

Victoria Church of England (VA) First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117423
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326604
Inspection dates	8 July 2009
Reporting inspector	John W. Paull

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	248
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Rowena Pike
Headteacher	Mrs Anna Brown
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 July 2006
School address	Prince Edward Street Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3HA
Telephone number	01442 865781
Fax number	01442 385205

Age group	3–9
Inspection date	8 July 2009
Inspection number	326604

© Crown copyright 2009

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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, and investigated the following issues:

- whether achievement is outstanding
- the extent to which the school's senior leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the impact of pupils' involvement in Fairtrade practices and ecological awareness
- the strength of leadership and the impact of extending hours in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body, senior and subject leaders, parents and pupils, observations of teachers and pupils at work and scrutinising documents, including records that track pupils' progress and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is of average size. It has its own Nursery and Reception classes in which it caters for three to five year olds in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Nearly all its pupils are of White British heritage, although small numbers are drawn from each of a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small proportion speaks English as an additional language. None of these pupils is at an early stage of acquiring English. Most of the school's pupils are from socially and economically advantaged families and only a low proportion are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

The school is part of the Eco-Schools scheme and it has gained a green flag. It is also a Fairtrade school. It holds Investors in People, Activemark and Healthy Schools awards, as well as quality marks for information and communication technology and for primary school provision.

There are breakfast and after-school clubs available on site. These are separately managed and have their own inspection report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Victoria First School is outstandingly effective. Its track record since its last inspection indicates that it is exceptionally well placed to maintain its high standards.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher, senior leaders and governors constantly monitor and evaluate performance accurately. They keep a close check on each pupil's progress, standard of work and personal development and well-being. The whole staff work together as a very effective team, taking note of any variations in performance, however small. They then review and adjust provision accordingly to ensure that pupils' needs are fully met. Challenging targets are set and nearly always met. Pupils receive information about how to reach them, and are involved in evaluations of their performance on the way. This helps them to concentrate on what they need to know. This rigour results in consistently high standards by the time pupils leave in Year 4.

Pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science is well above average, often of a very high standard. Skills in information and communication technology are often well advanced for pupils' ages. Art, design and technology and other subjects on display around the building are of impressive quality. Pupils enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment a little above that usually found. They make rapid progress and enter Year 1 at above average levels. Their progress is then sustained throughout the school and the high standards seen of pupils currently in Year 4 accurately reflect the school's records of their progress over time. A similar picture is apparent in the national test results at the end of Year 2. Since the last inspection, results indicate that pupils' performances have been well above average every year in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils from different social and ethnic backgrounds attain equally very well. More able pupils and those with particular gifts and talents are also catered for very effectively, and a high proportion achieves levels above those normally expected for their ages. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also thrive and progress remarkably well. Many of these pupils achieve nationally expected levels by the time they leave. All of this adds up to outstanding achievement at all stages, based on teaching of very high quality.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, are exceptionally strong. A very powerful climate of caring for others permeates what is provided, which is reflected in pupils' attitudes and the school's strong Church of England links. This also stems from an outstanding curriculum that, alongside its academic strengths, includes excellent planning in personal, social, health and citizenship education. This gives pupils many opportunities to develop social, teamwork and personal skills which, set alongside very good literacy and numeracy, prepares them remarkably well for the future. Pupils are cheerful and reliable, and regularly carry out many routine jobs that help the school to run smoothly. Their school and eco council provides a forum through which they convey their own ideas to senior staff about improvements that could be made. A Fairtrade group also contributes strongly in similar ways. Pupils understand right from wrong, and their behaviour is excellent in the classrooms and around the building, even when they are not directly supervised. Teaching and learning are outstanding and, as a result, pupils are attentive and invariably listen with great focus to the staff, responding to questions and working carefully on set tasks. They

also work very well independently, showing much initiative in solving problems and using the computers or books to research information of their own. A strong contributory factor is that the staff know the individuals in their class very well and plan highly successfully to meet individual needs. As a result, the school's mixed-age classes work very effectively for all groups, abilities and backgrounds. Pupils work and play together very amicably and are very willing to say that their school is particularly enjoyable and a safe place, which they are proud to attend. Attendance is consistently above average.

Major factors contributing to pupils' enjoyment and well-being follow from their involvement in Fairtrade activities and the way that the staff weave ecological factors into the planning of lessons. The overwhelming majority of questionnaires returned by parents confirm the benefit of these practices to their children. Responses indicate very strong support for the school's headteacher, leaders and managers and the direction that the school has taken. Parents are aware that senior staff decided to build global awareness into teaching and learning a number of years ago. It added to the already evident strengths in contributions to the local community made through very strong partnerships with the church, local agencies and other schools. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of provision have revealed a considerable expansion in pupils' empathy and understanding of people's priorities across the world. This indicates that the school takes very serious responsibility for building community cohesion. For example, pupils understand that farmers in India and countries in Africa and South America are entitled to a fair price for what they grow and sell in world markets. They know how this contributes to global responsibility in helping people to become economically independent and free. They know that buying Fairtrade products contributes to this aim and parents confirm that it is having an impact on their shopping, because their children bring such messages home. The pupils sell Fairtrade produce themselves whenever appropriate in school. Similarly, they are aware that if everyone '...turns off the lights it saves loads of electricity and helps to save the whole planet for everyone, everywhere'. Part of their ecological education includes growing food on an organic allotment of their own, highlighting the importance of healthy living. The curriculum also includes opportunities for exercise and the full requirement for physical education, in which pupils involve themselves with great enthusiasm.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. All statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils, child protection and assessment of risks are in place. Ongoing procedures for assessing pupils academically are careful, accurate and rigorous. A new electronic system to track pupils' progress through the school has recently been introduced. While it is not yet fully established, this is beginning to augment the very effective practice already available. Leaders, managers, and staff at all levels, including teaching assistants, some of whom have received training to higher levels, unstintingly contribute their skills to the benefit of all pupils. Governors, who support and contribute very effectively to strategic decision-making, have a system for ensuring that they know the school thoroughly, including links that keep them in touch with each class and with subject leaders.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage **Grade: 1**

Provision for children of Reception and Nursery age is exceptional. Despite recent changes in staff, leadership and management have succeeded in maintaining excellence in learning and development and in the promotion of children's welfare. Based on letters and questionnaire responses, very popular developments with parents include recent refurbishments and the introduction of flexible opening hours. These have enabled greater flexibility in parents' working arrangements, while still enabling their children to take full advantage of all that is offered in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Another innovation that is proving highly effective is the mix of Reception-age pupils with some in Year 1, giving access to outdoor learning for both age groups. The outdoor areas for Nursery and Reception permit plenty of opportunities for learning across all areas. This means that children's needs for different learning styles are available to them and well met. Tracking of progress indicates that pupils of both years are flourishing. On entry to the Nursery, attainment is a little above average. Teaching is outstanding so, from their starting points, children make very rapid progress through the Nursery and Reception classes. This is because resources are used highly effectively to interest children, allowing them to make choices about what and how to learn. At the same time, very good sessions in phonic skills and number work are taught to all. By the time they enter Year 1, personal development and well-being are outstanding. Children also achieve outstandingly in academic terms, with a good proportion achieving the age-related goals, including several who exceed them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the new electronic system for tracking pupils' progress is brought to full effectiveness.

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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2
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 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1
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



9 July 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Victoria Church of England (VA) First School, Berkhamsted, HP4 3HA

Thank you for all your helpfulness when Mrs Arora and I inspected your school. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you, including the school/ eco councillors and the Fairtrade group. We heard all about your Fairtrade award and ecological ventures. It all sounds very exciting – no wonder so many of you told us that you think your school is very enjoyable and a great place to attend. We agree with you. It is an outstanding school. We also thoroughly enjoyed seeing your work, which is consistently of a high standard. Your behaviour is excellent.

Here are some important things that are exceptional in your school

- your very good skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology mean that you are prepared exceptionally well for the future
- your teachers care for you and teach you very well indeed, so you make very rapid progress
- you cooperate very well with each other and with all the adults in your school, so it is like one big family
- your headteacher, staff and governors keep a careful eye on everything to ensure your safety, personal well-being and that your work is of high quality
- the adults in your school all have very good ideas to keep it excellent and they give you opportunities to add in your own ideas.

We have made the suggestion that your school should complete its introduction of a new system for tracking your progress as quickly as possible.

I should like to wish you every success for the future and hope that you will always enjoy your education as much as you do now. Mrs Arora also sends her good wishes.

Yours faithfully

John W. Paull
Lead inspector