



St Mary's Infants' School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117384
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 280061
Inspection dates 28–29 November 2006
Reporting inspector Rashida Sharif HMI

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	St Mary's Way
School category	Voluntary controlled		Baldock
Age range of pupils	4–7		Hertfordshire SG7 6HY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462892347
Number on roll (school)	131	Fax number	01462896202
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Ms Sue Welch
		Headteacher	Mrs Val Morris
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2000		

Age group 4–7	Inspection dates 28–29 November 2006	Inspection number 280061
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors over two days.

Description of the school

St. Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School is situated in the suburbs of Baldock. The school shares the site with the junior school. Most of the pupils are White British and only a few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average. Children's attainment on entry to school is below that expected nationally. The uptake of free school meals is lower than the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need is above average. This, together with the number of summer born children, has risen over the last two years. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Quality Mark. There has been a significant turnover in staff since 2004 due to the bereavement of the Foundation Stage coordinator and half of all teachers taking early retirement.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory education for all its pupils. Achievement is sound; children make good progress in Reception and adequate progress in Key Stage 1. The school is a welcoming and confident community committed to Christian values where the principles of social justice and equality underpin its work. There are strong links with the local church which plays an active role in the life of the school. There is a good partnership with the families and very good support from parents, who feel confident that their children are happy, safe and well looked after.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. This is because they enjoy learning and are committed to doing well in whatever they do. Their attendance and punctuality is satisfactory. Pupils trust staff to deal with their concerns and know who they can go to when and if they need help. Their personal development is excellent. Pupils' personal and social needs are addressed well through a good curriculum which is enriched by enjoyable activities that sustain their interest. In lessons pupils concentrate well and are attentive.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory but is better in the Foundation Stage than in Key Stage 1. Most children make good progress in the Reception year and traditionally reach standards which are close to levels expected for their age by the time they move into Year 1. Indications are that recent changes to provision are bringing standards closer still to levels expected. There are very good induction systems for children starting in the Reception class. In their first weeks at school they quickly settle, become confident and ready to learn. The coordinator provides strong leadership and ensures that new children are accurately assessed to establish their starting points. She sets high expectations for their progress right from the beginning. This information is used effectively to plan their next steps in learning. However, this level of progress is not sustained to quite the same standard as pupils move up through the school. Staff changes over the last two years, not least the death of a teacher, have had an unsettling effect and standards of attainment have declined. Furthermore, assessment information is not used consistently enough to plan for the needs of individual pupils effectively.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good as are relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils report that teachers always try to help them. Pupils value the programme of personal, social and health education and it supports their excellent personal development. They know the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods through growing their own fruits and vegetables which they enjoy eating.

Leadership, management and governance of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and understands its strengths and weaknesses. Most of the governors support the school well and are increasingly holding the school to account for its performance. The leadership of the headteacher and the support of the leadership team have been pivotal in maintaining the school's stability and sustaining high standards in the care of pupils and their personal and social development.

Self-evaluation and planning for improvement are satisfactory as are the procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers receive feedback about what they need to do to improve the quality of their teaching further. This is successfully bringing about improvements. The senior leadership team monitors pupils' progress well. However, other teachers are not sufficiently involved in monitoring and evaluating the impact of their work on pupils' overall achievement. The school gives satisfactory value for money and the leadership and management provide the school with satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the standards of writing for all pupils and in reading particularly for boys.
- Focus more sharply on outcomes for learners in daily lesson planning.
- Use assessment information more effectively to set accurate targets for individual pupils to reach.
- Further develop the role of subject coordinators to enable them to lead and monitor the quality of pupils' learning more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children make good progress by the end of Reception as a result of the good teaching and support they receive. Children are being prepared well for their future work in Key Stage 1. This fast rate of progress slows to a satisfactory level in Key Stage 1. At the end of Year 2, pupils reach broadly average standards but could do better. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. This is because of the targeted support they receive. Girls perform better than boys in Key Stage 1. The school has correctly identified writing for all pupils and reading for boys in particular as key areas that need to be developed further in order to raise achievement. Results in the national tests at Key Stage 1 have declined since 2004. This is due in large part to staffing difficulties in the last two years as well as a change in the pupil profile. Although pupils with learning difficulties and those who are summer born generally do well in relation to their starting points they do not always reach national averages. This is reflected in the overall test results.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal growth, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as is their behaviour. There are very good relationships at all levels which effectively contribute to the pupils' great enjoyment of life at school. The school gives pupils opportunities to take part in 'talk time' which provides them with a channel of communication to voice their views and opinions about school matters. Pupils value this and use it most effectively, for example, to improve the school toilets and the playground.

The pupils make an excellent contribution to the local community by, for example, organising over 70 parcels for 'Operation Christmas Child' and raising funds for other charities. The school promotes healthy and safe lifestyles amongst pupils extremely successfully. Pupils' attitudes to learning, ability to work harmoniously together and standards in basic literacy and numeracy skills provide a sound platform for their future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers have good classroom management skills and high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Teaching assistants are effective in supporting pupils. They enable pupils, particularly those with learning disabilities or difficulties, to improve their levels of concentration and rate of progress in lessons.

Teachers have confident command in the classroom and they explain things carefully to pupils. However, they do not make enough use of questioning to check pupils' understanding or to develop their speaking and listening skills well enough, particularly in Key Stage 1. Teachers are quick to praise pupils for good work and good behaviour and this has a positive effect on their attitudes. Marking in Key Stage 1, however, is not consistently focused on helping pupils to do better and pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to reflect on their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

In the Foundation Stage, a wide variety of interesting and engaging activities ensure that young children enjoy a broad range of experience. There is an appropriate balance between well planned purposeful activities and those that children choose for themselves. Rightly so, there is no distinction between work and play. The provision is good both indoors and out and skilfully builds on what the children know and can do. There is a wide range of interesting and engaging activities in Key Stage 1 that ensure pupils experience all that they should both during school time and through extra curricular activities. All pupils in Year 2 learn French each week which they enjoy. In a lesson observed, they took pride in counting up to ten and practising some of the greetings. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and additional support is provided to boost their progress. The school is aware of the underperformance of boys', particularly in reading, and is tackling this through a number of recently developed strategies for example guided reading and a literacy programme. However, it is too early for them to show a measurable impact on pupils' progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Procedures for child protection are robust and staff and governors receive appropriate training. Pupils know who to turn to for help and are confident in talking to their teachers and assistants about any problems. The clean and well maintained accommodation, as well as regular assessments of physical risk, promotes pupils' safety effectively. The impressive art display of the work of pupils and parents contributes to the lively atmosphere in the school. The pupils in Year 1 talk with excitement about the 'buddy' system run with the junior school. Year 2 pupils also talked about their own 'playground friends.' They, 'make sure that no one is left out or is lonely'.

The school provides good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, deploying teaching assistants well. The skilled special needs coordinator supports colleagues well and liaises effectively with external agencies to secure additional support where needed. Systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress are not yet sharp enough to allow teachers to give good guidance to pupils in Key Stage 1 on how to make faster progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of governance, leadership and management and the school's capacity to improve are satisfactory. The headteacher knows the school well. She has very high aspirations and shows strong leadership, inspiring the loyalty of governors, staff and parents and the affection of the pupils. However, the role of the subject coordinators to enable them to lead and monitor the quality of pupils' learning more effectively is not clear. Governors influence the school's work productively. Some of the governors visit the school regularly and have a reasonable understanding of its strengths and areas for further development. Finances are well managed; the budget links fittingly with school improvement priorities. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Improvements since the last inspection have been satisfactory. The increasingly stable staffing picture, together with the strong leadership of the headteacher demonstrates that the school is well placed to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 November 2006

Dear Children

St Mary's Infants' School, St Mary's Way, Baldock, Hertfordshire, SG7 6HY

Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school and for being so friendly and helpful. We particularly want to thank the pupils who gave up their lunchtime to talk to us. I really enjoyed visiting your memorial garden which you helped to set up.

These are some of the good things about your school

- You are extremely polite and helpful.
- I can see why you enjoy coming to school so much. You like your teachers and you like being with your friends.
- You get on very well with each other and the adults who look after you.
- Everyone works hard to make sure that you are safe.
- You are extremely enthusiastic learners and singers. You work hard and behave extremely well.
- You are very generous in collecting things for charity.
- You are growing up as confident, very well behaved children who enjoy learning and know how to keep safe and healthy.
- I was particularly impressed with your art work around the school and your singing in assembly.

This is what we have asked your headteacher and staff to do to make the school even better

- Help you to improve your reading and writing.
- Set you targets that will be just right so that you to have to think hard but not too hard.
- Give you activities which will be even more interesting so that you can learn even better.

We have also asked all the teachers to help Mrs Morris to work out what is going well in the school and what can be improved. You can help too through your 'talk time'.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif (Her Majesty's Inspector)