

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122024
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	359148
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Carol Worthington

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

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	249
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Melvyn Hunter
Headteacher	Jonathan Gardiner
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 13 lessons led by 10 different teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, and the Chair of the Governing Body. Discussions were held with two groups of pupils from Key Stage 2. Many pupils were spoken to informally. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at records of assessments of pupils' attainment, tracking of their progress and samples of their work in books. All safeguarding documents were scrutinised. Inspectors analysed 94 parents' and carers' questionnaires and those completed by 100 Key stage 2 pupils and 22 staff.

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

- Inspectors investigated whether the improvements in attainment and progress in Key Stage 2 are being maintained, and further improved upon, as a result of consistency of teaching and learning throughout the Key Stage.
- They looked at measures put in by the school to improve writing in Key Stage 1, and the impact of these on standards attained by boys and potentially higher attaining pupils in particular.
- They investigated whether recent changes in the Early Years Foundation Stage are resulting in better progress in children's personal development and early literacy skills, and whether these are now producing a firm foundation to be built upon in Key Stage 1.
- The team looked at how effectively leaders and managers delegate responsibility, and communicate their expectations for improvement and high quality outcomes in all areas of the school's provision.

Information about the school

This average-sized primary school is in an urban situation. The majority of pupils are of White British origin, but about a third come from other minority ethnic groups. Over half of these pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most of these pupils have needs that include specific learning or behavioural difficulties. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Mary's C of E Primary School is a good school. It has improved significantly from the satisfactory grading at its previous inspection. This is because the headteacher and deputy headteacher, who work in a highly effective partnership with complementary skills, have effectively communicated their vision of excellence and ambition for success throughout the school. Consequently, all staff work together as a highly committed team. The quality of teaching and learning has improved from satisfactory to good since the previous inspection because of regular lesson observations. These have enabled teachers to improve their practice through feedback on their performance with developmental follow-up. Teachers know the ways individual pupils learn best, and present a high level of challenge in most lessons. This motivates virtually all pupils to achieve well and make good progress. Standards in English and mathematics in Key Stage 2 have risen rapidly in the last three years and they continue to rise. Current attainment in Year 6 is above average. A similar picture is apparent in Key Stage 1, where standards have improved rapidly in the current year and attainment in the current Year 2 is only just below average. All pupils, including boys and those of higher ability, have made good progress from their well below average starting points. This rapid and sustained improvement shows that the school has good capacity to improve further. In Reception, provision is satisfactory. Children enjoy school and behave well, but there are weaknesses in outdoor accommodation and in opportunities for children to work independently.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, attainment in writing has improved, but not so rapidly as that in reading and mathematics. Work in books shows that pupils do not get sufficient regular opportunities to write at length, using literacy targets, in all areas of the curriculum. Pupils' spelling is not consistently accurate. In Reception, writing is improving, due to the robust application of a scheme introduced recently. This is successful, but too large a proportion of time is spent on it. This reduces the opportunities for children to develop their literacy skills through independent activities involving all the areas of learning.

The school's use of regular and accurate assessment allows all pupils' progress to be carefully tracked. As a result, underachievement is quickly identified and corrected, so pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those from minority ethnic groups, make good progress. Gaps in attainment between boys and girls are rapidly reducing. The increasing proportion who enter the school in all key stages with little or no English, also make good progress, because of the good support they get from adults and pupils alike.

Pupils develop as responsible and caring young people, who know how to keep safe and healthy. They enjoy school and their attendance is good. Their good behaviour and attitudes make a strong contribution to learning throughout the school. Their excellent contribution to the life of the school is led by the highly influential school council, which

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represents the school in a local federation. Pupils undertake many responsible jobs around the school. They have a strong understanding of the shared values of their diverse school community. The school makes an exceptional contribution to community cohesion through its extensive links with local, national and global communities. These include an exceptionally wide range of partnerships with schools, businesses and other organisations which benefit both the communities and the pupils themselves. The curriculum is enriched by topics on other countries chosen by each class. In these, staff are careful to put over a balanced view of life in other countries, so pupils from all ethnic backgrounds demonstrate a strong sense of common values across different societies. Pupils communicate with e-pals in five different countries.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attainment in writing to match that of reading and mathematics, by:
 - developing a wide range of extended writing, using pupils' individual targets, in all areas of the curriculum
 - ensuring that pupils learn to spell correctly from an early age
 - making sure that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage develop their writing through independent learning tasks as well as through dedicated lessons.
- Improve provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, by:
 - providing more opportunities for them to enjoy independent learning activities which develop their creativity, curiosity and imagination, both indoors and outside
 - improving the outside learning environment by making a dedicated area where children have free access to a wide range of exciting learning activities throughout the day.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge which are well below expectations for their age. Virtually all make good progress and attain above average standards in English and mathematics by the time they leave for their secondary schools. Pupils in Year 6 made good progress when enjoying the challenge of solving numeracy problems related to train timetables. In Year 4, pupils' good behaviour and participation in paired discussions enabled them to make a sound contribution to the development of the class description of a character in a story from New Zealand. Year 2 pupils made excellent progress in improving their writing with 'wow' words, simile and metaphor when describing a scene in a jungle. Pupils with special educational needs in Key Stage 1 made good progress in reading and writing when receiving guidance in small groups, because the valuable support and guidance given by teaching assistants enabled them to build words into sentences and accurately read them aloud.

Pupils say they enjoy lessons, and it is obvious that they do from the way they settle down quickly, persevere with their tasks and achieve well. Pupils' social skills are very well developed; they work and play harmoniously together and willingly take on responsibilities. They help make decisions on behaviour management, the curriculum and staff appointments. At break times, older pupils act as role models for good behaviour as

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they supervise the play of younger ones as their 'buddies.' They enjoy very active playtimes and sporting clubs. Pupils show their care for others by a wide variety of charitable giving, both in the immediate neighbourhood and further afield.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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?

Teachers capture pupils' interests by imaginative planning of work with stimulating and relevant activities. Good use is made of group work, mind-maps and computers to illustrate points quickly. For example, pupils are able to assess their own work by comparing it with that of others, when projected on a screen. Teachers incorporate a range of activities and prepare work which offers challenge to pupils of all abilities in most lessons. They make lessons stimulating and develop pupils' curiosity. For example, Key Stage 1 pupils excitedly looked for clues, previously hidden by their teacher, about the focus of their personal and social education lesson. They learnt some valuable ways of describing friendship, by making paper flowers with these descriptions written on their leaves.

The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to achieve well. The priority given to English and mathematics supports on-going improvement in attainment but, in Reception, limits the provision for independent activities. The Key Stages 1 and 2 curriculum is particularly creative in the provision of themed activities. It supports spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, and contributes significantly to community

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cohesion through a strong cultural dimension and opportunities for learning in real world contexts. The varied programme of extra-curricular clubs and activities contributes well to enjoyment and appeals to a wide range of preferences. Cross-curricular links enable pupils to develop core skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) in other subjects, but there are inconsistent opportunities to develop writing.

Well-organised arrangements for the care of all pupils contribute to their good personal development and well-being, and support their learning effectively. The school's work with children and families facing challenging circumstances is outstanding. It includes valuable support given by the Family Worker to pupils in potentially vulnerable situations, enabling them to be confident. They can talk to an adult if they are worried. There are many examples of barriers to learning being overcome for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Good guidance is given to pupils and their families when they start school and when they leave for secondary education, and this is being extended to transfer between key stages in school.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The newly created senior leadership team has a clear vision for the school's development. Leaders are fully involved in effective monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, continually improving provision and the quality of education. Adults have high expectations and this is communicated effectively to pupils. Challenging targets are set and usually met or exceeded. As a result of recent new strategies to improve literacy in Key Stage 1 and the Early Years Foundation Stage, there is already evidence of improved standards and progress.

The governing body's effectiveness is good. Its members have a good level of involvement in the school and are involved in making important strategic decisions. They carry out monitoring visits and are effective in challenging the school for further improvement, but still wish to develop this further. The governing body is vigilant in ensuring that good provision for safeguarding retains its high priority by regularly monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness. The school gives a very high priority to training for safeguarding and child protection and this exceeds requirements. Leaders' meticulous attention to checking the suitability of adults to work with children, and the record kept, is an exemplary model of its kind.

This is a school where everyone has equally good opportunities to succeed, and is expected to do so. The school uses a wide range of strategies and interventions to support children identified as being in danger of underachieving. All groups achieve equally well

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from their starting points, and they all have opportunities to take part in the excellent enrichment programmes. There is a good partnership with parents and carers. The school provides ample opportunities for them to be kept informed of their children's progress, and invites their contribution to topics. It responds well to parents' views and provides a wide range of opportunities for family learning. The vast majority who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire were very positive about their children's experiences at the school.

The school has excellent understanding of its own community and uses this to focus its exceptional contribution to community cohesion at local, national and global levels. The school is at the centre of its local community, participating in many local activities, including 'One World Festival', 'Big Lunch' and new developments, such as that of a local park. Through church, business, charitable and worldwide school links, this is extended far beyond, enabling pupils to have a strong understanding of common values throughout the world.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children enter the Reception class with skills and abilities well below those expected for their age, particularly so in speech and language. Consequently, there is consistent focus on developing reading and writing for a large proportion of the time. A new strategy for developing children's skills in identifying letters and sounds, and putting them together to make words and simple sentences, is successfully being used to raise literacy standards. It does, however, take up too large a proportion of learning time, and limits the opportunities for children to widen their experiences and develop literacy through independent learning activities. Too much learning is directed by adults, with limited opportunities for children to choose for themselves. Much of the teaching is good, but literacy sessions are too long for many children.

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Children are taught mainly in small, fixed groups and get too little opportunity to develop their personal skills through a wider variety of friendship groups. Some teaching is good, and activities are matched well to children's needs, but in other groups, children are too closely supported, and boys are allowed to dominate girls. Nevertheless, children enjoy some creative learning in their 'garden shop', where they sow and water seeds, design seed packets and cards, and make paper flowers to 'sell'. They also enjoy developing their physical skills when riding trikes and other wheeled vehicles. They have access to sand and water play at times during the day, but these have to be put away, owing to the open nature of the outside play area.

The setting lacks sufficient opportunities for children to develop their curiosity, imagination and creativity through guided play activities. Attainment has improved in the last year, and about half of the children are in line to meet the early learning goals in language and literacy, and more in personal, social and emotional development. This is considerably better than in previous years. Virtually all have made good progress from their well below average starting points.

Most children are confident and happy in this secure environment. Their personal, social and emotional skills develop satisfactorily in their groups and behaviour is good. They settle attentively on the carpet and are eager to discuss their learning. Transition between Reception and Year 1 is a positive focus to ensure a better start in Key Stage 1.

Planning is satisfactory, but does not include sufficient purposeful independent activities across all the areas of learning to complement the effective adult-led sessions. There is a satisfactorily equipped learning environment indoors and immediately outdoors, but the outside area is not solely used by Reception children, so activities have to be tidied away at break times. Children do not have sufficient free access to a wide range of stimulating activities to develop fully all the skills expected for children of this age. The welfare of all children has a similarly high profile to that throughout the school. There is a good partnership with parents and carers.

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

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed entirely positive views about the school. These included comments praising the school and its staff for the quality of education and care provided, and for its involvement in the local community. A small minority of parents and carers, however, voiced some concerns, particularly about bullying and the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors took these concerns very seriously and investigated them thoroughly.

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Inspectors saw consistently good behaviour during the inspection. They found that instances of unacceptable behaviour and bullying had occurred, but had been dealt with in an entirely appropriate manner. Records often showed the school making exceptional efforts to support pupils and their families when resolving situations. Pupils themselves said that incidents of unacceptable behaviour and bullying are very rare, but teachers and other adults are quick to deal with them and they feel sanctions are fair.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided 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 94 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 249 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	58	62	35	37	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	57	61	36	38	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	51	54	39	41	1	1	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	55	36	38	4	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	49	52	43	46	1	1	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	50	40	43	4	4	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	50	45	48	1	1	1	1
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)	35	37	48	51	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	45	48	45	48	3	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	34	38	40	15	16	5	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	34	36	44	47	7	7	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	35	37	50	53	5	5	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	56	60	32	34	3	3	1	1

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



20 May 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Kettering NN16 0JH**

Thank you very much for being so helpful to my colleagues and me during our visit. It was good to see you all so happy and enjoying your learning. We think St Mary's is a good school. It has improved a lot since its previous inspection.

Your headteacher, deputy headteacher and governing body do a good job in running the school. Teaching is good, so you enjoy your lessons and work hard. Your teachers expect all of you to do well, and so you do, particularly in reading, mathematics and computer skills. Although your writing is not quite as good, you are well prepared for work at secondary school. Your behaviour and attendance are good. All the adults take good care of you and in turn, you take care of those younger than yourselves, or are new to the school, particularly at lunch and playtimes. You learn how to keep yourself safe and healthy. You are very responsible and make an outstanding contribution to your school, local community and others, in this country and abroad.

You all get on very well together in school and enjoy getting to know some new friends abroad through emails. There are two things that could be improved in your school:

- your writing and spelling
- the provision of more exciting activities to help Reception children learn, both indoors and outside.

I wish you all well in the future and hope that you will keep on working hard, because you enjoy learning so much and want to do well.

Yours sincerely

Carol Worthington

Lead inspector

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