

Henlow Church of England Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	138027
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	398158
Inspection dates	1–2 May 2012
Lead inspector	Cathy Morgan

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	527
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Perry Huntley
Headteacher	Ray Payne
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2009
School address	Church Road Henlow SG16 6AN
Telephone number	01462 813733
Fax number	01462 817340
Email address	henlowacademy@schools.bedfordshire.gov.uk

Age group	9–13
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M1 2WD

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Introduction

Inspection team

Cathy Morgan

Additional Inspector

Michael Lafford

Additional Inspector

Raminder Arora

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 27 lessons taught by 27 teachers, made several shorter visits to observe teaching and learning in classrooms, looked at pupils' work and observed extra-curricular activities taking place. They observed the school's work, and scrutinised documents including: policies, action plans, information about pupils' learning and progress, attendance data, information from the school's monitoring and arrangements for safeguarding. Discussions were held with staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and the external education adviser to the school. Responses to questionnaires returned by pupils and staff and the 214 returned by parents and carers were analysed.

Information about the school

Henlow Church of England Academy is a large, middle-deemed-secondary school serving the Henlow area to the south east of Bedford. The school converted to academy status on 1 April 2012 and was formerly known as Henlow Voluntary Controlled Middle School. The school serves RAF Henlow, and it is not uncommon for pupils from the base to join the school after the start of Year 5 and leave before they reach the end of Year 8. A large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language and none is at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school admits a higher proportion than seen nationally of pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school meets the current floor standards set by the government, which determine the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. It has gained the Artsmark Gold, Healthy Schools Award, Football Association Charter Mark and the Sportsmark.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It is inclusive and has high aspirations to give its pupils excellent experiences which successfully promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is not yet outstanding because teaching, learning and achievement are not yet outstanding.
- Pupils make good progress in their academic and personal development which enables them to reach above average standards of attainment by the end of Year 6, and their attainment is also ahead of that expected when they leave the school at the end of Year 8.
- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Teachers are skilled in motivating pupils' interest in learning and the desire to do well. Teachers are enthusiastic about their specialist subjects and set high expectations which pupils emulate in the most successful lessons. Teachers monitor pupils' progress effectively, but, in a small minority of lessons, pupils are not able to work more rapidly at their own pace and insufficient use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enable them to work independently.
- The school's high expectations, a consistent approach to managing behaviour, and effective use of rewards and sanctions help pupils to develop self-discipline, confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, behaviour is outstanding, including pupils' attitudes to learning.
- Extremely strong leadership from senior and middle leaders and the governing body and effective distributed leadership at all levels have enabled the school to continue to improve since its previous inspection. The impressive curriculum, including a wide range of extra-curricular activities, provides pupils with exciting and memorable learning opportunities.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning to accelerate pupils' progress and raise their attainment by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to learn independently
 - extending further the effective use of ICT and the virtual learning environment
 - ensuring that all pupils are given opportunities to respond to questions in lessons to demonstrate their understanding and extend their thinking.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Inspectors' findings that achievement is good are overwhelmingly endorsed by parents and carers who agree that their children are making good progress at school. Pupils' mature attitudes to learning are commendable and contribute greatly to their achievement.

Inspectors endorse the school's own rigorous and extensive assessment of pupils when they join the school. Pupils' prior attainment is broadly in line with that found nationally on entry and pupils make good progress to reach above average levels in the national tests at the end of Year 6. School leaders have made a determined effort to ensure that pupils make even faster progress and current data, endorsed by inspection findings, demonstrate that pupils attain higher than expected standards in English and mathematics by the time they leave the school. The school adopts a successful inclusive approach. Learning resources are customised to ensure that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs have access to all aspects of the curriculum and achieve at least in line with other pupils. Those pupils who join the school at different times through the year also make good progress due to the excellent support from all staff.

The school places great emphasis on improving pupils' literacy and this is enabling pupils to develop good reading, writing and presentation skills. Pupils are well prepared for unannounced visits from 'Capital Kate', a teacher in costume who visits lessons to spot-check pupils' use of punctuation. Currently, in Year 6, attainment is above average, including in reading. Pupils make good progress in most lessons because they concentrate well, work hard and are well taught. In one mathematics lesson, Year 7 pupils who usually find the subject difficult, quickly grasped the concept of probability through a lively and practical paired activity and were able to use complex terminology to describe their results.

Quality of teaching

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Pupils are benefiting greatly from the focus in recent years on improving the quality of teaching. Almost all teaching is at least good and, sometimes, it is outstanding. Parents and carers overwhelmingly agree that their children are taught well. Typically, lessons are characterised by teachers' high levels of subject expertise, enthusiasm, effective planning and high expectations of pupils. Behaviour and relationships are excellent and contribute well to the positive and respectful atmosphere in lessons and to pupils' moral, spiritual and social development.

In the outstanding lessons, pupils of all abilities are motivated, enthusiastic and totally engaged in challenging and interesting tasks which enable them to make at least good progress in their learning. Teachers use a variety of strategies and a range of innovative resources to stimulate high-level discussions which illicit imaginative and considered responses from pupils. In a Year 5 science lesson, the teacher humorously used model skeletons and a puppet to aid pupils' understanding of the human body. When asked to describe specific functions of the brain, one pupil quickly responded, 'It's like a post-office up there, with lots of different operations going on.' Opportunities are plentiful for pupils to develop a wider understanding of the world, different cultures, sport, music and the arts. In the majority of lessons, activities are well planned to closely meet the needs and abilities of pupils, particularly disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Very occasionally, however, pupils are expected to work on the same tasks with few opportunities to work independently, and on these occasions their learning is not quite as effective.

Excellent use is made of peer and self-evaluation and pupils quickly become confident and competent in evaluating the quality of one another's work and commenting sensitively on the areas for improvement. Pupils are taught to read well and their use of specialist vocabulary in lessons is excellent. This was clearly demonstrated in a Year 7 art lesson when pupils produced detailed and imaginative evaluations using complex terminology to describe the spiritual and aesthetic aspects of paintings by Stolzenburg and Van Gogh. Where opportunities exist for pupils to make use of ICT, particularly the virtual learning environment, they demonstrate high-level skills and a great capacity to learn independently. This practice is not consistent across all subjects, however.

Feedback from teachers is regular and positive. Pupils enjoy receiving constructive comments and are well motivated to gain rewards for the quality of their work and behaviour in lessons. Alongside the many positive question-and-answer sessions, inspectors observed occasions when the same pupils were allowed to dominate and prevent those who are more reluctant to respond from extending their thinking.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding around the school and in lessons and is invariably maintained at this high standard. The mutual respect between pupils and adults

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contributes to the school's strong, positive ethos and calm atmosphere. Pupils enjoy many varied and unusual activities at lunchtimes and, as a result, there are very few incidents. Pupils have a very good understanding of what different kinds of bullying entail. They say there is virtually no bullying and any very occasional incidents are dealt with extremely promptly and effectively. Pupils think sanctions are fair and very effective. Pupils are very sensitive to one another's needs and those with parents in the RAF benefit greatly from belonging to the school's 'purple club' which provides them with support during times when parents are away on duty. The nurture room provides a wonderful, safe haven for all pupils at times when they feel particularly vulnerable and they make regular and sensitive use of the school prayer table.

Pupils say they feel safe. They know exceptionally well how to keep themselves safe when using ICT. Pupils' engagement is a priority for the school. The school council is proactive in a range of school developments, from the installation of parasols on the playground to active involvement in the selection and recruitment of new members of staff. Pupils' punctuality is excellent and attendance is above that seen nationally. Almost all pupils, parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire fully endorsed inspection findings and indicated that pupils behave exceptionally well and feel very safe in school.

Leadership and management

'Aiming For Excellence' is the school's mission statement and this can be seen in all aspects of its work. All leaders and managers, including the external education adviser and the governing body, are highly ambitious for the school. There is a clear focus on continuing to raise attainment and improve the progress of all pupils by enhancing the quality of teaching in all subjects. The school development plan is precise in its identification of priorities. Roles and responsibilities are clear and the expected outcomes for sustained improvement are explicit. The headteacher believes strongly in effective teamwork and his distributed leadership ensures that all staff have a shared responsibility and accountability for all aspects of school improvement.

Senior leaders and governors know the school well. They have identified and implemented a range of strategies to effect improvement and have successfully tackled the areas of weakness identified at the last inspection. There is greater accuracy and rigour in the assessment and recording of pupils' progress and the timeliness of targeted intervention. While this is leading to improvements in the use of data to inform teachers' planning, it is too soon to evidence the impact on outcomes for pupils in the forthcoming tests for Year 6, or to demonstrate that all pupils continue to make the progress expected of them. However, the school's track record of good achievement, pupils' outstanding behaviour and personal development, supported well by good and better teaching, ensure that it has the capacity to sustain improvement further.

Pupils speak highly of their involvement in regular 'tray check' activities, which enable them to discuss their progress with members of the senior leadership team.

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This helps to build their self-confidence and demonstrates the importance that the school places on nurturing individual pupils. The close analysis of progress data is used effectively to ensure that individuals and groups achieve equally well and action is taken promptly at any indication of underachievement. There is no discrimination in this school.

The curriculum is outstanding because it provides pupils with excellent, exciting and memorable activities which promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. The wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities is outstanding in extending pupils' learning and enhancing their personal development.

The senior and middle leaders ensure that all actions are based on an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. All staff are challenged positively and constructively through performance management, particularly in relation to teaching and assessment. Recently appointed middle leaders are adding their expertise and relentless enthusiasm to a committed and experienced team. They are all extremely well supported by senior leaders to continue to develop professionally.

The governing body is well informed and very evaluative and critical of its own work, as well of that of the school. It bases its actions on an accurate understanding of the school's performance and is challenging leaders effectively. This is clearly evidenced by governors' request for an extensive evaluation of the quality of teaching. The outcomes, which largely match the profile of judgements made during the inspection, provide an accurate assessment of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. There are clear plans to use this analysis to target specific areas for improvement and secure good or better teaching in all subjects. Governors have specialist expertise in tackling discrimination, safeguarding and child protection and ensure that all statutory arrangements are in place.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



3 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Henlow Church of England Academy, Henlow, SG16 6AN.

Thank you for the wonderful welcome you gave us when we carried out our recent inspection. Thank you to those who talked to us and filled out our questionnaire. It was very useful to have your views. We were impressed by your attitudes to learning, how maturely you engaged in conversation, and your polite and courteous manner, as well as by how much you enjoyed being challenged in lessons. We think your behaviour is outstanding. You told us that you think your school is good and we agree with you.

You are well taught and you achieve well. You enjoy lessons, especially those that allow you to be active and work at a fast pace. You benefit greatly from the many interesting extra-curricular activities which are provided for you, which you also enjoy. Staff look after you well and keep you safe, and so you feel secure in school. You all know how to keep yourselves safe, including times when you are using the internet. You look after one another well and we were very touched by the caring and thoughtful prayers many of you have placed on the prayer table.

Your headteacher, the school leaders, staff and the governing body want to continue to improve the school for you. We agree with them that teaching is good overall and we would like them to make sure that it becomes outstanding by making learning always the best it can possibly be for you. We have asked your teachers to give you all the opportunity to contribute your answers to questions in lessons and to enable you to work on tasks that let you find things out for yourselves. We also want teachers to make even better use of ICT and the school's virtual learning environment to help you become successful independent learners.

You can help too by continuing to work hard and being such positive pupils. I send you and your teachers my very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Morgan
Lead Inspector

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