

St Margaret's Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118464
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	358353
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Rob Crompton

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	293
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Baldwin
Headteacher	Nichola Hanman
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2008
School address	Orchard Street Gillingham ME8 9AE
Telephone number	01634 231327
Fax number	01634 261076
Email address	headteacher@stmargaretsinf.medway.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 24 lessons and observed nine teachers. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body and staff, and talked with pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, policies, assessment and tracking systems, safeguarding procedures and pupils' work. Inspectors examined questionnaires from 91 parents and carers, as well as those from staff.

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

- How successfully the school is helping boys to accelerate the progress they make in writing.
- How the school's evaluation of teaching and learning relates to the rate of pupils' progress.
- The school's capacity for improvement in the light of the temporary appointments of leaders and managers for next year.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average infant school. Most pupils are of White British heritage, with a very small minority from other backgrounds. A small number of pupils are learning English as their second language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, the majority having speech, language and communication difficulties. The school has National Healthy Schools status.

The headteacher is retiring at the end of this academic year. The local authority has asked the governing bodies of the infant school and the adjacent junior school to consider working more closely together, possibly leading to a federation or amalgamation. A decision has yet to be made. For this reason, the new headteacher and deputy headteacher appointments have been made for one year only.

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

Pupils enjoy learning and achieve well in this good school. Parents and carers are happy in the knowledge that their children are cared for extremely well. Their comments, reflecting the views of the overwhelming majority, included, 'Children's talents and special needs are identified early and provided for' and 'My son is receiving a rounded education where the needs of the whole child are met.'

Safeguarding procedures are excellent and are a strong factor in pupils' highly developed sense of security. Pupils feel entirely safe. Their good behaviour and positive attitudes contribute much to the good progress they make. A successful drive to accelerate the progress that boys make in writing has borne fruit, particularly in helping the more-able boys to fulfil their potential and reach the higher levels. Their attainment is now above average.

Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent. This begins in the Nursery and Reception classes where children respond very positively to the warm welcome from adults. Across the school, teachers keep a close eye on pupils' progress, set work which offers challenge for all groups, and provide pupils with clear guidance on how they can improve. Most teachers, especially in the younger classes, are skilled in engaging pupils by using their voices expressively to generate interest and excitement. This approach is not evident in some lessons, however, where introductions are quite long and rather pedestrian, leaving too little time for pupils to work independently. Pupils' learning is often enhanced by the use of interactive whiteboards to set out tasks and record their ideas, but staff are being encouraged, rightly, to use such modern technology more imaginatively.

A shared determination to improve is underpinned by effective leadership from senior staff and good governance. Strategic planning by the governing body is informed by consultation with parents and carers, pupils' surveys, links with subject leaders and focused school visits. Priorities are correctly identified through accurate self-evaluation, and the school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Following a review of how the school promotes community cohesion and pupils' understanding of cultural diversity, for example, this is now, appropriately, a priority for improvement.

The headteacher and the deputy headteacher, who is taking over the leadership next year, are working very closely together to ensure a smooth transition. Good headway has been made since the last inspection in consolidating strengths and tackling the relative weaknesses identified at that time. This track record, together with carefully considered succession planning, indicates a good capacity for sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, so that it is all as good as in the best lessons, by:
 - ensuring lessons are well paced and pupils do not have to wait too long to be actively engaged in learning
 - supporting teachers in modulating the use of their voice to engage pupils and generate a sense of excitement
 - increasing the use of interactive whiteboards to promote pupils' understanding, particularly for those who are more dependent on visual information. information.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to gain a deeper understanding of cultural diversity by:
 - ensuring that this is given a stronger emphasis in the school's promotion of community cohesion
 - providing further first-hand experiences for pupils to engage with children from different communities and diverse backgrounds in the United Kingdom. providing further first-hand experiences for pupils to engage with children from different communities and diverse backgrounds in the United Kingdom.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy learning and their overall achievement is good. As children enter Reception, their skills and understanding are generally below those typical of the age group but, due to good teaching, their levels of attainment are broadly average by the end of Year 2. Pupils progressed well in almost all the lessons observed. Year 1 pupils, for example, made rapid gains in sequencing numbers, distinguishing between odd and even numbers and counting up and back in twos. In recent years, the progress boys make in writing has been slower than in other subjects but, due to a range of successful strategies, they are now building well on their starting points. Indeed, this year, the proportion reaching the higher levels was above the national average. Pupils, including boys, are gaining confidence in their use of expressive phrases. Writing about a fox, one boy wrote, 'They catch chickens with one clever swipe of their claw.' Pupils increasingly use correct punctuation, as evident in one account of the Gunpowder Plot: 'The men who wanted to get rid of King James needed a plan. 'I know', said one of the plotters, 'We'll blow up the houses of parliament!' With the strong support of teaching assistants, pupils who are falling behind or who have speech, language and communication difficulties make good and often exceptional progress.

Pupils are happy to come to school, as seen in the above-average levels of attendance. With their average basic skills, they are satisfactorily prepared for their next school. They support one another in lessons and feel they are listened to by teachers and other adults. Pupils' awareness of the importance of a healthy diet and the benefits of exercise are reflected in the school's Healthy Schools status. They take pride in their roles as playground friends and play leaders but feel they could contribute more of their own ideas on what they would like to learn about in lessons. Pupils' good spiritual development is seen in their thoughtful reflection in assemblies, their sensitive response to one another and in their expressive art work. Pupils acquire a good understanding of different faiths,

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lifestyles and cultures through visitors. For example, they were very keen to talk about their experiences when being taught to play African drums. Involvement in raising funds for charities, together with the study of other countries, gives pupils a reasonable awareness of global issues, although they have limited insights into cultural diversity in the United Kingdom.

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	3
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	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?

Pupils' sense of security and well-being are reflected in the happy way they bustle into school to meet friends and see what activities await them. The good adult/pupil ratio means all pupils are known as individuals. Arrangements to help children settle quickly into school and to transfer to the junior school are excellent. Staff help pupils deal with new situations with confidence and are much appreciated by parents and carers. One wrote, for example: 'My son has gone from a shy child who didn't want to go to school to one who now looks forward to going everyday, thanks to the excellent care and devotion of the staff.'

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, together with those considered to be vulnerable or at the early stages of learning English, benefit from very good support. In addition to working very closely with parents and carers, the school has established strong links with a wide range of agencies and services to support such learners. Parents and carers greatly value the personal support given to families in times of need.

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The level of care for pupils is evident in the excellent relationships that underpin teaching and learning, which result in a warm and productive atmosphere in lessons. Teachers, for the most part, set work at a level that challenges pupils of different abilities, using a good range of assessment methods to identify their starting points, and plan accordingly. They provide clear guidance for pupils about how they can improve their work. Marking often includes a useful dialogue between teachers and pupils. For example, after the teacher had written, 'You have used "After that" well. Can you think of some different time words?' The pupil then listed several words and phrases that could have been used. Similarly, another pupil responded positively to a teacher's request: 'Can you think of better words to use in place of the ones I have underlined in blue?'

Activities in most lessons are well planned but, in their eagerness to ensure pupils understand what they have to do, teachers sometimes spend too long talking to the whole class and asking questions of individuals. This occasionally results in pupils being somewhat spoon-fed rather than encouraged to explore ideas for themselves and then discuss what they have found out. Pupils' learning is more successful when teachers generate a sense of excitement and urgency using their voice expressively, adopting a lively pace and keeping introductions short. Teaching assistants are generally well deployed and make a significant contribution to pupils' progress in lessons and in catch-up groups. However, teachers do not always take advantage of their presence at the beginning of lessons, for example to provide opportunities for pupils to contribute in smaller groups.

A review of the curriculum has led to the introduction of some effective strategies for raising attainment by increasing pupils' engagement and enjoyment. A good example is the way new topics and resources are motivating and supporting boys in improving their writing. Pupils' learning is enriched by a good number of clubs, including yoga, gardening and ocarina playing. Art, including clay work fired in the school's own kiln, adds a further dimension to pupils' enjoyment and cultural development. Teachers make increasing links between subjects to enhance pupils' enjoyment in learning, and pupils have good opportunities to practise and consolidate their basic skills across the curriculum. For example, in a Year 2 science lesson, pupils made effective use of a database to highlight differences in the habitats of various animals. In this lesson, the interactive whiteboard was used to model the task but this resource is not always used as effectively. A comprehensive programme of personal, health and social education, supported by residential trips, makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development.

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	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

There is a strong team spirit and shared determination to ensure all children get the best start possible to their education. The headteacher and deputy headteacher closely monitor the work of the staff and track pupils' progress carefully. They use this information well to identify and share good classroom practice and plan further training.

The governing body looks closely at assessment information and members are quick to question any fluctuations. They explore any emerging trends or anomalies in order to address any discrepancy in the achievement of different groups. This systematic approach reflects the school's strong commitment to equal opportunities. The governing body ensures that policies for the safeguarding of pupils are implemented highly effectively. Appointments are made following statutory requirements, the vetting of all staff is thorough, and training in child protection procedures is up to date. In view of current deliberations about future links with the junior school, the governing body logically decided to make temporary one-year appointments to the senior staff. As these temporary posts were all appointed from within the existing staff, the governing body is justifiably confident that this will enable the school to sustain its focus on continuous improvement.

Parents and carers have very positive views regarding the links between themselves and the school, particularly the ready access to the headteacher and staff. They are kept well informed about how their children are progressing. Through events such as 'Maths for Fun' evenings and termly curriculum information, parents and carers are given help and guidance about how they can support their children's learning.

Pupils' knowledge and understanding of their own locality and different countries and cultures is developed well through topics, celebrating religious festivals, and by artistic and musical performances. The school is seeking links with a school in a contrasting area with the intention of helping pupils to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

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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	2
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enjoy school and soon settle in due to the warm relationships adults establish with them. Good teaching channels their enthusiasm and they make good progress in learning so that levels of attainment are securely average in almost all areas of learning as children move into Year 1. The one exception is writing, where children, particularly boys, do not generally reach the expectations for their age. This is being addressed vigorously, with the Early Years Foundation Stage staff taking a lead in promoting boys' writing across the whole school. There are already signs of success, as evident in boys' willingness to write as they learn through topics they have suggested themselves, such as 'super heroes' and 'under the sea'. A systematic approach to teaching sounds and letters also has a positive impact on children's early writing skills.

A strong emphasis on personal development helps children to develop an eagerness to learn. They are attentive when working with adults and, when following their own interests, they also sustain concentration and cooperate well with one another. They respond enthusiastically to the many opportunities for playing and learning indoors and outside. Staff keep track of children's progress systematically, identify the next steps in their learning and plan accordingly. Children are eager to talk about their individual 'rocket targets'. For example, one pointed to the classroom display which included, 'I can write a, o and r correctly'. Adults take every opportunity to engage children in conversations about their learning. They use their voices very effectively to generate children's interest and enthusiasm. This was evident during one-to-one dialogue and as children gathered together at the start of the day. For example, before reading a story very expressively, the Nursery teacher successfully promoted children's self-esteem as they showed the 'Wow' cards their parents and carers had completed recording significant achievements at home; for instance, swimming a few strokes without arm bands. This home/school link exemplifies the productive partnership staff have developed with parents and carers.

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The joint Early Years Foundation Stage managers provide good leadership and are excellent role models for colleagues. They have successfully led improvements since they took over in January. They have correctly identified how the provision can be further developed, including a closer analysis of trends in children's achievements over time and the replacement of some outdoor resources, some of which are rather worn and uninspiring.

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

The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was about average. Almost all were happy overall with their children's experience. They were almost completely unanimous in their positive views of the school. Parents and carers expressed entirely positive views about how their children are kept safe, how behaviour is managed and how their individual needs are met. All were happy about how children learn about a healthy lifestyle, and the way they are prepared for the next stage in their education. There was no pattern in the negative comments made by a very few 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 Margaret's Infant 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 91 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 297 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	72	79	17	19	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	69	76	22	24	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	55	60	35	38	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	58	64	30	33	3	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	60	66	30	33	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	60	66	30	33	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	58	64	33	36	0	0	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)	60	66	27	27	30	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	63	69	27	63	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	56	62	32	35	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	55	60	34	37	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	64	70	23	25	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	73	23	25	1	1	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	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.



8 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Margaret's Infant School, Rainham, ME8 9AE

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed watching you work and play happily together. You get on well with one another and with all the adults. Your parents and carers are really pleased with the school and we could see why.

The school is providing you with a good education. You told us that you really enjoy learning because your teachers make sure you have many exciting things to do. Inspectors agree that this is the case. We were impressed by your lovely singing in the choir and during assemblies, and how confident you are in talking about your work.

The adults care for you extremely well and help you if you have problems. Those in charge of the school are working really hard to make it even better. In order to help them do this, we have suggested some ways that teachers could organise lessons to give you more chance to find things out for yourselves. We think teachers could use the interactive whiteboards more, for example, to show videos to help when you are learning about other people and places. We saw how some teachers capture your interest by the way they use their voices and we think it would be a good idea for other teachers to have a go at doing this. We have also asked the adults to find ways for you to get to know more about what it is like to live in areas of the country where there are people from lots of different backgrounds.

You can all play your part by continuing to try your best and work hard.

Yours sincerely

Rob Crompton

Lead inspector

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