



St Mary's VC Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109606
LEA BEDFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 278224
Inspection dates 20 October 2005 to 21 October 2005
Reporting inspector Ms. Ruth Frith LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Rook Tree Lane
School category	Voluntary controlled		SG5 4DL
Age range of pupils	4 to 9		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462 730343
Number on roll	227	Fax number	01462 733419
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms.W Scarr
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr. Colin Phelps

Age group 4 to 9	Inspection dates 20 October 2005 - 21 October 2005	Inspection number 278224
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size voluntary controlled Church of England lower school situated in the village of Stotfold near Hitchin. Most children who attend come from the village of Stotfold and a few from other nearby villages and towns. The percentage of children receiving free school meals is well below average. Overall, children's attainment on entry is at least in line with that usually seen for children of that age and in some cases above. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is below average. Nearly all children come from white British backgrounds. A few children have English as an additional language but do not require specialist language support. A club providing care outside of school hours is situated on the site, and a report on its effectiveness is attached.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school with several outstanding features. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection and the school has the capacity to improve further. It gives good value for money. Children enter a nurturing environment where their pastoral care is paramount, as demonstrated through the before and after school care. Children make a good start in the reception year because they are keen to learn. By the time they enter Year 1, they at least reach the standard expected for their age and frequently achieve beyond that. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school because children find the lessons interesting and work is usually well matched to the children's abilities. There is, however, a need for greater challenge in writing for the more capable children. Also, staff should focus more on ensuring that all children know what they need to do next in order to improve and reach their targets. Children's behaviour is outstanding and this, together with their exceptional attitudes, aids their learning. Children reach standards that are above the national average by the time they leave school. The quality of leadership and management is good and the headteacher has the confidence of children, parents, staff and governors. Areas for development are clear and areas of strength highlighted. These reflect the evidence gained through inspection and indicate a good system of school self-evaluation. Although satisfactory overall, the school development plan does not always clearly indicate the steps needed to improve the school further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide sufficient opportunities for the more capable children to reach the higher levels in writing.
- Develop the work on target setting so children have a clearer idea of how they can improve their work and know how well they are doing.
- Improve the school development plan by clarifying the precise steps needed to achieve the school's priorities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From broadly average starting points, children generally make good progress and achieve well. They settle quickly into school routines in the reception year and do well because of the effective teaching and support they receive. When they enter Year 1, most have at least reached the standards set for children of that age and some are working beyond that. By the time they reach the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. In 2004, standards in the Year 2 national tests for mathematics were exceptionally high because a good percentage of children reached a standard above that expected for their age. Staff have been particularly effective in raising standards in mathematics but recognise that more needs to be done to encourage children to reach the higher level in writing. Unpublished results for the 2005 national tests indicate a continuation of above average standards overall. Children in Years 3 and 4 continue to achieve well and reach above average standards

for their age. Most children in the current Year 2 and Year 4 are being appropriately challenged and school information indicates that they are likely to meet the realistic targets set. Children with learning difficulties achieve well because staff support them effectively in lessons. Gifted and talented pupils receive work which challenges them and this results in them also achieving well, particularly in mathematics but less so in writing. Children whose home language is not English achieve as well as others in the class.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development is outstanding. Their behaviour is exemplary because their moral and social development is excellent. They are very attentive in class and they play very well together at break times. Children talk about their school with great confidence and explain proudly to visitors the work and achievements of the school council. Their spiritual and cultural development is good. Children know how to stay safe and be healthy because of the excellent way the school provides for their personal, social and health education. They play energetically at break times and enjoy a very wide range of after-school sports activities. They choose fruit for snacks and many choose salad with their school meal. They feel there is no real bad behaviour or bullying and if they feel worried, teachers and mid-day supervisors are always sympathetic. As one said, 'We're not perfect, so we do fall out sometimes. The work of the school council helps them to understand how democratic organisations work and older children have jobs that help the smooth running of the school. These opportunities help them to become responsible young people and to realise the importance of their roles within the school community. Outstanding links are furthered with the local and wider community as children take part in festivals, church events and concerts, and when they support charities. Children are well prepared for later life by learning basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT and by developing the social skills they need to get on with others. Children enjoy school and their attendance is well above average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Overall, the quality of teaching is good and this helps children to achieve well throughout their time in school. In the reception year, children settle very quickly because of the strong focus on developing their personal, social and emotional education, and they respond well to the very welcoming atmosphere. Children continue to do well throughout the rest of the school. Because of the exemplary behaviour, teachers are able to ensure the time available is used well to help pupils to make good progress. Teachers have developed very positive relationships with the children and know them well. In return, the children are eager to please their teachers and work hard. Although the way teachers assess children's work is good overall, they do not always make full use of the information to plan hard enough work in writing. Some

teachers share targets with children, but this is not consistent, so that not all children are clear about what they need to do to improve. In lessons that were satisfactory, nearly all the children worked well on appropriate tasks and enjoyed the activities but a few of the more capable children did not have hard enough work. In an outstanding lesson, all children were working very hard and enjoying the challenges set which developed their mathematical thinking and understanding of number. They were keen to do as well as they could and gained much satisfaction from discovering the answers to mathematical problems. Those who find learning difficult were given particularly good support so that they too achieved well. Throughout, the pace of the lesson was brisk and the teaching stimulating. Lessons in Years 1 to 4 are well organised to meet the needs of children in mixed-age classes and ensure that they progress well with their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum for all children which fully meets the national requirements, stimulates learning and helps children to progress well. Staff in the reception classes have a good understanding of how young children learn and provide activities which stimulate the children's interests and help them to settle to their learning. Throughout the rest of the school, a wide range of additional activities enrich the formal curriculum, maintain the children's interests and help them to develop a greater understanding, for example, in history when they visit local places of historical interest or when they are visited by theatre groups. There is an exceptionally good range of successful clubs. These are well attended and provide opportunities for children to develop social skills in a less formal setting as well as encouraging healthy lifestyles through physical activity. The children's cultural awareness is enhanced well through a French club, art, dance and music activities. Visitors are warmly welcomed to share their knowledge and experiences with the children and their visits link well with curriculum priorities, for example, visits by authors and musicians.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good with some outstanding features. The before and after school provision is very well thought of by parents, and is reported separately at the end of this report. The school has secure arrangements for child protection and for ensuring the health and safety of children in school and on outings. Good supervision by mid-day supervisors ensures that lunch time is a peaceful and harmonious occasion. All staff are well aware of individual children's medical or other special needs. The school has clear systems for checking how well children are doing but staff need to ensure that children fully understand their targets and what they need to do to improve. The individual education plans of children who find learning difficult contain some clear measurable targets but a few are not specific enough. The very good links with neighbouring schools ensure children transfer with ease to the next stage of their education. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about how well the

school cares for their children. One commented, 'St Mary's has achieved an environment where the children feel safe, happy and secure'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The governors are very committed to the school and have a very good programme for the induction of new governors. They have all the required policies and procedures in place and fulfil all their statutory duties conscientiously. The school's process of self-evaluation is good. Governors work closely with the head teacher to gain an accurate view of how well the school is doing and its priorities for improvement. They are fully involved in school development planning and parents have also been asked to put forward their views to support this process. While the school development plan identifies the key priorities for further improvement some of the steps needed to achieve those targets should be more detailed. The school has effective systems for checking how good teaching is. Teachers in charge of subjects know how well their subjects are doing because they check test results, the quality of lessons and the quality of children's work. Performance management systems are fully in place with targets linked to those in the school development plan. The school enjoys good quality accommodation and staff work very well together as a team. There are clear procedures for effective financial management and the budget difficulties it faced in the past have been resolved. The school has tackled the issues for improvement from the last inspection and is well placed to improve further. The headteacher is very popular with staff, governors, pupils and parents and has ensured that the school is a warm and welcoming place for children and adults alike.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for making us feel welcome and for talking to us about your school. We think St Mary's is a good school with several excellent features. We particularly liked the following: - Teachers give you interesting work which helps you to do well, particularly in reading and mathematics. - There are lots of interesting clubs you like taking part in. You also like school trips, and visitors coming into school. - You enjoy school a lot and are keen to do good work. Your attendance is excellent. - Your behaviour is some of the best we have seen. You are kind to each other and you work and play together well. - You have good opportunities to make decisions through the school council and work particularly well with the local community. - Staff look after you exceptionally well and you feel safe in school. Mr Phelps and the staff work hard to improve St Mary's and have agreed with us that the following things would make the school even better. - Make sure that those children who are particularly good at writing have enough opportunities to do as well as they can. - Find ways to make you aware of what you need to do to improve your work and achieve the targets that are set for you. - Make sure that the plan for developing the school gives clear details of what needs to be done next. Thank you once again and good luck in the future.