



St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114552
LEA East Sussex
Inspection number 279410
Inspection dates 27 June 2006 to 27 June 2006
Reporting inspector Sheila Browning AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	School Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Hadlow Down
Age range of pupils	5 to 11		Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 4HY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01825 830375
Number on roll	71	Fax number	01825 850375
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Wendy Coleman
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs V Poole

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mark's Voluntary Aided Primary School is smaller than most other primary schools nationally. Most pupils are from White British families and a few are from White European families. Pupils come from the village of Hadlow Down itself and from the surrounding area. The school has a lower-than-average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties. When they enter the school, the attainment of most children is above the level expected for their age. In recognition of its work the school has gained a Basic Skills Award and the International Schools Award at Foundation Level from the British Council.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school is outstandingly effective, and recognises this. The quality of education, including teaching and learning, are excellent. As a result, pupils achieve exceptionally high standards. Children join the school with better skills than usual and get off to a really good start because of high quality teaching and well-focused learning activities. The majority of children exceed most of the expected areas of learning by the end of the Reception year. Pupils make excellent progress, particularly in their personal development, which promotes their exemplary behaviour very well. Excellent relationships between pupils and adults ensure that pupils enjoy and engage in all that the school offers. In this small school pupils receive outstandingly good care, guidance and support. Staff know a great deal about each pupil and their individual needs are very well met in mixed-age classes. The school has successfully tackled the relative weakness identified in writing. Despite the school's efforts to improve attendance levels, these do not reflect pupils' great enjoyment of school. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is dedicated to securing the highest quality of standards and progress in all areas of the school. Excellent links exist with parents and the wider community and, as one parent stated, parents are 'extremely happy with the school'.

Given the sustained high standards and achievement and the improvement since the last inspection, the school gives outstanding value for money, and has an excellent capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Take further steps to secure improved attendance levels.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards and achievement are exceptionally high by the time pupils leave school and year-on-year high standards are sustained. The school's 2005 results put the school in the top 3% nationally for Year 6 pupils' English achievements, and for value added overall. Children join the school with better skills than expected for their age in most areas of learning. By the end of Reception year, most children exceed the nationally expected goals for their age because of high quality teaching and well-planned learning experiences. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 continue to build on this good start to achieve above-average standards, though last year no pupils achieved the higher levels in writing.

Pupils' achievement is high because of outstanding teaching and pupils' outstanding attitudes to learning. Pupils make very good progress towards the challenging targets set. The school's own data analysis indicated differences between pupils' attainment in reading and writing. The rigorous focus to improve pupils' writing skills has

successfully tackled this. The school's thorough and accurate tracking of pupils' progress confirms substantial improvement in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Children love school and relish being a part of such a safe, caring and cohesive community. Their good will towards school is demonstrated in consistently excellent behaviour, which promotes their outstanding learning. Relationships are excellent and pupils report that there is no bullying. While there is a 'buddy stop' in the playground for those who feel friendless, pupils and staff report that it is rarely used because pupils work and play so well together. Older pupils look out for younger ones, encouraged by arrangements to pair those in Year 6 with new entrants to the Reception class. Pupils know the essential elements of a healthy lifestyle and understand how to stay safe. They appreciate the healthy diet on offer at lunchtime and enjoy the good range of sport and recreation opportunities. They participate in fund-raising to help others, including sponsoring the education of an African child. The school council makes constructive suggestions for improvements, has its own budget and provides a way for pupils to raise issues. Through these and other activities, pupils develop skills well to contribute to their future well-being.

Close links with the church underpin very good spiritual development. Despite its rural location the school's links with Africa ensure that pupils have strong multi-cultural awareness. Overall, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Attendance is average; more pupils than expected take holidays with their families in term times.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Lessons are thoroughly planned, prepared and managed so they start promptly and run smoothly. This ensures that the pace of learning is high. Teachers have high expectations, to which pupils are very sensitive. The excellent relationships ensure that there is a collaborative approach to learning between all adults and pupils so that any barriers to learning are quickly overcome. Teaching assistants are both sensitive and skilled and make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of learning. Stimulating resources are cleverly deployed to maintain interest.

Lessons are organised to provide the correct degree of challenge and support pupils require. Those with learning difficulties are well catered for because teachers and assistants know each individual pupil's learning needs and strive to meet them. With their outstanding behaviour and very positive attitudes it is impossible to overstate the contribution pupils make to their own learning. Teachers assess pupils' progress

regularly and in detail. This progress is carefully tracked over time and any anomalies are noted. The school then acts to provide the correct support required. This information is also used in planning lessons. Pupils' work is well marked and teachers' comments are friendly and encouraging, often leading to better work. Pupils are starting to receive individualised targets so they know the next steps in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is excellent. It is well matched to pupils' individual abilities and potential. Similarly, children in the Reception year experience an interesting curriculum that meets their needs well.

The curriculum focuses well on the development of basic skills. The emphasis on improving pupils' writing skills has successfully improved writing throughout the school. A strong feature is the pupils' involvement in the numerous extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors throughout the year which further enhance the curriculum. Another strong feature is the excellent focus on raising pupils' global awareness and forming international links with other cultures.

Every opportunity is used to raise pupils' awareness of healthy safe lifestyles, such as road safety training, fruit and water schemes, and through the sporting and environmental activities. The Young Enterprise in Education scheme is helping pupils develop citizenship skills and an understanding of the world of work. Strong partnerships with local schools and the community make a significant contribution to their personal development and ensure they have excellent opportunities to contribute to the wider community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding. Robust systems ensure that pupils feel very safe and secure. Child protection arrangements are thorough. Children in the Reception year learn in a stimulating environment and because of high quality teaching and careful lesson planning they make very good progress. Information about pupils' progress is used most effectively to raise achievement and give pupils effective support and guidance. Pupils are encouraged to assess and evaluate their own performance and progress and they know and understand their group targets. For example, one pupil explained that 'we have to write complex sentences'. Teaching assistants are used exceptionally well to support those with learning difficulties and to challenge more-able pupils. The personal, health and social education programme and excellent links with a range of external agencies contribute significantly to pupils' personal development and understanding of healthy, safe lifestyles. Excellent arrangements support pupils for the next stage in their education. The school works hard with parents to improve attendance and it is improving. Nevertheless, some pupils still miss too much school. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and feel well communicated with.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Top quality leadership and management underpin the excellent provision and achievement in the school. The headteacher is a remarkably effective leader. She has a very clear understanding of every aspect of the school and uses this in promoting ever-higher standards. Parents rate the headteacher highly. One wrote of her as 'dedicated, highly motivated and forward looking'. The common sense of purpose amongst all staff ensures school runs very smoothly.

The school monitors what it does thoroughly. It uses this information and that from assessment to prioritise for the future. The school improvement plan, jointly drawn up by managers and governors, is a practical and helpful document. Parents and pupils are regularly consulted about school life. This is an inclusive school; accurate information, which the school has, promotes equality of opportunity very effectively.

The staff and resources available are good but the school recognises and is acting on some weaknesses in accommodation. It plans to improve access between the Reception classroom and the children's outdoor play area to make some Foundation Stage activities easier to undertake. Financial planning is very thorough.

Governors are very supportive of the school and are frequent visitors. They have made a strong contribution to the school's plans for the future. They are generally well informed and use their links with subjects to give them a feel for what is going on. However, their monitoring tends to be informal and does not permit completely objective evaluation.

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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?	1	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	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	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	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	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	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	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 for helping us when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and seeing your lessons. We think you are very lucky to be at such an excellent school.

There are many great things about your school, and these are a few of them:

- The standard of your work is exceptionally high and you really enjoy school.
- Your headteacher provides first-class leadership.
- Your behaviour is outstanding and we were impressed with the way you all get on so well together and how older pupils look out for younger ones.
- Your headteacher and all the adults in the school take outstandingly good care of you and help you to achieve really well.
- There are lots of exciting clubs and extra activities, which you really enjoy.
- You contribute exceptionally well to school life and to the community.

We know everyone wants to do even better and we have suggested some things the school should do to help

- Some of you are missing a bit too much school. It would be really good if more of you could get through the year without missing any school time.