

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111316
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	395439
Inspection dates	10–11 July 2012
Lead inspector	Ruth James HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Mitchell
Headteacher	June Morris
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Ruth James
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Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Seventeen lessons were observed and all teachers seen. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation relating to pupils' attainment and progress, safeguarding, improvement plans and monitoring records. In addition questionnaires from staff, pupils and 62 parents and carers were analysed.

Information about the school

St Mary's is slightly larger than the average sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school has many awards including Artsmark Gold and the International School award.

The school meets the current floor standards, which sets the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
 Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because pupils attain less well in mathematics than in English and occasionally the progress of more-able pupils slows during particular lessons. The vast majority of pupils, parents and carers are extremely positive about the school and it has several outstanding features.
- Pupils make good progress to reach standards that are broadly average. Standards in mathematics are not quite as good as in English but they are improving. Where there are gaps between the levels of attainment of different groups they are closing.
- In lessons, teaching is consistently good across the school and as a result, pupils make good progress. Relationships are very good and teachers promote pupils' self confidence, creating a good climate for learning. In lessons, pupils are enthusiastic and well motivated. Teachers typically have high expectations, although there are occasions when work for more-able pupils could be even more challenging. Teaching effectively contributes to the outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- Behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around school. Attitudes to learning are excellent. Staff optimism and enthusiasm combined with skilled teaching ensure that aspirations are raised. Attendance is above average and rising steadily, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school. Bullying is extremely rare and pupils feel safe. They are friendly and welcoming. They are encouraged to be reflective about their own behaviour and they show respect for each other and for adults.
- Leaders and managers are highly effective in monitoring the work of the school and planning improvements. The wealth of data about pupils' attainment and progress is analysed thoroughly and used effectively to tackle any underachievement and plan and target interventions. The curriculum is also outstanding and through it the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Performance is managed very effectively and the ongoing professional development of teachers is prioritised to ensure that teaching is of high quality.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further, especially in mathematics, by:
 - continuing to vigorously pursue any underachievement identified
 - making sure that pupils are aware of their targets and precisely what they need to do to reach them
 - improving the consistency of marking so that pupils receive clear guidance about ways of improving their work.
- Ensure that more-able pupils make good or better progress in every lesson by:
 - promoting more independence
 - ensuring that the work set is suitably challenging
 - providing additional extension work for pupils who finish their work quickly.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

In lessons, pupils enjoy learning because of the varied activities and the good relationships they have with teachers and teaching assistants. Their highly positive attitudes make a good contribution to their learning. They are well motivated, keen to answer questions, readily tackle the tasks and activities set and collaborate well with each other. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils worked on word problems that required them to pick out different pieces of information and use these to work out the necessary sequence of steps in their calculations. They approached this enthusiastically, often using their mental mathematics skills to arrive at parts of the solution, and there was some productive collaboration and discussion. Those who found the problem difficult persevered and were as keen as those who worked more rapidly.

Although cohorts differ children typically begin nursery with skills and development that is below those expected for their age, especially in language and communication. Over time pupils make good progress and reach average standards by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 6. Although historically, national test data show that standards fell slightly in 2011 in Year 6 this was the largely the result of specific circumstances and this cohort of pupils was not typical for the school. School assessment data, and inspection evidence such as lesson observations and work scrutiny, show that current pupils are making better progress. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers as a result of the effective support they receive.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is consistently good and pupils achieve well over time as a result. Almost all parents and carers who responded in the questionnaires said that they felt their child was well taught and inspectors agree with this view. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Lessons are well contextualised and good links are made across the curriculum. Teaching is engaging and motivates pupils well. Information and communication technology (ICT) and resources are well prepared and utilised. Teachers make good use of their assessment of pupils' previous attainment, knowledge and understanding to plan lessons. However, very occasionally work set for the most-able pupils is not sufficiently challenging.

Activities are imaginative, teachers have high expectations and motivate pupils very well. As a result, pupils display tremendous enthusiasm for learning. Some new strategies to support the raising of attainment have been deployed, including 'talk maths', and these are beginning to have an impact.

Teaching assistants are very well trained and used well to support learning. They are informed, flexible and responsive and make a significant contribution to teaching and learning, especially for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The pace of learning is good overall because teachers use observations and questioning effectively to assess pupils' ongoing understanding. They use this information well to adjust their teaching or the learning activities to ensure that a suitably brisk pace of learning is maintained. A strong emphasis on reading and the enjoyment of books together with the effective teaching of phonics (linking sounds and letters) ensures that pupils achieve well in reading. Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development highly effectively.

Pupils' learning skills are well developed and they demonstrate resilience and confidence and can articulate their own learning preferences. However, there are occasions when teachers provide very structured activities rather than allowing a greater degree of independence and encouraging pupils, especially the more able, to make more decisions themselves. Those who finish their work quickly often help others by explaining their strategies, but there are some missed opportunities to offer extension work to challenge them further. Older pupils are usually aware of their targets and their progress towards these. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly. Although pupils' books are marked regularly feedback varies between year groups. Teachers make good use of praise and encouragement do not always provide specific feedback that would enable pupils to improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils thrive in the nurturing ethos found in the school and their own highly positive attitudes make a significant contribution to the happy atmosphere. Inspectors found pupils' courtesy and manners to be exemplary. In lessons, pupils are enthusiastic and engaged demonstrating cooperation and respect. They concentrate well and persevere in the face of difficulty. Teamwork and relationships between staff at all levels and pupils of all ages are strong. The wealth of different opportunities offered by the school encourages pupils to think about possibilities beyond their home experiences and supports the raising of aspirations. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They develop into optimistic, mature young people with a real desire for learning and a strong sense of responsibility to others because of the environment, culture and ethos within the school, and the secure management strategies in place.

Pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe is well developed. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare because the school gives it a high profile and pupils understand that it is totally unacceptable. Older pupils in particular are highly aware of different types of bullying. They are very clear, for example, about the offensive nature of homophobic bullying. Pupils are trained to encourage cooperation through strategies such as 'Big Dave's buddies'. They are consistently positive about behaviour and safety across all school contexts. Punctuality and attendance are good and improving. A continuous whole-school focus celebrates successes in these areas. Strategies to promote behaviour for learning are very effective, starting in the nursery and being developed and built upon as pupils progress through the school and take increasing responsibility themselves. Pupils regard the rewards

and sanctions used as fair and report that they are applied consistently. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the parents' questionnaire have highly positive views about behaviour and safety as do pupils.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers at all levels are very experienced, and highly capable. Self-evaluation was over-optimistic but in discussion it was clear that leaders and managers have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a range of strategies are in place to ensure that the decline in standards in 2011 is not repeated. Improvement plans have a strong focus on raising achievement but success criteria are not always explicit. Progress data is collated regularly and provide the basis for meetings between class teachers and senior staff to consider how any underachievement might be tackled. Teachers are clear about potential barriers to learning and work hard to apply different techniques to overcome these. The quality of teaching is prioritised very effectively through performance management and wide ranging professional development strategies.

The curriculum is exceptionally well planned to provide breadth and balance and to meet the needs of all pupils. Extra-curricular activities include a wide variety of clubs. Junior-aged pupils spoke enthusiastically about residential offered to different year groups. Themed weeks, such as science week, and trips and visitors also enhance experiences. Teachers make good use of local networks to share good practice and continually seek to improve their own delivery. The school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The culture of sharing and celebrating achievement is well embedded. This was exemplified in an infant assembly where pupils showed genuine appreciation of others successes. The 'Treasure Chest' inspired awe and wonder as the mechanical system gave rewards to children nominated for effort and attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy. In some instances the reward cards needed to be read out by the pupil and often included challenging words which they tackled confidently in front of their peers. The school is a harmonious community where pupils feel safe, know they are well cared for and really appreciate the good teaching and other opportunities offered. International links are a strength and many attractive displays help to reinforce pupils' understanding of other cultures. Pupils are encouraged to be reflective and their concern for those less fortunate than themselves is shown in the substantial funds they have raised for charitable causes.

Equal opportunities are promoted effectively as the closing gaps between the attainment of different groups shows. Together with the consistency of teaching and other improvements such as attendance this demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve. Members of the governing body, including parent governors, have a good relationship with the headteacher and staff. They bring a range of skills and are highly committed to the school, having supported it effectively in the quest to improve the Key Stage 2 accommodation. They have a good understanding of the performance of the school and the reasons behind the drop in attainment in 2011. School leaders and the governing body ensure that arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective and that child protection procedures are well understood by staff.

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.



12 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Runcorn, WA7 2NR

As you know inspectors visited your school recently and I am writing to you to tell you about our findings. We enjoyed meeting you and talking to some of you. We also looked at questionnaires from you and your parents and carers. We are very pleased that you attend school regularly because you enjoy it so much.

We have found your school to be a good school, with many outstanding features. We were very impressed with your excellent behaviour and the way you tackled your work in lessons so enthusiastically. Your teachers work hard too, and as well as explaining subjects carefully they plan lots of interesting activities for you in lessons, as well as trips, visits and clubs to make sure that you get lots of different experiences. You told us how much value what school offers you. The provision for your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Your school is very well led and the headteacher and other leaders make regular checks to ensure that everything runs smoothly and you are learning well.

We have asked your headteacher to work with the staff to make your school even better by firstly helping you reach the highest standards you can, especially in mathematics, and secondly making sure that all of you, especially those working at the higher levels, have suitably challenging work.

We wish you every success.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector

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