

St Mark's CofE (A) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124308
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	363329
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Des Cotton
Headteacher	Mrs Michelle Johnstone
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Wood Terrace Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire ST1 4LR
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Twelve lessons were visited and ten teachers observed. Meetings were held with parents and carers, groups of pupils, and the Chair and members of the Governing Body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at whole-school planning, teachers' planning and school policies.

Information about the school

The school is larger than most primary schools. Most of the pupils are of Pakistani heritage. Other minority ethnic groups are represented with an increasing number of pupils whose parents and carers are from Eastern Europe and Gypsy Roma Traveller. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average and the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. The school provides for the Early Years Foundation Stage in two Reception classes which work as a unit.

When St Mark's CofE School was inspected in May 2009, it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, the school was inspected on five occasions. At the last monitoring inspection the school was judged to be making good progress.

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

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

This is a satisfactory school with many good features. The outstanding new headteacher has transformed the school in less than two terms into a happy place in which to learn and to teach. She is ably supported by her effective new senior leadership team. All staff work well together; they share their good practice and support each other. New systems have been put in place to monitor teaching and learning, and to track pupils' performance. These systems hold teachers to account. As a result, the school accurately evaluates itself and has a good capacity to improve further. Governance has improved and is now satisfactory. The governing body confidently asks questions and holds the school to account. Relationships with parents and carers are good. The school seeks the views of parents and carers and quickly acts on them.

Assessments made on entry to the school, suggest that most children enter Reception classes with levels of development that are below those expected for this age in language and mathematics.

Attainment remains low but is improving strongly. The school has correctly identified weaknesses in pupils' writing. As a result, pupils now have many opportunities to write for a purpose. Teachers' assessments are now secure because of the support they have received and the work they have undertaken moderating each other's marks. A carefully thought through set of steps now guides pupils in how to improve their writing so that they can attain the higher levels. This enables all pupils to make good progress. The school now sets challenging targets and clearly differentiated work for pupils in the early stages of learning English, so that they make similar progress to all other groups of pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in lessons because teaching assistants understand how to support them through tailored interventions. The school acts swiftly to identify the learning needs of all new pupils. This is particularly important for the increasing numbers of Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils joining the school, as opportunities for their formal education have in some instances been limited. The quality of care, guidance and support that the school provides is good and sometimes outstanding. For example, the care given to new arrivals and their families.

Teaching is good because lesson planning is closely linked to data on pupils' performance and is clearly matched to pupils' needs. Learning in lessons moves at a suitable pace and the majority of activities interest the pupils. Marking of work is frequent and teachers' comments help pupils to understand how to improve, and opportunities are provided for pupils to practise their next steps in learning.

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The curriculum is satisfactory. The school understands that it does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to practise and apply key skills in literacy and numeracy, nor does the curriculum sufficiently reflect the cultural and home backgrounds of pupils. Pupils' behaviour is good. They are polite to each other and show respect. Pupils feel safe in school, because of the good care, guidance and support they receive and the nurturing atmosphere in which they learn.

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?

- Further develop the school's curriculum so that it consistently provides imaginative and effective opportunities for learning and applies key skills in literacy and numeracy to reflect the cultural diversity of the school and the wider community.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment on entry is well below national expectations. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is low but improving rapidly. This is because the quality of teaching has improved and teachers are now confident that they are doing the 'right' things to accelerate progress. Learning has improved and is good. Teachers understand how to plan work which is well matched to different groups of pupils. In lessons, especially at the upper end of the school, pupils are often able to choose the level of difficulty for their own work. Teachers consistently check pupils' understanding and modify work to reflect this. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, the teacher correctly identified that a pupil in the early stages of learning English, understood the work and could tackle more demanding problems. This pupil very much enjoyed the challenge, and with the careful support of her teaching assistant she was able to explain her thinking to the class.

Teachers' planning now takes account of whether pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are also in the early stages of learning English. Consequently all groups of pupils make good progress. Good quality resources engage pupils' interest in their learning. Laptop computers are used in lessons to help pupils draft their work and improve their writing. Pupils understand their learning targets and use this information to help develop their own work. For example, in a Year 6 literacy lesson, a pupil accurately used a Thesaurus to look up a word, as he wanted to find a better one to express his ideas.

Attendance has improved so that it is in line with other schools. This is due to the hard work and consistency of approaches used to engage and listen to parents and carers.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments are satisfactory overall. However, pupils' spiritual understanding is a strength. The school is working hard to improve pupils' social and cultural understanding.

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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	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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 and learning are good and sometimes outstanding. During the inspection teaching was observed to be satisfactory or better. Pupils show a keen interest in their learning and report that they enjoy their lessons. Bilingual support from teachers and teaching assistants is very effective. For example, in a Reception class phonics lesson, the teacher seamlessly moved between English and Polish to support a child who was in the early stages of learning English. As a result, he participated fully in all the class activities and could complete the work successfully. A high level of challenge and skilful questioning by staff enables learning to move at a brisk pace. In lessons where assessment information is used effectively, tasks are carefully adapted and modified during the lesson by teachers in order to maintain high levels of challenge. Teachers effectively use a wide range of strategies, such as 'talking partners' to encourage pupils to discuss their learning, thus increasing the participation and motivation of pupils. In the very few satisfactory lessons, the pace of learning slowed because introductions were too long. All classes enjoy one trip per term to enhance their learning.

The school rightly identifies that opportunities are missed to make the curriculum more stimulating, in order to engage pupils further and raise standards. The school has already started developing the curriculum in Years 5 and 6 and pupils have commented on how much more exciting their learning is as a result. Changes to the curriculum in Year 1, to reflect the needs of pupils who have not achieved the Early Learning Goals, are already

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beginning to bear fruit with improved progress. The school also recognises the need to develop a curriculum which reflects the majority of pupils' cultural background.

There is an appropriate emphasis on staying safe and developing healthy lifestyles. Pastoral support within the curriculum is strong. Intervention strategies are tailored specifically to meet the needs of pupils; these are closely monitored and effective.

The quality of support is outstanding. This is through its response to pupils' individual needs and the community it serves. The deployment of specific staff to help pupils and families has been a key feature of the school's success in this area. The school goes to great lengths to support the more vulnerable pupils and their families, helping them to overcome barriers to education and social integration. Bilingual staff are used to good effect to provide a link between parents and carers and school. The school has made great efforts to ensure that information for parents and carers is available in a range of languages. The integration of the many new pupils that enter the school throughout the year is done exceptionally well and as a result, these pupils settle quickly.

Links with external agencies are well developed and used to good effect. The school can provide striking examples of where it has intervened to support families and pupils to overcome barriers to education and social integration. Transition arrangements with the feeder Nursery school are well established. Plans are underway to develop closer links with the local high schools.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Her drive and determination have in a very short space of time, radically improved the school. She is effectively supported by her senior leadership team, who share her vision and determination. As a result, the strengths and talents of the senior leadership team have been able to flourish. Together, they have successfully tackled weaknesses in leadership, teaching and built stronger relationships with parents and carers. Senior leaders and managers, and the governing body effectively embed ambition and drive improvements. Middle managers take responsibility for developing their subjects, have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning and share good practice with colleagues. The school has successfully tackled major changes in a short period of time. For example, monitoring systems accurately pinpoint weaknesses and tackle them efficiently. Displays around the school celebrate pupils' work. The introduction of the new school uniform, together with the logo designed by pupils illustrates the greater pride the school has in itself and its 'can do' ethos. The new school library is a popular and well-used space, with an increasing number of dual language

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books. The change of location of the headteacher's office, places it at the heart of the school, and is easily accessible to all.

All staff have clear job descriptions and performance management interviews with targets which link to the school development plan. Thus, all staff are held to account well.

Parents and carers are very positive about the school; they feel listened to and encouraged to participate and engage with the school. The school has worked hard to improve relationships, build trust and involve parents and carers. For example, they enjoy helping in classes and being involved with the recently formed Friends of St Mark's. Parents and carers said they were impressed with how much the school had changed. They feel confident that their child will receive a good quality of education. Staff stand at the school gate to greet and meet parents and carers at the beginning and end of the school day. A small number of parents and carers expressed concern about the poor quality of the school meals provision. The school is aware of the poor quality of the meals and shares parents concerns. A few parents and carers were unhappy about the quality of marking of homework. Some would appreciate more support from the school in helping their children to complete homework. The school recognises that there are opportunities to improve homework.

Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements. The school has worked effectively to update its policies and ensure that all staff are appropriately trained. It has recently implemented an e-safety policy, but has yet to share this with parents and carers.

The school rigorously promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination. This is reflected in the diligent work of staff to ensure vulnerable pupils are appropriately supported by the school and outside agencies. The school also seeks to support parents and carers with a range of issues. For example, school staff help parents and carers to arrange hospital appointments for pupils and have invited the Citizens' Advice Bureau into school to talk with groups of parents and carers.

The school has begun to develop its work in the community as part of its role in developing community cohesion with activities, such as fundraising for repairs to the local mosque, and money to help people in the Pakistani floods. Pupils were also very proud of the large sums of money they had raised for Red Nose Day.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
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

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and improving rapidly as a result of good leadership and management. Personal development skills are in line with those expected for children of this age. By the time they leave, most children have made good progress in their learning, with notable gains made in number work. Children are presented with a variety of opportunities to improve their early writing skills but progress in this aspect has not been as rapid. On leaving reception, many children remain below the Early Learning Goals desirable for starting Year 1.

Staff provide an imaginative and stimulating environment that captures children's interests. Teachers make effective use of the vastly improved outdoor area to plan a good range of exciting and purposeful activities across the different areas of learning. This enables children to learn effectively through play. Children clearly enjoy their time in school and make good progress over the year, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those in the early stages of learning English. The quality of teaching is good throughout and practitioners intervene purposely to guide learning although, on occasion, opportunities are missed to maximise children's language development. Support for pupils who are in the early stages of learning English as a second language is excellent and this enables them to improve their English, access the curriculum and make the same good progress as other children.

The well-being of children is promoted effectively and children have a good understanding, for example, of how to play safely. Children are well cared for and forge good relationships with adults. The quality of leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and has been influential in driving forward improvements. The leader has ensured that welfare requirements are met and that systems for assessing children's progress are rigorous. Partnerships with parents and carers are good. Children feel very

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safe in this nurturing environment. Good induction procedures and the high value placed on children's well-being ensure that they settle quickly and enjoy school.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires for parents and carers are not normally distributed by Ofsted for special measures monitoring inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

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.



24 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School, Stoke on Trent, ST1 4LR

Thank you for all your help and comments throughout the inspection. They were very useful to us. We were very impressed by your courtesy to us and how well you worked together in lessons. You look very smart in your new uniform and your new logo is very attractive. We agree with you that your school has greatly improved. You go to a satisfactory school which has many good features. It provides you with a safe and caring environment which enables you to develop well as confident learners.

Your school is led really well by the outstanding work of your headteacher. She is ably supported by the senior leadership team and your hard working and dedicated teachers, teaching assistants and governing body. Together they make sure that you aspire to great things. All staff care about you and encourage you. We were impressed with your good behaviour around school and in lessons and your improved attendance. You must keep up your good standards of behaviour and attendance so that you can continue to improve the quality of your work. Teaching and learning are good and teachers try to make sure your work is well matched to your learning needs. In particular, the bilingual support you receive helps pupils who are just starting to learn English to learn well. The curriculum is satisfactory. We have asked your school to develop it further to give you greater opportunities to practise your writing and numeracy skills. In addition, we would like you to have more opportunities to learn about cultural diversity and the wider community.

We wish you continued success in all you do.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker

Her Majesty's Inspector

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