

St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	118618
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	379648
Inspection dates	25–26 January 2012
Lead inspector	Wendy Simmons

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	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Jones
Headteacher	Acting Headteachers: Jonathan Bassett, Vanessa Dunnet and Clare Fullagar
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Wendy Simmons

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited 13 lessons; some observations lasted more than 25 minutes and others included short observations to explore pupils' typical learning across a range of subjects.

All seven teachers were observed and discussions were held with teachers. The inspector held five meetings with different groups of pupils and listened to pupils read. Samples of pupils' work were seen. Meetings were held with the senior management team and four representatives of the governing body.

Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), observed the school's work and evaluated the responses to the questionnaires from pupils, staff and the 38 parents and carers. A range of documentation was scrutinised, especially that linked to the school's development plans and to assessment data showing how well pupils are developing their skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Information about the school

This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. There are five classes, of which all but Year 6 are mixed-age; this includes a class with Early Years Foundation Stage children and Year 1 pupils. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds and the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below average. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.

The school currently has three acting headteachers and is supported for two days a week by a retired headteacher. From April 2012, there will be further restructuring, as one of the assistant headteachers will become the substantive headteacher. Since the last inspection, the school has experienced a number of staffing difficulties. Three classes are currently taught by staff who work on a job-share basis. The school meets the current floor standard.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- St Mark's is a satisfactory school, which benefits from a spacious and well-designed building and grounds and from a team of staff, governors and parents and carers who work together well for the benefit of the pupils. The school is recovering securely following a period of staffing difficulties. There is a concerted approach to school improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are satisfactory.
- There are notable strengths in the impressive provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that children develop basic skills quickly from their varied starting points. . In Years 1 and 2, however, pupils' progress in using letters and sounds is not quick enough (phonics) to enable pupils to reach higher than average levels of reading and writing. The gap between boys' and girls' achievement in mathematics is closing. The school is working to sustain this, so that boys do consistently well and teaching is consistently good. Currently, pupils do not do enough real-life, practical problem solving in mathematics or in other curriculum subjects. Opportunities are being missed to edit and extend pupils' writing skills in the school as a whole.
- Leaders have secured considerable improvements in reading. They remain focused on improving writing. Some targets and opportunities for pupils writing are not challenging enough to ensure that the more able do as well as possible.
- Pupils enjoy school, are polite and well behaved. Attendance rates are high and pupils report that they feel safe in school.
- Between Years 1 and 6, leaders have taken firm and effective action to eradicate almost all inadequate teaching, so that pupils make the progress expected. Some teaching is now good but further improvement remains a focus to raise pupils' achievement further.

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Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' overall achievement and the quality of teaching to good by January 2013 by:
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to do practical, real-life problem solving, in mathematics, including making more links with other subjects
 - building on the secure start already evident to ensure that boys' progress in mathematics is sustained consistently well in all classes
 - raising the challenge when teaching phonics in Years 1 and 2 to accelerate improvements in reading and writing and ensuring that pupils use phonic skills in other subjects
 - ensuring that writing targets for pupils are consistently challenging
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to do extended pieces of writing, including helping pupils to edit their work so that more reach higher levels of attainment.

Main report**Achievement of pupils**

Parents and carers, in their questionnaires, noted that they would recommend the school to others and a large majority were satisfied with the way in which their children develop. The inspection also found progress to be satisfactory overall.

Children do particularly well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because they start school with often lower than expected skills and make rapid progress as a result of very good teaching. This ensures that the gap is closed significantly so that their attainment is broadly average by the beginning of Year 1. Children's achievement in the basic skills of reading, writing, mathematics and social skills are notable strengths of their development in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Pupils' progress in mathematics is improving. By the end of Year 2, pupils confidently worked on addition and subtraction, with the most able using three-digit numbers. The sample of work seen, however, showed that links between mathematics and other subjects are not consistently well developed from class to class in the school as a whole. In the past, boys have not done as well as they should between Years 2 and 6 in mathematics. However, lessons and samples of work confirm that all pupils, including the boys, are now building up skills quickly. For example, pupils use and explain different methods of calculation and work on more complicated word-based problems. They apply their tables and mental arithmetic

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skills securely and commented how they practise their tables very regularly now. Year 6 pupils explained how they were improving their skills in relation to factors and multiplication. There was good evidence of pupils using jottings to show individual methods of calculation.

Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals often do better in English than the national average for this group. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress and sometimes this is good because of the quality of extra support which enables them to work individually. One Year 6 pupil explained how the support is, 'helping me to get my ideas down better by myself'.

Pupils agree that making their own 'mind maps' helps them to think hard and link their learning in other subjects. However, this approach tends to be more effective in developing literacy across the curriculum than mathematics. Pupils' progress is on track to meet the targets expected in 2012 in mathematics and English. Pupils enjoy reading regularly and talking about books in depth during guided reading sessions where progress is improving. Pupils read very regularly. By the end of Years 2 and 6, their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is average.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers believe that the quality of teaching almost always meets the children's needs. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the very impressive range of indoor and outdoor resources, exciting activities and strong teaching ensure children are engaged and curious about learning. For example, children were helped to understand the vocabulary and phonic sounds within the story of 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' well.

Typically, between Years 1 and 6, lessons are suitably planned to meet pupils' different needs. Pupils are encouraged to think hard and explain their ideas well. For example, in a science lesson Year 3 and 4 pupils carefully made parachutes of different sizes. Following this and a test flight, they confidently explained why the 30-centimetre parachute stayed in the air longer than the 20-centimetre and 10-centimetre versions. This lesson exemplifies strong links between mathematics and other subjects. However, in the school as a whole links are not as well developed.

Teachers have good subject knowledge overall. In phonics, however, teachers do not use technical vocabulary enough to help pupils to understand skills. For example, by using words such as 'segmenting' so that pupils can write and spell words as accurately as possible. Nonetheless, when reading, pupils usually 'blend' letter sounds together effectively to work out new words. Phonic skills are very well taught in the Early Years Foundation Stage but pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2 is more uneven as opportunities are missed to apply and reinforce their skills in a range of different activities throughout the week.

Pupils report that teachers are making lessons more fun and this helps them to become absorbed in their learning. Teachers make sure that pupils have targets for

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improvement but these are sometimes not specific enough. All the teaching staff focus well on promoting pupils' descriptive language through discussions and questioning. However, only a few teachers skilfully show pupils how to edit and improve their writing skills. Teachers do not plan enough time for pupils to produce extended pieces of writing.

Provision, through community links, assembly themes and the garden areas, promotes pupils' spiritual development particularly well. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to reflect, explore their feelings, develop respect for others and enjoy the arts. Teaching helps pupils to explore different cultures through stories, visits, special projects and through very well established links with the local church.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils report that they are very safe at school and that there is a good standard of behaviour overall. Their view is endorsed by those of their parents and carers. The provision for pupils' moral and social education enhances well pupils' attitudes and behaviour towards others.

Issues, such as how to deal with bullying, including internet bullying, are integrated into the curriculum. Pupils have also had opportunities to talk about different kinds of bullying. They confirm that it is very rare and always dealt with quickly if it should occur and parents and carers agree. There have been no exclusions in four years and no racist incidents reported.

Very occasionally, pupils with complex behavioural difficulties find it hard to manage their behaviour for short periods of time; this can lead to occasional disruptions in lessons. A few parents and carers commented on this. Staff are skilled at managing behaviour issues, so that they do not impact on the learning and well-being of pupils. Attendance rates are high and pupils are punctual. Pupils enjoy school and staff work very closely with parents and carers.

Leadership and management

Leaders provide well-defined and effective safeguarding procedures and promote equality for all. Discrimination of any form is not tolerated, as is evident from the fact that all groups of pupils are fully included in the life of the school and achieve similarly to each other.

The staff questionnaires confirmed that they are proud to be part of the school and parents and carers believe the school is well led and managed. The acting headteacher arrangement is working suitably.

The governing body is fully involved in the life of the school and in challenging it to do better. Leaders' self-evaluation has strengthened since the last inspection so that

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teaching, following a decline, is now improving well, aided by professional development and good monitoring. Analysis of how well different groups of pupils achieve is now tracked rigorously and is leading to more even progress across the school. The school's improvement plan accurately emphasises where improvement is needed. Overall, the school's track record of sustained improvement over time demonstrates a secure capacity to improve further.

Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development suitably across a wide range of subjects and through extra-curricular activities. For example, there are increased opportunities for pupils to become independent learners who are curious about the world. The curriculum is satisfactory. Improvements include pupils doing more investigations in science and improving their use of jottings to help them with mathematical calculations. The focus on guided reading is strong and is helping pupils of all abilities to improve their reading skills at an increased rate. An increasing number of visits are also helping to engage learners.

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.



27 January 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Mark's Church of England Primary School, Aylesford
ME20 7HS**

I am writing to thank you for helping me to find out all about your school and for filling in the questionnaires. You go to a satisfactory school that is welcoming and safe. You report that you feel welcomed, well cared for and are keen to attend. Congratulations for behaving well, being polite and for your excellent attendance by the time you leave Year 6.

You have noticed that the adults are trying to improve things for you. Year 6 pupils explained very clearly how you have more interesting things to do and are helped to be more independent. I was delighted to find out that you are practising your tables, explaining different ways to solve calculations and are learning more in guided reading sessions. It was good to see you doing interesting scientific investigations and having opportunities to use the wonderful building and grounds to help you with your all-round development. You make steady progress in learning new things because teaching is satisfactory. The Reception class children often complete their learning tasks outstandingly well. The three acting headteachers are working well to improve the school.

Here are the things that need to be done to improve.

- Make sure that teaching in mathematics and English is at least good so that you can do as well as possible.

This will mean that you will be doing more practical, real-life mathematical problem solving and younger pupils in Years 1 and 2 will be doing more letters and sounds (phonics) work. All of you need help to do longer pieces of writing and to learn how to edit and improve your writing. Teachers will make sure that your targets are as helpful as possible.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons
Lead inspector

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