: for example, staff are trained in appropriate child protection procedures, and pupils as well as staff are aware of pertinent issues such as internet safety. The leadership has secured good links with local schools, resulting in good transition arrangements for when pupils move school. It also communicates well with parents. The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory; there are good opportunities for pupils to be involved in community activities within the school and local community. However, apart from a link with another school in Devon, there are few links further afield, and most pupils have a limited awareness of multicultural issues affecting Britain and the wider world.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress overall in the various areas of learning. They make particularly good progress in their personal and social development, for example in their ability to work constructively with each other and with older pupils, and also in developing good numeracy skills. By the time they leave Reception, many children show levels of skill and knowledge which are above average for their age. They are confident and articulate, for example when talking to visitors. There is a good balance between activities children choose for themselves and those led by an adult.

The leadership is outstanding. The Early Years leader has thoroughly analysed provision for the children and recognises how it can be further improved, for example in developing facilities and resources. She has also developed very good links with the local pre-school, so that transition to the main school is very smooth. She skilfully manages the school's provision so that the Reception children are sometimes taught alongside Year 1 pupils, but at an appropriate level for every child, as seen, for example, when the children were learning mental arithmetic in a lively way. The leadership also meticulously and regularly assesses children's progress and ensures that their learning experience is both fun and appropriately challenging. Parents are fully involved in their children's progress and recognise the strengths of the provision. The Early Years leader is supported well by other staff.

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	1

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Views of parents and carers

Most parents are very positive in their perception of their children's experience at the school. Typical was the comment of one parent that 'The children get the best of starts to their education.' They are particularly complimentary about the quality of teaching and the degree to which their children enjoy school and make progress. Parents feel that their children are very well cared for. They believe that the school is moving in the right direction. A very small minority of parents believe that the school does not always handle incidents of misbehaviour appropriately, and also believe that their views are not sufficiently taken into account or that they are not helped enough to support their children's learning. The inspection team acknowledges these concerns, but judges that the school deals with inappropriate behaviour well. Inspectors also judge that the school keeps parents well informed about the various activities going on in the school, and welcomes parental involvement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St. Helen's Church of England 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 65 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 161 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	62	22	34	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	38	58	24	37	2	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	27	42	34	52	2	3	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	63	23	35	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	47	72	15	23	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	51	25	38	5	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	45	33	51	2	3	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)	29	45	31	48	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	54	28	43	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	52	26	40	2	3	4	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	42	30	46	4	6	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	35	54	25	38	3	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	58	21	32	2	3	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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 pupils' 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.



24 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St. Helen's Church of England Primary School Bideford EX39 5AP

Thank you for your friendly welcome when we visited your school this week. We very much enjoyed talking to you, and you told us a lot about how much you enjoyed school. We know that you like many things: the fact that you feel very safe and that the teachers and other adults are friendly, and that you like the clubs and visits, especially the ones where you stay overnight with your friends. You told us about how you enjoy most of your lessons, especially when you get to do 'fun things'.

St. Helen's gives you a satisfactory education. Until recently some of you, especially the older amongst you, did not do as well as you should have done, particularly in English. The situation is improving, because all staff are working hard so that you can make more progress, for example by doing more interesting writing, not just in English lessons but also when studying other topics. We believe that the school looks after you very well, and if you continue to work hard for your teachers, you will do even better in your work. Sometimes you need more information on how exactly you are doing in your work and how you can improve.

So that you can do even better in your work we have asked that:

- your teachers sometimes give the cleverest amongst you more challenging tasks so that you can show exactly how well you can do
- you are given more information on how you can improve your work, by using your targets more in lessons and showing you exactly how well you are doing
- the school finds more ways of helping teachers share good ideas on how to help you learn even more effectively in your lessons.

You can help by continuing to work hard and asking your teachers how you can improve your work. Thank you again for your welcome, and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Laver
Lead inspector

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