



St Mary's School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114681
LEA East Sussex
Inspection number 279431
Inspection dates 6 July 2006 to 6 July 2006
Reporting inspector Terry Elston AI

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

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|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Type of school | Special | School address | Horam |
| School category | Community | | Heathfield |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 | | East Sussex TN21 0BT |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01435 812278 |
| Number on roll | 50 | Fax number | 01435 813019 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | Mr John Clements |
| Date of previous inspection | 29 November 1999 | Headteacher | Mr Richard Tracey |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a small school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and for an increasing number of pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There are 13 pupils who board at the school. Pupils come from across the county. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic families. One in five pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is double the average for the county. Five pupils are in the care of the local authority. Of the 57 pupils, only seven are girls. The acting headteacher has been appointed until April 2007, when the school will become one for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school believes its overall effectiveness to be satisfactory and inspection evidence confirms this. During a period of uncertainty about the school's future, the capable leadership team has provided clear direction to the staff and helped create a strong team spirit. The teaching is satisfactory, with some significant strengths in the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the way teachers make lessons interesting. A minority of teachers, however, find it hard to control the behaviour of the increasing number of pupils with behavioural difficulties admitted to the school. Nevertheless, behaviour is satisfactory overall. Most pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and make satisfactory progress. They do well in reading, mathematics, science and physical education, but achievement is unsatisfactory in information and communication technology (ICT), modern foreign languages and music. In ICT, progress is slow because teachers use the technology too sparingly in other subjects. In music and modern foreign languages, the school has found it hard to recruit staff with specialist knowledge and so the teaching is not good enough. Pupils find the well-planned curriculum interesting and take part enthusiastically in activities at lunchtimes and after school. They feel safe because of the good standard of care, support and guidance provided by all staff. Parents value this aspect of the school's work highly and are very pleased with the overall provision. Finances are managed well and the school provides satisfactory value for money. There is much evidence of improvements made since the last inspection, particularly in assessment and the way the school evaluates its effectiveness. It is well placed to improve further. One boy interviewed, with a history of poor behaviour and attendance at previous schools, showed maturity beyond his years when he said, 'You know, this school's all right and some bits of it are very good.'

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 3

The boarding provision makes a satisfactory contribution to the learning and the personal and social development of the 13 weekly boarders. The school has had significant problems appointing a suitably qualified head of care and this has denied the provision strong leadership, although one has been appointed for September of this year. Pupils enjoy their evenings as boarders and the many activities planned for them. The links between the school and residential setting are sound and enable useful information to be shared between staff. The last annual report by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in February 2006 confirmed that the boarding provision complies well with the National Minimum Standards of Care. It identified good practice, and only minor issues relating to the meeting of the national care standards that the school has already rectified.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching further and ensure that all teachers have the skills to manage pupils' behaviour effectively.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to use ICT in all subjects.

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' standards in modern foreign languages and music.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievements are satisfactory. Their attainment on entry is well below average but nearly all make good progress in literacy, numeracy and science because of the well-planned curriculum and good teaching in these subjects. By the time they leave, most pupils have done well and, while their standards are still below average, their achievements have improved significantly. The exceptions are small groups of pupils in Year 8 and Year 9 with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. While these pupils achieve satisfactorily, their progress is slower than that of others because sometimes their poor behaviour means they do too little work in lessons. In the latest national tests for Year 9 pupils, the indications are that pupils exceeded their challenging targets in all subjects and improved significantly on the previous years' results. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 do well in their externally accredited work, including a wide range of courses preparing for GCSE work and those preparing them for college and employment. Pupils do particularly well in physical education, as shown by their rapidly improving achievements at GCSE level and their many successes in local sporting events. Progress in ICT is too slow because teachers include too few ICT tasks in their planning for all subjects. However, the new subject specialist teacher is starting to make a difference and recent assessments have shown some significant improvements in pupils' attainment. In modern foreign languages and music, the lack of teachers with the necessary skills has restricted pupils' progress and their achievements are inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Behaviour is satisfactory, overall, but while most pupils enjoy school and behave well, a few older pupils, particularly boys, get bored easily and find it hard to stick to the rules. This restricts their learning. These are in the minority, though, and exclusion rates are falling to acceptable levels despite the growing number of pupils admitted with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Pupils value highly the way the school seeks their views on important issues and the way they are respected as individuals. They speak enthusiastically about the positive changes to the school over the last year, and a significant decrease in bullying makes them feel safe. Attendance is satisfactory and improving fast, particularly for looked-after children. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils think deeply about issues, take part enthusiastically in the excellent assemblies and show good concern for people in the world less fortunate than themselves. They work hard to enhance the school and local environment. This gives them a sense of pride and achievement, prepares them well for the future and promotes good relationships with local residents. They enjoy responsibility and, through

the school council, have been successful recently in securing more choice for healthy food options at lunch time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The teaching and learning are satisfactory. Relationships are generally good and these encourage pupils to answer questions without fear of failure. Most teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and make lessons interesting so that pupils work hard and enjoy their learning. This was shown to good effect in one lesson when the teacher's effective use of ICT presentations, video clips and quick-fire questioning captured pupils' interest. When they started independent work you could have heard a pin drop. The rate of learning is slower when teachers struggle to control pupils who lose interest in the lesson. This leads to constant interruptions and, as a result, pupils do too little work. The teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills is good, and teachers work hard at including reading and number work in all subjects. The teaching and learning in modern foreign languages and music, however, are unsatisfactory because the school lacks teachers with the necessary specialist skills. The school rightly accepts that the recruitment of well-qualified teachers for these subjects is one of its main priorities. Assessment of pupils' progress is good. Teachers' thorough knowledge of pupils, accurate tracking of their progress and the setting of challenging targets have done a lot to improve achievement over the last year.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. A growing number of nationally accredited courses help ensure that pupils are provided with challenging work that enhances their self-esteem and prepares them well for the future. The detailed curriculum planning ensures that basic skills of literacy and numeracy are reinforced well in many lessons, which is why they make such good progress in their reading and number work. A weakness in the curriculum is the lack of sufficient opportunities planned for pupils to use ICT in all subjects. The school provides a good range of activities at lunchtime and after school to enrich the curriculum. There are very good links with other schools. These provide pupils with valuable opportunities to play competitive sports and give them the benefit of specialist teaching to prepare them for a wide range of GCSE courses. Pupils are well prepared for life beyond school through good careers education and well-organized work experience. Personal, social, health and citizenship provision is good, and teaches pupils much about how to stay safe, manage their behaviour and be a valued member of the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, support and guidance are good. The school is successful in providing an environment that pupils and parents report is increasingly safe, supportive and calm. The new behaviour policy, with its emphasis on rewards rather than sanctions, is generally working well and there is good evidence of improved behaviour and fewer exclusions as a result. However, there is still some lack of consistency in the way the policy is implemented, which explains why not all pupils behave well all the time. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the good quality of help and guidance they receive. Monitoring of personal and academic progress is good, and is particularly strong for groups of vulnerable pupils such as Travellers or those looked after by the local authority. Staff pay close attention to the small number of girls on roll to ensure that their particular needs are met. Pupils' targets are clear to staff, pupils and parents, and linked well to their individual needs. The school monitors procedures for child protection and health and safety regularly, and any shortcomings highlighted by external inspectors, including the Commission for Social Care Inspection, are rectified quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and deputy make a good team and provide clear direction for the school's future. They have high expectations of what pupils and staff can achieve and are good at evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses so that improvements can be made. In the last year, following a thorough audit of the provision, they have made very good improvements in the assessment of pupils' progress, the standards of behaviour and the range of external courses offered by the school. The recently introduced system to evaluate standards of teaching is rigorous, but it has not been in place long enough to rectify the weaknesses in some lessons. The targets and strategies in the school's improvement plan are linked clearly to raising levels of achievement, keeping pupils safe and preparing them well for the future. Since the last inspection there have been good improvements in the weaknesses identified. Subject leaders make a sound contribution to school improvement, but the difficulties recruiting staff have led to some subjects such as modern foreign languages and music lacking a co-ordinator. The school takes good account of the views of pupils and parents and uses the information well to make improvements. The governing body makes a good contribution to the leadership and management of the school. Governors provide clear direction, and keep themselves well informed about the provision through regular, well-planned visits.

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Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 | NA |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 | NA |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage | NA | 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? | 3 | NA |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 | NA |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 | NA |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 | NA |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 | NA |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | NA |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 | NA |
| The attendance of learners | 3 | NA |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 | 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 | 2 | 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? | 3 | 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? | 3 | NA |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 | 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 | 3 | NA |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 | 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 | Yes |
| Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy | Yes |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, two inspectors visited your school recently to find out how well you are doing. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and showing us your work. We enjoyed our day and really liked talking with you and finding out what you thought about your school. I was pleased that you appreciated the help from the staff there.

What impressed me most about the school:

You get on very well with the staff and most of you work hard.

You do well in English, mathematics, science and physical education.

You enjoy the work and have fun in lessons.

Your teachers look after you well and keep you safe.

Your headteacher and deputy know how to improve the school still further.

Your attendance is improving all the time.

What I have asked the school to do now:

Make sure all lessons are as good as the best ones.

Enable pupils to use computers more in all subjects.

Find teachers with specialist knowledge for teaching modern foreign languages, such as French and German, and music.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Elston Lead inspector