

St Nicholas' CofE Primary

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134611
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	381696
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2012
Lead inspector	David Speakman

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 of pupils on the school roll	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Laurie Yearley
Headteacher	Sally Staley
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2008
School address	St Faith's Road Alcester B49 6AG
Telephone number	01789 762578
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	12–13 March 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Speakman

Additional inspector

Clare Saunders

Additional inspector

Jason Smith

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 14 lessons taught by 13 teachers, spending 11 hours directly observing pupils' learning in class. They heard pupils read and scrutinised their writing in workbooks and on display. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils. They took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including improvement plans and self-evaluation, as well as assessment data to monitor pupils' progress. Questionnaire responses from 161 parents and carers, 150 pupils and 29 members of staff were analysed.

Information about the school

St Nicholas' CofE Primary School is larger than the average primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is similar to the national average. Most pupils are White British but a very small minority come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below average and none are in the early stages of learning to speak English. The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs, including those with a statement of educational needs, is similar to other schools. The school meets the current floor standard set by the government, which determines the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. A children's centre and independent nursery provision operate from the same building, but they are not run by the governing body and were not included in the inspection.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. At the time of its previous inspection the school was judged to be good with some outstanding features. Since then, standards have risen and they are now high across a wide range of subjects. Pupils make excellent progress.
- Pupils achieve exceptionally well at all key stages. From starting points on entry that are below those expected for their age, pupils reach standards that are high by the end of Year 6. Pupils of all abilities make the same excellent progress. The outstanding curriculum provides many well-planned opportunities for pupils to excel.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and around school, and this makes a significant contribution to their learning. The school is very effective in minimising the impact of any inappropriate behaviour on the learning of other pupils. Pupils rise to challenge very well, apply themselves fully in lessons and show great initiative. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are safe in school. They gain a good understanding of how to stay safe and are confident in asking for support when needed.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers make learning interesting and engage pupils very well. Activities are challenging for pupils at all levels of attainment and firmly based on prior learning so that all pupils are given excellent opportunities to develop and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects.
- The headteacher and leadership team provide highly-focused leadership. Their robust systems to raise the quality of teaching and learning have been highly effective in developing teachers' professional skills to a high level of competence, and this has been a key driving factor in pupils' improving performance. Some formal school policies are due to be updated.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that all policy documents are up to date and current so that they fully reflect the excellent practice in the school.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment below the levels expected for their age. They make excellent progress and by the time they leave, attainment is well above average in English and mathematics. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are very keen to learn and demonstrate outstanding independent learning skills. They make choices and are confident in leading their own learning. Children choose activities wisely and in particular those that extend their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy skills. In Key Stage 1, attainment is rising steadily and the most recent teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 were above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in reading is above average in both key stages. They show enjoyment in reading. They read with confidence and clarity, aware of punctuation and show good strategies for reading unfamiliar words. Pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 is outstanding, and the standards of work seen during the inspection in the older year groups were well above average in English and mathematics. Pupils currently in Year 6 are on course to continue the trend of high attainment, and a good number of pupils in Year 5 are already working at levels beyond those expected nationally for the end of Year 6. Pupils enjoy reading for pleasure. Independent readers choose texts that are challenging and effective in developing their reading skills and their levels of understanding. They talk with understanding about stories they have read.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make exceptional progress. The provision of extra help through a wide range of support programmes is prompt and effective. Support is well targeted and focused on individual needs so many pupils quickly develop the knowledge and confidence to work independently. This is demonstrated by the decreasing numbers on the special educational needs register as pupils get older.

Pupils enjoy learning and have well-developed learning skills. They learn very well in small groups, discussing and collaborating with each other. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 have produced some high-quality literacy work. Pupils use expressive vocabulary, vivid description and excellent grammar such as similes and metaphors, often combined with excellent information and communication technology skills, to produce promotional flyers for their firework inventions, or comic strip stories. Pupils rise to the stimulating challenge and comment on how much they enjoy this type of learning

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activity. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire agree with the inspection findings on pupils' progress and a significant number made comments that their children are making excellent progress.

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers who returned questionnaires rightly feel that their children are taught well. Teachers use the school's curriculum very well to challenge pupils' thinking, develop reasoning skills and consolidate prior learning through interesting activities set into meaningful contexts. In Year 4 mathematics, pupils were challenged to use their knowledge and understanding of number to investigate and devise strategies to maximise the product of two numbers using three given digits. The teacher skilfully asked leading questions to encourage pupils to think carefully and to engage in 'trial and improvement' methods to find the outcomes of the investigation. The teacher's good knowledge of mathematics supported her planning well in enabling these pupils to develop higher-order mathematical skills.

The majority of teachers use a wide range of techniques to interest and involve pupils. They promote pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development exceptionally well in lessons, for example by encouraging discussion and reflection, and promoting enquiry and a study of literature from a range of cultures. Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teaching children about letters and the sounds they make is made effective through teachers modelling sounds accurately and giving children lots of opportunities, both indoors and outside, to make the sounds and write the letters for themselves.

A number of common strengths have developed under the robust monitoring of the senior leadership team. Teachers use assessment information well to plan tasks that match pupils' prior attainment at all levels. They have very high expectations of pupils, and provide consistently high levels of challenge to move pupils on rapidly. Pupils' work is marked in a helpful way, with comments on what pupils have done well and how work could be improved. Teaching assistants are skilled in the provision of support for those at risk of falling behind or who need extra support with their work, and in pushing more-able pupils on in their work. In lessons, they support teachers very well in making sure that pupils are fully engaged in learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Behaviour in all lessons observed and around the school was at least good and more often outstanding. Pupils believe behaviour to be good and say that any inappropriate behaviour is dealt with effectively. They are not aware of any bullying taking place. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are positive about behaviour in school. A few expressed concern about bullying and behaviour in lessons. School records confirm there are a very few incidents of concern, involving a very small number of pupils, but incidents of misbehaviour and bullying of any kind are extremely rare and dealt with effectively.

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Pupils are very considerate and cooperate well in lessons. They are respectful of others' views, encourage each other to do well and spontaneously congratulate others when they achieve success. Peer mediators actively promote others' well-being and are successful in helping to settle minor differences. Pupils feel safe during the day and almost all parents and carers confirm confidence in their children's safety. Pupils with a concern turn readily to an adult, knowing that any difficulties will be quickly resolved. Staff provide strong pastoral care and ensure sensitive support for pupils and families whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable, and when supporting pupils with medical or emotional difficulties. Attendance is above average. Staff are robust in tracking attendance and punctuality.

Leadership and management

Excellent leadership and management have brought about sustained improvement, successfully building on previous strengths to achieve the aim of becoming an outstanding school. A good number of parents and carers commented that they think the school is outstanding. One wrote, 'My children moved from another school that was good with some outstanding features. Having experienced St Nicholas', we now realise what outstanding really means.' Standards are still rising, pupils' progress is improving, and teaching has improved so much is now outstanding. Robust performance management ensures staff are held accountable for the achievement of their pupils. Very effective professional development means that staff have developed the expertise to manage classes so that all groups of pupils make excellent progress. The improvements to date show that the school has a strong capacity to improve even further.

The governing body has a clear understanding of the school's effectiveness. Governors are fully involved in monitoring, self-evaluation and strategic planning. They are proactive in seeking and using the views of parents and carers. Policies are largely up to date, but a few are due for revision and update. Governors meet their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding. It is given a high priority, and arrangements for keeping children safe are very well managed. Leaders ensure the safe recruitment of staff, make full checks on any adult working in the school, and are vigilant about site safety. Staff are well trained in child protection and qualified in first aid.

The curriculum is designed to provide pupils with rich experiences and opportunities to develop their communication, language, literacy and numeracy skills by applying them in meaningful contexts. The topic-based approach to learning, combined with the strong personal development programme, is highly effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It prepares them very well for the next stages of their education. The school operates as a highly cohesive community, based on understanding and respecting all others. Equality is promoted well and discrimination of any kind discouraged. Any pupil in danger of falling behind is quickly identified and supported to get back on track. This ensures that all pupils, regardless of background or ability, have equal opportunities to succeed.

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



14 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas' CofE Primary School, Alcester, B49 6AG

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you. Your views were really helpful, including those some of you expressed in questionnaires. You will be pleased to know that we have judged the school to be outstanding, and you can be proud of playing a part in the school's success.

You all make excellent progress, whatever your background or ability. Standards in your school work by Year 6 are higher than in most other schools, and your personal qualities are impressive. You approach school life in a sensible and mature way, helping each other wherever possible. You enjoy school a great deal and behave exceptionally well. The school is a very safe and pleasant place for you to learn.

The school is led and managed exceptionally well. This has helped all adults working in it to develop the ways in which they work, so that all of you are given interesting tasks that move your learning on at a very quick pace. You play your part by taking on challenges with excitement and enthusiasm. This means that there has been a further improvement since your school was last inspected, when it was judged to be good. We have asked the governors to make sure that their school policies are up to date, so they fully reflect the outstanding practice we saw.

We are confident that you will do all you can to help the school improve even further, particularly by continuing to work as hard as you do now.

Yours sincerely

David Speakman
Lead inspector

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