



St Mary's CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116880
LEA Herefordshire
Inspection number 279931
Inspection dates 7 June 2006 to 7 June 2006
Reporting inspector Graham Sims AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Fownhope
School category	Voluntary aided		Hereford
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Herefordshire HR1 4PG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01432 860474
Number on roll	97	Fax number	01432 860474
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr D Colley
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2000	Headteacher	Miss Allyson Taylor

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 11	7 June 2006 - 7 June 2006	279931

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Church of England Primary School is a small village school with four mixed-age classes. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. Their social and economic circumstances vary widely but are broadly average overall. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those eligible for free school meals are below average, and no pupil is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is similar to the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

What a delightful school St Mary's is! The great majority of parents and pupils agree. One parent summed the school up in these words, 'really pleased with the school ... excellent communication ... lovely teachers ... great atmosphere ... very open and welcoming.' Pupils made the following comments: 'The teachers are very easy to talk to ... they work hard ... they're fair ... we really like the lessons they give us ... it's a fun place.' This is without doubt a good school. Pupils achieve well throughout the school. Good quality education in the Reception year enables children to progress from a broadly average level on entry to a high average level at the end of the year. By the time pupils leave school, standards are well into the above-average range and are continuing to rise. This comes about because of good teaching, a good curriculum, good care, support and guidance and the pupils' response to learning. Their attitudes are positive and their behaviour and inter-personal relationships are excellent. The school has come a long way in the last three years. Governors rightly attribute this to the very good leadership of the headteacher, who has brought harmony to the school, lifted its spirit, created a great sense of teamwork and raised people's expectations. Although generous in grading their performance, the generally good systems for self-review enable senior staff and governors to have a good understanding of what they are doing well and what needs to be improved.

What stops this from being an outstanding school? There is not always enough rigour and challenge for some of the older and more able pupils in each class. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to use their initiative or to work independently on substantial pieces of work. Subject leaders are still not adventurous enough in evaluating their subjects and finding ways to make them even more stimulating and interesting. These areas for improvement do not detract from the big picture, that this is a good school which provides good value for money. Improvements over the last three years indicate that it certainly has the capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the older and more able pupils in each class are sufficiently challenged in the work they are asked to complete.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to use their initiative and develop their independent learning skills.
- Develop subject leaders' abilities to review the curriculum in their subjects to make work more stimulating and interesting.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well throughout the school. The level of attainment when children join the Reception class is broadly average, but there is a very wide range. Some children are already very articulate, but others clearly have difficulties with their learning. Children make good progress in the Reception class, particularly in their personal,

social and emotional development, and standards are at the top end of average by the time they start Year 1. Standards in reading and writing at the end of Year 2 have improved over the last few years and are now above average. Improvement has been slower in mathematics, but signs are that results in 2006 will be better than in 2005, when they were marginally above the national average. A particular strength in 2005 was that all pupils achieved the national expectation of Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.

Standards at the end of Year 6 have also improved, from average in 2002 to above average in English, mathematics and science in 2005. The 2005 results represented particularly good progress because half of the year group had learning difficulties, yet almost all pupils reached the nationally expected Level 4 in all three subjects.

The proportions of pupils in Years 2 and 6 who reach the higher levels of attainment are similar to the national average, but some more able pupils could do better. It is their performance that is preventing the school's results from being outstanding. Although the school has been reasonably successful in meeting its targets, they are not quite challenging enough with regard to the more able pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. In some respects it is outstanding. There is no doubt that the great majority of the pupils enjoy school. Their behaviour and relationships at all levels are excellent. The pupils are adamant that there is no bullying 'because everybody is friendly.' They have positive attitudes to work, cooperate with their teachers and work well with each other. They are very polite and show great maturity in their dealings with adults. They are a delight to talk to, so it is no wonder that adults from the community enjoy having lunch with the children each week. The level of attendance is above average, but has fallen in recent years, reflecting the number of families who take holidays during term-time.

The pupils have a good understanding of what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle and are also well aware of safe practices. Most pupils put this good understanding into practice. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and local community, for example, setting up the laptop computers for lessons, but more could be done to give them greater responsibility in helping to run the school. The school council fell into abeyance, but pupils are looking forward to its imminent reinstatement. Good levels of basic skills in literacy and numeracy and improving skills in information and communication technology (ICT) lay solid foundations for their future well-being. Most pupils have a great deal of self-confidence, but the school could provide more opportunities for them to use their initiative and develop more fully as truly independent learners.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers plan well and possess a good range of expertise. Classroom assistants help pupils with learning difficulties very effectively, contributing significantly to their good achievements. Teachers provide well for a small number of the most able pupils, enabling them to achieve well as they work with older pupils. However, the older, more able pupils in each class are not always stretched enough when given work with which they are already familiar. Pupils enjoy learning. They work well together and on their own. There are, however, insufficient opportunities for them tackle major pieces of work independently or to use their initiative in deciding on the methods and resources to use.

Assessment informs pupils properly about how to improve, and they understand short-term targets well. All staff give encouraging oral feedback. This makes pupils of all abilities confident that they can achieve well, though some more able pupils lack sufficiently challenging targets. Pupils are also becoming usefully involved in assessment of their own work and that of others, offering perceptive, sensitive critique in a music lesson, for instance. Teachers use resources, such as improved ICT hardware and software, increasingly well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Although there is room for more adventurous planning and less dependence on schemes of work prepared by external agencies, the curriculum is developing to provide more interest and motivation for pupils as the staff become more confident to try new ideas. Older pupils in particular value the Christian ethos and 'touchstones' vision statements which underpin provision. There is a good balance between elements such as creativity and activity. Time for physical education has improved. Statutory requirements are met and the school also manages to include a foreign language for older pupils, soon to be extended to others. Good planning ensures that work matches most needs, and pupils with learning difficulties receive good support. Flexible timetabling proves useful in allowing the most able younger pupils some movement between classes for different subjects. However, curricular planning is not always challenging enough for older, more able pupils in each class. Pupils of all ages enjoy a good range of popular extra-curricular opportunities, sports, chess, crafts, ICT and music amongst them. Fortnightly curriculum enrichment hours, for example, in gardening or cooking, further enrich pupils' experience. Personal, social and health education contributes well to pupils' understanding of how to stay healthy and safe.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. All staff know pupils very well individually and are highly concerned about the safety, well-being and development of each one. Very good liaison with the on-site playgroup facilitates smooth transition into Reception, and effective internal communication between teachers ensures similar movement from one class to the next as pupils get older.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are very secure. Pupils feel very safe in school and comment on the friendliness and support they experience. Though targets could be more challenging for some, pupils speak positively about understanding teachers' marking and knowing how to improve. Almost all parents are highly supportive of the school's care for their children. They feel well informed about the curriculum and about how well their children are doing. Pupils are well prepared for transfer to the main high school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management have moved the school a long way in the last three years. The headteacher has very skilfully united staff into a real team which is cooperative, hardworking and enthusiastic. Outstanding support from governors in managing finances and premises has led to a more efficient school and a better working environment. Most importantly, standards have improved and this trend looks set to continue.

It hasn't all been plain sailing. The great majority of parents are very pleased with what the school offers. A small minority is not, but the inspection findings do not substantiate the concerns raised by these parents. Reorganisation of subject responsibilities into a more collegiate approach was found not to work as well, and the sensible decision was made to revert to the former system. However, subject leaders have not yet fully developed their confidence or ability to evaluate their subject areas, identify what could be improved and then manage change.

Overall, however, there is a good understanding of the underlying strengths of the school and the most important areas for development. Parents are consulted by means of a questionnaire and the school has provided a detailed response to any concerns. The school is forward-looking, has much to commend it and aspires to be even better. Improvements over the last three years show that it certainly has the capacity to do so.

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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?	2	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?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	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	1	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?	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

Dear Pupils

We really enjoyed visiting your school. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for talking to us. You think your school is good – so do we! These are the main things we found out:

- You work hard, participate well in lessons and collaborate with each other, and these factors are helping you to make good progress and to achieve well.
- You are polite, friendly, helpful and very well behaved, and this makes it a pleasure to be in your school.
- You have good teachers who make lessons interesting for you, treat you fairly and help you when you are in difficulty.
- The staff know you very well, provide a high standard of care, and ensure that you feel very safe in school.
- The staff work together very well as a team and have a good understanding of what works well and what could be improved.
- The headteacher and governors have made some really good changes to the school in the last few years.

There was nothing about your school which caused us any serious concern, but if the teachers did the following things, they could make it even better still.

- Ensure that the work they give you is always hard enough.
- Provide you with more opportunities to use your initiative and develop your independence.
- Discover the things which interest you most and the ways in which you learn most effectively and build these more into their teaching.

If you could help your teachers with these things, you could make your school into one of the very best.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Graham Sims Lead Inspector