

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110455
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	378103
Inspection dates	26–27 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Alison Cartlidge

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	331
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Cash
Headteacher	Julie Hills
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 March 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 19 lessons taught by 11 teachers. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, parents and carers, staff and pupils. The inspection team observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, information on pupils' progress, safeguarding policies and other documents. Questionnaires from 155 parents and carers and 186 pupils were scrutinised.

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

- How provision is increasing the progress of pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, girls in mathematics and the more-able pupils in writing.
- How far teaching and teachers' marking is developing to become consistently good or better.
- The impact of subject leaders and how the use of tracking information is being developed to monitor pupils' progress.
- How provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage enables children to plan their own work, gain independence and to learn quickly.

Information about the school

This is an above-average sized primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with other pupils coming from a range of backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The school has a below-average percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils have differing needs, including emotional and behavioural, and speech, language and communication difficulties. The school has received several awards including Healthy School status. An above-average number of pupils join the school other than in the Reception Year. There have been several changes in the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders over the past two years.

The breakfast and after-school clubs are not led and managed by the school's governing body and did not form part of this inspection.

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

High rates of attendance demonstrate the pupils' delight in coming to this good and rapidly improving school. Pupils make positive comments such as 'Lessons are fun and help you to learn' and 'Everyone is kind, encouraging and helpful.' Caring members of staff help all pupils, including those with special educational needs and or/disabilities, to enjoy learning and to feel safe. Outstanding partnerships with parents and carers support the excellent care provided and consequently the school is extremely popular. Two parents and carers spoke for others by saying 'An all-round good school' and 'Children are valued for what they bring to the school.'

Children make a good start to their education in the Reception classes. They gain independence and learn quickly. In Years 1 to 6, girls and boys of differing abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress leading to above-average and rising attainment by the end of Year 6. They make especially good progress in speaking and reading, enabling them to become articulate and competent in using reading to support learning across the curriculum.

Pupils' good behaviour contributes to their good learning in the overwhelming majority of lessons. While most teaching is good, occasionally lessons do not involve all the pupils fully in discussions or give them enough opportunity to work independently, especially when teachers talk for too long. When this happens, pupils become passive and the pace of learning is slower. Following a whole-school focus on developing marking, teachers often write comments to help pupils to improve their work. However, pupils are not always given the opportunity to follow up the advice they have been given straight away. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community by carrying out a wealth of responsibilities including being playground buddies and eco-warriors. They are especially proud that they were able to share their views on the proposals for the high-speed train link at a public meeting.

There are good and on the whole accurate procedures for self-evaluation which support the leaders' planning for improvement. Senior leaders have gathered a wealth of information about provision and pupils' progress. This is not fully utilised by all subject leaders and they are not all fully trained to enable them to take an active role in ensuring that slight variations in teaching, learning and pupils' progress are tackled immediately. Good improvements have been made since a dip in attainment in 2009, demonstrating a good capacity to improve further. For example, the most recent national test results in Year 6 were the highest in six years because even

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more rigorous use is being made of tracking information to monitor pupils' progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the involvement of pupils in their learning so that they are consistently challenged by:
 - enabling all pupils to participate during whole-class discussions
 - ensuring that pupils have a greater opportunity to work independently
 - making sure that pupils are clear about how they can improve their work, and are provided with the opportunity to act on advice provided through teachers' marking.

- Train and empower subject leaders so that they all influence the improvement of provision and pupils' learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Most pupils join the Reception classes working within the levels expected for their age. Pupils in all year groups are very enthusiastic about coming to school. They especially appreciate the themed curriculum weeks and days, and taking part in practical activities. For example, in a good history lesson in Year 3, pupils enjoyed using their powers of deduction to decide which parts of the school building were the oldest. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who join the school other than at the usual times, do well over time and learning is quick in most lessons. Differences in attainment between girls and boys are no longer apparent in mathematics. The school has tackled writing for more-able pupils and most work provides good challenge. As a result, attainment is above average and rising. Pupils are supportive of each other and work together well. For example, in a good mathematics lesson in Years 5 and 6, pupils helped each other to derive square numbers from multiplication facts, ensuring that they gained confidence and learned quickly. In a few lessons, when teachers talk for too long, pupils are given limited opportunities to practise what they have learnt and to make decisions about how they are going to complete a task.

Pupils' achievement is good for all groups of pupils. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given good support towards reaching their specific targets. Pupils' above-average literacy and numeracy skills and good personal development prepare them well for the next stage of education and later life.

Pupils feel very safe at school and know how to avoid danger. They know that their worries are tackled swiftly and effectively, although they are not all fully aware of why some actions help them to remain safe and healthy. Pupils' spiritual development is a particular strength. They take a full part in school prayers, raise funds for charities and make sensitive reflections when talking about topics such as making good choices in behaviour and dealing with conflict. Their awareness of cultural diversity is developing and is enhanced by visits and visitors and their links

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abroad. Pupils are good at following the school’s clear moral code. The school deserves its Healthy School status because pupils are keen to take part in the various sporting activities on offer, have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and an above-average proportion of pupils appreciate healthy school meals. Older pupils are pleased to wear their pedometers to monitor their levels of exercise.

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	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and teaching assistants are enthusiastic, form good relationships with the pupils and manage behaviour well. Teachers have a good understanding of the subjects they teach and use resources well, including information and communication technology (ICT), to support teaching and learning. For example, in a good literacy lesson in Years 3 and 4, the teacher used an amusing slide show to help pupils learn words that sound the same but have a different spelling and meaning. Marking is frequent, but teachers do not always ensure that pupils have the chance to heed written advice straight away.

The curriculum focuses well on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and leaders are working on providing broader opportunities for cross-curricular work. Recent developments have successfully narrowed the gap between girls and boys in mathematics and for more-able pupils in writing. Shared planning supports equal opportunities between classes and provides work of varying degrees of difficulty, although on occasions work is not fine-tuned sufficiently to meet the needs of all abilities within an ability set or class. The creative arts are promoted well and the

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

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school provides a wide range of additional activities. For example, as part of a recent history topic, pupils enjoyed dressing up like Florence Nightingale and other people from the past.

Members of staff know the pupils very well and keep track of their progress meticulously. There is particularly good support for pupils who are finding life difficult, enabling them and their families to take a full part in what the school has to offer. Close links with other schools and external agencies ensure that transition arrangements are strong, enabling pupils to be confident about changing class or school. Attendance is monitored rigorously and encouraged successfully with class certificates and an attendance cup.

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher shares her passion and high aspirations for the school and its performance with other leaders. The recently restructured senior leadership team embeds ambition and drives improvement well because there is a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve the school further. Whole-school developments are having a positive and sustained impact on pupils' progress. The promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is good and pupils of differing abilities are supported and encouraged equally well. All pupils are included very well socially, and the school is working successfully to eliminate any slight unevenness in learning and progress between classes.

The school's safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Members of staff are trained effectively, with the result that procedures are carried out robustly. Leaders and the governing body are diligent in ensuring safe recruitment.

The governing body is knowledgeable about the school. It plays a key role in supporting and challenging other leaders. It has helped bring about positive changes in aspects of school life such as the healthier lunchtime arrangements. The school provides good opportunities for pupils to be involved in the local community and to learn about cultures other than their own. For example, pupils recently enjoyed designing and planting a flower border in the town centre. The school is seeking to develop community cohesion further by expanding opportunities for pupils to forge links with a contrasting school in London. Parents and carers are exceptionally well involved in their children's education. For example, the school provides an ICT

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workshop for parents and carers and pupils.

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in the Reception classes, especially in personal, social and emotional development, and they enter Year 1 with above-average attainment. A wide range of activities is made available indoors and outside, and children enjoy working with each other and members of staff. For example, during the inspection, children developed a wide range of skills when helping to make fruit salad and were enthusiastic about exploring the wildlife area for conkers and other treasures.

A warm, welcoming atmosphere and exceptionally strong links with parents and carers enable children to settle into school life swiftly and to establish good relationships with each other and their teachers. Clear routines help children to become confident, happy and keen to learn. Children enjoy talking about what they are doing, learn quickly and behave sensibly. Sensitive support is provided for children's social and emotional needs. There are good arrangements for assessing learning and 'learning journeys' provide valuable information on how children are progressing. Children make choices about what they are going to do, although some activities that they have chosen for themselves do not extend their learning or engage their interest fully. Leaders have good plans for improvement and members of staff are working well to increase boys' progress in literacy by providing boy-friendly activities such as the exciting outdoor role-play building site.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

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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

There was an above-average response to the inspection questionnaire and the very large majority of parents and carers are positive about all aspects of the school. They are particularly pleased with leadership and the way their children are kept safe and happy. The inspection team also found this to be the case. Although a few parents and carers disagreed that the school deals with their concerns and suggestions and communicates with them over their children's progress, during this inspection, the inspection team found that the school responds to concerns and suggestions appropriately and provides good information on pupils' progress. It seeks the views of parents and carers and makes changes in the light of their views.

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 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 155 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 331 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	102	66	49	32	4	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	116	75	35	23	4	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	63	41	76	49	13	8	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	67	43	74	48	8	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	77	50	72	46	3	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	75	48	69	45	7	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	89	57	60	39	2	1	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)	82	53	63	41	3	2	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	68	44	77	50	3	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	64	41	81	52	5	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	56	36	73	47	11	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	102	66	49	32	2	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	99	64	52	34	4	3	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



28 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Amersham HP7 OEL

We enjoyed coming to see your friendly school. Thank you for being so helpful during our visit. We are pleased to tell you that your school provides you with a good education.

These are the best things about your school.

- You enjoy school and make good progress, especially in speaking and reading.
- You behave well and are exceptionally good at taking responsibilities in school and the local area.
- We agree with you when you say that teachers look after you really well.
- The headteacher and other leaders are doing a good job and know what needs to be done to make your school even better.

These are the things we have asked your school to do next to help it improve.

- Make sure that you all take part in whole-class discussions, and have greater opportunity to work independently and to take decisions about how you use and extend your knowledge and skills.
- Make sure that you are clear about how you can improve your work, and have the opportunity to act on advice provided through teachers' marking.
- Help teachers who look after subjects to do more to improve teaching and learning.

Thank you once again for telling us about your school and letting us see your work. All of you could continue to help your teachers by always taking part in discussions.

Yours sincerely

Alison Cartlidge
Lead Inspector

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