

St Mary's Junior Mixed School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117385
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	395758
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2012
Lead inspector	Marion Wallace

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Lockett
Headteacher	Patricia Jenkins
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2008
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Marion Wallace

Additional Inspector

Janice Williams

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 12 teachers in 23 lessons and held meetings with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. They took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at: improvement plans for the school and for subjects; the governing body minutes; assessment information; and curriculum planning. In addition, they carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work, listened to readers and analysed 130 questionnaires received from parents and carers, some of whom they met at the beginning of the school day.

Information about the school

St Mary's is an average-size junior school. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs and those supported by school action plus is above average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is average and no pupils are at the early stages of learning English. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school does not meet the current floor standards, which set the minimum standards expected by the government.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It has improved rapidly since September 2010 when the school experienced a severe dip in attainment and achievement. The use of assessment procedures, tracking and the setting of challenging targets to accelerate progress are contributing to the improved progress pupils make. It is not yet good because inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement for all groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, is satisfactory. It is not yet consistently good in all classes and has not been good over time. Attainment is broadly average in reading and writing and slightly above in mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall. There are some good and outstanding lessons, but sometimes teachers' expectations are too low and they miss opportunities to ensure pupils fully extend their work. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously but do not always challenge pupils to strive for the next level and do not always make explicit what must be improved.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. During the inspection behaviour around the school and in lessons was good or better. Pupils showed positive attitudes to learning and said that they felt safe in school. Attendance is above average. However, a small minority of parents, carers, staff and pupils reported that behaviour in lessons is sometimes disruptive to learning and incidents of inappropriate behaviour are not always dealt with effectively. The records support this view.
- Leadership and management, including the leadership of teaching and management of performance, are satisfactory. Appropriate priorities are identified clearly in detailed improvement plans. The headteacher is very

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experienced and well organised. She monitors teaching regularly giving effective helpful feedback and targets for improvement. The role of middle leaders is less well developed.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure achievement in writing and mathematics is good over time by:
 - ensuring high levels of punctuation and spelling in writing tasks
 - ensuring pupils have more opportunities for independent work in lessons.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching so it is consistently good or better over time by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment rigorously to plan lesson activities that challenge all groups
 - the good or better practice that exists in the school is shared more widely
 - marking is consistently good or better so that pupils are clear about how to improve their work
 - expectations of behaviour are consistent throughout the school.
- Increase the impact of school monitoring and self-evaluation, particularly in English and mathematics, by ensuring that middle leaders check the effectiveness of initiatives more rigorously and act swiftly to remedy weaknesses.

Main report**Achievement of pupils**

Most parents and carers think that achievement is good. Inspection evidence shows that pupils' learning and performance over time are satisfactory and pupils attain broadly average standards by the time they leave the school. Attainment on entry is broadly average and records indicate that the school is on target to meet the government's floor standard this year, as it did in 2009 and 2010. A few parents and carers feel their child could be making better progress and inspection findings support this view. After a two year dip, attainment and progress in reading and mathematics has improved as a result of the school's focus on improving teaching and targeted support for all groups of pupils. Most pupils currently make satisfactory or better progress in reading and have positive attitudes to reading; standards in reading by the end of Year 6 are broadly average. Pupils enjoy reading and can talk about their favourite authors and the type of book they enjoy most. Occasionally expectations for using punctuation and appropriate pencil grip are sometimes missed. Writing skills are being suitably developed in other subjects; Year 6 pupils used writing skills well to enhance learning in history, writing with empathy about evacuees and using language appropriate to the time.

Pupils' skills in mathematics have improved significantly over the last year. Pupils are gaining confidence and a growing understanding of mathematics because opportunities for basic skills and problem-solving tasks have improved. The weekly

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'Function Machine' challenge is popular and encourages pupils to tackle challenging problems. More-able, older pupils demonstrated their ability to use number, place value, digital roots and multiplication as well as their quick mental capacity when challenged to provide decimal numbers in a 'countdown' game. Middle-ability pupils demonstrated their ability to use simple strategies effectively when multiplying numbers by decimals. Pupils enjoy learning when teachers plan interesting tasks, but teachers sometimes miss opportunities fully to extend groups or on occasions the task given is too challenging. This is because teachers do not always match activities sufficiently closely to pupils' prior learning.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress over time because support is well focused and based on a sound analysis of individuals' learning needs. Since September, the gap between the performance of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, boys, middle attaining pupils and those known to be eligible for free school meals and others compared with all pupils nationally is closing rapidly.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers say that teaching is good, and so do the pupils. Inspection findings show that it is satisfactory over time. There is an increasing amount of good or better teaching in all years but teachers' expectations have not been consistently high enough over time to ensure good learning by the end of Key Stage 2. Reading is well taught. Throughout the school relationships are good, teachers explain tasks clearly and are well organised. Occasionally the pace of learning slips because challenge is sometimes insufficient or too great to ensure good learning.

In lessons where teaching is best, good use of assessment ensures work is closely matched to the needs of all groups of pupils. Enthusiastic teaching ensures the pace of learning is good or better and pupils are actively engaged. Teachers use questions well to ensure the learning moves on and teachers quickly adapt lessons to fit emerging needs because they have judged pupils' understanding well. In lessons that are no better than satisfactory, assessment information is not always used well enough to plan teaching which meets learners' needs. Activities are pitched too high or are too easy so that pupils are insufficiently challenged. There are some missed opportunities to involve pupils fully in tasks so that they spend too long listening and their time to work independently is limited.

Some good examples of marking were seen that informed pupils how to improve their work, but this was not consistent in all classes. Pupils with additional needs are well supported by teaching assistants in class and they confidently respond to questions. Teaching and learning for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are satisfactory over time but there is an increasing amount of good teaching, since September 2011, that is accelerating individuals' progress.

Pupils' social development is promoted when they work together and cooperate well with each other in paired or small group tasks. Assemblies provide good

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opportunities for spiritual and moral reflection and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum and focus art weeks.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are very polite, friendly and welcoming to visitors. Most pupils behave well around the school and respond well to teachers' expectations and guidance for good behaviour. Pupils and staff show respect for each other and for visitors to the school. The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire thought behaviour was good. A few parents and carers thought behaviour could be better and that inappropriate behaviour was not always dealt with consistently well. A few pupils also reflected this view in their questionnaire responses. Discussions with parents, carers, pupils and staff show that, though the typical behaviour of most pupils is good, behaviour in lessons reflects the quality of the teaching. There are a few pupils whose inappropriate behaviour is not always well handled by a small number of staff. For this reason, pupils' behaviour for learning is satisfactory, though the new 'Protective Behaviour' policy, appreciated by pupils and staff, is having a positive impact. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to behaviour.

Most parents and carers who replied to the inspection questionnaire, or who talked to inspectors, felt that their children were safe in the school and pupils' views echo this. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying through the curriculum. They talk knowledgeably about safe use of the internet, and they were aware of the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Pupils know the difference between falling out and bullying and say that they can discuss any problems, including bullying worries that they have, with adults. They report that any concerns are usually dealt with effectively. The school records incidents of inappropriate behaviour and responds to parental concerns.

Leadership and management

Since the last inspection the school experienced a dip in attainment and achievement but there has been significant improvement in all aspects this year and the school is back on course to regain the very strong position they were in three years ago.

Many pupils, parents and carers commented on the positive impact of the headteacher's work. The headteacher's skilful management and experienced leadership are clearly evident and senior managers communicate strong drive and ambition. Middle managers, however, have not yet all fully developed their role in monitoring and ensuring initiatives have maximum impact, and this restricts the overall impact that leadership and management have.

Staff work together well and they have an adequate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Equality of opportunity and the elimination of discrimination are pursued effectively. Provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has improved and these pupils are now making the same progress as their peers. The school's success in turning round a marked fall in

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achievement indicates that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

The leadership and management of teaching have ensured that teaching is improving rapidly. Appropriate professional development has enhanced teachers' skills and achieved greater consistency in the methods used across the school, especially in mathematics, though there is more to be done to achieve consistency in teachers' behaviour management skills.

The school's evaluation of its own performance is effective. Tracking of progress over time is now thorough, and senior leaders have employed sensible strategies and interventions to promote improvement. The school is starting to share good practice in teaching. The governing body ably supports staff and challenges the school well to ensure school improvement initiatives are successful.

The curriculum adequately meets pupils' needs. It provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and it promotes equality and tackles discrimination effectively. Assemblies give very good opportunities for reflection. Parents, carers and pupils appreciate the good extra-curricular opportunities and enrichment activities such as gardening club, music tuition and residential trips to Wales and Essex.

All safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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 May 2012
Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Junior Mixed School, Baldock, SG7 6HY

Thank you all very much for welcoming us to your school. We thoroughly enjoyed your assembly, talking with you and your teachers, and reading the views of those who returned questionnaires. We agree that the school has many strengths, but it is satisfactory overall because teaching and your progress over time are satisfactory. These are the things we liked best.

- You all settle into school well in Year 3 and are prepared adequately for secondary school.
- You enjoy learning and teachers give you interesting things to do such as your theme days, art week, residential trips, visitors, and visits that make learning fun.
- You enjoy school and this is reflected in your above-average attendance.
- There are good opportunities for you to take on responsibilities such as monitors, buddies and members of the school council, and contribute to helping your school improve.

The headteacher, governors and all the staff know what needs improving. We have identified three things that will help the school get better. The headteacher and governors must:

- ensure standards in writing and mathematics are consistently good each year and over time
- ensure that teaching is consistently good or better over time, that marking challenges you all to improve your work and that the good learning we observed happens in all lessons
- ensure all your managers keep a careful eye on things to make sure achievement and standards continue to rise.

You can all help by continuing to work really hard.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Marion Wallace
Lead inspector

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