

St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118613
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358400
Inspection dates	31 January 2011–1 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Norma Ball

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	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Stevenson
Headteacher	Helen Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons as well as a small out-of-class teaching group. Inspectors observed eight teachers. They met parents and carers informally on the first day of the inspection, and held meetings with the headteacher, teaching staff, members of the governing body and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised samples of pupils' work, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress, management and curriculum documentation, teachers' planning and safeguarding documents. Inspectors took account of questionnaire responses from 56 parents and carers, 13 staff, and 85 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How successful are the school's strategies to improve attainment in mathematics, especially for more able pupils in Key Stage 2?
- Do teachers use assessment information effectively to set appropriate challenge for pupils and is this leading to improved progress, especially for girls and pupils of higher ability?
- How well does the curriculum contribute to pupils' achievement?
- Do leaders and managers at all levels monitor the work of the school rigorously, and is this leading to improved achievement?

Information about the school

St Mark's is smaller than the average sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage and, of the small proportion of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds, a few speak English as an additional language. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has been reorganised and the proportion of pupils with these needs, including those with a statement special educational needs, is now average. A quarter of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is higher than that found nationally. The breakfast and after-school club are managed by the governing body. The school has the Activemark award and Healthy School status.

The acting headteacher was appointed in September 2010. It is a part-time appointment and the leadership of the school is shared with the deputy headteacher who has been in post since February 2010. In the past two years the school has experienced a number of staffing changes.

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 Mark's provides a satisfactory quality of education. Pupils enjoy coming to school because they enjoy learning. The acting headteacher has taken rapid action to improve areas of the school's work. A careful review of the progress pupils make has led to new initiatives to improve pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stage 2. A booster class for pupils in Year 6 who are falling behind in their learning is proving successful in accelerating progress in both literacy and numeracy particularly for less able pupils. Attainment is average at the end of Year 6; it is better in English than mathematics. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that these pupils make the same satisfactory progress as their classmates. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. Parents and carers are pleased with their children's experience of school and one wrote, 'Our children really enjoy school. We are extremely pleased with the nurturing atmosphere fostered at St Mark's.'

Children settle quickly in Reception and have a sound range of learning experiences in the classroom. However, the outdoor classroom is not used to full advantage to extend all six areas of learning through a range of interesting activities. Most pupils behave well, although they can become distracted in some lessons when the pace of learning slows. Teaching is satisfactory. Teaching is better in Years 1 and 2 because teachers make consistently good use in lessons of the information they have on pupils' progress to plan tasks which stretch children of different abilities, especially more able pupils. Targets for older pupils in Key Stage 2 are not sharp enough or regularly reinforced, so pupils are not clear what they have to learn next. Marking is inconsistent in quality and does not always identify the next steps in learning or explain clearly how and where a piece of work can be improved in order for pupils to make better progress. In older classes teachers' questioning is variable in quality and does not always ensure that all pupils, especially girls, are fully involved in discussions so they can share their ideas. However, girls make the same satisfactory progress as boys and work well independently.

The monitoring of teaching and learning and the secure embedding of new curriculum initiatives in the classroom are not sufficiently regular or rigorous to ensure the quality of teaching and learning improves throughout the school. Subject leaders are developing their skills to share the monitoring role with the headteacher. The headteacher has made a rapid and accurate assessment of important priorities for improvement in the school and is supported by a committed leadership team. The members are working with determination to encourage other staff to share in the drive to improve achievement for all pupils. Safeguarding procedures are secure. The governing body is supportive of the school and is taking steps to improve its skills so that it can better challenge senior leaders and managers and play an active role in helping to set the future direction of the school. Self-evaluation is accurate. The school has a satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

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Up to 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by improving teaching, especially in Key Stage 2, by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is used more accurately to plan work which fully challenges all pupils, especially the more able, and also identifies sharper targets for improvement which are clear to pupils
 - making sure the marking of pupils' work shows clearly how it can be improved and what pupils need to learn next.
- Improve the provision in Reception by ensuring all six areas of learning are planned for the outside area and that that activities are enticing for children.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills of senior leaders so they share with the headteacher in regular and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning
 - increasing the involvement of the governing body in monitoring all areas of the school's work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Children make a satisfactory start to their learning in Reception. They enter Reception with skills and abilities below those expected for their age. They make good progress in Years 1 and 2, but progress slows in Years 3 to 6 and the standards pupils attain at the end of Year 6 are average. As a result of a recent drive to improve attainment in literacy, there is a stronger focus on developing pupils' writing skills and the choice of imaginative themes, such as the spooks theme in Year 6, is encouraging creative and extended writing. Initiatives to improve attainment in mathematics lag behind those in English, but are now a school priority. Pupils in Year 6 who are falling behind in mathematics and English are taught in a separate class for three days a week. Progress in this group is good. For example, in a lesson on recognising characters from written descriptions, pupils were encouraged to look in detail at how the writer created an image for a character in words. A mind map was used well to summarise the class views which skilful questioning had drawn out from all members of the class.

Tasks are well structured in some classes, especially for younger pupils, to ensure all make good progress, including the more able. In a Year 2 numeracy class, tasks were well matched to the four ability groups in the class as they looked at multiplication and division problems in hundreds, tens and units. All pupils understood what they were expected to do, settled well and received good support.

Pupils enjoy their work and want to do well. However, in some lessons, where the pace is too slow, pupils' attention can wander and pupils become distracted. They like sharing their ideas, especially in small groups and pairs. In some classes girls are shy and slow to contribute to the class discussion and teachers' questioning does not always ensure that girls make an equal contribution. Pupils show a good sense of responsibility in the duties they undertake in class and around the school. They understand right from wrong and

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show kindness and concern for others, as is reflected in their enthusiastic fundraising for charities. However, pupils have only a limited awareness of other cultures and lifestyles. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They are equally aware of how to stay safe and that includes the sensible use of the internet. Attendance is average and is monitored well, but a few families do not attend regularly. Pupils are soundly prepared for their move to secondary school.

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	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
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	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory with examples of good teaching in Years 1 and 2. Teachers have good subject knowledge and the purpose of lessons is explained clearly to pupils. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored at whole-school level, but assessment information is not used consistently in classes in Key Stage 2 to plan lessons that meet pupils' different learning needs. This often results in very similar work being given to different ability groups. Able pupils often finish work quickly and are given, for example, no extension tasks to further involve them or which offer more challenge. As a result, their progress slows. Targets are set for pupils but they are not sharp enough, discussed with pupils regularly or consistently designed to meet the needs of individual pupils. As a result, pupils do not value their targets and they are not a regular focus in teaching to help guide them to the next stage of their learning. Most work is marked regularly and pupils are praised for their efforts, but marking does not regularly identify how, and in what ways, a piece of

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work can be improved. Teaching support assistants are well deployed and provide satisfactory support in class.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Information and communication technology (ICT) is well integrated into lessons. Links between subjects are developing to help make learning more interesting and to provide additional opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy and literacy skills. For example, in a Year 1 lesson the theme of Africa, based on the story of a boy called Hamda, looked at aspects of life in rural Zambia. This theme made good links with literacy, numeracy, art, geography, music, and dance. Extra-curricular activities, although not extensive, are well planned and bring learning alive outside the classroom. A sound range of clubs are well attended by pupils and sporting activities extend links to other schools through regular matches. Good supervision ensures that pupils are safe and the breakfast and after-school clubs extend the safe care of pupils. The satisfactory care provided for pupils in school is extended by prudent use of a wide range of agencies. Through the family liaison officer, the school's care is extended to embrace families as well as pupils. Transfer arrangements at all stages are efficiently managed.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The acting headteacher, although only in post for a term, has taken incisive steps to raise achievement for all pupils. A newly-appointed senior leadership team has focused carefully on its areas of responsibility. The provision for pupils with special educational needs, literacy and the Early Years Foundation Stage have all been reviewed and improvements are being closely monitored. A focus on numeracy is planned later than that for literacy. Advice and support from the local authority have been used well to help develop effective strategies to raise achievement and also to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders and managers are not complacent and recognise there is still much to do. The deputy headteacher and the leaders of literacy and numeracy are new to their roles and improving their skills. However, they are not yet involved in the monitoring of teaching and learning.. New initiatives are becoming embedded but at different rates through the classes as some teachers require more support to embrace the new drive for improvement. The school tackles discrimination effectively and ensures all pupils participate in school activities. However, it is providing only satisfactorily for equality of opportunity because of the variability in pupils' achievement. Girls make the same progress as boys, but more able pupils are not fully stretched to achieve as well as they could.

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The safeguarding of pupils' welfare is satisfactory and a regular focus for the governing body and senior staff. The governing body is improving its skills and the involvement of individual members so that there is a greater collective knowledge of the school and informed participation in monitoring all developments. The governors are keen to offer a balance of support and challenge in driving the school forward. Community cohesion is satisfactory. There has been a careful evaluation of the school based on its involvement in the local community. However, insufficient work has been done in developing pupils' understanding of their role as future national and global citizens through planned initiatives to extend their awareness of the multicultural nature of modern society. Parents and carers are kept well informed about events in the school and what their children will be learning. There are regular opportunities to meet with staff and discuss their child's progress.

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
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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
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 settle happily in school because they receive good care. Children enter Reception with a range of skills and abilities, but they are below the expectations for their age. Children make a sound start to their learning and make good gains in their acquisition of speaking skills and some elements of numeracy. There is a focus on improving children's writing and reading skills by developing their understanding of words and learning to blend the letter sounds. Nevertheless, they enter Year 1 with skills and abilities that are still below average. Resources are used appropriately by staff to plan activities that cover the six areas of learning in the indoor classroom. Learning activities led by teachers are satisfactory and develop children's skills soundly. However, opportunities are missed to extend children's skills outside the classroom because resources are not deployed to stimulate children's interest and encourage their creative development.

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Children mix well and learn to share. As a result, children follow routines well, respond positively to adults and follow instructions quickly. They play well together, for example, boys and girls were helping their model dinosaurs to go into the toy garage and find a place to settle down. One boy explained, 'They like it inside because it's warm. Our dinosaurs told us they like going in the lift because they get to the top really quickly.' Leadership and management are satisfactory, and the new leader has improved both the accuracy and frequency with which children's skills and abilities are monitored. Good links are forged with parents and carers who are kept closely informed about the progress their children are making. The home-school diary provides a valuable, regular link with home. The links with local nurseries and pre-school groups are used effectively and there is a careful and well-planned transfer for children into Year 1.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

A large majority of the parents and carers, including those who spoke to inspectors, are pleased with all aspects of the school. They all value the fact that their children enjoy school. Parents and carers are happy with their children's experience of school and think that they are safe and helped to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. A few parents and carers expressed concerns about how well they are informed about their child's progress. The inspection found that links with parents are satisfactory and the regular newsletters explaining what pupils will be learning have been welcomed. The school accepts that short interim written reports, in addition to the annual report, would be helpful to parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mark'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 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 187 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	75	14	25	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	59	22	39	0	0	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	38	28	50	6	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	36	30	54	4	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	41	31	55	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	50	26	46	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	48	26	46	1	2	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)	22	39	26	46	2	4	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	41	28	50	3	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	34	31	55	3	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	45	24	43	4	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	15	27	32	57	2	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	55	24	43	1	2	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



2 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's Church of England, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8LN

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and being so friendly and helpful to us. We enjoyed talking to you and visiting your classes. We were impressed to see how much you enjoy your lessons. You know a lot about being safe and healthy. You learn lots of interesting things in your time in school. You told us how much you like your school and that you think your teachers and all the other staff are kind and helpful to you. Your headteacher, other staff and the governing body are working hard to help you do the best you can. We think that St Mark's is a satisfactory school. This means it does some things well, but also needs to make some things better.

We have suggested three things which we think would help to improve your school.

- We have asked your teachers to use what they know about the progress you are making to give you tasks that are always a good match to your ability and to set you targets that show clearly what you need to learn next. We have also asked that when teachers mark your work they make it clear how and in what ways you could improve it.
- So that children in Reception have lots of chances to explore and play imaginative games, we have asked that activities planned for them in the outside area are more exciting.
- To help your headteacher keep a close check on your lessons and how well you are doing, we have asked other senior staff to visit your lessons and to look at your work to make sure you are making the best progress you can. We have also asked members of the governing body to check very carefully all that the school is doing so they can help your headteacher and other staff to plan important improvements for your school.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and doing your best at school. It was a great pleasure to visit St Marks's and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Norma Ball

Lead inspector

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